



The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

Feb 16-22, 2001



of DEMOCRACY

Trial & Error

- Deadlock in Parliament
- Transport Strike
- Nepal - China Road

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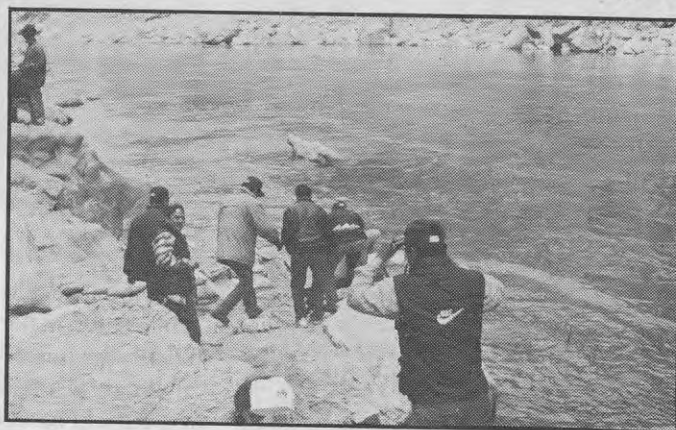
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COVER STORY: Fifty Years of Democracy : Trial And Error

After fifty years, the major challenge of Nepali democracy still remains maintaining the people's faith in the democratic process
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PURNAGIRI : Dam Of Controversy

As UML activists allege the Indian government of trying to construct a dam at Purnagiri unilaterally, the Mahakali treaty falls into controversy once again.

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INTERVIEW : Ingrid Ofstad

Norwegian Ambassador Ofstad talks on issues of bilateral interest.

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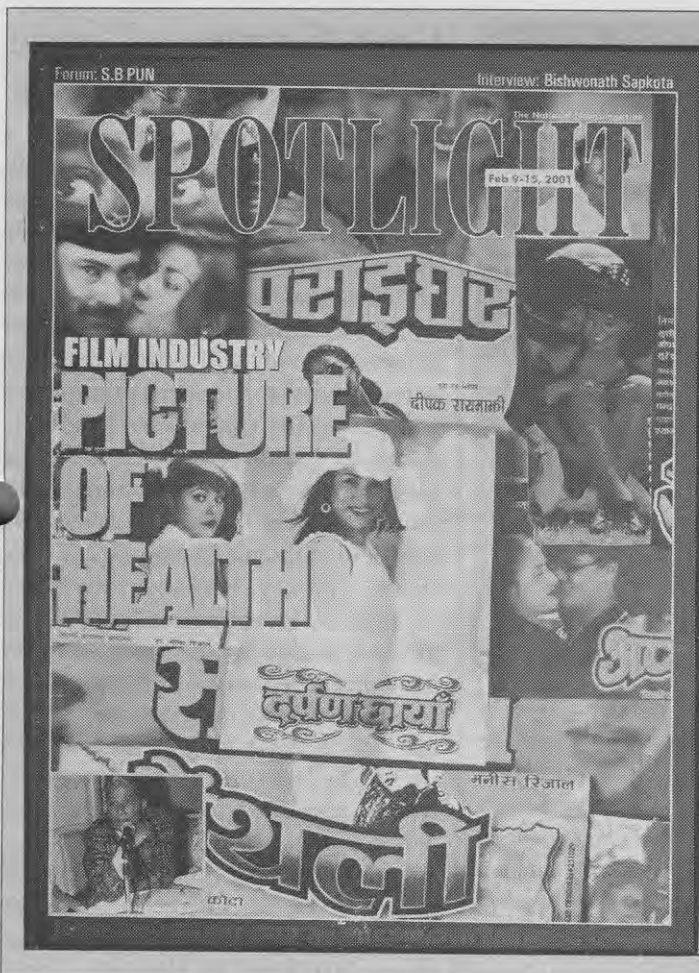
EDITOR'S NOTE

Situated at the confluence of Jhelum and Neelum rivers Muzaffarabad is a peaceful and beautiful city. Except a few scattered refugee colonies, there was nothing to suggest in Muzaffarabad that a few miles away a few precious human lives were being lost everyday. February 5 which is celebrated in Pakistan as Kashmir Solidarity Day, provided this scribe an opportunity to study the Kashmir problem on the spot. Visits to Muzaffarabad, the refugee camps and a few miles further to the actual Line of Control have only accentuated the utter necessity of resolving the Kashmir problem as early as possible. Even though the refugees have been well looked after their miseries at being separated from their loved ones, at being deprived of their homes and hearths and their humiliations surviving on generosity were harrowing. But their determination to return to their homeland was quite remarkable. This arranged tour of the international visitors to all those areas reflects Pakistan's seriousness in reducing tensions and paving the way for a peaceful settlement of the nagging problem. The All Parties Hurriet Conference leaders also met with the team of international visitors and briefed them about their future strategies. Asked whether they would agree to the Line of Control being declared the international border, they almost exploded that they could not even think of such a proposition and were prepared to fight another few decades, if necessary. Because of the unilateral cease fire announced by India, even the Chakhoti Village, just a few kilometers from the Line of Control looked quite normal. But the smoldering fires burning in the hearts of the men living there could be easily felt if one talked to them. The few days spent there have strengthened the belief that the people living on either side of the Line of Control would never accept anything less than a plebiscite at the earliest possible opportunity. (For a detail story on Kashmir Solidarity Day, read our next issue.)

* * *

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is in serious predicament. Even though his party commands a majority in the Parliament the opposition parties have restricted it from functioning normally for two successive days. In itself, it should have been taken not only as a big humiliation but almost a vote of no confidence. But, Koirala is a hard boiled egg. He will not relinquish power that easily. Since morality and patriotism are quite strange words for him, he will never be swayed by anybody to give up eating the easy coming goodies of the office. That he is not working in the interest of the country have been proved by the anti-national citizenship amendment bill which he had the temerity of labeling 'finance bill' and the ordinance that he made the king to promulgate when the session of the parliament was imminent. We have, time and again, exhorted the king to act emphasizing the fact that the people and country are more important than abiding by the constitution. Procrastination always lands men in peril. It is time all patriotic forces have to join hands and save the country from going to the dogs. The urgency of the situation demands that even the rebel Nepali Congress members of Parliament must join hands with the opposition and teach their arrogant leader a lesson. ■

Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



Brightening Image

The cover story "Picture Of Health" (SPOTLIGHT, February 9) provided detailed information on the Nepalese film industry. It is rare that the mainstream media gives much attention to the investment and development in the entertainment sector. This is one of the few areas where thousands of people are getting employment. Given the right atmosphere, this could be more productive to the country's economy as well.

Bikas Shrestha
Battisputali

Good For Artistes

The growth in the film industry will mean well to Nepalese artistes. Both in terms of recognition as well as financial return, film artistes will now have reasons to be content in their profession. Hopefully, this satisfaction will translate into better performance in the days to come.

Kamal Sigdel
Harihar Bhawan

Natural Outcome

When you can not hope to earn enough through sports to get by the obstacles of life, you definitely would want to explore other alternatives ("In Search Of Greener Pastures", SPOTLIGHT, February 2). It is, therefore, natural that many Nepalese players have left the country for jobs overseas. There is no reason to criticize them. Had the sports sector been lucrative, none of them would have gone abroad. It is better to develop professionalism in the country so that talented athletes will stay here.

Pramesh Amatya
Jawalakhel

Unscientific Move

There are many items in your February 9 issue that I would like to comment on, but I think it important to draw attention to the banning of vehicles older than twenty years because it affects a large section of the masses ("Age Is The Bar" SPOTLIGHT). Instead of conducting the emission tests strictly, the government has taken the easy way out. It is like killing the patient rather than curing the disease. There is no compulsion to provide unadulterated fuel. That the inaugural emission check failed to clear the prime minister's gleaming Mercedes Benz, while the subsequent checks of Vikram tempos granted them green stickers for a long time, clearly highlights

the corrupt practice. The Volkswagen Beetle is a collector's item, and so are many other models. What harm is there to let the old cars in good condition ply the streets? The authorities spread the unscientific rumour that the LPG engines are pollution-free, forcing the microbus and tempo to convert; now we are deprived of our cooking gas even.

Shukra Raj Acharya
Naya Bazar, Kirtipur

Growing Gory

Most of the Nepalese films are a cheap copy of Indian movies that extol sex and violence. But thankfully, the Nepalese audience have more often than not rejected these type of movies at the box of-

office. The clear case is the success of 'Darpan Chhaya' which is based on Nepalese values. Strange enough, the producers are yet to shed off the old story lines.

Chaitanya Bista
Chabahil

Build Technology

There is a stark need to improve the technological infrastructure to make quality films in the country. In the absence of technological expertise, domestic films are no match to Bollywood products. Big studios, stat-of-the-art equipment are pre-requisites if Nepalese producers want their films to become famous across the border.

Binit Maharjan
Kusunti

Quake Concerns

The article "Convulsions In Kathmandu" (SPOTLIGHT, February 2) aptly pointed out the vulnerability of the capital valley. Experts are expecting a big quake to rock the country, but the authorities seem to be blissfully ignorant. It gives me nightmares just thinking about what would happen to Kathmanduites in case a Gujarat-like quake were to hit them. May lord Pashupatinath save Kathmandu.

Hari Dhungel
Bansbari

Policemen And A Chinese National Injured

At least 11 people, including seven policemen and a Chinese national, were injured when suspected Maoist rebels ambushed a vehicle carrying explosives to be used in the under-construction Indrawati hydropower project Saturday, a spokesman for the Home Ministry said Sunday. The rebels exploded a pipe bomb at Sauteni Khola in Jyamire Village Development Committee in Sindhupalchok district, to the north of Kathmandu bordering the Tibet autonomous region of China. The rebels were believed to have intended to loot the explosives being carried to the construction site by National Hydropower Company (NHC). The rebels fled from the site after a nearly one-and-a-half-hour gun battle with police. No casualty was reported on the part of the rebels.

