



Opinion:  
Dipak Gyawali

Nepali Congress Convention : Leadership Tussle

World Tourism Day Special

MDG Goals : High hope



Interview:  
Rameshnath Pandey

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FORTNIGHTLY



# NEPAL Caught In The Middle

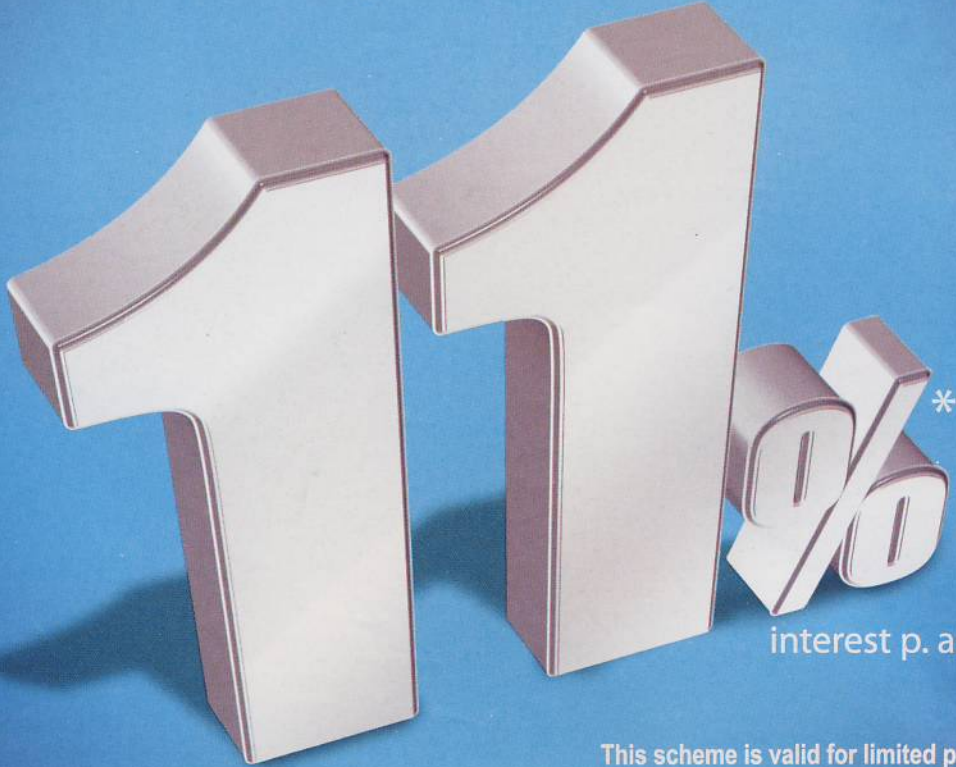
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### From The Editor

Sandwiched between the two giant neighbours Nepal has long been caught in the middle. Even as the southern elephant and the northern dragon compete to protect and promote their rival interests in Nepal, the country with the mighty Himalayas on the north and the fertile plains on the south has been able to survive thus far. As the long-running undercurrent of the rivalry resurfaces in the critical political transition of Nepal from monarchy to a republic, serious questions have begun to do the rounds - one more time -- about the country's future. The issue is certainly nothing new as such. We did a cover story last year, long before the current debate got off. We have sought to take a fresh look at the issue. And we believe that despite competing interests of the two big neighbours, they have a common stake in the stability of Nepal.

*Keshab*

Keshab Poudel  
Editor

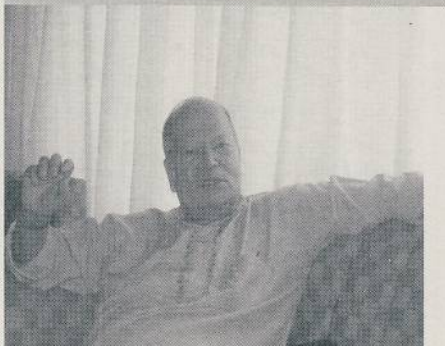


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**WFP-PAF Sign Agreement**

The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) and the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), two of the largest organizations working in Nepal's



most food insecure areas, joined forces by signing a Memorandum of Understanding and forming a strategic alliance to alleviate poverty and food insecurity in the Mid to Far-Western Hill and Mountain regions. The MoU was signed by Ms Dominique Hyde, Officer-in-Charge, WFP Nepal and Raj Babu Shrestha, Executive Director of PAF, in the presence of PAF Vice Chairperson, Vidyadhar Mallik.

"The alliance between the Poverty Alleviation Fund and WFP Nepal, together with the commitment of the government of Nepal, demonstrates something can and is being done to empower the rural poor and end the trap of hunger and poverty that has plagued the lives of people in the Mid and Far-Western Hills and Mountains for too long," said Dominique Hyde, Officer-

in-Charge, WFP Nepal.

The strategic alliance between PAF and WFP paves the way for a new model of reaching and assisting the poorest and most vulnerable communities in

Mid-to-Far Western Nepal - where household agricultural production is commonly sufficient

for only 3-5 months of the year. By leveraging the capacity and experience of both organizations, joint projects will effectively maximize the coverage and impact of humanitarian and livelihood-development interventions.

According to a press release, the PAF agreement follows a partnership agreement signed between WFP and the Ministry of Local Development that will see WFP receive US \$35.8 million to help the government provide a social safety net in the Mid to Far-Western Hills and Mountains. All three organizations are supported by the World Bank and the agreements mark a significant step forward in development partner and government collaboration to address poverty and food insecurity in the most remote area of the country.

**WFP-Nepal Gets US\$ 1.14 M From ECHO**

The European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) has provided US\$ 1.14 million to the United Nations World Food Programme in Nepal to combat acute food insecurity in Mid-Western Nepal.

The contributions will be used to procure nearly 900 metric tonnes of rice to meet the short-term hunger needs of 61,000 people living in the Karnali region, the most food insecure area in Nepal.

"Recent shocks such as unpredictable weather patterns, crop failures, and increasing food prices have worsened the situation in the Karnali,"

said Nicolas Oberlin, Deputy Country Director, WFP Nepal. "As a result, WFP is taking urgent action to combat acute food insecurity, and the funding from ECHO will help us to continue our work in the region."

In several VDCs in Jumla, Humla and Mugu districts, main winter crop production has dropped by more than 50%, severely exacerbating the already precarious situation of geographically isolated local populations.

**Operation Sight, Sound, Smile In Nepal**

U.S. military medical personnel treated, free of cost, over 50 Nepalis for cleft lip and palate, chronic ear disease, and cataracts. As part of "Operation Sight, Sound and Smile," a team of eight

medical professionals from Tripler Army Medical Center arrived in Kathmandu on September 9 for the ten-day humanitarian mission at the Birendra Army Hospital.

The Office of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy worked jointly with their counterparts in the Nepal Army to bring the medical team to Nepal. The project offered specialty surgical services to Nepali patients who were not able to obtain them previously. While more than 50 surgical procedures were performed, over 100 patients were evaluated.

"This mission has been a tremendous opportunity to interact with our military medical colleagues in Nepal to share experiences and educate each other while providing valuable care to the local population," said LTC Scott Rooft, mission commander of Operation Sight, Sound and Smile.

Operation Sight, Sound and Smile projects advance cooperative relations between the United States military and various nations in the region. They are funded by United States Pacific Command.

**KOICA Volunteers Conference**

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) organized a three-day conference on KOICA Volunteers Program from September 15-17, 2010 in Pokhara. The program was chaired by the representative of KOICA Nepal Office Ms. Young Ah Doh and a delegation from KOICA Headquarter.

According to a press release of Korean Embassy, its prime objective was to review and evaluate KOICA volunteer's activity in Nepal. Simultaneously, the program is also designed to share the best practice, experience, exchange knowledge and learning among the KOICA volunteers working in Nepal.

It is expected that the meeting will





give a platform for the volunteers to talk about the challenges they faced while performing their duties and the effective measures taken to overcome them. Similarly it is believed that the discussion program will allow all the volunteers to promote friendship among them.

Since 1990 KOICA volunteers are deployed in various governmental organizations within and outside the Kathmandu valley according to the demands from Nepalese government.

### HIV/AIDS Media Awards

Nepal is establishing its first-ever HIV/AIDS Media Awards, to recognize and honor the key role the media are playing in helping combat the country's highly complex epidemic. The establishment of the awards was announced at an HIV/AIDS media workshop, with the inaugural awards ceremony slated for World AIDS Day, December 1, 2010.

According to the press release of UNAIDS, the awards are an initiative of the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIV and Development (APLF), Nepal, via its Media Panel, and in collaboration with the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), government ministries and organizations, private sector representation, and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

The award consists of Rs.50,000 each for three stories in Radio/TV, print media and online categories. There will be a cash prize of Rs. 50,000 for the top entry in the print, radio, television and online categories. Stories must have been produced within the 12-month timeframe from October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010.

The theme of the inaugural awards mirrors that of World AIDS Day 2010: Universal Access and Human Rights. "What this means is using a human rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS," explained Dr. Maria Elena Filio-Borromeo, UNAIDS Country Coordinator for Nepal. "Global leaders, including the government of Nepal, have pledged to work towards universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support, recognizing these as fundamental human rights."

### USAID Launches New Anti-Trafficking Program

The launch of USAID/Nepal's five-year \$6.8 million Combating Trafficking

## Embassy Of Israel Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Embassy of Israel organized a program as a part of the events of celebrating 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of establishment of the diplomatic relations between Nepal and Israel, a Memorial Ceremony in honor of Late B. P. Koirala, the Prime Minister who established diplomatic relations with Israel.

Addressing the program, prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said that B.P. played a very important role in the process of modernizing Nepal. The establishment of relations with Israel is one of them.

In his address, former foreign minister Dr. Bhek Bahadur Thapa highlighted the importance of diplomatic relations with Israel in such a crucial time. Dr. Thapa said B.P. Koirala is a legendary figure and his role was important in taking such a decision.

Son of late B.P. Koirala and CA

in Persons (CTIP) program was marked in Nepal. The program will be implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF) and its eleven partners, who will contribute additional funds for a total of \$7.4 million for the efforts. Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare Sarva Dev Ojha, U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Patricia Mahoney, USAID Deputy Mission Director Jed Meline, TAF Country Representative George Varughese, Chief Secretary Madhav Ghimire and several other officials from the Government of Nepal and Nepali Civil Society Organizations attended a ceremony in Nepalgunj to announce the start of the CTIP program.

At the launch ceremony, DCM Mahoney voiced the U.S Government's strong commitment to end modern day slavery in Nepal. "The program will increase action to combat to human trafficking, a form of slavery that is as big a problem today as perhaps anytime in history and comes at a time of great need in Nepal. We remain deeply concerned about Nepal's ability to maintain a 'Tier 2 ranking' on the Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report. Without successful



member Dr. Shashanka Koirala also said that B.P. learned so many things from Israel, one of them is to protect sovereignty and integrity of a country like Nepal. Foreign minister Sujata Koirala also spoke on the occasion.

Ambassador of Israel to Nepal Dan Stav praised the role played by Nepal's democratic leader B.P. Koirala in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Ambassador Stav said Israel always gives high importance to its relations with Nepal.

action by the Government to fight trafficking, some of the U.S. Government's larger foreign assistance in Nepal may be automatically cut."

She noted that the Government of Nepal needs to show significant progress on strengthening enforcement against all types of trafficking; to improve protection of survivors; and to strengthen the national human trafficking working committee.

Estimates vary about the scope and magnitude of modern-day slavery. The latest U.S. Government studies indicate that as many as 800,000 people are trafficked internationally each year and that millions more are trafficked within their own countries. Non-governmental organizations in Nepal estimate that as many as 15,000 Nepali women and girls are trafficked to India annually, while 7,500 are trafficked domestically for commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 Nepali women become involuntary domestic workers each year within Nepal, according to the U.S. Department of State's 2009 "Trafficking in Persons Report." ■



## BOK Expanding To Rural Parts

Chairman of Bank of Kathmandu Narendra Kumar Basnyat opened a Branch of Bank of Kathmandu in Birtamod of Jhapa district. Birtamod's is the 17th branch of the Bank. Inaugurating the branch, Chairman Basnyat said that his bank is committed to expand the banking sector throughout the country serving the people living in remote parts of Nepal.



Bank of Kathmandu has commenced a week long program "BOK Ghardailo Saptaha", as a means to encourage non banking people to come into banking transactions.

Panauti and its areas such as Khopasi, Sunthan, Malpi, Dhingakharka, and Kushadevi etc are the areas where the first phase of the programs related to the campaign will be undertaken. Such programs will be organized in places such as educational institutions, co-operatives, social organizations and door to door campaigning will be done for those who are unable to attend the function.

The campaign includes information regarding benefits of Banking transactions and knowledge dissemination on various Banking activities along with updates on services provided by Bank of Kathmandu. The Bank will also be emphasizing on its "Save for the Future" campaign to promote saving habits and will be further enhancing on how today's saving helps in meeting bigger needs for future.

According to Corporate Communication Officer Brinda Singh, another highlight of the campaign will include awareness of registration of birth certificate for all the children residing in those areas as it has been found that people are still unaware regarding its usefulness. The Bank will also be helping in the registration process.

The program will be conducted in presence of all its Bank Officers and the Bank has further plans to conduct similar programs in other areas.

## Safa Bus To Follow Safa Tempo

Demolishing the monopoly of Safa tempo, 14-seater battery-run Safa buses are set to ply in the streets of Kathmandu. They are being introduced by Nepal Electric Vehicle Industries (NEVI), which is already operating Safa Tempo three-wheelers. The Safa buses are expected to help anti-pollution drive by promoting clean vehicles.

## 'Fish Museum' In Lakeside

In order to attract curious tourists during the upcoming

tourism year, a 'fish and environment museum' has been opened in Lakeside, Pokhara. The Fisheries Research Center has opened the museum at the cost of Rs 600,000. The aquarium built alongside Phewa Lake houses fishes of different species. In lakes and rivers in and around Pokhara, fishes of 35 different species are found. Most of them including those considered endangered are kept in the aquarium of the museum.

## NC Gets Cold Shoulder From Big Houses

The Nepali Congress (NC) has received a rude shock as many leading businessmen and big houses refused to come to its rescue on the eve of its 12th general convention. The party calculated that it would need Rs 30 million to hold the convention. But it could collect only up to Rs 10 million - that, too, only as donations from its own leaders and cadres. Various parties had nominated well-known industrialists as CA members. Maoists nominated Padma Jyoti of Jyoti Group; UML nominated Binod Chaudhary of Chaudhary Group and CPN-Marxist Leninist nominated Rajendra Khetan of Khetan group. Many say that the businessmen nominated by some other party were shy to openly help the NC. The NC had nominated Diwakar Golchha to CA. The Golchha Group, however, is said to have helped NC this time as well. In the past, president Girija Prasad Koirala and his close aides used to collect fund for NC in non-transparent manner. This time NC had asked businessmen to openly fund them by depositing money in their bank account.