Police were able to protect the explosives and recover eight pieces of socket bombs, a 100-meter long electric wire and a pressure cooker from the site. This was perhaps the first time that a foreign national had fallen victim to Maoist attacks. A NHC vehicle was destroyed in the explosion and three people, including former Royal Nepalese Army personnel, were critically injured. Nine people, including seven policemen, were airlifted to Kathmandu for medical treatment. The Chinese national and four other persons were being treated locally. *Compiled from reports.*

Bhattarai Criticizes Cabinet Expansion

Senior Nepali Congress leader and former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has expressed his reservations to the newly expanded cabinet by Prime Minister G. P. Koirala. In a statement issued Thursday, Bhattarai said Koirala had not consulted him or shown him the list of proposed names before making the announcement. Saying that Koirala would not be able to do justice to both of his responsibilities as prime minister and president of the party at the same time, Bhattarai said the deteriorating law and



Bhattarai

order situation in the country and the Lauda Air scam would make the days ahead difficult for Koirala. Prime Minister Koirala had reshuffled and expanded his 10-month-old cabinet to 37 members on Wednesday. *Compiled from reports Feb. 9.*

Locals Demand Development Of Arun III Project

While the government and a foreign company remain deadlocked over the issue of submitting a 'performance bond' to get the survey license of the much-talked about 402 MW Arun III project, local people in the Arun valley in eastern Nepal have urged the government to immediately expedite the process to develop the project. In a discussion program organized in the capital Saturday, local people from Sankhuwasabha district also formed the 'Arun Water Utilization Committee' to pressure the government on the matter. The government has refused to award the survey license to EurOrient, a US-company, for failing to deposit Rs 42 million in 'performance guaranty.' The 201 MW Arun III project was shelved in 1995 after the World Bank refused to finance it, citing protests from environmental groups. *Compiled from reports Feb. 11.*

Govt. Forms Probe Commission

The government has constituted a three-member judicial commission today to probe into the deaths of more than half a dozen people in police firing in different parts of the country two months ago. The commission, headed by Govinda Kumar Shrestha, judge at the Lalitpur Appellate Court, will submit its report within 45 days. The opposition Nepal Sadbhavana Party announced it had withdrawn its protest programs, including blocking the parliament rostrum, as the government had fulfilled its demand of constituting the judicial probe commission.

Earlier, a government-formed commission headed by a former secretary had failed to identify people responsible for street violence in December last year that led to the killing of five people, including minors, in the capital, Kathmandu. Two more people were killed in police firing in Saptari district, eastern Nepal. The violence had erupted in the wake of alleged remarks by an Indian movie actor, Hrithik Roshan, against Nepal and the Nepalese people. Roshan denied making any such remarks.

Special Court Rejects Plea

The Special Court has rejected the demand for judicial custody for ANNFSU (Revolutionary) general secretary Purna Prasad Poudel and four of his associates Tuesday. The accused are in police custody for their failure to submit individual bail amounts of Rs 10,000 (approximately 150 US dollars) as demanded by the Kathmandu District Administration Office (DAO).

The bench comprising judges Mohan Prasad Sitaula, Gyanendra Bahadur Karki and Jagannath Pathak ordered that a fresh demand be made for their judicial custody once the DAO repeals the case. A case was filed against 15 members of ANNFSU (Revolutionary) under the public offence (crime and offence) act 1990 in the Special Court, Monday. *Compiled from reports Feb. 8.*

China To Assist In Rasuwa Road Construction

The Chinese government has agreed to expedite the process of building the Syaprubesi-Rasuwa road. During a meeting of the consultation mechanism between the foreign ministries of Nepal and China in Kathmandu early this week, the Chinese side also agreed to award fifth freedom right from Shanghai to Osaka and multiple designations of the Nepalese airlines on the Kathmandu-Lhasa route, the Foreign Ministry said. During the meeting, the Chinese officials appreciated Nepal government's one-China policy and its stance on the questions of Taiwan and Tibet. The Nepalese government welcomed the Chinese government's decision to extend consular jurisdiction of Royal Nepalese Consulate General in Hong Kong to Macao also. *RSS reports, Feb. 8.*

'Govt. To Review Security Situation': Acharya

Minister for Defence Mahesh Acharya has said the government would review the management of the security apparatus in the country in the aftermath of fatal attacks aimed at Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyay and members of his team in western Nepal last week.



Acharya

Addressing a program organized by Reporters' Club of Nepal here Tuesday, Acharya said the government had decided to set up the Armed Police Force to deal with the situation of organized armed violence. He said the government would train and equip security personnel in view of new security threats.

The minister described the Maoist movement as "aimless and directionless" and said a Nepali killing another Nepali can never help in resolving the problems of poverty, unemployment and corruption. Acharya said the government had always kept open the doors of dialogue with the rebels. He did not give details. *Compiled from report Feb. 7.*

Poverty Reduction Program In Limbo

The much-talked about 'Poverty Reduction Program (PRP)' has failed to kick off even six months after it was passed by parliament. The government had allocated Rs 10 million to set up a Poverty Reduction Fund. The National Planning Commission (NPC) had identified 119 village development committees in 65 out of 75 districts of the country to launch

the poverty reduction programs. "We have been repeatedly asking the Finance Ministry to release the fund for this priority program but the budget has not been released as yet," said Mahendra Pandey, joint secretary at the NPC. Under Secretary at the Finance Ministry, Lal Bahadur Chhetri, however, said there had been delay in releasing the budget as the NPC could not furnish satisfactory details regarding the expenditure and auditing of the programs launched under the PRP. The ministry said it is yet

to receive reports of expenditure made under the program during the last fiscal year. Out of Rs 33 million allocated under the program last year, only six VDCs had received a total of Rs 4.8 million. *Compiled from reports Feb. 08.*

'It's Wrong to Seek PM's Resignation': Singh

The chairman of the Nepal



Singh

Sadbhavana Party (NSP) Gajendra Narayan Singh has said to demand the resignation of the prime minister, who enjoys majority support in parliament, was undemocratic and against parliamentary norms and values. Saying that there would be no moral pressure on the prime minister from the resignation demand, Singh said the main opposition, UML, and Rastriya Prajatantra Party were only engaged in an electoral strategy by asking for Koirala's resignation. Five opposition parties had submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Koirala Monday seeking his resignation. They have accused the Koirala government of failing to maintain law and order and indulging in corruption, among other things. *Compiled from reports Feb. 7.*



Queen Aishwarya observing paintings of Ragini Upadhyaya at an exhibition

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SAID NEPALESE CITIZENS were killed in an earthquake that struck the western Indian state of Gujarat on January 26. The ministry did not give details. The quake, measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale, devastated several towns and settlements in Gujarat, killing more than 20,000 people.

THE NEPAL DEVELOPMENT BANK Ltd. (NDBL) AND the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) have signed an agreement under which the latter has agreed to pick up 10 percent equity in the NDBL. According to the agreement, a representative of IDBI will be appointed to the management of NDBL and the Indian bank will provide technical assistance to its Nepalese partner. The first development bank of Nepal, NDBL was set up with an authorized capital of Rs 320 million and issued capital of Rs 160 million. The bank, which started operations six months back, has already registered an operational profit of Rs 18.6 million, said bank chairman Uttam Pun.

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) has decided to initiate various studies to jointly move forward to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The meeting, which concluded in Kathmandu Monday, also decided to organize a SAARC Economic Meet, advance the study of small and cottage industries of member countries and study the infrastructure development of transportation sector in the region. According to the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the meeting also okayed a Pakistani proposal to organize SAARC Trade Fair in Pakistan in April this year. The meeting also decided to forward the process of forming SAARC Mediatory Council and has authorized the SAARC Tourism Council to organize a SAARC Tourism Mart.

THE LAST RITES OF PIONEER SOCIAL WORKER Dayabir Singh Kansakar were performed at Shobha Bhagvati in the capital Tuesday. Kansakar died at the age of 90 at his residence in Kathmandu Monday evening. Late Kansakar had established Paropakar, Nepal's first social service organization, during the Rana regime. He selflessly devoted his life in the service of the

helpless and the destitute under different organizations known as 'Paropkar.' Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, senior government and opposition leaders and people from all walks of life paid tributes to Kansakar.

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT has urged the government to form a commission to provide immediate relief to former 'Kamaiyas' (bonded laborers). At a press meet on Wednesday, chairman of the committee Jivan Prem Shrestha said the commission should be given special powers to provide basic amenities to former Kamaiyas. A seven-member team comprising lawmakers from the Social Justice Committee had inspected temporary camps of Kamaiyas, who were freed seven months ago. The problem of immediate rehabilitation still has not been solved, said Shrestha.

NEARLY 2,000 PUBLIC TRANSPORT VEHICLES HAVE gone on an indefinite strike beginning Saturday in protest against a student organization's demand for a 50 percent reduction in the fare for students. The Nepal National Transport Entrepreneurs' Federation and Nepal Transport Entrepreneurs' Federation, which are already launching another agitation against the government's decision to ban vehicles older than 20 years from next year, called the strike in the capital valley. They said they would continue the strike unless the government intervened and found an amicable solution. On the other hand, ANNFSU, the student organization of the CPN (ML), has said it is also ready to sit for tripartite negotiations if the government invited them. Officials have declined to intervene, describing the controversy as a "bilateral matter".

THE FEDERATION OF NEPALESE CHAMBERS OF COM-merce and Industry (FNCCI) and Confederation of Danish Industries (CODI) signed a memorandum of understanding in Copenhagen recently to promote trade and investment between the two countries. In the memorandum, both parties have agreed to promote bilateral trade and investment, transfer technology, increase cooperation in service and commercial areas, exchange information and organize trade fairs in both the countries periodically. The Danish business community has expressed interest in importing chemical-free agro-based products from Nepal, FNCCI President Pradip Kumar Shrestha said, upon his return from Copenhagen.

THE FINANCE MINISTRY HAS BROUGHT OUT A NEW budget preparation manual (BPM) replacing the one issued in 1997. A senior official at the ministry said work on preparing the budget for the forthcoming fiscal year has begun since the third week of January, and that the new manual would guide the next budget. The ministry is preparing to present next year's annual budget estimates during the third week of May. The prime objective of the new manual is to create effective improvement in budgetary expenditures by achieving the target through elimination of shortcomings seen in the past, officials said. According to the new manual, government ministries will have to answer three questions while demanding funds: the major objective of the program, revenue likely to be generated, and the cost of the program. ■

“When Dr. Mahat came to my office after other ministers had already taken their oaths, he went to the toilet thrice. Then, I knew for sure he was really not feeling well.”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, revealing that Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, whom he appointed as the finance minister, could not attend the oath-taking ceremony because of ill health, talking to reporters, in Kantipur.

* * *

“At that time my name in the party was Ranjan. It became Ramesh during the marriage. Even Gayatri (Nepali's wife) was not told about my real name and address.”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary and the leader of the main opposition, reminiscing his life during Panchayat days, in Chhalfal.

* * *

“The rights activists should create a situation that would compel the government and the Maoist to come for the dialogue.”

Sher Bahadur Deuba, former prime minister, in Space Time daily.

* * *

“Going by the experiences we gained in 1992 and 1995, our actions this time will be more responsible and mature.”

Bharat Mohan Adhikary, chief whip of Unified Marxist Leninist, when asked if the opposition party was planning to be as aggressive as in 1992, in Budhabar.

* * *

“We didn't join the government on



Jitendra Bhandari

moral grounds.”

Chiranjibi Wagle, former minister and Congress dissident leader, in Nepalipatra.

* * *

“Nepalese people gave the mandate to Nepali Congress to rule the country for five years. Such a majority government

can not be easily dislodged by using force in the parliament and street.”

Gajendra Narayan Singh, president of Nepal Sadbhavana Party, in Bimarsha.

* * *

“The government seems bent on more bloodshed than holding a dialogue with the Maoists.”

Jhal Nath Khanal, central leader of Unified Marxist Leninist, in Janadesh.

* * *

“The last ten years has been the decade of formal democracy. There is a certain format but it is followed without the spirit.”

Jeevan Lal Satyal, former general secretary at the Parliament Secretariat, in Deshanter.

* * *

“I am a lady. How can I propose at first?”

Sarishma Amatya, pop singer, who recently married her boyfriend and reputed pop singer Sanjeev Pradhan, on who proposed first, in Ghatana Ra Bichar.

* * *



Buddhabar

Bhattarai's Man

In his formal reaction to the new cabinet, former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai publicly disowned Omkar Prasad Shrestha, who joined the Koirala team as minister of culture, tourism and civil aviation. After the new cabinet line-up was announced, the Koirala camp wasted no effort to emphasize

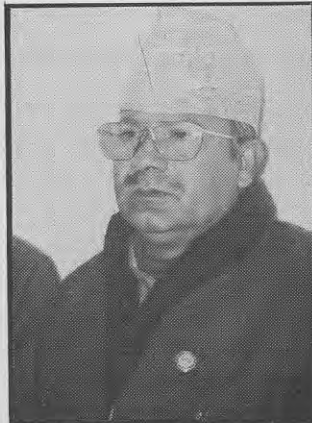


Shrestha : 'Disowned by Bhattarai'

that Shrestha was appointed on Bhattarai's "quota". For his part, Shrestha still considers himself to be Bhattarai's man. The new minister knows that it was Purna Bahadur Khadka, Dr. Narayan Khadka and others who are conspiring to poison his ties with his dear leader. Will Bhattarai reciprocate Shrestha's warm sentiments?

Shadow Statements

CPN-UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal is known for his long and winding speeches. The leader of the opposition spoke for over an hour at the inaugural session of the 19th session of the House of Representatives. There was nothing new or constructive in his speech. Nepal seemed to believe he was addressing a special parliamentary session on corruption. At a time when



Nepal : Boringly long speech

the country is facing many crises, Nepal focused on irregularities in the appointment of a teacher. It looked like the head of the shadow government was reading a shadow statement prepared by a shadow colleague.

Strategy For Survival

While reshuffling his cabinet, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has used a new tool for political survival: placing henchmen as ministers of state in key ministries. Take the instances of Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Omkar Prasad Shrestha Forest and Soil Conservation Minister Prakash Koirala. All have die-hard Koirala loyalists - Gopal Rai, Mahadev Gurung, and Shiva Kumar Basnet - as subordinates. After one minister declined to take the oath, nobody knows whether - or how long - Koirala's formula might work. But you have to commend Koirala's strategy of keeping rivals on a leash.

Partyless Politics

From the way some Nepali Congress members are snub-

REVELATION

"I Reserve The Right To Resign At Any Time"

- PALTEN GURUNG

PALTEN GURUNG, who had refused to be part of the new cabinet, changed his mind within hours and joined the other new faces in taking the oath of office at the Narayanhity Royal Palace. Gurung, who was with the dissident Deuba group for long, stunned many of his own party colleagues by bolting to the Koirala camp. The new minister for labor and transport spoke to SPOTLIGHT after the oath-taking ceremony on the reasons for his U-turn. Excerpts:

What led you to change your mind barely hours after issuing such a hard-hitting statement?

I changed my mind after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala made a renewed call for party unity. I decided to join the government in the larger interest of party unity.

At a time when such a large number of MPs are against the way the prime minister reshuffled the cabinet, how do you believe your joining it would unite the party?

Girijababu has assured me that he would take necessary steps to bring unity in the party. If he fails to fulfil his part of the pledge, I reserve my right to resign at any time.

But some of your colleagues see your decision as opportunistic. What do you say?

If you look at the faces of some of the people who are accusing me of opportunism, you can easily see the kind of reputation they have. As a member of the Nepali Congress, I cannot defy the order of party leader without giving adequate reasons.

After your decision to join the government, have you switched your loyalties?

I am a loyal Nepali Congress worker. I don't have group or sub-group loyalties.

bing their leader, it seems the politics of partylessness has come back into prominence. Barely hours after he issued a statement with Khum Bahadur Khadka against the manner in which the cabinet was formed, Minister of Labor Palten Gurung took a U-turn to take the oath of office. Another new cabinet appointee Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat suddenly felt sick. It really looks like the individual takes precedence over the party.

Film Formula

Nepalese film producers seem to be convinced that a film cannot be considered complete without a potent mix of sex and violence. This is probably why Haribansha Acharya's new comedy "Tan Ta Saraini Bigris Badri", too, contains the two ingredients in full measure. Whatever the production banner or story line, the celluloid formula seems to be the same.

PARLIAMENT Games They Play

As the opposition members continue their demand for PM's resignation, deadlock seems inevitable

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

The third day of the winter session of the parliament on Tuesday was no different. Opposition lawmakers came heavily upon the government and continued demanding resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for his alleged involvement in corruption in the controversial Lauda Air deal. As opposition lawmakers started chanting slogans gheraoing his rostrum, Speaker Taranath Ranabhat adjourned the meeting till Wednesday morning. "We will not allow the running of regular business of the House until the issue of Lauda controversy is resolved," declared UML spokesman and legislator Pradip Nepal.

Ruling party lawmakers looked ill-prepared to counter massive attacks mounted by the opposition. Former assistant minister for civil aviation, Narayan Singh Pun—referred to as a 'rescue MP' by the opposition—defended the state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation's decision to lease a wide-body aircraft from Lauda Air, an Austrian company. RNAC had leased the plane for a period of 18 months beginning December last year. "In the history of RNAC, the said deal is one of the most competitive and transparent one," said Pun. "There is no room for irregularity in the entire deal."

The ruling lawmakers defended the government's decision and said it was wrong to demand the Prime Minister's resignation at a time when the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is probing into the deal and is yet to come up with its findings. Prime Minister Koirala, too, brushed aside the allegations and said he would not resign under pressure. "The opposition should come in a constitutional way," Koirala told reporters in his hometown, Biratnagar, early this week.

Opposition members seem to be in no mood to listen to Koirala. Referring to the suspension of executive chairman of RNAC, Hari Bhakta Shrestha, and the resignation by Minister for Tourism, Civil Aviation and

Culture Tarini Dutta Chataut, they said now it was the turn of the Prime Minister. "The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Parliament has found the deal as an irregular one and against the interests of the RNAC after investigation," said Lilamani Pokhrel, a United People's Front lawmaker. "As the Council of Ministers is also involved in the deal, as the head of the cabinet the Prime Minister has no way out than to resign in order to facilitate the investigation."



PM Koirala : Feeling the heat

Prime Minister Koirala had told the PAC a few weeks back that they should wait until the CIAA comes up with its conclusion. "The government will help in booking the guilty if there had been any irregularity in the deal."

In the entire controversy, the opposition lawmakers have failed to establish that the Prime Minister or somebody else on his behalf have received kickbacks. They have been alleging the government of disobeying the directives of a parliamentary committee. "We did not want to disregard the parliament. The RNAC was compelled to enter into the deal through negotiations as there was no response to four global tenders," said former Minister Chataut.

As the opposition parties have joined their hands in seeking resignation of the Prime Minister, the issue has turned into a hot political issue. "Our fight is not against Nepali Congress. All we want is to remove a tainted Prime Minister," said former Finance Minister and UML leader Bharat Mohan Adhikari.

Analysts say the main opposition UML wants to take benefit out of the simmering discontent within the ruling party. They also want to exert pressure upon the government at a time when it has failed to fulfill its basic duty—to provide law and order to the people. Opposition lawmakers laughed away when Prime Minister Koirala reiterated his government's commitment on the opening day of the parliament last week (Feb. 8). Amid attacks from ultra-left groups like the Maoists and its splinter CPN (ML), the UML badly needs some issue to rally its party workers around and draw popular attention.

As the ruling and opposition parties find themselves in a deadlock, important bills like Armed Police Force Ordinance and Amendment bill in the civil code hang in balance. UML and other opposition parties have registered a notification at the Parliament saying that they will not support the ordinance. The government wants the bill to be passed as early as possible in order to mobilize the force to contain the five-year-old Maoist rebellion.