## Mega Bank Inaugurated

The Mega Bank Nepal - the latest bank to hit the financial block - has been formally opened on September 17. The 28th commercial bank was inaugurated by Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal. The Mega Bank has the largest number of promoters at 1291. The Bank has coined the slogan of 'Halo dekhi Hydropower samma.' In line with its slogan, the bank has also started investment in the sugarcane farmers of Hariaun of Sarlahi districts. The bank has Rs 1.63 billion of paid up capital. In the last two months it has collected deposits totalling Rs 1.70 billion. It has already provided loans totalling Rs 2.10 billion in this period. The chief executive of the bank, Anil Shah has informed that the bank will open 12 branches this year while its target is to open 50 branches in five years.

## Ncell Reduces ISD Tariffs

The private sector telecom operator Ncell is preparing to reduce the tariff of international calls made to 20 countries. They include India, China, Japan, US, Thailand, Hong Kong, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The new fare will be applicable before the Dashain festival. The Ncell had reduced the tariff for international calls three months ago as well. Likewise, a month ago, it had slashed the tariff for domestic calls.

## Himalyan Bank Opened Kalanki Branch

In the process of extension of its branches, Himalayan Bank opened its branch in Kalanki. Inaugurating the branch, Chairman Manoj Shrestha said that the opening of the branch of the Bank in Kalanki will enhance its capacity and the areas of services. ■





### 'Maoists Want To Capture Power'

Lack of development may have swelled their (Maoists') cadre. But they do not run charitable institutions... They are



political elements and want to capture the power of the state. It is rather simple to say the Maoist violence is a result of lack of development and lack of opportunities and basic amenities. This is not the sole reason. This is more imaginary than actual. The Maoists have not gone to tribal areas to protect the tribal but to capture the state power with gun. (The existence of a red corridor from Pashupatinath in Nepal to Tirupati in India) is largely ephemeral and a proposition which is difficult to accept. (Indian finance minister Pranab Mukherjee on Indian Maoists in Indian Express, Sept 17. Mukherjee, when foreign minister, was instrumental in the 12-point Delhi accord between the

imparted training to 16 Nepali intelligence officers at the National Investigation Department on 'tradecraft' of infiltrating and operating inside communist and Islamic terrorist

Nepalese Maoist rebels - who say they have solidarity with their Indian counterparts - and the mainstream parties)  
**CIA Train Nepal Spies**

CIA officers Bob, Michael and Peter serving and retired department officials, chief of the department, Ashok Dev Bhatta, referred to, among others, his initiatives on bringing telephone intercepting machine from China for counter-intelligence. (Jana Aastha, Sept 15)

### Chinese Delegation

The visiting Chinese communist party delegation

led by influential leader He Yong, in a meeting with the UCPN (Maoist) team led by chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', said that China did not want to get overtly involved in the Nepalese affairs the way India does because that could invite any kind of disaster to the Nepalese people. During the meeting, the Maoist leaders complained that their government fell because of India and even now India had come in the way of electing a new prime minister. (Ghatnara Bichar, Sept 15)

### India Backed Deuba

India had backed Sher Bahadur Deuba in the election for the president of Nepali Congress. It is said that the role he played in the conclusion of the



Mahakali treaty 14 years ago and in taking on the former Maoist rebels had been evaluated very highly by India. There had also been speculation in the Congress circle that Khum Bahadur Deuba, Bimendra Nidhi and Chitralakha had also been the reasons behind India's sympathy towards Deuba. The Congress circle was also agog with speculations that Sujata Koirala's initial intransigence (who later backed out) on contesting for the general secretary was at the provocation of Indian minister Pranab Mukherjee. The Indian government and the Congress-I had assigned Mukherjee as in charge of the Nepal affairs. (Sanghu, Sept 13)

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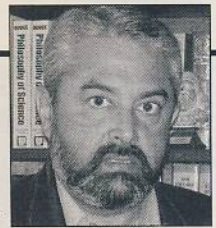
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# Of Befuddled Architects And Their Collapsed Architecture

—DIPAK GYAWALI



One can take Tolstoy's famous saying about happy families and turn it around to explain the Nepali media: free press in all genuine open societies are alike; it is only in societies with dishonest politics that each media house is distorted in its own unique way. Last week saw a leading reporter on water resources of a leading Nepali daily arrested and sent to serve a five-year jail sentence. Why? Speculations abound from his in-house trade unionism to women problems to professional vendetta and cyber law over-activism by both the police and the feminists; but the presswalla profession that otherwise responds with alacrity to any criticism of guild members has not seen fit to explain to his myriad readers what really happened. The journalist in question had unashamedly argued in the past that only the end of King Gyanendra's rule would see donor cornucopia overflowing with hydropower projects galore, that party hacks would make the best power sector managers in this hour of unprecedented crisis. Such media ennui only seems symptomatic of Nepali media's collective embarrassment at its uncritical attitude to anything Loktantra even while spewing venom at anyone upholding alternative views.

Consider two explosive events of last week that have been muffled in media silence when they should have been the stuff of vigorous debates. Nilamber Acharya, chair of the committee that should draft our new constitution stated publicly that the constitution will not be made in the time remaining. Now, a CA-drafted new constitution is the only reason why the monarchy was displaced, the 1990 constitution relegated to the dustbin, elections held in 2008 and a non-functioning parliament's term self-extended by a year. Damning statement it was and politicians in other countries have resigned or been disgraced into limbo for far lesser challenge to the accepted political understanding of the day; but in Nepal's enigmatic Loktantra, there has been no response, nor soul-searching, not even from what can only be concluded as comatose members of the constituent assembly.

The other is the statement by former prime minister KP Bhattarai, but first a word about the Kangressi jamboree underway. Sifting through pages after pages of banal media reporting, one is unable to find what the various contestants stand for, even less what the party's position is on various burning political issues plaguing the country. Nepal is today experiencing unprecedented political crisis on both domestic and international fronts, but the country's oldest democratic

party exhibits total vacuity of inspiring national leadership. Against this background comes KP Bhattarai's response to the letter of invitation to attend the party's 12th national convention. The man who led the party for twenty years through its darkest days and in whose name the party won majority seats in the third parliament was caustic in his reply. He said that the Kangress of today had given up on the ideals of BP Koirala and Ganeshman Singh, was wallowing in fraudulent republicanism, and had become a politically fake and meaningless entity.

One would have thought that such a rebuke by the man whose picture adorns all Kangressi billboards and who happens to be the only living founder of the party would have seen at least some breast-beating remorse or, at the other extreme, genuine angry demonstrations by Loktantra's true believers. But embarrassed silence is all we see, prompting the critics to argue that Nepali Kangress is essentially brain-dead. It has lost all inspiring idealistic values and has been taken over by the unscrupulous who have made politics a means of earning

large amounts of money quickly. For many who like to call themselves liberal democrats or green socialists, the rot within the Kangress is too deep, the divergence between its de facto and de jure objectives too wide to be cured

by a soul-less convention focused on factions and their internecine battles. Much hoopla is made of young leadership emerging, which is unsurprisingly inevitable in a long-gerontocratic party. However, in the absence of demonstrated moral leadership, merely having new young faces is hardly sufficient to pull the party out of the quagmire it has sunk into through governance malfasance since 1991.

The litany of Kangressi sins is long but methods used by Girija Koirala to sideline both KP Bhattarai and Ganeshman Singh was the beginning of the slide downwards. It came with the Kangress giving up all pretences of standing for social justice and national interests. Privatization was pursued wantonly even as the state services were weakened, favouring not the productive industrialists but the trading class of comprador bourgeoisie who became the party's mainstay. Economic policies meant kowtowing to donor fads, and national interests in water agreements were sacrificed for the privilege of foreign support. Such an about-face was done not through open party debates and decisions but through excessive centralization around the Big Leader and his coterie. Even local governments were allowed to lapse into limbo until the

**The biggest failure of Kangressi political leadership has been since their infighting during the third parliament which led to its dissolution in 2003.**



appropriate time party aristocrats could nominate their henchmen to fiefdoms in municipalities and DDCs, thus preventing the people from choosing their local leaders. Even now, one wonders, what is stopping the Kangress from pushing for elections in municipalities and VDCs? No matter what the mythical perfect federal structure might be tomorrow, the population and boundaries of municipalities and VDCs are not going to change! But the debate within the Nepali Kangress is oblivious of all such concerns.

The biggest failure of Kangressi political leadership has been since their infighting during the third parliament which led to its dissolution in 2003. Unable to unite for the purpose of challenging the totalitarian political phenomenon of armed insurgents who have never accepted parliamentary democracy, they instead became their political porters when they agreed to carry the ill-thought out agenda of federalism, secularism and republicanism. These have still not been assimilated by the rank-and-file of the party or accepted by the larger polity of their natural supporters, as the current deadlock and impasse over constitution making becomes chronic. As the learned constitutional expert Bhimarjun Acharya puts it, the new constitution cannot be made given the plethora of basically unresolved political framework; if made by papering over fundamental differences, it cannot be promulgated; if forcibly promulgated through Mughlani and Firanghi pressure (as was the constituent assembly elections for an unprepared democratic polity) it will not last very long.

And it is not that these are 'truths that we hold as self-evident'. Even in their homeland - Europe and by extension the United States as a historical adjunct - these values are far from established and continue to be fiercely debated. Just this past week we have seen how Pope Benedict XVI has announced his crusade against secularism in the land of the mother of parliaments where the head of state is also the head of church. His statement - 'the legitimate role of religion in public life' - should have been contrasted against the Vatican welcoming Nepal's going secular after sidelining the monarchy! It is doubtful if the aspiring Kangressi leadership or their media acolytes are even aware of the contradiction and its implications. In terms of political leadership, the overall political architecture of 2005 has essentially collapsed and its main architects, both Nepali and foreign, have become a sorry-looking lot that cannot be much of a basis for the architecture of a New Nepal. ■

## MAOIST-UML DEAL Stuck!

By SAROJ DAHAL

**S**tung by the *Maharagate* over the prime minister's race, Maoist supremo Prachanda made an unexpected turnaround.

He got out of the race for the top executive office. But not without ensuring that the only rival, Ram Chandra Poudel, did not get a walkover.

Seven-time unlucky Prachanda got the UML on its side to refrain from voting for Poudel in the eighth round due next Sunday.

revolt or overtly work for a new constitution under the present set-up — before its extended meeting scheduled in late October.

The Maoist-UML deal therefore does not sound too promising to break the present deadlock.

The deal was a result more out of the compulsions of both parties than a sincere desire to move ahead.

Under mounting pressure from within and without in the wake of repeated loss in the PM's voting and the *Maharagate*, Prachanda was looking for a safe-exit.

If Mahara seeking 'Chinese money to buy votes' over phone has not been independently verified it has not been denied outright by the Maoists, either.

The Maoist position has been 'what is important is how the phone of a senior leader was tapped not the



**Jhalanath (Left) and Prachanda** : Alliance for power

The Maoist-UML deal aims at forcing Poudel to withdraw too, and forming a consensus government.

Poudel suspects a conspiracy behind the consensus *mantra*.

The leadership issue also remains a contentious knot to untie even in the unlikely event of a consensus.

The ambitious UML chairman, Jhalnath Khanal, hopes to fulfill his long-cherished dream in the new situation.

Prachanda has not given up his, either. By agreeing to speed up the management and the 'integration' of the Maoist combatants, he hopes to build a platform on which he can claim to have transformed the former rebel outfit into a *civil* party.

That is easier said than done. The deeply divided ex-rebel party is unlikely to make a major policy decision — to covertly go for a popular

contents of the phone conversation'.

The UML too had the compulsion to get out of the stinging attack on its "neutrality" in the PM's voting.

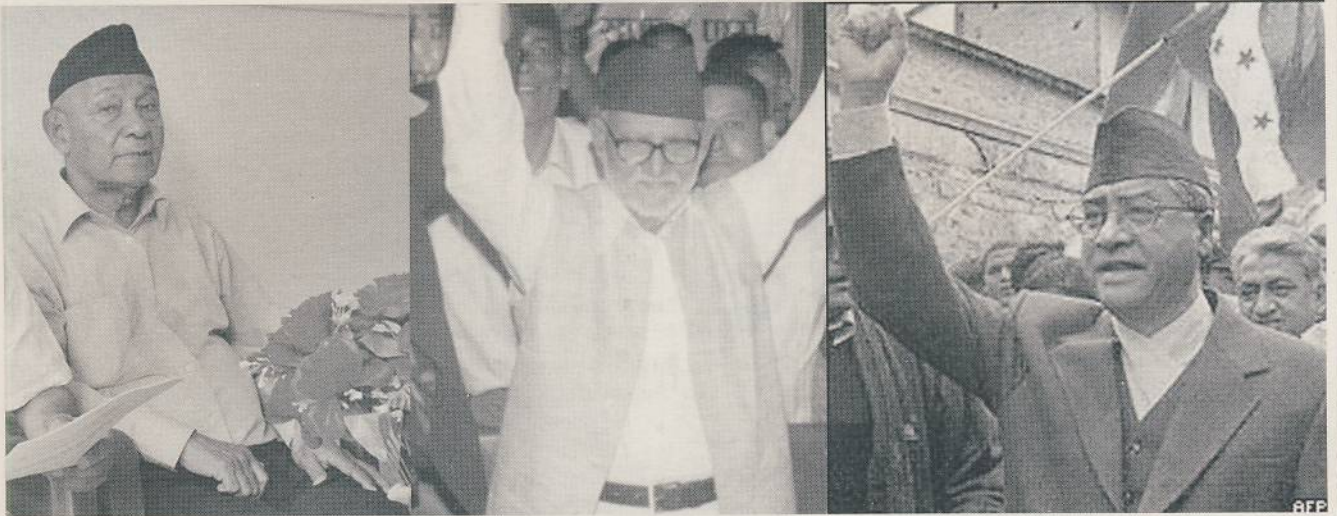
If the top leaders had any hidden agenda, as suspected by the Nepali Congress leaders, it fell flat two days after the deal.

No sooner had the Maoist vice chairman Narayan Kaji Shrestha hinted at a Maoist-UML combine to lead a majority government, if the Nepali Congress did not fall in line, the faction-ridden UML roundly rejected the idea.

Instead of breaking the stalemate the Maoist-UML deal is expected to prolong it.