Known as the "bill session," the winter session of the parliament was supposed to spend its time in discussing the bills. Unfortunately, no political party seems to be serious over it. "The role of the opposition is to work as a representative of the people and hold the government accountable to the parliament," said Purna Man Shakya, acting chairman of the Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercise (SCOPE). "But the opposition doesn't look serious in this issue as it is pressing for the resignation of the Prime Minister instead of discussing the issue of nationwide corruption in a comprehensive way and find a way out."

In its decade-old parliamentary history, there have been a number of impasse in the parliament over the issues including ratification of Mahakali treaty and alleged irregularities in the 1999 general elections. All those controversies were resolved through dialogue between the government and opposition parties. "This issue, too, can be resolved through dialogue in a similar way," said Shakya. "For this, both the ruling and opposition should work honestly and stop staging a political drama like this."

Will the legislators listen? ■

PURNAGIRI Dam Of Controversy

Is the main opposition party serious to the issue that it is raising?

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

As lawmakers and activists belonging to the main opposition Unified Marxist-Leninist party, marched to far-western Nepal late last year, 'nationalists sentiments' were sure to be whipped up. "India is trying to construct a dam at Purnagiri across the border in a unilateral way," claimed Dr. Mangal Siddhi Manandhar, a geographer and UML lawmaker. "If constructed, the dam will submerge several villages on Nepalese side and displace at least 30,000 people."

The activists, coordinated by Democratic Nationalist Youth Organization (DNYO) — the youth wing of the UML — threw survey equipment in Nepalese territory into a river. They did not bother to think that the Nepalese government would have to compensate for the loss of the equipment. "We will leave no stone unturned to stop India from constructing the dam," said Gokarna Bista, chairman of the DNYO.

Both the Nepalese government as well as the Indian embassy in Kathmandu have refuted the allegations. In a statement issued last week, the Embassy of India noted with surprise the persistent campaign against, what it said, investigations regarding the Pancheshwar Multi-Purpose Project and the Treaty between Nepal and India concerning the integrated development of the Mahakali River including Sarada Barrage, Tanakpur Barrage and Pancheshwar Project.

Concluded on February 12, 1996, the

treaty was ratified by two countries in 1997 and the instruments of ratification were exchanged during the then Indian prime minister's visit to Nepal in June 1997. According to the treaty, the investigations and the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) was to be undertaken jointly by Nepal and India.

For this purpose, a Joint Project Office - Pancheshwar Investigation was set up in Kathmandu in December, 1999. The Joint Project Office responsible for carrying out the investigations is jointly headed by two senior water resource engineers



Mahakali river demarcating Kaubeni & Purnagiri : Site of controversy

from Nepal and India. "The investigations at the Purnagiri Dam site are being carried out under a contract awarded by the Joint Project Office," said the Indian embassy.

During the visit of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to India in August last year, it was jointly agreed that studies would be expedited so as to finalize the Pancheshwar DPR by December 2001. The treaty had a provision to complete the DPR within a period of six months.

"There can be no question whatso-

ever of one party to a bilateral agreement taking unilateral steps for any investigation or construction," said the Indian embassy. "It is hoped that the joint investigations which will provide the data necessary for the finalization of the Detailed Project Report, and hence the implementation of the Mahakali Treaty, would be permitted to be carried out without hindrance."

Looking at the sensitivity of the issue, Ministry of Water Resources, in a statement, explained in detail the provisions of the Treaty and the investigations being carried out for re-regulating dam at possible sites Rupaligad and Purnagiri. "It is wrong to say that India is unilaterally constructing a dam at Purnagiri. All we are doing is to conduct a joint survey to determine the location of a proposed re-regulating dam," said Mahesh Man Shrestha, spokesman of the ministry. Officials blamed the opposition of spreading rumors.

So, besides the history of deep rooted mistrust and misconception regarding the issue of sharing of water resources between Nepal and India, what could be the reason of latest UML 'activism'? Interestingly, the present UML leadership had actively supported the ratification of the Mahakali treaty by parliament and even withstood the pain of vertical split in their party over the issue.

"The controversy over Purnagiri is purely a political one," said Rameswor Man Amatya, a water resources

expert. "Will they now admit that they had made mistake by endorsing the Mahakali treaty?" he asked. "Critics say as local elections approach, UML needs some agenda to retain its hold in the local bodies in the region. Moreso, as all 19 parliamentary seats in the region have been swept away by the ruling Nepali Congress party.

"India's priority is water, not electricity. India could take water to Delhi by building a dam at Purnagiri," said Amatya. But it may be premature to jump to a conclusion before the survey is over. ■

HEALTH

Nutrition Education

The government conducts National Vitamin A Program with the view to reduce mortality

BY AKSHAY SHARMA In Tatopani

“A child had drowned, but because I was pregnant, I was not able to give the necessary mouth-to-mouth respiration. I asked another person to do it. I was so scared and I told the villagers that he needed to be taken to the hospital. But they thought he had died and he eventually died.” says Pema Poudel of Pulping Kathi VDC, Tatopani, describing the scariest moment she has faced.

Pema, a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) participating in a three-day workshop organized by the National Vitamin A Program (NVAP), said: “I have trained here for three days and I’ll teach others at my village what I’ve learnt. We are focusing on telling people that things like milk, vegetables, eggs they that they sell, they need it for themselves.”

Research studies conducted in Nepal show that supplementation of a high dose of Vitamin A capsule could reduce child mortality by 28 percent. His Majesty’s Government initiated the NVAP in 1993, which has been designed to virtually eliminate Vitamin A deficiency in Nepal.

“I was interested in medical treatment as a child,” Pema told SPOTLIGHT. “Today we get Rs 150 for our work. During the Panchayat era, we used to get Rs 100 during programs like this. Even though my family does not support what I am doing, we have managed to create awareness,” Pema says. A member of the part of the Ama Samuha, Pema pledges to work to make life in the village better. “There are 12 volunteers in my ward and we desperately need primary health care. But VDC members ignore this issue. A sick person has to go to Kathmandu for treatment,” she says.

“My mother in law doesn’t like me doing social work. Nevertheless, teachers teach us and we go to teach other people at other places. We get Rs 25 per day and we distribute pamphlets.”

The program, initiated by the Ministry of Health, uses a campaign to provide high-dose supplements to children from 6 to 60 months twice yearly. The program is initiated in new districts each year. The program is scheduled to operate in Jajarkot, Salyan, Rukum, and Rolpa

in the future, say experts at the organization.

Chinimaya Poudel, 48, from Ward No. 3 Tatopani, says: “I want the upcoming generation to benefit. I do this because I believe it’s my dharma. People still believe in witches. People still marry young. We need to create awareness among the general public.”

Speaking on February 7 to an audience comprising mostly of women, Yam Prasad Gautam uses various techniques to create awareness. He sings in a catchy tune, “Don’t let a pregnant woman die, give her Vitamin A capsule in six weeks.” And the audience hums along.



Training villagers : For a healthy tomorrow

“Vitamin A is essential in rural areas because of inadequate amount of Vitamin A in the people’s diet,” says Gautam. Stressing that Vitamin A causes night-blindness, he breaks into another chant, “Don’t survive only on rice and pulses (dal) because a child’s life can be ruined by not eating fruits and vegetables.” And the audience pledges to teach what they have learned during the three-day training program.

Gautam calls an elderly woman to explain to the audience what she’s learnt. She can’t read. Asked how she would preach the new message she said, “A pregnant woman needs Vitamin A because it affects the child in the womb. We need to plant vegetables and fruits in our backyards. Pumpkins, Karkalo, Sisnu are a big source of Vitamin A. It effects all the village and it is up to all of us to strengthen this national program.”

Among the major national programs of the Ministry of Health are distribution of polio drops and Vitamin A capsule throughout the

country.

Gautam asks the audience to clap and dance and hums another tune, “Don’t survive only on dal and bhat because your child will curse you for not feeding you with green vegetables and fruits.”

Ram Kumar Shrestha, director of the National Vitamin A program, speaking to SPOTLIGHT on February 8, said, “Respect and social status, education and learning, leadership, social work, opportunity and achievement, trust, among others, are the elements which FCHVs use to motivate the people. If the community becomes responsible, the program can be successful.”

The objectives of the program are to provide all children from 6 to 60 months high doses of Vitamin A twice a year. The program also treats Xerophthalmia, measles, prolonged diarrhea and severe malnutrition with Vitamin A capsules and supplement high dose of Vitamin A capsules to postpartum mother within six months of delivery and to improve food habits and to ensure that Vitamin A is consumed through foods that are rich in it.

MC Sorcar, the magician working for the program, was the sensation of the event. As his practiced fingers produced milk, eggs, vegetables that was definitely a new approach towards awareness. “We need to spread this message from Mechi to Mahakali,” Sorcar says.

“We know everything, but if we see something that cannot be explained, it leaves an imprint on one’s mind,” Sorcar says.

“The economic conditions in rural areas are very poor. Supervision is not good enough. We need to boost the morale of the community. We have observed some positive aspects, though. We need a good support system. Why not give the female workers some facilities to encourage them in other works like this?” asks Shrestha.

By the end of October 2000 the program had covered 69 out of 75 districts in Nepal, according to figures provided by the program. And has managed to reach 89 percent of the population. Under the program, 62,202 multi-sectoral people and 38,801 FCHVs have been trained, over 2.90 million children have been provided with Vitamin A capsules. Over 25,000 child deaths have been averted each year, say experts.

“The program has placed FCHVs in contact with millions of mothers and their family members. This activity is oriented toward developing the skills of FCHVs to mobilize their community for health and nutrition facilities,” says Shrestha.