The days of the caretaker prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal are not over yet. ■





NC Leaders Tamang (left), Koirala (centre) and Deuba : Tussle for chair

## NC CONVENTION

# Pomp And Show

*The first convention of Nepali Congress party, after the demise of G P Koirala, fails to show a way out to the ongoing political impasse*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**T**he make-shift convention hall at the Bhrikuti Mandap in Kathmandu looked like a festival venue throughout the third week of September. Nearly 3,000 delegates from all over the country could be seen chatting with their friends and meeting prospective leaders. Many of them were busy seeking votes for themselves in the party's new central committee elections.

At a time when the country remains without a chief executive for more than two months, the five day 12th convention of the Nepali Congress (Sep 17-21) focused more on choosing a new leadership of the party rather than finding out the root cause of the prolonged political instability in the country and how to deal with that.

During the colourful inauguration of the convention on September 17 at the Open Air Theater at Tundikhel, NC leaders engaged in a verbal duel with chairman of the Unified CPN (Maoist) Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) who was also present at the dias. "Maoist party is mainly responsible for the on-going political deadlock," thundered Nepali Congress parliamentary party leader Ram Chandra Poudel, who has been contesting for the post of Prime Minister against Maoist supremo. Referring to Prachanda's decision to withdraw his nomination from the race (after seven rounds of inconclusive voting), Poudel said he won't withdraw his nomination unless the Maoists give up violence and turn into a 'civilian party.'

After facing a humiliating defeat in the Constituent Assembly elections in May 2008, NC workers throughout the country were in an upbeat mood in the run-up to the general convention this year. "Nepali Congress has remained at the centre of Nepali politics for the last sixty years. After this convention, we will again take a lead to usher the country into a peaceful era by drafting the constitution and taking the peace process to a logical conclusion," said Dr Minendra Rijal, a Nepali Congress leader and minister in the caretaker government. He, however, did not disclose what magic formula his party possessed to accomplish these tasks.

The void created by the demise of veteran Nepali Congress leader and former Prime Minister G P Koirala seemed difficult to fill in despite the enthusiasm shown by NC leaders and workers.

"The main test before the NC leadership at present is whether it can stand up to the Maoist party that is harping on an ultra-nationalist plank by propagating anti-India sentiments," said Kanak Mani Dixit, a political analyst. "If it doesn't shed its laziness and activate its rank and file and intelligentsia, it will gradually lose its ground and the national political spectrum will be occupied by other actors." ■



INDIA.CHINA@NEPAL

# Hind-Chini

## Vie Vie

With security concerns topping their agenda in relations with their common small neighbour, India and China have a long history of suspecting each other's motive in the land-locked Himalayan nation — and acting and reacting accordingly. But both apparently realise that a full-scale open hostility will only benefit the distant third party — the western powers. Hence the need for a mutually beneficial compromise — i.e. stability — in Nepal. At any cost.

By SUSHIL SHARMA

The recent visit of a high-powered Chinese delegation, coming as it did close on the heels of the tour of the India *prime minister's* special envoy, triggered a fresh debate on the rivalry of the two giants in the baby Himalayan republic.

The visit of the 24-member Chinese team led by the vice-prime minister ranked senior communist party leader, He Yung, was widely seen as a proof of growing Chinese concern and interest in Nepal.

That the Indian special envoy, Shyam Saran, preceded politburo

member Yung at Tribhuvan International Airport has been viewed as a reflection of the increasing rivalry of the big neighbours.

But the fact of the matter is: the under current was there long before it began to openly surface.

Just rewind the recent history. And look at what happened 60 years ago.

A year after chairman Mao Zedong unfurled the red flag in Beijing marking the arrival of communism, prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru got his fledgling Nepalese counterpart, Mohan Shumsher

Rana, to sign the 1950 treaty.

The treaty, a bone of contention in the bilateral relations even now, was clearly prompted by democratic India's security concerns over the emergence of a communist regime the next door.

Ten years later, Nehru 'advised' Nepal's first elected prime minister, B.P. Koirala, against visiting China ahead of India.

In meeting with Koirala in Delhi, Nehru went on to ask his good friend to abandon the plan to befriend Beijing altogether — in vain, though.



B.P. was out of power soon. King Mahendra dismissed his government and jailed the sacked prime minister.

But the relations between Mahendra and Nehru too soured subsequently. And the Chinese defense minister Marshall Chen Yi made a stunning statement: “any attack on Nepal will be considered an attack on China.”

This remains the strongest Chinese statement ever over external threat to Nepal.

The mid-sixties witnessed a dramatic scene on the streets of Kathmandu.

Demonstrators vandalized a Chinese stall at a fun fair at Pradarshini Sthal – later named after the Lichhabi princess Bhrikuti who was married off to a Tibetan king. The protestors went on to destroy chairman Mao Zedong’s photo.

The Chinese embassy in Kathmandu suspected Indian hand and warned that it will “break the skulls” of the miscreants.

Some of the activists involved in the attack are currently at the centre of national politics. They are accused of a south tilt.

In 1990, China supplied some lethal arms to the royal regime of Nepal. Angry, India imposed economic blockade. A pro-democracy movement followed. King Birendra was forced to give in absolute powers.

In the resultant new political set-up of Nepal, China began to suspect that its Tibet sensitivities were not being adequately taken care of.



**Chinese Leader He Yung (Left) and NC Leader Sushil Koirala**

It was not for nothing that a Chinese defense minister, in 2001, made a trip to the southern Himalayan neighbour.

Chi Haotian was the first Chinese defense minister to visit Nepal.

The visit took place two years after prime minister Li Peng told the visiting former Nepal’s prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, in Beijing, point blank that China did attach importance to relations with Nepal for “security reasons” as well.

One of the most powerful persons — No. 2 in the leadership rung after President Jiang Zemin — Li’s remarks on relations with Nepal was the strongest

by any senior Chinese leader since the Sino-Indian war.

Having initially embarked on a three-nation South East Asian nation tour, which took him to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, Defense Minister Chi had hastily put Nepal on his itinerary.

The visit of the Chinese defense minister to Nepal took place at a time when India started changing its policy on its eastern neighbour, Myanmar, to make compromises with the east Asian nation’s military regime in an obvious attempt to tame the growing Chinese influence there.

Instead of making a halt at Myanmar, at the end of the region’s tour, Chi decided to take a long flight to another region, South Asia. And it was clearly not just a simple stop-over on his way back to Beijing. Chi spent full four days in Nepal.

The first ever visit of Nepal by the defense minister of one of the world’s Big-5 nuclear powers took place immediately after Chinese strongman Li Peng was greeted by regional rival, India, with the test of the long-range Agni missile that had the power to penetrate deep inside the communist republic.

Having changed into his military uniform upon arrival at the Tribhuvan International Airport — coincidentally



**Indian Special Envoy Shyam Sharan Meeting with Maoist Leaders**



on Nepal's Army Day — Chi made it a point to be seen in uniform in all official programs.

The message he was trying to give was obvious despite a trip to Lumbini.

Interestingly, the He Yong-led Chinese delegation also did not forget to fly to the birthplace of Buddha.

Talking about the recent past again, the opening of the Indian consulate general's office in Birgunj reportedly prompted the Chinese to seek a similar presence in the southern plains of Nepal.

China has already begun to fund projects across the country, following a similar move by India in recent years.

If the sensitive Mustang district on the borders with Tibet is an example, the free food aid to border districts on the north is clearly an attempt to win the hearts of the local populace. Interestingly, Nepal has not been able to make most if “for want of money” to foot the transportation bill.

India has been equally been suspicious of China in the region – Nepal included. Latest example: prime minister Man Mohan Singh's recent remarks.

In an off-the-record chat with Delhi editors, he dubbed China as the “number one threat”, according to a report in *The Times of India*.

Although Singh was reported to be angry over the publication of the “off the record” comments, there had been no official denial to date.

The remarks from the soft-spoken gentleman prime minister was unexpectedly the strongest after the maverick defence minister George Fernandez declared China “the number one enemy” in the wake of the 1998 Pokharan nuclear test which he said was targeted at the communist foe.

However, analysts say, in Nepal the two giants have compulsions to be not at war despite competing security concerns.

The two have common concerns and interests as well.

As it focused its attention on China, India has found the growing western presence and influence cutting into its clout in Nepal in recent years.

The huge pumping of dollars and pounds through various channels, mainly the non-government organizations, has threatened to dry out *therupiah's* leverage.

The western factor is a headache to China too. For a different reason, though.

It fears Nepal turning into an international hotspot for activities directed at its most soft target — Tibet.

It was at the top of the agenda in talks the recent Chinese communist party delegation held with the Nepalese officials. From president Ram Baran Yadav to prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal to top leaders of all the three main parties.

The western-backed UNMIN and the OHCHR have been a reason of common concern to both Asian giants.

As permanent member of the security council, China may be a party to the UNMIN's presence and extension of its tenure, but its discomfort is no longer a secret.

Nepal sliding into chaos or a civil war – as feared by some — has the potential of bringing the two big neighbours to collide head-on given their competing interests and concerns.

But that will not be an attractive option for the two emerging world powers – especially China which would rather keep India engaged in regional conflicts such as Kashmir.

An open conflict with the rising China is also something India would possibly like to avoid, as it struggles to catch up with the dragon land which just recently overtook Japan as the world's second largest economy.

Obviously, both would want to avoid direct confrontation. Chinese spokesperson's remarks last week would amply testify this.

Said Jiang Yu in Beijing, “from Chinese point of view we believe that China and India are good neighbours and two emerging powers.”

As China played host to two senior



**Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian Visited in Nepal**

India ministers, Kamal Nath and Kapil Sibal, for talks on boosting bilateral trade and economic cooperation, Jiang said, “Strengthening cooperation and building mutual trust is beneficial to the two peoples and also conducive for world peace and development.”

China had been greeting the Indian ministers close on the heels of the row over the denial of visa to an Indian army general based in the Indian-administered Kashmir, B.S. Jaiswal, and the reports of Chinese troops in Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

India called off defence exchanges in protest, but China was quick to describe the incidents as aberrations. It said, joint defence exercises with India would continue.

And the spokesperson Jiang expressed hope that “individual incidents will not affect the overall interests of development of China-India relations.”

Indian officials were quick to reciprocate, “the active engagements of the Indian ministers show that New Delhi, while asserting its stand on its core concerns in ties with Beijing, continues its close engagement with China...”

Once bitten twice shy, Delhi may have reasons to be more concerned, though. It felt betrayed in the 1962 war with China over the much-hyped *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*.

But some 50 years later, the Indian elephant has limited options other than to live in and co-existence with the Chinese dragon even in areas it considers its backyard. Nepal included. ■



# 'India-China Competition Is Natural'

-RAMESHNATH PANDEY

Former foreign minister RAMESHNATH PANDEY closely watches the political developments in Nepal. In the wake of debates over the external forces making Nepal a battleground, former foreign minister Pandey, who started his career as a journalist and ended up with politics, spoke to KESHAB POUDEL at his residence about the role of external powers in Nepal. Excerpts:

**What is your impression about growing Chinese activities?**

For the first time, China has shown its concerns and interests in Nepal. We have to take note of the statement in which the visiting Chinese leader says China will not interfere in internal affairs of Nepal and it is unacceptable for China any interference by others in internal affairs of Nepal.

**Do you think it is a major shift in Chinese stand?**

Yes. China used to say in the past that they would not interfere in internal affairs of Nepal. This was ritual. But, Chinese used another word saying they will not interfere in Nepal's affairs and it is unacceptable for them if others make interference. Now the questions come. If other forces interfere or China takes others' activities as interference, what action will China take? Whatever action it takes, it will put Nepal in a difficult position.

**How can Nepal preempt possible accident?**

If we failed to complete the peace process in four months as we have committed to the international community, civil war will break out in Nepal and that is going to be a proxy civil war and it will push Nepal into Yugoslavia's road from Lebanon. It will wipe out Nepal from the international map.

**Do you mean the recent statement of Chinese is a warning to south or suggestion for restraints?**

I don't have any confusion that India has security, political and economic concern. It has been there for a long time and it will remain there. India will make its efforts to address it. We have to take it naturally. We should not forget that Chinese security interest in Nepal is also growing. As its security concern in Nepal is growing, we have to take Chinese actions as natural. However, we have to understand the fact that the adventurism shown by our government and other international players in Nepal increases the security concern of Nepal's two neighbors.

**How can Nepal avert the confrontation?**

There is a feeling in both the capitals of India and China that Nepal government does not have the capability to look after their genuine concerns and they have to take care of their own interests by themselves. In this situation, we need to convey both the neighbors that we will protect their genuine interests.

**How much possibility is there to build mutual confidence in Nepal between India and China on their own interests?**

I think you can write a very good essay on the theme but it is impossible in international politics and it is just a wishful thinking. We should not forget the fact that both

of Nepal's neighbors, India and China, are aspiring or global economic powers. There is a competition for leadership between them. There is only one leader and one cannot get the leadership without minimizing the other. If they want to become Asian powers, both the countries need to maintain good relations with their neighbors so that they can concentrate outside.

**What is India's concern in Nepal?**

Since the establishment of relations with India in 1947, India has always shown its concern in Nepal regarding its security. She has made every effort to protect her interest in Nepal. It is natural as every big country has concern with smaller country and they make efforts to address that concern by using their influence. We should not take such efforts otherwise.

**How do you view India's relations?**

The weakness of Indian foreign policy is that India's relationship with its entire neighbors is very bad. India's relations with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan are not good. India is trying to build relations with all neighbors but their security feelings and worries are there. India needs to change its stand to build relations with its neighbors on the basis of mutual respect. This is a prerequisite for India.

**If India establishes good relations with its neighbors, will it change the relations between India and China?**

Despite this, there will be no tangible change between India and China. Their clash of interest will be there. In such a situation, they will come with mutually agreed confidence building measure is just a wishful thinking. This is not practical but theoretical.

**It is reported that Nepal's two neighbors are worried about the presence of western forces, UNMIN and OHCHR. Don't you think they come together to maintain their influence?**

There will be no substitution for UNMIN and China will not feel secure with the presence of anybody. It may feel secure under the presence of UNMIN since it is one of the members of P5. Even for India, the best bet will be UN.

**How can Nepal safeguard the interests of both the neighbors?**

For both the neighbors, the best option will be strong, stable and prosperous Nepal. We should not forget the principle that a big country feels secure when a small country is stable. Had Afghanistan been secure and stable, peaceful and prosperous, Bin Laden would not have been born. One cannot make the global environment secure by turning a small country insecure and chaotic. It will not make any power safe in case of chaos in a smaller country.

**Do you think China is reliable and trustworthy as in the past?**

We need to give up a phobia of past that China will come to help us in the crisis. How much is China trustful? We need to be clear on that. When we established our relations with China, it was in isolation and was weaker

**Yes. China used to say in the past that they would not interfere in internal affairs of Nepal. This was ritual. But, Chinese used another word saying they will not interfere in Nepal's affairs and it is unacceptable for them if others make interference.**



internally and poor. China was very friendly and trustful at that time towards her friends and friends relied on it.

#### Why are you suspecting China?

Now China is a different country and it has already become an economic power. China is sustaining American economy. China has strengthened its capability globally and it is stronger. What will be present China's attitude? Will it be different than old China or similar? We have yet to test it, whether China is dependable to its old allies or not. If we have built our own thinking based on old perception, it may be right or wrong. It will be risky.

#### What is required then?

We need to earn the trust of both of our neighbors. We have to give confidence to both of our neighbors that their interest is properly protected in Nepal. Nepal's interest will not be served as long as Nepal does not guarantee this. We have challenges and opportunities as well.

#### What do we need to do to protect our interest?

We cannot protect our interest without addressing genuine concerns of both the neighbors. Nepal has much opportunity as well. The big market of Nepal's two neighbors can bring prosperity to Nepal. If we create a situation favorable to us, we can change the world. We must act as a bridge to increase understanding between two neighbors. In this situation, we can protect our interest as well as can bring prosperity. Nepal can also prevent possible conflict between India and China and it will be major contribution in the global peace.

#### How do you assess India, China relations?

Conflict between India and China is growing. We have to read two statements of Indian prime minister and defense minister which showed that the conflict between India and China is growing and there is war of words between them. Since both the countries have matured leadership, this conflict will not bring any war. But the trends showed that war of words will increase further.

#### What will happen after four months when the tenure of UNMIN is completed?

I hope for the best that everything will be completed, including the peace process in four months. We need to be clear that it is not the UN responsibility to conclude the peace process. UNMIN can supervise and support and assist the peace process. Mistrust is growing between the political parties and there is a deficit of trust between UNMIN and Nepal. In this situation, I can see lesser possibility of completion of the peace process.

#### Will UNMIN tenure be extended again?

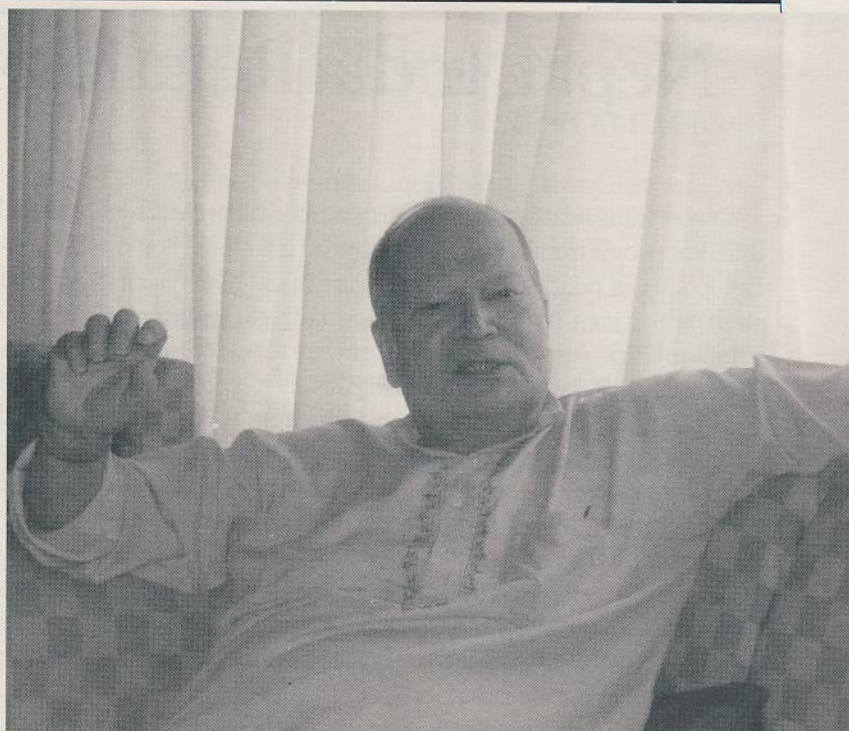
UN has already decided to pull out UNMIN in four months. Even if extension is required, we need to take a very strong initiative to persuade the Security Council again. Given Nepal's present quality of leadership, I don't think we have such a diplomatic capability.

#### What will be other options?

Once UNMIN is pulled out, UN secretary general's statement includes the word 'alternative' arrangements in case Nepal's peace process remains incomplete. There is a big question what that 'alternative' means. Nepal has not made any efforts to seek clarification on that word.

#### Don't you see there will be a vacuum after UNMIN leaves?

When UNMIN leaves, there will be a big vacuum and there is no institution which is capable to fill it. One group



argues that political parties have the capability for this. If they are capable, why do not they settle the peace process? If external force tries to fill that vacuum, it will be a major disaster for Nepal.

#### Which external force is that?

All of us know which force has largest security stake in Nepal but it is not in an interest of external force. Nobody can justify it to replace UNMIN.

#### If the southern neighbor tries to fill that vacuum, what will be the reaction from the north?

The north will definitely react in many forms. We should not forget that effects of Nepal's chaos and instability directly spill over to India and China. If Nepal's chaos affects these two emerging powers, it will affect the peace and stability of the region and the world. Its ramifications will be much more serious and larger than what we are expecting.

#### How do you look at the current row between the UN and Nepal?

We had made a blunder when we wrote a letter to the United Nations. The letter shattered more than 53-year old good relations between Nepal and the UN. Nepal is widely respected in the UN as it has made very important contributions against apartheid. When Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in Congo in 1961, the UN set up an inquiry commission, which was led by Nepalese foreign minister Rishikesh Shah. Nepal was given such a huge responsibility and regard. When the UN won the Nobel Peace Prize, then secretary general took the Nepalese Army officer to accept that Noble Peace Prize.

#### If that is so why did Nepal take such a decision?

I think a conspiracy against Nepal is going on and we are playing at their hands. The efforts are going on to show international community that Nepal is a weak nation, it is incapable to take decisions on its own and there are wide divisions and differences among major political parties.

*We have to read two statements of Indian prime minister and defense minister which showed that the conflict between India and China is growing and there is war of words between them.*



# Nepal, India Relations At Sixty

-YUBARAJ GHIMIRE



Nepal India relations have been described differently by different people from both sides. Many call it 'unique'. Some call it 'special relations' while there are many who resent such adjectives being used to describe the bilateral relationship. But there seems to be an element of romanticised view of the relationship always, especially in Nepal, as there has hardly been an effort from this side to have the relationship reviewed and upgraded within the realms of realities.

Gandhi's India—an India that is just and treats its neighbours with respect, an India that may want to act benevolently at times, an India that does not flex its muscles in the neighbourhood, and an India that does not quite demand reciprocity—quite often is the referral point when most Nepali leaders feel that India only has an obligation to 'give' to Nepal. Stretching arms with begging bowl has often been the political culture that successive Nepali governments have preserved and followed over a period of time. Naturally, national dignity and pride become the first casualty of such behaviour on the part of the state.

As the formal bilateral relationship enters its 60th year—considering signing of the 1950 treaty of Peace and Friendship—the two

countries seem more confused about its nature and dimension. There are people in both countries at the policy making level who believe the 1950 treaty is 'unequal', there are also voices in favour of massive regulations of the open border—something considered unique feature of the bilateral relationship—and play down something called '*roti beti ka sambandh*'. India's security perception places Nepal on the list of countries with high possibility of its territory being used by anti-India forces including terrorists and fake currency smugglers.

In the context, India seems willing to go for a review of the 1950 treaty asking Nepal to decide the nature of change, modification or improvement it wants in that, something Nepal is still vague about. Some of the provisions in the treaty and associated arrangements including India having the final say on import of arms by the government of Nepal, and Indian companies having priority rights on major developmental contracts are definitely in detriment to Nepal's interest in the current era of global competition. Similarly, some Indians hold the view that the treaty is

unequal in the sense that while Nepal has the right to buy and own property in India, that reciprocity has not been granted to the Indians in Nepal.

While the provisions of the treaty can always be reviewed—and in fact they need to be—the irritants in the bilateral problems can largely be attributed to attitudes that the treaty does not confer on officials or agencies of the state. That is at least an open assertion in Nepal. Indian authorities' open involvement in Nepal's politics is something that is making the south unpopular here. The fall of monarchy—an agenda that India put forward while bringing the Maoists and seven political parties under the 12 point agreement—has also brought China in Nepal in an unprecedented scale. India's perception so far that it can cause any happening in the north may still be valid, but where it has gone wrong is the fact that the consequences may not exactly be what India wants. Nepal obviously will not go, and cannot go against its vital interests and of India or China, or for that matter of any country, unless they directly clash with its own national interest.

There is a growing perception here that India wants to extract undue concessions from Nepal at the time of crisis, especially from a regime about to fall.

**There are people in both countries at the policy making level who believe the 1950 treaty is 'unequal', there are also voices in favour of massive regulations of the open border—something considered unique feature of the bilateral relationship—and play down something called '*roti beti ka sambandh*'.**

The signing of 1950 treaty with Mohan Shumsher when the regime was facing a popular mass protest—all that in full knowledge and support of India—is cited as an evidence even today. It was repeated in 1990 when S K Singh came to see King Birendra with Rajiv Gandhi's proposal that India be given priority rights over Nepal's water resources compared to other international bidders, and that it accept India's vital security interests over Nepal. Such perceptions need to be addressed while two countries sit to decide how to take the relationship further. And of course, that has to be matched by suitable conducts on the part of peoples, especially representing the two states. Nepal and Nepal should be clear that they need to discuss business with India, and that Gandhi's values are as alien to India as to the rest of the world while discussing the bilateral issues. A nuclear India and an economically fast growing India may not mind deploying more Seema Suraksha Bal (SSB) along Nepal-India border and create a distance between the peoples of two sides bound by geography, history, culture and language if that's how it will feel safer and secure. ■



# "Indian Interference In Nepal Is Now Naked"

- SURESH ALE MAGAR

Constituent Assembly member SURESH ALE MAGAR is a well known UCPN-Maoist leader. Magar, a former English teacher at the Nepal Law Campus, was elected to the CA from Tanahu constituency No. 3. As uncertainty continues to cloud over the constitution writing process, the CA member spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues. Excerpts from a half hour interview:

**Why does your party always talk about external interference in internal politics? Is it just a gimmick or something real?**

External interference in Nepalese politics is not a new phenomenon. It has been there for a long period of time but there is a naked interference now by a neighboring country which even interferes in the parliamentary elections.

**Which neighboring country?**

It is India which is interfering with the internal politics of Nepal. Indians are nakedly interfering in Nepal's politics to the extent that they issued threats to CA members representing Terai. Indians are making every effort to stop our leader Prachanda from becoming the prime minister.

**Your party now seems to be fond of India bashing. As long as your party received a warm welcome in India, your leaders did not hesitate to sign the 12-point agreement in New Delhi. Why did you not oppose mediation then?**

We are not fond of India bashing. Of course, people of India supported our movement but the Indian government is always against us. I was arrested by Indian police and extradited to Nepal. Other leaders like CP Gajurel, Matrika Yadav and comrade Kiran too were arrested by police. So far as our relations with people of India are concerned, they are always warm.

**Chinese are also showing interest in Nepali politics and one Chinese businessman reportedly agreed to provide your party 500 million rupees. Why does your party not oppose China?**

So far as the money issue is concerned, it is a conspiracy of Indians to defame our party. Our party leaders have already challenged the concerned parties to form an inquiry commission to probe it. The Chinese have never shown any interest in the internal politics of Nepal. We will oppose any country if it interferes with the internal political affairs of Nepal.

**But your party is pointing only to India.**

Although there are embassies of Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh, China and many others here, it is India which is openly interfering in internal politics of Nepal. India is dictating who should be the prime minister of Nepal. Indians even do not spare newspaper houses. Had Indians remained idle, there would have been no reason to blame them.

**Is not your party's stand anti-Indian?**

We are not anti-Indian. What we have been doing is defending our country's sovereignty and integrity. We want to establish the right of the people to decide who is going to be the prime minister of Nepal and who is going to be the president. If somebody sees this as an anti-Indian stand, we don't have to say anything to them. Because of the nationalist stand of our party, we have already suffered a lot but we will not give up on it. That is our identity.

**There is the need of unity among the people and political parties to defend the nation but your party's proposal to carve Nepal into federal states on the basis of ethnicity creates more rifts. What do you say?**

This will strengthen the nation. If people get their ethnic recognition on the basis of units, they will defend their territory by themselves. Our aim is to unite the country into diversity. Our party's proposal is guided by nationalism and the federal model is also based on it. Until people are made strong, there will be nobody to defend the nation. Although the King also harped on the slogan of nationalism, it proved hollow because he did not recognize diversity of Nepal.

**How hopeful are you that the new constitution will be promulgated by May 2011?**

There is no option before us. We need to promulgate a new constitution to strengthen the achievements made by Janandolan II and Madhesh Andolan. Only through the new constitution, we can consolidate Democratic, Federal Republic of Nepal. In all these circumstances, the political parties must work hard to bring the new constitution by May 2012.

**There is a growing disagreement among the country's major political parties over forming the new government, how do you see the possibility of writing the new constitution?**

It is the primary duty of political parties to fulfill their commitments expressed to the people. We promised to the people that we will write a new inclusive constitution for them by way of which they will be the real masters of the country. If we don't fulfill our promises, we will lose people's faith and trust on us.

**There are so many differences among major political parties over the thematic committee reports. How can you settle all these in a short span of time?**

We have to settle them. All of us agree on federal democratic republic. The issues like forms of government and other issues will be settled once we sit together.

**How do you see the role of other political parties?**

Had other political parties shown sincerity, the differences would have been settled a long time back. Nepali Congress and CPN-UML need

to give up their regressive stands. Once they turn themselves progressive, most of the confusions will be cleared.

**What is the position of UCPN-Maoist?**

Our party's position is clear. We don't compromise with anybody so far as our agenda of federal republic Nepal is concerned. We will continue our struggle to empower all the people particularly those who are oppressed for a long period of time. People's Movement II and Madhesh Andolan have already indicated how people will react in case they are denied their rights.

**The United Nations Security Council extended the tenure of UNMIN for four months for the last time. Do you think the Comprehensive Peace Agreement will be fully implemented by then?**

We are working to conclude the Comprehensive Peace Agreement within four months. UCPN-Maoist always supported peaceful resolutions of all the problems. This is the reason we joined the mainstream politics.

**Recently former King and his family have intensified their activities. Do you see any possibility of revival of monarchy in Nepal?**

It is a mere wish of some people. I don't think Nepal will have monarchy again as people have dumped it into the dustbin forever. In the name of Hindu religion, King is trying to establish himself and he is making efforts to restore his role. ■





## BUDGET CRISIS

# Development Derailed

*In the absence of new budget, the development expenditures have all but come to standstill – threatening to precipitate a wide scale crisis*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**T**he three-point pact between the ruling Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) and opposition Unified CPN Maoists on September 17 had ignited hopes for early breakthrough of the protracted political deadlock.