By the end of 2002, the NVAP will implement programs in all the 75 districts of the country. The objective is to train 40,000 FCHVs and build a infrastructure and networking system. ■

TRANSPORT STRIKE

Public Hazard

People are stranded as transporters keep their vehicles off the streets in protest against the government's decision and students' demand

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

Hundreds of commuters, especially those who have to come to work from outside the ring-road, were left stranded for days as transporters kept their minibuses and tempos off the streets after left-leaning student organization demanded they give students fifty percent concession even as they were already sweating at the government's decision to

The transporters have categorically stated their inability to abide by both the government's decision as well as the student's demand. "The transport entrepreneurs will be badly hurt if the decision to remove their vehicles is implemented. Besides, we are also not capable of giving discounts to students," said Sarad Upreti, President of Federation of Nepalese Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE). The entrepreneurs, however,

Student's Union (ANNFSU-Marxist-Leninist). He points to similar facilities provided to students in Delhi, Beijing, Colombo and other places.

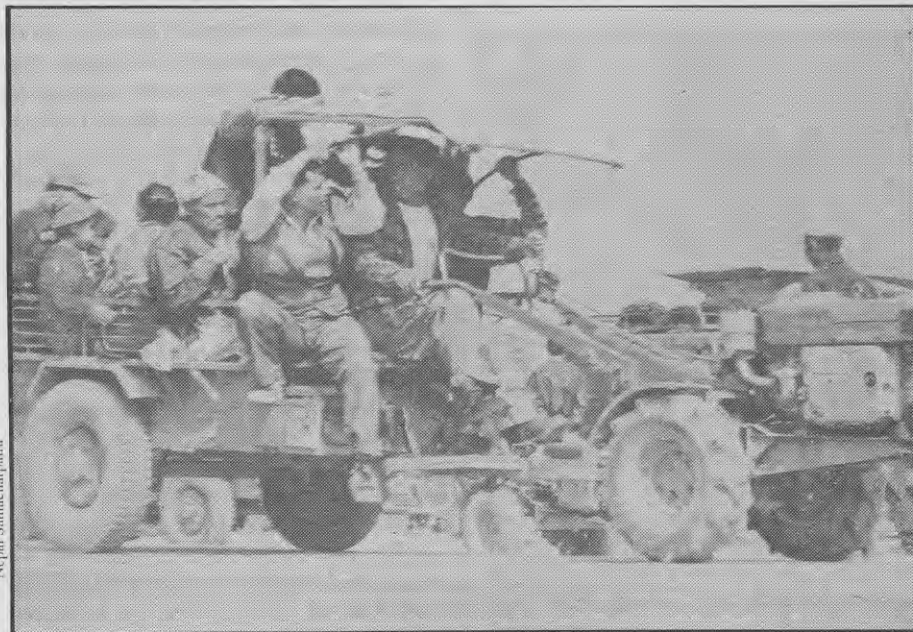
The Marxist-Leninist student union has been actively pursuing this demand since February 5. Other student unions, too, have lent their moral support to this demand. This sudden spurt of campaigns from the student unions could be seen as interesting especially since all government campuses in the country are going to elect new student representatives two weeks later. "Our demand has no relation with the campus election. We should be engaged in our organization-building activities at this juncture but we chose to pursue the overall interest of Nepalese students because it has been long since the authorities and concerned agencies turned deaf ears to our various memorandum about the demand."

In fact, Manandhar accused the transport entrepreneurs of flaring up the issue and giving them violent tones. "Everybody knows that we do not shy away from using force to make our demands fulfilled. But at this particular incident, we have not engaged in any violent activities or throwing stones to vehicles in streets. Rather it is the entrepreneurs themselves who have engaged in violent activities to link up our demand with their earlier protest against the government's decision to ban the vehicles older than twenty years."

Manandhar said the ANNFSU-Marxist-leninist was willing to give compensation if it was proved that their cadres were involved in violence. The student organization's demand include student concession in not only the transport but also in hospitals, entertainment places and research/study organizations.

Even as the commuters were hit hard by the transport strike, the government showed little interest to resolve the deadlock. Negotiations between the transport entrepreneurs and the government were going on till Tuesday (February 13).

Although both sides appeared hopeful of an early settlement, the transporters have threatened to expand their strike from February 16 if the talks fail to yield results. ■



Nepal Samacharpanna

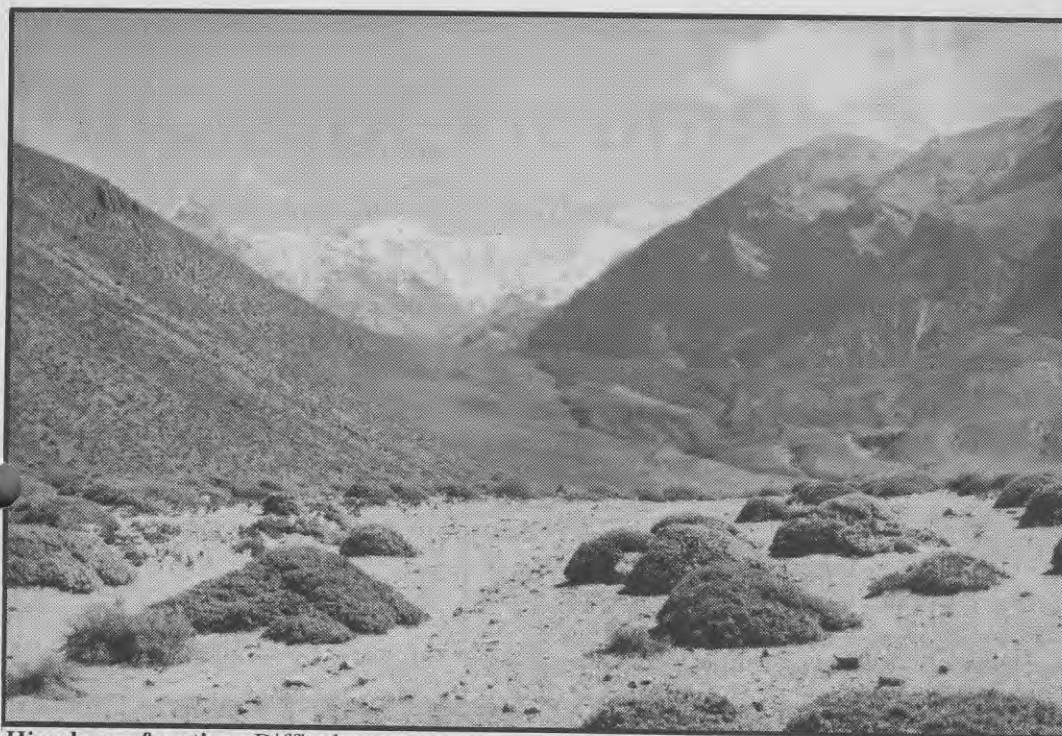
Commuters travel by tractor : Strike stricken

ban all vehicles older than twenty years from the valley from November next year.

Although the present strike did not affect electric vehicles, micro buses and taxis, they, too, were seen plying only in limited numbers. "For people like us who do not have private vehicles and who have to come from peripheral regions, this strike has really hurt," said Shiromani KC, who has to come to work from Balkot.

maintain that they are willing to provide discounts to students if the government agrees to bear the cost.

On the other hand, the students seem bent on having their way. "Our demand for concession is perfectly justifiable. It does not matter who bears this discount, but students have to be given this facility," said Basanta Manandhar, general secretary of All Nepal National Free



Himalayan frontier : Difficult to access

Photo : Sandesh Manadhar

SYAPRUBESI-RASUWAMADHI ROAD Another Way To China

As the volume of Nepal-China trade increases, the two countries agree to construct another road through Rasuwamadhi

By KESHAB POUDEL

Nepal and China have agreed to build a road linking Syaprubesi of Rasuwa district and the Kerung Pass of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

Unlike in 1962, when all the major powers opposed Nepal's move to build the strategic Kathmandu-Kodari highway, no foreign government has directly opposed the move this time around.

But building the road along the rugged mountain pass — which is described as one of the most difficult parts of the world — is not going to be any easier.

At a time when the trade volume

between Nepal and China is increasing manifold, policy makers have realized the need to open another road to Tibet. Before the inauguration of the Kodari highway, the Kerung Pass was the busiest point on the Nepal-China border.

After the completion of proposed Kathmandu-Rasuwamadhi road, it will be the first road in Nepal which will link Tibet Autonomous Region through a road built by India. It will be the first time a Chinese road would connect with an Indian-built road through a portion constructed by Nepal.

Before connecting to the Trishuli, the Rasuwamadhi Road will have to cross the 62 km Trishuli-Syaprubesi road constructed by the Royal Nepalese Army.

If work proceeds without interrup-

tion, the construction of the road will be completed within three years. "If the Chinese side wants to, the road can be completed even before that," said a senior official at the Department of Roads.

The Kerung Pass was traditionally a major trading point between Nepal and Tibet. It was virtually closed down following the opening of Kathmandu-Kodari highway, the only road linking the Tibet Autonomous Region of China with Nepal.

After nearly 40 years, Nepal and China have realized the need to open alternative roads to expand their trade relations. The length of the proposed road is about 135 km. It will pass through the all-weather Trishuli road and Trishuli-Rasuwamadhi gravel road.

Although the proposed road will be longer than the 113-km Kathmandu-Kodari road, it will provide easy access to the Tibet market.

During the visit of Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the Chinese government agreed to Nepal's proposal to build the road linking Rasuwamadhi and Syaprubesi. The Chinese will construct the 22 km portion between Syaprubesi and Rasuwamadhi.

According to the Department of Road's official, the Chinese will have to build a 26-km portion within their country to connect with the closest road in China. The road will be built under a turn-key project and the Chinese will bear the entire cost.

The road will also help Nepal to supply food grain to the remote northern districts of the country.

The Chinese side has already submitted a detail survey of the project to the Department of Roads. According to the survey report, the Chinese have also emphasized that the construction of the road would help expand bilateral relations. Whether it will be easy to materialize remains to be seen ■

NEPAL-INDIA TRADE

Car Row

The dilly dallying over allowing the entry of self-certified Indian cars into Nepal sparks a fresh trade row

By KESHAB POUDEL

As Indian cars are being stopped at the Raxaul custom point on the Nepal-India border on the ground of their non-compliance with Nepal's emission standards, bilateral trade relations have plunged into renewed controversy.