But it has further worsened the chances of early resolution of economic deadlock.

The state of budget-less-ness is set to continue well beyond September 26 – the date set for 8<sup>th</sup> round of PM election and the date publicly highlighted by the Finance Minister as the ultimate deadline by which the budget had to be introduced if the country is to avoid full-blown economic crisis.

The three-point pact has ensured that there will be no new PM on September 26 as well since the Maoists and the UML have both decided to stay away from the election process.

Consequently, the efforts to resolve budgetary crisis have been foiled.

Result is the total disruption of development, and increasing chances of government being lawfully unable to spend money even under regular headings.

## In A Fix

Finance Minister Surendra Pandey is in a fix these days.

“Two months of this fiscal year have already passed. But even one percent of total development expenditures has not been spent,” he rued.

The government wanted to spend Rs 125 billion on development this year.

But till now only Rs 300 million could be spent.

“This means contracts for developments have not been awarded. Without these contracts, workers will be out of job,” Pandey added.

In Nepal, government is the largest employer as the billions it spends, especially on development projects, open opportunities for employment and spur growth.

The lack of development expenditure, thus, will have far-reaching impact.

“Workers will not be able to earn their bread on the eve of the festive season. We could even be unable to pay salaries to some of the government staffs including teachers from coming month,” he said.

## Fallacy Of One-third

Although, in principle, the government can spend one-third of development expenditures it incurred in the previous fiscal year, in practice, that is hardly the case.

“Take for example, a construction of bridge. How can the contract for one-third be awarded or who will be interested in one-third contract? Which one-third part will a contractor start to build?” asked the Finance Minister.

He gave a dire warning.

“If there is no political resolution soon, I am afraid, the development expenditure will come to a total standstill.”

## Way Out

The Finance Minister and his team at the Ministry of Finance had tried in



**Finance Minister Pandey : Empty handed**

vain to make the parties see sense that leaving the country without budget is in nobody's interest.

His efforts failed miserably as opposition Maoists and coalition partner Nepali Congress both refused even to amend the finance act that would have allowed the government to increase the custom rate of gold.

The passage of the bill would have resulted in lifting of import ban the government has currently imposed on gold.

As a result, the central bank is being forced to sell 1 metric ton of yellow metal from its reserve.

Such moves are fraught with unseen dangers.

Economists have said that the indifference to resolve budgetary crisis by the political parties is gradually evolving from nonsensical to criminal.





# Economic Crisis Is Real

- Prof. BISHWAMBHER PYAKURYAL

Nepal is in a serious economic crisis as the country is running without annual budget. Although there are certain progresses in GDP, this kind of fluctuation in GDP is common. However, Nepal's economic indicators are in totality heading for a negative trend. This is an issue of serious concern. If we continue to put the country in the present situation, a major crisis is inevitable in the future. Economic statistics indicate how the situation is deteriorating further. If we talk about the trade, our export declined by 10 percent compared to the last year. During the last fiscal year, our export was about 67 billion rupees with increase of 14 percent than the previous year. Nepal's total trade deficit has increased by 47 percent globally this year. This is a very serious implication for a country where the scenario of foreign direct investment is bleak and there is no environment for employment.

The increment in export is the only way to sustain the economy. Nepal's export is declining but the import is increasing in alarmingly high rate. Thus, Nepal has been spending a huge amount of its hard currency to exchange the Indian currency used to import the goods. Because of this, the prices of our exported items are extremely high but our earning from export is low. Nepal's foreign currency reserve is also not satisfactory. Now Nepal has 3.58 billion dollars foreign currency reserve. Compared to last year when it increased by 18 percent. There is a trend of declining of gross foreign exchange reserve.

Nepal's import is rising because Nepal is spending almost all hard currency to import petroleum products. Since the price of oil increased in the international market compared to the last year, the increase is about 24 percent. This means we need to spend a huge amount of money to import oil. Since the prices of crude oil increased from 61 to 71 dollars, importing refined oil from India including the excessive duties will

increase its cost. Because of this, the cost of production also increases.

There is huge imbalance in government's income and expenditure as there are no restrictions at all in expenditure even at this period. Our recurrent expenditure, like in hospitality, travel allowances and other increases. Similarly, the non-budgetary expenditure too increases. This is unrecorded in our economic terms. We have double digit inflation in the last one year though India's inflation declined to zero. Whoever may come to the government; the ruling side always defends their economic policy and plans as well as economic scenario during their tenure. This government is not exception. Of course, certain progress

**Nepal's import is rising because Nepal is spending almost all hard currency to import petroleum products.**

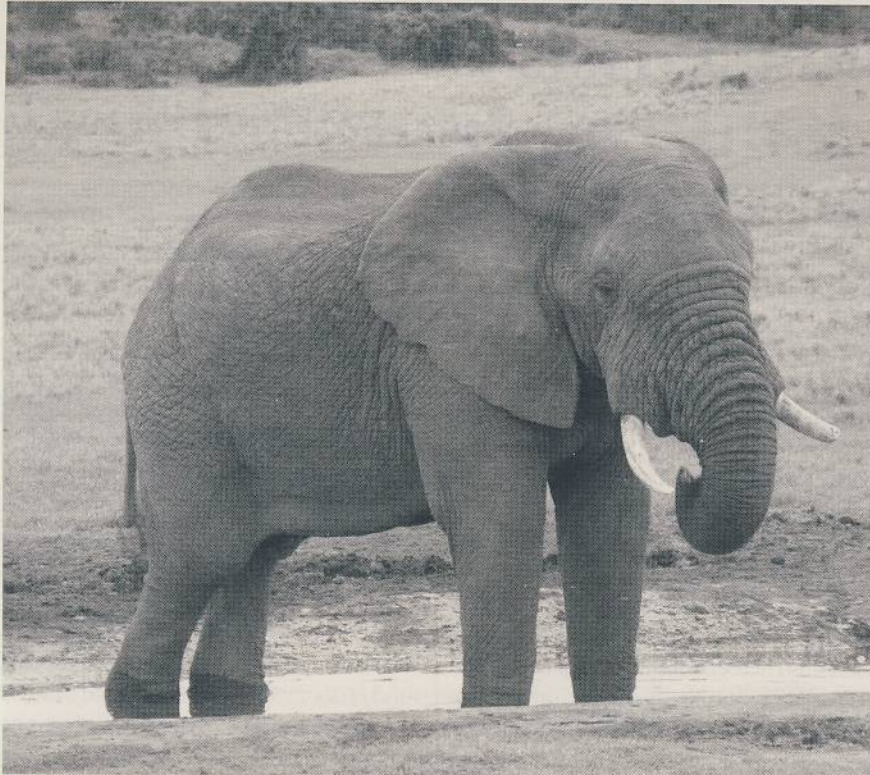
has been made in the last few months, like Balance of Payment is gradually improving following banning the gold import in the free market. Similarly, the imports of luxurious cars declined because of tightening of loans by banks.

As an economist, I have to reveal that Nepal's economy is in a dire situation or it is on the verge of collapse. If this situation continues for a longer period of time, no body can rescue the economy. Due to lack of regular budgets all the development activities are at standstill and even there are no budgets in the hospitals and dispensaries where poor people cannot get medicines. Forget about other things, simply the government cannot provide subsidies in energy, water and fertilizers. Elderly people, widows and other people cannot get their monthly allowances provided by the government. This denial will affect the kitchen of such poor and deprived people. The big ongoing infrastructure work will also suffer. In some cases, the government will have to make heavy compensation. If the government cannot issue final payment, the cost will be

overrun. Although Nepal's development partners have expressed their commitments to provide necessary resources for development activities, the government is not in a position to use it because they don't have the budget to add the counter part or matching funds. Despite all these things, donor communities have pledged to provide 110 billion rupees to Nepal. This pledge will be materialized when we will be in a position to put our contributions too in the basket. However, Nepal government is yet to bring an annual budget. Our country's situation is bad. Thanks to this situation, Nepal's opportunity to get that fund is doomed. It is unfortunate that we are losing our credibility. Had the budget been passed in time, many projects would have been completed. We would also save money. Poor people can die because of lack of budgets in hospitals. Hospitals and primary health care centers are out of budget. This will affect the life of poor and ordinary people.

Our policy is faulty. Even in normal situation with timely budget, we failed to deliver medicine to people. In this situation, there is no guarantee things will improve. Because of political reasons, the budget is not released. You cannot make Nepal bankrupt on political reasons. This is a crime of political leadership against the nation. On the one hand they have disputes with the UN, on the other hand political leaders are turning Nepal as a bankrupt nation. To save the nation from being bankrupt and to maintain the minimum growth rate, the political leaders should have to open the parliament even for one day and release the country's budget. Political leaders must pay respect to the nation. It is unfortunate that ruling as well as opposition parties have shown no sincerity towards the nation. The victims of this unnecessary political deadlock are the common people who voted their leaders to run the government. If political leaders do not seriously think about the nation's economy, the term nationalism will remain just as a part of political statement. *(As told to New Spotlight)*





**Wild Elephant** : No boundary

## TRANS-BOUNDARY MEETING

# Giant Issue

*Wildlife officials from Nepal and India discuss joining hands in curbing destruction by wild elephants*

UMA KANTA KHANAL in Jhapa

**S**ince 2036 B.S., according to locals, more than two dozen people have been killed in Bahundangi VDC, which is the gateway for elephants from India, alone. The wild elephants not only damage the crops but also knock down the houses of people. So, people of eastern Nepal are not positive about saving these pachyderms. They say that the animals should be killed.

The eastern Terai of Nepal has been affected by herds of elephants for many decades. They come from Assam in the peak season of maize and paddy. The situation becomes much panicky when

herds of more than hundred elephants enter the villages. The villagers' fury peaks and they try to attack the wild animals.

In view of the increasing distance between the elephants and the human beings of the eastern Terai, the local authorities of Jhapa and the Indian State of West Bengal met on August 30 to discuss how to decrease the distance between them, saving both.

The Indian forest officers say that generating awareness to save the wild elephants is one way to go. Assistant Forest Officer of West Bengal Government for Kurseong Subdivision Narayan Chandra Roy said, "We have to

make people aware not to attack the elephants. There is a biological need of the elephants too. So, if the elephants decline, our existence as human beings will also be in danger."

Nepal's team, including District Forest Officer, the representatives of Nature Conservation Society of Bahundangi and the media representatives had gone to Panighatta, West Bengal, to discuss the issue.

The discussion centred on this issue for at least three hours. Sudhir Kumar Koirala, DFO Jhapa, said, "The traditional method of chasing the elephants has not been effective."

He added: "We have come here to know how you are managing the wild giants."

But the Indian officers only focused on saving the wild animals.

Mr. Roy said, "The first thing is the corridor of the elephants has been blocked by the residences of human beings. They are not threatening our existence, instead, we are snatching away their living, food and movement."

The Indian officers also complain that the elephants have been severely attacked in the Nepal side. Bhupen Biswakarma, a ranger in Panighatta forest office, said, "The elephants are attacked furiously there and they die here."

The members of the Nepali team said that the Indian side should not leave animals to Nepal side in peak season of the crops. But the Indian authorities said that the boundary is not for the wild animals. They are free to move anywhere.

"We have to make a joint effort to reduce the effects of elephants in the villages of India and Nepal," DFO Jhapa, Sudhir Kumar Koirala, said. The Nepali representatives focused on the joint efforts to reduce the effects of elephants on the villages.

"In India, if a person is killed by an elephant, his or her family gets Rs. one lakh (IC) as compensation," a ranger in Panighatta forest office, Bhupen Biswakarma said, "If compensation is given, the people will think positively regarding the movement of elephants and begin to think about saving them.

"But in Nepal, no compensation has been given to the victims." ■



# Chandni Chowk To Gurgaon

By ABIJIT SHARMA



Early this month, Delhi got connected to Gurgaon through a metro line. The addition of 12.53 km to Delhi's Metro made it possible to reach the millennium city from the Central Secretariat and Qutub Minar within minutes. The newly opened line has already become a huge hit among the

traffic rush and busy roads, where almost 70 lakhs vehicles do ply every day.

The train service boasts of having carried 1.25 billion commuters over the past eight years, which is more than the estimated 2011 population of India (1.20 billion). The Delhi Metro created another record by this month by registering the highest ever ridership of 14 lakh people on a single day. The Metro has also been credited for maintaining safety and security standards.

But challenges lie ahead. Despite the much fanfare and positive response it received on its operation, problems have already begun to surface. If not addressed

with metro security. However, overcrowding the trains and stations has already become a big headache. It often becomes impossible to board the train during office hours, where a near-stampede situation quite often occurs. Repeated appeal of the Metro officials to keep away from standing close to trains fall on deaf ears, raising serious safety concerns.

The construction of the metro began in 1998, in two phases. Phase I has been completed along with parts of Phase II. The 14,430 crore rupee train service has five lines reaching to most of the major residential and commercial areas of Delhi. It covers a total distance of 138 kms. with 117 stations. The plan is to cover the whole of Delhi by 2021. This will be something for Delhiites to celebrate with a bang. But unless they stand up and take extra care while making most of their prized possession, the celebration could end up in a whimper.

The journey from Chandani Chowk to Gurgaon — and the whole service — could meet the fate the Akshay Kumar-starrer Bollywood flick, *Chandani Chowk to China*. A disaster. Not a Anuragh Basu classic *Life In A Metro*. A scintillating hit.



Delhites. More than 32,000 commuters took advantage of it no sooner than it came into operation.

Since its opening in 2002, the Delhi metro service has received an overwhelming response. It has been a big boon to the residents of the capital, who are frustrated with the infamous

on time, it could end up being yet another victim of the much criticized Indian system.

Credit goes to the officials for maintaining the rules — so far. Notice boards are on display regarding punishments for offences like spitting, sitting on the floor, or not cooperating

## ADB Awards Teams For Helping Villagers

Three projects which are helping to improve the lives of the rural poor in Nepal by providing jobs, skills and income generating opportunities have been recognized for excellence in delivering results by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The winning projects, Community Livestock Development Project (CLDP), Road Connectivity Sector Project (RCSP) and Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project (DRILP), all of which are supported by ADB, were on 7th September presented with the Outstanding Project Management Award.

Finance Secretary Rameshore Khanal presented the awards to the winning project teams at a special ceremony held in conjunction with ADB's annual Country Portfolio workshop.

"These awards recognize the project

team's excellent performance, efficiency in implementation and achievement of targets — both statistical as well as on the ground," said Barry J. Hitchcock, Country Director, Nepal Resident Mission. "The successful implementation of these projects has significantly contributed toward maximizing ADB's overall contribution to help reduce poverty in the country, particularly among the rural poor and disadvantaged, and in supporting efforts to empower women and promoting inclusive development."

The Community Livestock Development Project aims to reduce the incidence of poverty in rural areas of the 48 districts through an intensive livestock program, livestock processing and marketing, and higher-altitude livelihood pilot programs. The project has helped increase per capita income of

beneficiary households significantly.

The Road Connectivity Sector Project aims to support construction and upgrading of 10 feeder roads measuring a total of about 490 Kilometers. The expansion of the feeder road system is expected to improve access to market, health, and education centers in rural areas. The project is the first ADB sector modality intervention in the transport sector in Nepal. All the road construction activities are targeted to be completed by June 2013.

The Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project's goal is to reduce poverty in 18 very poor remote hill and mountain districts affected by the conflict. The purpose is to achieve sustainable increase in access to economic and social services and enhance social and financial capital for people in the project area, particularly poor and disadvantaged groups.

By NITISHDEV BHATTARAI



PROF. DR. HEMANG DIXIT

# Passion To Serve

*Dr. Dixit shares how he pursued a cause he deemed worthy and learnt to become 'the person'.*

By PRATIMA GYAWALI

Only a few persons like Dr. Hemang Dixit spend all their life for the cause they pursue. With a long experience in medical education, Dr. Dixit has seen all that is happening in terms of modern medical science as practiced in Nepal.

Dr. Dixit is a distinguished figure in the Nepalese medical realm. A renowned pediatrician and creative writer, Prof. Dr. Hemang Dixit, is well known for both his works. Born in Kathmandu in 1937, Dr. Dixit is an inspiration to many in how to build a wealth of information, experience and knowledge.

Education was a priority in his family. Dr. Dixit's father, Dr. Siddhi Mani, as he was known, himself was highly qualified and one of the most prominent medical doctors in Nepal during his era. Dr. Siddhi Mani firmly believed that the principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things and not basically repeating what other generations have done and hence wanted his children to get the best of education.

After preliminary education at home, Dr. Hemang Dixit was sent for schooling at Sherwood College, Nainital and Bishop Cotton School, Shimla in India. He finished his G.C.E. from University Tutorial College, London in 1956. Dr Dixit started his medical education at Charing Cross Hospital Medical School of London University in 1956. He completed it in 1961 doing the MBBS and LRCP, MRCS of the Conjoint Board.

After completing his education, Dr. Dixit returned home to Nepal in 1965 and started work at the Bir Hospital. He was posted to the newly established Kanti Children's Hospital in 1970. After 11 years, he left the government service and joined the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of

Tribhuvan University as Reader in Child Health in 1977. He became Dean of the IOM for almost four years and he became professor in child health in 1985. Dr. Dixit also severed as the Co-coordinator of

Health Learning Materials Project for a number of years. Though he retired from the IOM in June 2000, his passion to serve medical education never dies. He joined Kathmandu Medical College in February of 2001 and he has been working at the capacity of its principal now.

For his professional commitment, he was chosen to lead professional organizations like Nepal Medical Association and the Nepal Pediatric Society as a president. He also severed in the Nepal Medical Council for a number of years. He says that he would like to have used all the wonderful talent and gift god has given him for the betterment of the country both as a writer and a medical professional.

## "I Have Learnt To Become The Person"

DR. HEMANG DIXIT

DR. DIXIT shares his views with PRATIMA GYAWALI. Excerpts:

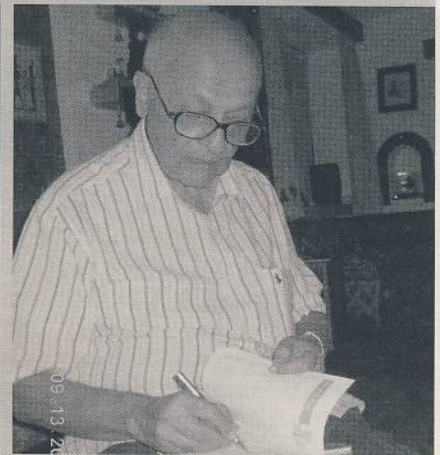
**Of all the things you have learnt from your parents which do you feel was the most valuable?**

Of course I have learned a lot of things from my parents. I learnt that education was very important from my very initial days. I have learnt to become the person I want to be without being held back. I have learned to always love and respect everyone. I have also learned that family always comes first and to always help others whenever you can.

**Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood days?**

In my childhood days the influence went beyond my parents. In those days everyone knew every other person in the area. We lived as a community not as individual families. The social bondage beat, the "tole", as we called it, was a lot stronger. Now we do not communicate or know who lives the next door. The population density and the professional aspects of life have made time very valuable. In my early years everyone seemed to have all the time in the world. In those days as we lived in big communities and the collectiveness of the neighborhood existed. My father had the most influence in me. Although he never forced me to study medicine and if I had not studied medicine I most probably would have been a writer.

**What suggestions do you have for the youth of today?**



The way I was brought up I cannot overemphasize on the importance of education yet once again as I have said throughout the time we have talked this evening. However, I would like to also mention that not only book knowledge, the knowledge has to be practical as well. It is important now that you excel in many sectors and have a more diverse knowledge base. With the availability of the internet and the tremendous development in mass media, information is available for anyone to keep updated in disciplines of interest. I also would like to emphasize on the importance of reading. I do not think the youth today read enough despite the fact that the access to reading materials have drastically increased. Lastly, education, hard work, honesty and proper communication are all equally important. ■





WORLD TOURISM DAY SPECIAL

# Prospects Galore

*Despite growing political instability, difficulty in getting air tickets even at a high price and saturated infrastructure, foreign visitors are showing their passion for relishing the cultural and natural beauty of Nepal.*

By KESHAB POUDEL

**N**epal is full of diversity. From geography to nature and weather, several things make Nepal a unique draw for the visitors. From the time when the British Military team led by Kirk Patrick one hundred fifty years ago visited Nepal till now, the passion of tourists to test the natural and cultural diversity of Nepal is alive.

It is good news for Nepal that the World Tourism Day is being celebrated this year with the slogan of Tourism and Biodiversity in support of United National Year of Bio-diversity. As one of the most biologically diverse countries and tourism destinations, Nepal, albeit small, has a reason to rejoice.

One cannot deny the fact that there is a greater value of biodiversity for

tourism and Nepal needs to grasp this. Nepal's tourism market expansion from Himalayas or top of the world to lowlands such as the Terai's national parks is an indication of how biodiversity adds value to visitors.

As Nepal is aspiring to increase the number of tourist arrivals to 1 million during the Visit Nepal Year 2011, Nepal's bio-diversity can be sold to lure the tourists.

"Tourism industry can benefit a lot by selling Nepal's bio-diversity along with cultural and geographical diversity," said Dr. Ram Prasad Chaudhary, professor of botany at the Tribhuvan University. "Nepal is a home to an abundant number of plants and animals."

Nepal's tourism will have a lot to learn and gain from other countries regarding how to sell bio-diversity.

According to UNWTO, World Tourism Day is a thematic event held every year on 27 September. Its purpose is to foster awareness among the international community of the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, political and economic value.

The event seeks to address global challenges outlined in the UN Millennium Development Goals and to highlight the contribution the tourism industry can make in reaching these goals.

Unlike in the past when they welcomed guests at Tribhuvan International Airport, giving them garlands and some cultural shows, tourism entrepreneurs need to show different ways this time around.

Nepal Tourism Board

To promote Nepal's market abroad, Nepal Tourism Board has been launching various programs in different parts of the world. Thanks to its efforts, the number of tourists coming to Nepal has increased despite political instability.

Nepal Tourism Board is marketing Nepal abroad, from neighboring countries, India and China, to those far and away like Australia and Europe. NTB took part in the international tourism festivals, and also organized Nepal festivals in different parts of the world.

This year Nepal's pavilion at the Shanghai Expo is a major attraction for visitors there. More than 2 million visitors have already visited the Nepal Pavilion. Nepal also organized tourism promotion in Lhasa.

One of the disappointing things about Nepal is the growing number of strikes and bandhs. Though these types of activities drastically declined this year compared to the last year, political parties are still choosing bandhs and strikes as an easy way to press their political demands.

As Nepal Tourism Board is vigorously marketing Nepal abroad, Nepal has a fair possibility to achieve the target to lure a million tourists to visit it. ■



# "Tourism Needs Peace To Thrive"

- ADITYA BARAL

ADITYA BARAL is not a new name. Baral has a long experience of working in Nepal Tourism Board. The Director of Public Relations and Publicity Department also worked as the foreign relations advisor of prime minister late Girija Prasad Koirala. Baral spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues in the context of World Tourism Day. Excerpts:

As Nepal is celebrating Nepal Tourism Year 2011, what prospects do you see in the context of ongoing political instability?

As long as there is peace in the country, political instability is not an issue for tourism. Tourists are least concerned about the political situation if it is not violent. They don't want their tour itinerary to be disturbed by bandh, chakkajam and other violent protests. This has been proved right as after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Treaty in 2006, tourist arrivals started to grow. As long as we practice democratic exercise without resorting to violence, Nepal Tourism Year is going to be successful. And, Nepal bound travelers have always considered Nepal at the center of their mind more than other trivial issues surrounding Nepal. As long as we maintain the sanctity of tourist's programs there will be no problem at all to achieve our goal whether it is NTY or other normal period.

Nepal is between Asia's two economic powers India and China, what does it need to do to increase the number of tourists from the neighboring countries?

The first and foremost factor is keeping cordial relations with these two emerging economic powerhouses. Once we are able to radiate warmth and confidence in relations, possibilities of boosting the economy through tourism from these two nations are immense. I am sure, if we keep our house in order, none

of the forces of the world can deter us from economic prosperity. Moreover, if two neighbors prosper through global impact, why would the other proximate neighbor be deprived? So this is a natural theory of development. Besides, good air connectivity is the key factor to bring more tourists in Nepal. So Nepal's focus should be to attract more airlines from these countries providing extra benefits in terms of landing and parking fees. Another important thing that Nepal can do is to vigorously promote Nepal in the different cities of China and India where there is good air connection.

Are there any new products for

enjoy going to jungle safari, casinos and sightseeing in Kathmandu and Pokhara. But devout Buddhists love to go to Buddhist shrines including Lumbini. I guess, style of presentation would leave us in competitive edges with all these bountiful products and unmatched hospitality.

Since the last many decades Nepal has been selling the same products in the international market like Everest, Annapurna and Langtang for trekking, don't you see the possibility to open the Himalayas of far western region?

Khaptad and Rara National Parks have been open for trekking for years. But due to poor infrastructure and marketing, trekkers are not encouraged to go there. These places are equally beautiful as Annapurna and Langtang but in tourism, private sector plays more important role in promoting these places internationally. Since source market is outside Nepal, it's important for trekking areas in Far Western

region to be taken up by tour operators of tourist generating markets. Therefore, Nepal Tourism Board always encourages international tour operators to get actively involved in promoting these areas by providing platform in the international travel fairs.

Is the present air capacity enough to bring a million tourists? What about the capacity of the hotels?

Nepal has enough air capacity to bring 1 million tourists in Nepal. Right now 27 airlines are operating from different parts of the world to Nepal. In addition to this, one budget airlines from India is operating its flight to Nepal next month. Accommodation is not a big problem in catering to 1 million tourists. Recently the government has introduced Home Stay policy which allows people to have guests in their houses under proper



Indian and Chinese tourists visiting Nepal?

We are nature based destinations. We cannot change the topography of our country. Hence, tourism here does not connote changing the products; it is more about changing the perception through proper presentation supplementing with more value additions. So, finding a niche segment and offering them with the renovated offers is the only way to keep our destinations distinct from others. Remaining competitive is another realm for survival. The present trend depicts that young Indians are now interested to try adventure in Nepal. Unlike their earlier generation, they seek adventure in traveling. So bungee and rafting have become very popular among India's cyber generation. Visit of Chinese tourists in Nepal is just recent phenomena. They





guidelines. It will help us to accommodate more tourists in Nepal even during the peak season.

**How can tourism contribute to uplift the life of rural people? Do you have any special packages to attract tourists in rural Nepal?**

As statistic shows almost 30% tourists coming to Nepal go to trekking in rural areas. Tourism is the only industry in Nepal having highest trickle down effect and major beneficiaries are in rural areas. Offering special packages doesn't fall in the domain of Nepal Tourism Board. It's the responsibility of private sector to make packages and offer them to tourists. We do have many tour packages prepared by private sector to attract tourists in rural Nepal such as village tourism packages in Sirubari, Ghalegaon, and Tamang Heritage Tour

in Rasuwa. We are very much concerned to replicate these modular village centric economic tourism programs.

**How vulnerable and sustainable is Nepal's tourism?**

It is the people's mindset that makes things vulnerable and sustainable. Unlike other industry, tourism industry is prone to anything that happens around the world whether it's terrorist attack in the USA or volcanic eruptions in Iceland. In tourism, everything depends on how people take traveling. Human beings are by birth restless and wish change. Despite best efforts put together by everybody, tourism has not been kicked off as it should be due to many sundry reasons known to everybody. But best thing about tourism in Nepal is that people love to come to Nepal again and again defying the travel warning issued by their

countries. If demand (incoming tourist) is consistent tourism would automatically be sustainable. I am sure this is the one plus point we have that makes us sustainable.

**How do you look at the investment in tourism sector?**

Businessmen always ponder over two things before making investment: favourable climate of investment and return on investment. Though there is a huge prospect for the latter, they are still quite apprehensive about the first one. There is least hope of having Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in tourism right now. However, local investors seem to have been quite excited to invest in tourism industry. It could be because of an atmosphere of hope brought about by Nepal Tourism Year. Surge in tourist arrivals has encouraged many tourism entrepreneurs for further investment. ■





report was launched.

"We need to be proud of the progress we have made in the MDGs but we need to be cautious about how to sustain them and achieve the remaining targets," said Navodita Chaudhary, chairperson of Social and Cultural Solidarity Committee and member of the MDG group of CA members.

"This is especially impressive given the fact that the country is emerging from a decade-long conflict and political instability. Nepal has made a striking progress in reducing poverty, in getting children into schools and in saving the lives of children and mothers. The national averages continue to mask significant disparities between ethnic, social and economic groups, amongst rural and urban populations and people living in the mountains, in remote areas and in the terai (plains)," said the report.

#### The progress

After the completion of two thirds of the time, Nepal needs to focus on eradicating inequality and social exclusion to achieve the MDGs and to sustain peace. According to Nepal's third MDGs Report, which was released recently, poverty came down to 25.4 percent in 2009 from 42 percent in 1996. These gains have been most impressive in the last five years with a 5 percent drop in poverty. Yet a quarter of the population still lives below the national poverty line and inequality is increasing.