The row over the import of self-certified Indian cars worsened following an interim order issued by the Supreme Court last month. In its decision, the court asked customs and other officials not to allow the entry of Indian cars on the basis of self-certification without seeking further clarifications.

In a public litigation filed by advocate Prakash Mani Sharma on behalf of Pro Public, the petitioners argued that self-certified Indian vehicles do not meet the emission standard set under the Nepal Emission Standard 1999 and urged the court to declare null and void the agreement signed by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala during his visit to India to allow the import of Indian cars on the basis of self-certification. Car dealers complain that their side of the story was not heard before the court issued the interim order.

His Majesty's Government introduced the Nepal Motor Vehicle Emission Standard which became effective from December 1999. The laws and procedures tried to replicate the Euro I standard. However, the norms deviated so substantially from the Euro I standard that no vehicle manufacturer in the world could comply and export vehicles to Nepal.

Primarily, the deviation arose from the fact that the government demanded Type Approval (TA) and Conformity of Production (COP) certification to be presented at the time of import from the government-authorized testing agency. The Euro I legislation clearly states the submission of COP should be 12 months from the date of manu-

facture. Euro I legislation mandates a chassis dynamometer test for vehicles weighing under 2.5 tons and carrying fewer than six people. Nepal's standard mandates such a test for vehicles weighing under 3.5 tons.

Because of the non-recognition of self-certification of the Indian manufacturers, some vehicle imports under this category came to a standstill for few weeks. After requests from Japan and Korea, the government allowed the import of vehicles



Cars in street : Do they comply with standard?

from those countries on the basis of self-certification.

But in the case of India, a resumption of imports of such cars was possible only after the visit of Prime Minister Koirala. Last week, the government again issued instructions not to allow vehicle imports from India on the basis of self-certification. As a result, most dealers are holding large number of vehicles in Raxaul.

The car dealers have suggested that Indian cars manufactured after April 1, 2000 should be allowed to enter Nepal. There argument is that Indian manufacturers are legally obliged to maintain Euro I standards on vehicles produced from that date onwards.

After the announcement of new emis-

sion standards, Nepal stopped importing some models of Indian cars. Only after the letter of understanding signed between two countries on August 3, 2000 did Nepal agree to accept self-certification of Indian cars.

Car dealers complain that the present policy on self-certification discriminates against Indian cars. "If self-certification is wrong for Indian car manufactures, than it is wrong for all car manufacturers," said an Indian car dealer.

As the row over the import of Indian cars on the basis of self-certification continues, there are fears that Nepalese exports to India may face a similar fate in that country. "If the Nepalese government does not provide equal treatment to Indian cars and does not respect the joint communique, India could take retaliatory measures," said a diplomat in Indian Embassy requesting not

to be identified.

The joint communique issued after Prime Minister Koirala's visit to India specifically points out the need to allow imports of Indian vehicles on the basis of self-certification. According to the agreement, imports of Indian vehicles into Nepal under Nepal's new emission norms would be permitted on the basis of self-certification by Indian vehicle manufactures based on type approval. In a reciprocal move, India also agreed to withdraw additional taxes on Nepalese goods.

As the prime minister is weak no ministry seems to be in a position to execute the decisions of another agency. Meanwhile, Indian cars are sitting idly at a Raxaul lot, waiting for their turn to cross the border. ■

MAOIST VIOLENCE

Innocent Victims

Two children die on the day the Maoist rebellion enters the sixth year. Will the violence come to an end?

By A CORRESPONDENT

As the underground Maoist rebels were celebrating completion of five years of their armed rebellion, two teen-age boys fell victim to the violence. Prakash Dhungana, 11, and Khem Raj Dhungana, 14, died immediately after a bomb exploded near their house at Mangalsen VDC, ward no. 6, in far-western district of Achham early Monday. Eight others, including six minors, from the same family got injured in the incident.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the mishap as yet.

Chief District Officer of Achham, Khum Raj Punjali, told SPOTLIGHT over telephone that the bomb exploded near a public tap at Mangalsen village on Feb. 12 when people had gathered to collect water. All ten people belonged to the same Dhungana family. Officials later airlifted all injured persons, includ-

ing a 15-month-old girl child, to Nepalgunj in mid-western Nepal for treatment.

Authorities say the bomb may have been left unattended when a group of suspected Maoist rebels had attacked the prison at the district headquarters at Mangalsen the previous night. No casualty was reported during the attack. Police diffused two more bombs at a distance of 200 meters from the site of incident. "We condemn the use of lethal weapons near human settlements," said Krishna Pahadi, chairman of Human Rights and Peace Society (HURPES).

"We call upon all the parties concerned to avoid such mishaps."

According to official figures, more than 1500 people have lost their lives during the Maoist rebellion, nearly 60 of them are children below the age of 16. While officials blame the Maoists for the unfortunate incident, the underground Maoist party has not commented on the mishap as yet. A source close to the Maoist said the rebels were taking caution to avoid civilian casualties after the Panchkatiya incident last year.

As the rebellion enters into the sixth

As the government is working on to equip the newly established Armed Police Force and rebels strengthening their 'base areas' in the mid-western hills, violence is likely to escalate further.

year, more and more civilian are falling victim to the insensible violence. Human rights activists have attempted to bring the government and rebels to the table of negotiations but without success.

As the government is working on to equip the newly established Armed Police Force and rebels strengthen-

ing their 'base areas' in the mid-western hills, violence is likely to escalate further. "The government should not violate human rights under any circumstances while the rebels should not do anything to hurt people who are not actively engaged in the conflict," said Pahadi. "In order to end the on-going violence, there should be an extensive initiatives from all quarters including the civil society and the government should guaranty the good governance," he added.

Unfortunately, both these are in short supply in the present day Nepal. ■

FAR WESTERN REGION

Bridges Of Friendship

With the completion of the 22 bridges, the rest of Nepal now has unhindered link to the far western development region

The construction of the 22 bridges along the East-West highway in the far-western development region has finally been completed. Indian and Nepalese experts jointly carried out the field inspection of the Kohalpur-Mahakali Section of the highway early this month. Funded by the Indian government, the total grant assistance for the project was Rs.1088 million.

These bridges have been constructed in some of the most difficult terrain in western Nepal. In the past, efforts of other agencies to construct the bridges in this sector had not been successful. Some of the problems, such as the artesian conditions, were so peculiar in nature that it was difficult to find a solution even in engineering text books. Therefore, the construction of these bridges was a daunting task. Special designs had to be evolved to take into account the severe artesian conditions prevailing at some sites, said officials.

Begun in 1996, despite many odds posed by the peculiar geographical condition of the terrain, the last of the 22 bridges in the project was completed in May last year.

With the construction of these bridges, the Mahendra highway in far western Nepal has become operational even during monsoons and opened up new possibilities in trade, investment and economic growth in this part of the country.

These bridges stand as an important landmark of the ongoing cooperation and friendship between India and Nepal. ■

50 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY

Experiments

And

Turmoil

In the last five decades of democratic experiments, Nepal has seen many highs and lows — and has committed many mistakes. Despite political instability and turmoil, the country has achieved remarkable progress in the area of political, social and economic transformation. But the overriding challenge still remains the maintenance of the people's faith in the democratic process and fulfilling their growing aspirations

By KESHAB POUDEL

Life is at a standstill in urban areas because of a strike called by the Nepal Transport Entrepreneurs Federation. The winter session of parliament is stalled by an alliance of opposition parties led by the CPN-UML. Life in the rural parts of the country has been severely hit by a Maoist insurgency that has entered its sixth year.

As Nepal celebrates 50 years of democracy, endemic political turmoil is challenging the very future of the country's democratic

institutions.

When a sizeable section of the ruling party has joined opposition parties and professional groups in deviating from the normal constitutional process, the very existence of democratic governance comes under question. Moreover, popularly unaccountable bodies like the Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) are attacking the basic spirit of the constitution by demanding more powers. In this race to concentrate power, these organizations are willfully ignoring the eternal wisdom that authority without popular accountability only breeds authoritarianism.

The democratic process is always under threat in Nepal by democratic deficits represented by the unelected and the unaccountable.

"Success in constructing a democratic civil society depends on the commitment of the population at large to the democratic ideal, on its active involvement in all aspects of political, social and cultural life, on tolerance of differences combined with respect for majority opinion, as well as on the existence of democratic institutions and wise political leadership," says Federico Mayor, former director-general of UNESCO, in the preface to "Democracy — An Analytical



Demonstrators : Energizing democracy

Survey" by Jean Baechler.

In the last five decades, Nepal has passed through various stages in transforming itself from a backward nation to a modern state with a democratic constitution and system of governance as well as firm development infrastructure.

The history of Nepal's modernization has been full of political instability and turmoil but the country has made long strides from being one of the most remote places of the world to one of the most accessible. The challenge still remains the stabilization of the political process and achieving economic progress.

Although political turmoil always shakes the political process, the country has achieved some notable progress in the areas of building political institutions and economic and social transformation. Whatever the scale of the hostile situation flourishing in the institutions, the country today has solid infrastructure, including schools, health posts, administrative branches in all the 4,000 villages and highways that link the country's east to the west and north to the south.

Importantly, a new breed of leadership is coming up through competitive politics at the grass-roots level.

Ongoing Political Turmoil

If the present political scenario inside parliament and on the street provide any message, it is that instability seems to be the rule of Nepalese politics. As virtually all opposition parties are united in their objective to force Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to

resign, a group of rebels in the ruling party, led by former prime ministers Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Sher Bahadur Deuba, sees this as an opportune time to oust him. Democracy is a system governed by the rule of law. There are constitutional provisions on changing the prime minister and running political institutions. Unfortunately, Nepalese politicians are so desperate for political change that few have patience for the rule of law. Even after a 50-year experience, Nepalis have yet to develop democratic habits.