One of the grim sides of the report is growing disparities. The proportion of working poor people who are working but earn less than a dollar a day - is more than one in five. On hunger, the picture is grim with close to 40 percent of children below the age of five underweight.

Along with this grim picture, there is, however, good news on primary education with enrolment rates at 93.7 percent and parity in the ratio of girls to boys. The gender gap remains high in some regions like in terai where fewer girls than boys are enrolled.

Fewer infants and under-five children are dying in Nepal today with significant improvements between 2001 and 2006. By 2009, the infant mortality rate was estimated to have dropped to 41 per 1000 live births. Under-five mortality rate was 50 per 1000 live births, down from the 162 of 1990. The country is on track to achieve this goal, the report says.

## MDG TARGETS

# High Hope

*In spite of the growing political instability and chaos, Nepal is close to achieving several of the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015*

By A CORRESPONDENT

"It was the best of the times, it was the worst of the times ...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness..., we have everything before us, we had nothing before us..."

That is how English novelist Charles Dickens described a situation in his *A Tale of Two Cities*. Present day Nepal needs a similar description.

Looking at the country's rift-ridden politics, many people conjure up a situation of darkness as if it was the worst of the times. But not everything has ground to a halt.

Looking at the progress made towards

the Millennium Development Goals, it may be described as a season of light and hope with everything before us.

Thanks to the support of Nepal's development partners and dedication of Nepalese bureaucrats and technicians, Nepal is close to achieving several of the eight globally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to poverty, education, health and environmental sustainability by 2015.

Although Nepal has been passing through a phase of sinister conflict and political instability, its progress in terms of MDGs is no mean feat. This was the reason why all Nepal's development partners, political leaders and planners felt a sigh of relief when this progress



# “We Need To Be Proud”

DR. JAGADISH CHANDRA POKHAREL

Dr. JAGADISH CHANDRA POKHAREL, vice-chairman of National Planning Commission, has been monitoring progress related to the MDGs in Nepal for a long time. Pokharel spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on related issues. Excerpts:

**How do you view the Nepal's Millennium Development Goals Progress Report?**

Despite the conflict situation and political instability, we have achieved a lot of progress. That is a good sign. The achievements made in infant mortality, school enrolment and maternal mortality are extraordinary. Of course there are many challenges ahead, particularly enhancing employment opportunities, reducing inequality and social exclusion remain major challenges.

**What does the report actually indicate?**

There are stark disparities as well. The chances of surviving up to age five are more than seven times higher for children born to mothers with high school or higher education- 13 per 1000 live births, as compared to children born to mothers with no education at a high 93 per 1000 live births. The report points to similar disparities in the chances of women surviving childbirth. Significant disparities are observed between women living in cities and those living in the hills, between those with higher levels of education, wealth and higher caste and those disadvantaged by poverty, caste or ethnic identity. The maternal health goal is likely to be met and maternal mortality rates are down from 850 in 1990 to an estimated 299 per 100000 live births in 2010.

An important thing of note is that Nepal has already achieved the 2015 target of bringing down undernourished population from 49 percent to 25 percent. Still, despite other gains, over 200,000 children are estimated to be out of school and those who are out of the education system are the most marginalized and hardest to reach.

“Has Nepal got what it takes for a sprint on the final stretch to the MDG 2015 finish line? We know what needs to happen to turn these indicators around

The report shows that all of the country's people reap the benefits of development including the hard to-reach poor and those living in remote and inaccessible areas. Of course, delivering service is very difficult.

**What concerns you much about the situation?**

The well-being of those who are hardest hit by discrimination, exclusion, poverty and unemployment is a major concern.

**As climate change is affecting the entire environment, what steps will NPC need to take to address this?**

Climate change is going to be a major issue. The Ministry of Environment has already prepared NAPA document and identified the areas for adoption. On part of National Planning Commission, the three years interim plan also stresses the

for good-sound policies that are sustained from one to the next, clear roles and responsibilities for all those involved, greater resources directed to the next generation, clear roles and responsibilities for all those and a lesser focus on results. Nepal has shown the way on maternal and infant mortality- let's apply the lessons to hunger, sanitation, and inequality,” said Robert Piper, UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal.

Nepalese society has been passing through a political crisis, having changed three prime ministers in just four years and two political systems and two constitutions. The report reveals that the gap between haves and have-nots is also increasing.

The income inequality increased from 0.34 in 1996 to 0.41 in 2004 and recent estimates have shown that it has further increased to 0.46 in 2008/09. To address the challenges of social inclusion, the report recommends that the government should make the redistribution of benefits, social justice and mainstreaming of marginalized populations and geographic areas as its overarching goal.

All the targets are not on the track. The targets that are not on track are full and productive employment for all, and reducing green house gas emissions to

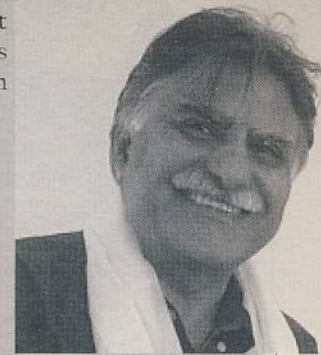
need to implement various adaptation plans.

**How is Nepal prepared to present its report at the forthcoming general assembly?**

We need to be proud about our performance. I would like to thank all Nepal's development partners in supporting us. That is going to be a great moment as Nepal has been in a position to achieve some of the goals out of eight.

**It is said that the disparities are growing. How do you look at this?**

Even the report revealed the growing disparities. Since we have made a major progress in reducing poverty, we will be able to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.



halt climate change. Significant challenges also remain in areas like reducing hunger, women's empowerment, protecting bio-diversity and in providing access to clean water and sanitation.

According to the report, food insecurity is a major problem for many Nepali people. High dependence on traditional agriculture, low productivity, small landholdings, limited off-farm and wage-earning opportunities, low wages/incomes, and various deep-rooted structural discriminations and exclusions are major factors causing food insecurity at the household level. The geographic terrain combined with lack of basic infrastructure and access to new technology make it virtually impossible for some areas to be food-sufficient in the foreseeable future. With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve Millennium Development Goals, UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend a summit in New York on 20-22 September to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs.

The report says macro-economic indicators, especially over the last two years, show serious weaknesses. The balance of payments deficit continues, with the weak fiscal discipline, dependency on imports for revenue and an unfavorable investment environment.





## POST CONFLICT THABANG

# Peace Trickles

By KISHOR RIMAL

**F**ar from the capital, in the mid-western hills of Rolpa, the people are cheering because the war is formally over. But they are still frightened with the present political scenario. They fear if the peace process fails, the war will begin again.

Thabang village of Rolpa was the former headquarter of rebels. Here they made their plans, sheltered their guerrillas and trained their cadres.

Thabang village lies in northern Rolpa. It takes two days on foot to reach this village from the nearest road. The village was the most vulnerable in the war time. Brutality, from state as well as from rebels, never ended in this village.

"More than 50 houses were bombed and burned and 30 people were killed. In the crossfire we had to flee from the village to save our lives. In doing so, many women gave birth to their children in the

forests, small children saw their houses burned, and some saw their family killed in front of them," remembers Jay Kumari B.K., a local resident, who gave birth to a son in the forest as they fled from their village in the crossfire.

In the post conflict situation, villagers here want sustainable peace in the country. This place had been isolated from the outer world for ten years. Development activities were almost nil during the conflict. Until four years ago, there was no basic infrastructure here.

But now, thanks to the efforts of the local people, there are a small micro-hydro plant, a higher secondary school, a public library and a health post. People had to walk two days to the district headquarters to make a telephone call to Kathmandu or abroad. Now most of households of this village own a mobile set.

"The trauma that war left behind in

the minds of villagers, including small children, is serious. But not all impact is negative. People of this place are now politically aware. They are concerned about the development issues as well," says Umesh Buda Magar a local youth.

Every family is volunteering to construct roads that link them with the district headquarters. The war taught them the importance of peace, social participation and development issues and brotherhood.

Besides development people also need jobs to generate income. So the villagers are working together to develop this place as a tourism destination.

Within this short interval of time, post conflict Thabang village has changed a lot. There are no more political campaigns as in the past but development hopes are running high. People are aware about participation in development. They are aware about their duty to develop their village and heal the trauma of the war.

Thabang village is just a model. There are many villages in Nepal which were vulnerable in war time. The trauma of war can be reduced by teaching them about social participation. The acute frustration from political scenario can be reduced by engaging people in the development activities of their own society and fulfilling their hopes for development. This can be the only path of restoring long term peace in Nepal and healing the trauma of war. ■

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# "Few Signs Of Progress Towards Constitution"

-SURESH ACHARYA

After working in the process of constitution making by raising awareness at the grassroots level and building public opinion, MIREST-Nepal published a book incorporating various aspects of constitution making. SURESH ACHARYA, president of MIREST - Nepal, spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on the background of his book. Excerpts:

The first phase of constitution making is completed following the finalization of thematic committee reports. What role will the organizations like yours need to play now?

Of course, there are 11 reports of thematic committees but nobody knows what is going on. Constitution making process has been derailed. Nobody is taking care where Nepal's historic constitution making process is because the forces which drive the constitution making process don't want to take ownership of the process. There is more uncertainty now because of this.

**Who are responsible for this?**

Political parties which raised the issue of constituent assembly are responsible for this. I am surprised why no political party has shown the guts by publicly expressing their complete ownership over the process. What is lacking now is the ownership. There are confusions among the people about the question of ownership.

**If parties do not take ownership, why did they agree to extend the CA tenure?**

Of course, the tenure of CA was extended for a year. One has to accept the fact that it was extended by force and the process was confusing. Many questions are raised about the political legitimacy, constitutional legitimacy and moral authority of the extended CA. There are questions as to whether the extended CA has the legitimate right or not.

**If that is the case, why is there no opposition against it?**

People accepted this decision to prevent chaos and uncertainty. For stability and peace, everyone accepted the extension. Look at political parties, they seem to be enjoying with the situation, it is unfortunate that even after completion of one fourth of the extended

tenure, the process of constitution writing has not rolled.

**Do you mean CA meetings have not taken place after its extension?**

After the extension of the tenure, the CA held only one meeting, that too to endorse the amended working procedure. It was amended 11 times in the past and this was the 12th amendment. No meeting has taken place since then.

**If that is so, what is the rationality behind this CA if it does not function?**

This is a very unfortunate situation. Thanks to the inaction of political parties and CA members, these kinds of questions are raised now. Political parties and CA members have to take the responsibility for this. Had they worked sincerely, the constitution making process would have reached a different stage.

**In the past, the civil society used to stage demonstrations, what is its role now?**

The function of legislature is to produce the government, law and constitution. However, Nepal's legislature and CA failed to deliver these all. In this context, it is not unnatural to raise questions about the legitimacy and rationality of the existence of this body. If it does not fulfill its obligation, everyone can ask why to keep such a legislature which has neither produced the government nor the constitution. The political leaders and CA members have to take the responsibility for this. CA members are directly responsible to the people and they have to reply to them.

**Do you believe the CA will draft the new constitution?**

Looking at the present trend, I don't think it will produce the constitution. There is no sign at all. For the past four months, the Constituent Assembly has not summoned any meeting. I want to question those 601 elected CA members and 27 political parties what they had promised to the people. They failed to work in accordance with the mandate. People were very encouraged when political parties said that they will deliver progressive and inclusive constitution to the country.

**If the situation prolongs, how do you foresee the future?**

If people continue to get frustrated,



they will go after CA members. Some CA members even expressed worries about the growing disenchantment among the people. CA needs to produce a constitution at any cost. People have tolerated everything for the sake of peace and stability. People accepted the decision to declare federal republic by amending the Interim Constitution before holding the elections of CA. This is too much for them.

**Do you think the new constitution promulgated by the CA will last for long?**

Given the present political trend, even if the constitution is made, there will be nobody to take the ownership. It will generate more conflicts and the constitution will be scrapped. After making the constitution, there is a possibility of a lot of opposition. This is going to be a more dangerous situation.

**Do you mean both the candidates, Maoist leader Prachanda and NC leader Poudel, have lost the confidence of CA?**

Given the results, both have lost their support in parliament. In a situation when both of them failed to garner support of half of the parliamentarians, both the candidates have to withdraw their candidacies.

**It is said that they cannot do it legally and constitutionally. What do you say?**

If there is no legal procedure to withdraw the candidacy, both of them need to resign from the CA membership. Legally, they cannot withdraw the candidature. What they need to do is to resign from the membership to give an outlet to the present deadlock.



## BHIMDUTTA (MAHENDRANAGAR) MUNICIPALITY

# Road Ruin

From the tender process to the construction phase, the recently completed Majh Gaun-Airighat Urban Road of Bhimdutta Municipality passed several stages before its execution. Yet the road project landed in controversy following obfuscation at various places. The road project was awarded in accordance with the existing laws and municipal regulations. But what was it that prevented the concerned authorities from checking the quality of construction, which has pushed the project into the purview of the Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority?

By UMID BAGCHAND  
Mahendranagar (Kanchanpur)

It took more than one and a half years to complete the 1.3 kilometers Majh Gaun-Airighat Urban Road Project of Bhimdutta Municipality. The municipality has completed several similar projects in the past. This one also fell under the category of improving the gravel and fair-weather roads to blacktopped coating.

The project completed in July 2010. When it was to be handed over to the municipality, the blacktopping cracked in several places. The road turned into a bumpy earthen road within a month. This did not surprise the users' group. In fact, the users were expecting this to happen long before the project completed. They had lodged complaints with municipal officials about the low quality materials used by the contractor. They fell on deaf ears.

The users' group complained about the quality of work with the contractors as well as the municipal technicians. "We lodged the complaints to the

municipality when the primary work started," said Keshab Bista, chairman of the users' group. "The construction company continued its work and municipality did not respond to us."

The Rs. 4.9 million road project was awarded to the lowest bidder in accordance with the Public Procurement Act 2007, Public Procurement Regulations 2008, Local Self-Governance Act 1999, and Municipal Regulation. During the process of bidding, out of 16 bidders, Sani Devi Construction Company was awarded the tender since it proposed its bid at less than 42 percent of the total budget of 4.9 million rupees. It agreed to undertake the work for Rs. 2.9 million. The whole process is transparent but it did not make it a good project.

When the tender was announced, consumers were happily hoping that they had saved a huge amount of money. Their happiness was short lived. Soon after the road construction began, disputes erupted between the Sani Devi

Construction Company and the users' group over the issue of quality of materials.

"We suspected how a company can construct the road with 42 percent less than the estimated cost. We even suggested second tender as per the act but politicians opposed it saying the benefit went to the municipality. That may be so in paper, but it is the local consumers who have been made to pay the price," said a municipal engineer. "Our technical opinions are rarely considered by the nominated board members."

Municipal officials claimed that they could not change the bidding process as the Public Procurement Act said the lowest bidder should be awarded the tender.

Bhimdutta Municipality and Sani Devi Construction Company signed the agreement on August 2009. According to their agreement, the construction company would have to complete the work





**Newly Constructed Road Ruined Within A Week** : Misuse of resources

by April 2010.

However, the contractor sought all payment from the beginning. According to an engineer, after getting the first installment of the payment, it made several efforts to get the second and third installments. Thanks to the absence of the then executive secretary, the payment was delayed. It was learnt that some local political leaders pressed the executive secretary of the municipality to issue the payment.

His absence was a blessing disguise, they say. "Had Pudashaini released the money, the construction company would have the upper hand," said an official. "We have to go to find the company. Now the company is roaming in our office."

Whatever the pressure he had to bear, Pudashaini did not release the money as demanded by the construction company. He is said to have resisted all pressures. Mostly, these kinds of contracts involve corruption.

#### Regular Irregularity

In fact, the municipality followed the laws and regulations, but did not give a second thought as to how the construction company would ensure quality at a cost which was 42 percent less than the estimated budget. There is a provision in the act that allows the concerned authorities to recall the tender if they feel that the lower bid could compromise the quality.

This is not only a single road project ruined in no time. As cost compromised quality, most of the municipal roads shared similar fates. Since most of the petty contractors were either backed by political leaders, their henchmen or supporters, or they didn't mind bidding the tender even at one third of what was needed, the crux of the matter to them was the municipal money.

**Bhimdutta Municipality was not an isolated case.**

Situated in the far western part of

Nepal, bordering Indian State of Uttarakhand, Bhimdutta Municipality, 700 km west of capital Kathmandu, has upgraded a number of earthen and graveled roads to black topping. However, most of them are inferior in quality and ruined.

With the population of more than 100,000 in recent estimates, Bhimdutta Municipality's urban growth is as high as other cities. As the city's population increases, the demands grow for better infrastructure, including blacktopped roads. With the pressure of local community, the municipality, as all other projects, endorsed the Majh Gaun-Airighat Road Project, which covers wards 12, 16 and 17.

Although there are several cases of misuses and malpractices in the construction of urban roads, the 1.3 kilometer Majh Gaun-Airighat Urban Road came to the forefront of public debate because of the resistance by users'



group and the delay in payment due to frequent absence of executive officer of the municipality.

#### Road Standards

The National Road Network comprises national highways, feeder roads, urban roads, district roads and village roads. The national highways together with the feeder roads constitute the Strategic Road Network (SRN) of the country. There is a certain standard set for them in the process of construction, including layer of roads, gravels and use of bitumen.

The lack of standards for urban roads is related to lack of standards and manuals for urban drainages. There are 2260 kilometers urban roads or 13 percent of total roads, with all urban roads sharing similar problems.

Local people complained that from the beginning there was a problematic policy. The municipality did not listen to them when they went to complain about the problems—they said the contractor did not use any bitumen or gravel as part of the agreement.

Interestingly, the municipality's engineers were absent in this whole process.

"We had rarely seen any engineer or official," said a member of a local users' group. "If we don't have any role to play, what is the use of forming the users' group and seeking our participation?" asked group member Mohan Bahadur Mahata. "How can the roads last long as the contractor has used just 19 drums of bitumen to complete the blacktopping of 1 kilometer of the road. The contractor just leveled the earth and put a few inches of gravel and then a thin layer of concrete and bitumen."

As well-trained manpower is needed to design, construct and supervise the roads, Bhimdutta Municipality has neither strong technical division to design the road, nor has it technical experts to supervise the construction process.

"We raised the issue of low bidding and the capability of the contractor. The municipality board passed the decision to award the project," said an engineer of the municipality on condition of anonymity. "Just completing the legal procedures do not make the tender

perfect, one can play a game under the disguise of law."

Although they do not have the technical capacity and the manpower, most of the municipalities in Nepal are given an excessive authority to manage urban constructions, including the city roads, by the Local Self-Governance Act 1999. In the absence of elected representatives and technical manpower, this act is often misused to fulfill the petty personal interests by local political leaders. The local community has to bear the cost.

The roads are often designed under pressure from local groups and political parties. "After the demand of local community and pressure of political leaders, we designed the road with the cost of 4.98 million rupees," said engineer Himalaya Sing Aire.

In such processes, the quality and design is nobody's concern. Only interest among various groups is to spend the annual budgets.

#### Question of Quality

From thickness of the road to materials and even the length and width of the road, the construction company has manipulated everything that can be manipulated. As per the agreement, the blacktopping should be not less than four meters in width. However, the construction company has blacktopped only 3.5 meters width of the road. The consumers' group complained that the contractors did not wash the gravel before mixing it into bitumen and the layer of gravel is much thinner than expected.

Nepal Road Standard 2027, revised 2045, stresses the need for consistency in road designing and construction requires certain road standards. It said that at any stage in the life of a road, it must be capable for providing passage to the traffic wishing to use it at the lowest overhead cost per kilometer. Acceptable gradients are related to truck operating characteristic and the design. The standard said that the road shall be designed with a capacity sufficient to cater for the estimated traffic volume 10 years after the date of completion.

Considering the busy service road, roads are proposed with the capacity of 10 tons for black topped layer surface and more for finished asphalt concrete layer.

Asian Development Bank's Technical Assistance Consultants' Report 2008 pointed out that in municipalities there is an absence of separate section that directly takes the municipal roads. The responsibility of construction and maintenance of road comes under planning and construction section. There are civil engineers in this section but none specializing on road. The persons available are preoccupied with several works.

Even the Ministry of Local Development accepts that municipal technical sections need up gradation with adequate manpower. "There is a deficiency of skill in the engineering section," said spokesperson of ministry.

"As per the agreement, there is the need to complete four layers of work before putting bitumen and concrete. The contractor completely ignored us and put very thin layers of gravels at base and he didn't even use bitumen and concrete at the top as part of the standard requirement," said Keshab Bista.

#### Political Nexus

The users' group smelled a nexus between the municipality officials and the construction company. "We wonder who prevented local municipal technicians from visiting the site when we opposed the work from the day one. We lodged the protests but all our protests went to vain.

The users' group also accused municipal technicians, who hid all their complaints and did not visit the construction site, of being at fault. After several complaints, the municipality wrote a letter to the company referring to the objections of local people over the issue of quality of materials. The construction company continued its work as the municipality just watched as a spectator.

Contractor Debidutta Bhatta rejected the charges made by the users' group and claimed that his work fulfilled the standard set by the contract.

"What I have done is more than satisfactory. The city road is not a highway and it is for local use," said Bhatta. "It is the member of consumers' group who tried to obstruct construction all the time because I denied fulfilling their extra demands." What I have done is more



than satisfactory. The city road is not a highway and it is for local use," said Bhatta. "It is the member of consumers' group who tried to obstruct construction all the time because I denied fulfilling their extra demands."

Although the users' group blamed contractors and local municipal officials for all this devastation, the contractor and municipal officials have their own complaints. With the pressure from local political leaders, the municipality decided to upgrade this portion of the road. "We cannot justify this road in terms of economic benefit. Whatever the users' group said about us, they too are not far from the local nexus of political parties," said a municipal official on condition of anonymity.

#### Contactors' Revelation

Contractors too have their own grumbles. "I paid money to the workers of political parties from day one. Whether there is the lowest or the highest bid, we have to pay donations to the leaders of local political parties," said a local contractor.

The officials said they cannot defy the order of any political parties as it is risky to their lives. "Who will come to protect us in case of physical assaults to us by workers of political parties? Along with physical threat, we will be transferred anywhere at the cost of defiance," said a municipal official on condition of anonymity. "We opposed the process of finalization of bidding that this contract should not be awarded in such a low value. We were unable to exert pressure and the tender was awarded to it."

Contractors accept the fact that they pay money to local political leaders to get the tender. They also accuse the municipal officials for creating hurdles in every payment over the issue of commission.

"We have to pay donations to the political parties and their sister organizations. We have to pay certain percentages to the municipal technical staff to sanction our payment. Along with this, a contractor has to pay 5 percent commission of the tender to Construction Association. If you add all of this, you will actually get less than 75 percent of the stipulated amount. "Only fools can think that we use quality materials and



**Bhimdutta Municipality: Under Investigation**

quality roads?" said a contractor on condition of anonymity.

#### Under CIAA Investigation

In a row over the road, the users' group filed a case with the Commission of investigation of the Abuse of Authority against the contractor and the municipality. Users' group chairman Keshar Bahadur Bista and Amar Bahadur Bista jointly registered complaints with the CIAA. After that, the CIAA ordered the municipality not to release the remaining amount of money to the contractor and launched investigation.

The CIAA asked the municipality to send the report about the quality of materials used in the road by testing it at the lab of Road Department. "The municipality has already made necessary arrangements to test the quality of roads by asking the support from the Road Department," said engineer Air.

According to the municipality, the contractor has just completed 900 meters of blacktopping out of 1143 meters.

The contractor agreed that there are patches in the road.

"I am ready to face any investigation. Yes, there are some patches in the road it is because heavy vehicles were rolled on the road which is built for light vehicles only," said Bhatta. "The estimate of this road is for less than 10-tons heavy vehicles but how can it take loads of 20 tons vehicles?"

Since 2002, all local bodies are running without elected political representatives. Instead, municipalities, VDCs and DDCs are under the guidance of central government officials. However, some mechanisms such as Seven-Party-Committees have been established for smooth functioning of local bodies.

According to the study of Urban Development through Local Efforts UDLE, in order to provide basic municipal services (e.g. road, drainage and water supply) Nepalese municipalities have invested nearly Rs. 1,128.288 million as "Capital Investment" in FY 2005/06.

On average, Nepalese Municipalities expend Rs. 344,380 for "Capital Investment" in every sq. km improvement.

Bhimdutta (171.24 sq. km with 511.36 population density) invested a huge amount of money in construction particularly on road in the year 2007. However, the state of road is not different than Majh Gaun-Airighan urban road where a long nexus of various vested interests works. How long can local bodies drain resources in constructing such roads to nowhere? This remains to be answered.

*This is the second of nine investigative story on politics of local bodies supported by The Asia Foundation. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of The Foundation or Founder.*



# Face Recognition

-BUDDHA BASNYAT, MD



The brain is amazing. There are some people who will be able to go to a new place and remember the buildings and the left or right turn they took to get there. There are some others like me who, if they have to retrace their steps, will have no idea if they turned left or right. However, believe it or not, there are people worse off than me, who will have no sense of direction regardless of having been in a particular area for weeks to months.

Apparently the same area of the brain that deals with this memory of directions is also linked with face recognition. Some people cannot remember faces. Obviously there are degrees of this problem. Have you met someone who was completely unable to recognize you although you had dinner with them a few evenings ago? Before they remembered you, you had to fill them in on the conversation you had; and finally then they were able to recognize you.

In fact the relative lack of face recognition is not an uncommon problem. My wife, who is very observant has been disappointed with me several times on

these Kathmandu streets when I have driven past her (with my mind somewhere else) without any signs of recognition. Clearly I have come to realize that together with my poor memory of directions and perhaps a compromised face recognition ability, I suffer from a mild prosopagnosia, which is also defined as facial blindness.

Prosopagnosia may also explain the situation, when a Nepali baby brought up in his own Nepali environment has a hard time recognizing individual Caucasian faces because they may all, relatively speaking, "look the same" and vice versa. I remember when I was studying medicine in Patiala, Punjab, initially all the Sardarjis with their beards and turbans looked alike.

In these days of MRI scanners, people with overt prosopagnosia clearly show lesions on the underside of the temporal cortex of the brain when scanned. They say that the difference between the best face recognizers and the worst amongst the prosopagnosics is comparable to that between people with an IQ of 150 and

those with an IQ of 50. But as with any bell curve the vast majority are in the middle.

Severe, debilitating prosopagnosia is estimated to affect two percent of the population in the US. But relatively little thought is given to this problem compared to say dyslexia (remember, Taree Zameen Par?). Teachers and others are increasingly aware of the especial difficulties (and often the especial gifts) that dyslexic children may have. But for people with severe face blindness, for now, there is not much else to do but share this problem with others who may suffer from this and rely on your ingenuity to get by in daily living.

What is reassuring is that many capable people have suffered from varying degrees of lack of face recognition. Many well known writers and even neurologists suffer from this affliction. The famous British anthropologist Jane Goodall who suffers from a varying degree of this problem says that she would be better able to recognize her individual chimpanzees if she did not have mild prosopagnosia!! ■

## Movements Should Benefit Rural Women

RADHA POUDEL

The development issues and concerns regarding women's right have received amplified attention since the restoration of democracy in 1990. Various civil society organizations are working at the local, national and international levels to empower women and ensure gender equality. Definitely, Nepali women are making a headway in increasing women's participation in the decision making process. Currently, Nepal is the 17th country in the world having high women's participation in parliament (33.2%) whereas Rwanda is the first such country.

To institutionalize women's participation in the decision making process, we need to invest a lot of time, cost, human resources and so on. To some extent, the discriminatory laws were abolished and incorporated in the draft constitution and there high hopes that the trend will continue in the constitution finalization process. However, rural and poor women do not get tangible results as civil societies dream in their manifestoes, visions or missions.

Most of the civil society organizations are

working under the policies and rules/regulations of the Social Welfare Council as well as the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations. None of the governing bodies, however, make any enquiry about the results against social movements. Especially, why do social movements not bring about significant changes among rural women? Or why is there a gap in the leadership between the national and the local level? Finally, few women become leaders. Those who do mostly come from the rich, political, urban and high academic background. Rural women only become vehicles for them which seem more hierarchical, patriarchal as well as feudal.

In the given scenario, the approach of implementation of social movements, strategies taken by organizations and perspectives have to be reviewed urgently and systematically. Thus, the following points would be a way forward to mitigate challenges and gaps in the social movements and their outcomes:

1. Result based management should be incorporated rather counting the inputs e.g. not to count the number and head of trainees

(women) but count the head of new leaders in higher positions and responsibilities.

2. Disaggregated data has to be maintained by region, caste, education and interest in order to invest them to enhance their knowledge, skills as their capacity and interest.

For example, if a member of women's group in a rural village doesn't know about letters, start letters, numbers.

If she knows about letters or knows simple calculation and wants to join school, she has to get support to enroll in school or can learn computer for managing her daily activities.

If she has lower secondary school, invest for her tuition for getting higher level school education.

If she has a higher secondary school background, invest should go for her further education.

Her education and vocational training or her life can move simultaneously.

Thus, her leadership has to be multiplied for filling the gap of leadership, consequently women empowerment and leadership could be sustained. ■







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