"If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form but also in fact, what must we do? This first thing in my judgment we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means that we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. Where there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving social and economic objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and sooner they are abandoned, the better for us," said B.R. Ambedkar, the renowned Indian constitutionalist.

Unstable Governments

Efforts to change governments in short intervals is not a new phenomenon in Nepalese politics. Every prime minister in the last 50

years has been the victim of political turmoil. Following the overthrow of the Rana regime, no prime minister — whether under absolute monarchy or democratic despotism — has completed his full term in office. The first thing those in the opposition are desperate about is to replace the prime minister of the day. This goes on to show that Nepalis are unable to distinguish between the failure of the system itself and the failure of the leadership and particular individuals.

In the decade following the introduction of democracy, Nepal had almost half a dozen prime ministers. Mohan Sumsher Rana, Matrika Prasad Koirala, Tanka Prasad Acharya, K.I. Singh and Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala held office between 1951 and 1960. Even under the Panchayat system, which presupposed the active leadership of the monarch, no government could complete its full term. Surya Bahadur Thapa, Kirtinidhi Bista, Nagendra Prasad Rijal, Tulsi Giri, Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Marichman Singh Shrestha were replaced one after another, some being primary characters in the political version of musical chairs. The charges against all of them were corruption, inefficiency and nepotism. Whether the system is based on the principles of a sovereign parliament or the centralized structure of an absolute monarchy, political instability and turmoil have remained a bitter reality of life. Are we culturally predisposed to political instability?

"If we evaluate the political course between 1951-1960, we find that political leaders were very committed to the stability of the political system. Today's political leaders are more concerned with acquiring power than strengthening democracy and nationalism," said historian Dr. Rajesh Gautam, who has published several books on the evolution of modern Nepalese politics.

As Nepal's political leaders have to spend most of their time and energy to hold on to their position, the country's development has always suffered. "If you are always concerned about your political position, when will you start working for the country?" asked an economist.

Nepal seems to be one of those few countries which has spent all of their time in search of a workable political system. Nepalis have experimented with all kinds of systems and are still struggling for an answer.

Many other countries in the region have long chosen the political mechanism that they think could best attain their people's aspirations. Nepalese leaders have wasted precious time in upholding the interests of a particular political system rather than the interests of

the country.

Insurgencies In Nepal

Interestingly, all political systems and governments in Nepal have faced various kinds of political insurgencies, except during the first five years after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990.

Many of today's leading political players were once battle-hardened insurgents. Nepali Congress workers have tried everything from seeking to liberate Solukhumbu through armed action to making an attempt on the life of the king. The CPN-ML and Nepal Janbadi Morcha launched violent insurgencies against the Panchayat system. The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist is in the midst of a 'people's war' against the existing system. The only difference in these insurgencies lies in their violent intensity.

Over the last few months, residents of the capital city have endured general strikes called by political parties and witnessed schools disrupted for a full week by student unions. Despite the ample opportunity of transferring power through a democratic and transparent manner, an ingrained culture of conspiracy to gain power continues to dominate the country's politics.

1. Nepali Congress 1961-1962
2. Nepali Congress 2023 - 2027
3. Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist and Leninist 2028-2031
4. Nepal Janbadi Morcha 2042-2046
5. Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) 2052 - till now

Economic and Social Progress

In economic and social sectors, Nepal has made some significant progress. Although the pace has been too slow, Nepal has also gained success in the process of institution building. The extent of the turmoil and experiments is evident from the fact that the country has seen four constitutions under two political systems.

When democracy was introduced five decades ago following the overthrow of the Rana regime, Nepal did not have any kind of institution to sustain the power of the people. The literacy rate was under two percent and only 376 kilometers of rough vehicle tracks existed in the valley and the Terai. Electricity was virtually non-existent and food supply was very limited. There were only 321 primary schools, 11 secondary schools and one technical college. Life expectancy was 26 years and health facilities were rare. In the absence of grass-roots-level political institutions, it was always difficult to build roads, hospitals, schools and drinking water systems.

"Everyone who has travelled in the rural areas of Nepal is astonished to find such poor transport systems consisting of foot trails only. There is virtually no transport system in the rural areas of Nepal. Only a few trails have just been created gradually, where people were walking," said Toni Hagen in his book *Observations on Certain Aspects of Economic and Social Developmental Problems in Nepal, 1959*. "The economic pattern of Nepal is unique as far as the 8.4 million people of the country live in the same ways as they did

several hundred years ago.... The administration in the countryside, in our sense of word, is simply non-existent. Out of the 10 wireless stations which were established some years ago, eight are out of order now."

There have been remarkable changes in the transport sector. Roads link 62 of the 75 districts of the country. More than 400 MW of hydropower is generated within the country, over 10 million people are literate and four universities have produced 200,000 graduates. There are 37,397 schools with more than 5.2 million students. Basic health services are available in all the Village Development Committees.

"There has been economic transformation but the climate conducive for the economic development is yet to be achieved," said Dr. Bishwakeshar Maskey, professor of economics at Tribhuvan University. "We are yet to formulate a strategic vision for the development of the country."

Growth of Institutions

Fifty years ago when Nepal opened up to the outside world along with a new democratic regime, the situation of the country was pathetic and, from today's vantage point, unimaginable.

Growth of the independent judiciary is one of the important achievements of the five decades of democratic experiments. Nepal has now three levels of judiciary. To maintain law and order and carry out day-to-day administrative works, district administrations have been opened up in all 75 districts. The introduction of decentralization helped to transfer authority to the district level. These efforts at institution building helped to un-

Nepal. Although the organization of the political parties is as old as the democratic process, they are yet to shape with the democratic values. Following the restoration of democracy, all major political parties have held their conventions but defeated factions have not accepted the verdict of the party organization. The CPN-UML and the RPP suffered splits as the losing factions refused to accept the election results.

The Nepali Congress is not free from such controversies, either, as Bhattarai and Deuba are yet to reconcile with the verdict of the recent party convention. Despite these distortions, political parties have been developing in an institutionalized manner.

More than 4,000 political institutions are now working throughout the country, penetrating once impregnable rural areas. Administration, highway and communication networks link the country from the east to west and north to south. Had Nepal been



A bus load of political workers : People power

successful in accelerating its economic growth, the situation obviously would have been much better.

Helpless prime minister

One key reason for the flaws in the system is that over the last 10 years, the prime minister's authority has been curtailed through court decisions. Controlling corruption is a prime duty of the prime minister, but he does not have the authority to keep his own ministers and party MPs in check because of the curtailment of his prerogative to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections.

Powerful slogans support the development of a healthy political process. But when slogans remain restricted to rhetoric, people alienated from the process. Opportunities have been missed because the country has spent time and resources in a ritual of sloganeering while politics has represented little more than trial and error. Countries that started out with greater disadvantages than Nepal's have left us far behind in the development race.

The current national mood of gloom also mirrors the fact that Nepalis have not been able to reconcile with the polity of the country. Sizeable groups on the left and the right are still searching for alternatives to the present system.

"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," Winston S. Churchill once said.

As it is a philosophy as well as a collection of practices accumulated through time and experience, democracy cannot be achieved rapidly. This is particularly so in countries that are emerging from decades of totalitarian or authoritarian rule.

Changes in human attitudes are less easily accomplished than the remodelling of the political structure.

Democracy is an extremely slow process whereas development in economic as well as technological terms can be achieved very fast. A capable leadership can bring out tremendous results in a very short period but that miracle is not possible in democratic process.

Had there been mature political institutions, things would have worked almost in automation. Had there been very capable and dedicated leadership, the situation, too, would have differed. Despite lacunas in institutions, things could have been much better. But, unfortunately, Nepal lacks both.

Hard Road Ahead

The road has not been an easy one. The making of the first democratic constitution

faced years of delays amid political uncertainty and controversy. The constitution of 1958 was promulgated under a Royal proclamation and the model was based upon the Westminster style of parliamentary democracy. Sir Ivor Jennings, an outstanding constitutional expert of his time, was the architect of the constitution behind the scenes.

Considering the institution of the monarchy and the unitary form of government, it was most suitable to Nepal's condition and situation. More than a year and a half of practice introduced the people to constitutional practices and methodologies.

The king, the prime minister and parliament performed their roles in keeping with the core provisions of the constitution.

Recent publications of two very impor-

ing the institutions and improving the economic conditions.

The constitution promulgated to establish a partyless democracy failed to bring politicians of opposite convictions into its fold. So the constitution always remained in an abnormal adjustments with heterogenous forces.

In a very difficult situation of balancing Nepal's relations between India and China and between two emerging forces of the Cold War — the United States and the Soviet Union — the political changes of 1990 took place.

Decades-long confrontation of the monarchy with democratic forces came to an end by this change and a new era of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy began. But the country, handicapped by its size and location, could not run the process



Bhattarai (left) and Koirala : Lack of reconciliation

tant biographical books — by B.P. Koirala and by K.P. Bhattarai — testify to the genius of the politicians of that time. But some mysterious political development put enormous powers into the hand of the king and put the prime minister in prison.

The experience of the last five decades has shown that the introduction of democracy is a complex process which involves more than mere political transformation.

The two major forces — the traditional monarchy and modernizing democratic forces — have always remain suspicious of one another, and the country has faced unpredictable situations.

Confrontation between the two forces had seriously hampered the process of build-

smoothly. Once again, the system is under a threat almost everyone can perceive but few can exactly define.

The constitution and all institutions within it seem to be facing a new kind of challenges to their survival. The judiciary is becoming more assertive and press freedom is now a strong feature of society.

Critics of previous system have overlooked the democratic foundations that were laid then. Behind what is described as a dark patch in the country's democratic history lie some of the seeds of democratic behavior.

The growth of leadership from the grassroots was started during the Panchayat system. More than 4,000 local bodies units of self-governance were institutionalized dur-

ing that period of partyless politics.

It was that 'undemocratic' system which taught the basic rights of voting to the common citizens and encouraged them to choose their own leaders.

Nepal has committed many mistakes in the past 50 years while learning the values and ideals of a modern political system.

The inherent tendencies of some sections are not compatible with modern political systems. Whenever a political system tries to evolve, intellectuals promote anarchy in different forms and pave the way for the emergence of an authoritarian ruler.

In recent years, the question of corruption has become one of the major banes of public life in Nepal. It is necessary to take more effective means to deal with this growing menace. At the same time, leaders have to guard against the emergence of anti-democratic or totalitarian structures.

In our warped vision of empowering institutions — as in the case of the CIAA — we are losing sight of the abuse a concentration of power without accountability can foster. If people start thinking that a police state can curb corruption, then what is the role of an evolutionary political process.

"Everybody wants to be a son of Jung Bahadur in Nepal whenever he or she is in position to exercise authority," said advocate Bharat Raj Upreti in an article 'Suru Na Anta'.

Challenges Galore

It is wrong to say that everything is green and fertile because that situation ultimately helps to formulate negative pictures about Nepal. Comparing the situation with other parts of South Asia, Nepal is yet peaceful and harmonious and congenial to the success of democracy as well as economic development. If a little bit of sympathy and understanding is given to these realities by its two neighbors, Nepal has the potentiality to speed up development and improve the quality of the people's lives. After a firm network of roads is built, businesses and transportation operated by the private sector would help improve quality of life. Twenty years back deforestation was the main political issue. The hills and lands of the country have been made green today by the support of friendly donor countries.

The country's literacy rate is not very high, but the attitude of the people toward sending their children to school is a sufficient indicator that illiteracy can be removed if it is properly managed. People know the future is going to be very competitive. So there is tremendous pressure on politicians not to interfere in education.

In terms of infrastructure, Nepal has made tremendous improvements.

	1951	2001
1. Literacy	2 percent	40 percent
2. Hospitals dispensaries	5	80+
3. Life expectancy	26	56.1
4. Electricity	2 MW	400 MW
5. Road	321 KM	7000
6. Political institutions	x	4000
7. Graduate	x	200,000
8. Number of schools	334	37,500
9. Technical College	1	20
x	Not available	

The Nepalese people have vastly improved their health care options, their educational and literacy services and the contributions of Nepal's women to their communities and their nation. Despite the challenges offered by remote villages, and a rugged and diverse topography, Nepal's accomplishments have been remarkable.

As former prime minister B.P. Koirala during the Panchayat period as a dissenter was in a hard process of negotiating for national reconciliation said that it was a heart breakingly slow process. So is the case with the democratic process. There is not a switch-button

effect in its result. It has to be evolved by step-by-step practice and experience enriched by that. In Nepal the people at present think that the mere declaration of democracy brings the full-fledged result but it is not like that.

The current parliament is made up of all kinds of political leaders who have played a role in the democratization process of the country. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai represents an older generation of modernizers.

Main opposition leader Madhav Kumar Nepal embodies the second generation. Then there are people like Surya Bahadur Thapa, a luminary of the previous system.

After the restoration of multiparty democracy, power was shifted from aristocrats to the people. Somewhere along the road, things took a different turn somewhere and a new aristocracy is emerging.

The experiment of the first 50 years was painful and full of turmoil. But that doesn't detract from the challenge to stabilize the democratic process to fulfill the growing aspirations of the people over the next 50 years. ■

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OBITUARY

End Of An Era

Dayabir Singh Kansakar leaves behind a legacy of social service

By A CORRESPONDENT

T rue to his name, Dayabir Singh reflected compassion and strength throughout his life. When he silently passed away on February 5 at the age of 90, he left behind the exemplary legacy of Paropakar social movement.

Born in 1968 BS in Keltole, Kathmandu, Kansakar was the pioneer social activist of the country. He started social service at a time when the authoritarian Rana regime would suppress everything that could undermine its dictatorial rule in the country.

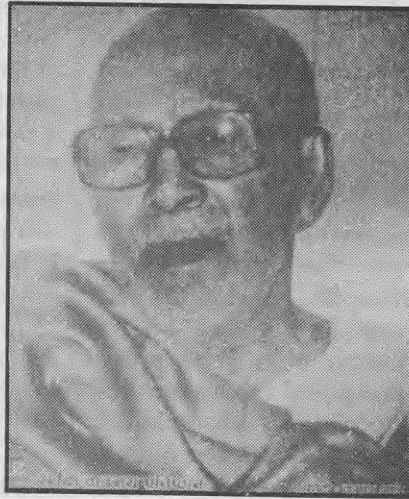
The first Nepalese to have donated his blood, Dayabir Singh opened a series of Paropakar social institutions to help the underprivileged. From orphanage to ambulance service and from training nurses to building hospital, he devoted his whole life to the improvement of society.

A man of the Gandhian mould, Dayabir was also active in promoting the small and cottage industries in the country. He always emphasized the role of small industries in the economic development of the country.

There is hardly any social sector that was left untouched by Dayabir. The focus of his attention remained on education, health and human service. Some of the major institutions he set up include Paropakar Indra Rajya Laxmi Maternity Hospital, Paropakar Orphanage, Paropakar Ambulance Service, Paropakar Higher Secondary School.

He was also the founding member of Nepal Red Cross Society and Sajha Co-operative beside leading a number of Buddhist committees. He also represented Nepal in a various social conferences abroad.

Recognizing his devotion to social



Dayabir : Exemplary social activist

work, Dayabir was decorated with various awards like the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu (Third and Fourth) and the Tri Shakti Patta.

At the fag end of his illustrious career, Dayabir Singh was bed-ridden due to illness. The prime minister, deputy prime minister, ministers, opposition party leaders, businessmen, social workers, intellectuals and many others from different walks of life came to pay their last respects to him on Tuesday. He was cremated in accordance with Buddhist traditions. He is survived by his wife, five sons and two daughters.

With his passing away, the social service sector of Nepal has had to bear an irreparable loss. This loss will be more closely felt by all those underprivileged people who had enjoyed his warm guardianship.

While the leaders present to pay their last respects stressed the need to emulate his principles, they would be paying true tribute if they took over the torch passed by Dayabir Singh Kansakar. ■

SMARIKA With A Noble Cause

The proceeds from a new album go for handicapped children

In what is seen as a pioneering attempt, singer Situ Kharel handed over proceeds from sales of her first CD/cassette album "Smarika" (In Memorium) for a noble cause. Situ Kharel's daughter, Smarika, handed over a cheque of Rs 51,001 to Principal of Navjyoti Center, Sister Anne Marie, for the welfare of the mentally handicapped children attending the center last week. The school intends to develop a toy library for the children with this donation.



The money was collected from the advance sale of the album in the U.K. The album "Smarika" includes ten modern songs by different lyricists, including Kiran Kharel. The album, produced by Smarika Media Service, is marketed by Music Nepal. The songs were recorded at Symphony Studio.

The debut album by Situ Kharel is an indication of her singing talent. It is a matter of joy for music lovers that a melodious voice has emerged in the market looking for some creativity. ■

'Political Commitment Is Necessary To Curb Corruption'

— INGRID OFSTAD

INGRID OFSTAD is Norway's ambassador to Nepal. Norway opened its embassy in Kathmandu last year and Ofstad was appointed ambassador three months ago. She spoke to KESHAB POUDEL and SANJAYA DHAKAL on various issues of bilateral concern. Excerpts:

The Norwegian government is involved in the Basic and Primary Education Project in Nepal. What are your impressions of the project?

There are still some difficult parts when it comes to really decentralizing the planning and implementation of the program. I hope there will be more activity in the field soon, more concerned children and parents can build alliances with local school teachers, and gradually power moves from the central ministry to the district and school levels. High quality education can only be achieved when there is demand for education from the local level

How did the Norwegian government decide to become involved in the project?

We think providing education to children including girls is the most important area for the development of the country. The level of education here is very low. We believe that when children get education, they will have greater access to participate in development. Education is also one of the basic rights.

How do you assess the overall development assistance of Norway to Nepal?

Assistance through the government is very new. Nepal became a main partner for Norwegian cooperation only in late 1996. Therefore, we are still building the government support program. Traditionally, our support has been through NGOs - which we believe has been quite successful - and Norwegian companies. As for government-to-government cooperation, it is a bit early to measure the effects.

What is your experience in the Khimti hydropower project?

Khimti is the first big foreign private investment in Nepal. The Norwegian company that was responsible for the project had its problems. Being the first one, the government was not properly

prepared to handle the large private investment. Both parties had to learn along the way. For the Norwegian hydropower sector, it was a new experience to work outside Norway. There was lots of learning along the way.

Based on your experience with Khimti, what measures do you suggest Nepal should take to attract greater foreign investment in developing hydropower?

I believe there is still a lot to be done to make Nepal become more investment-friendly. The decisions from the government's side may be the major problem, as they are inconsistent. It is not easy to be a foreign investor in Nepal. One is not completely sure whether there is an agreement in Nepalese society that you want foreign investors. There is a need for a broader consensus in society on how Nepal shall deal with foreign investors.

What are the major areas of cooperation between Nepal and Norway?

The major areas of cooperation are basic and primary education, hydropower development, mainly by private investors, and the Melamchi Water Supply Project for Kathmandu valley. There has been support through NGOs also.

The trade volume between Nepal and Norway is insignificant. What can be done to increase bilateral trade?

I think this is an area that we need to explore. Norway is a very small country with very few people. I am not so sure it could be a large market for Nepal. Nevertheless, there are possibilities for expansion. I think we have to sit down with the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and others to find ways to increase exports from Nepal.

What is your position on the Melamchi project? How much support are you willing to provide to the project?

The NORAD board is going to meet on February 20 to make a final decision. We believe that we will provide a total assistance of US\$32 million - \$25 million for the construction of the tunnel and \$7 million for the planning. We hope that all the donors, including the World Bank, come along. This is an extremely complex and huge project. People in

We believe that we will provide a total assistance of US\$32 million - \$25 million for the construction of the tunnel and \$7 million for the planning.

Kathmandu valley need water, that's why we want to support the project. In fact, the people are quite desperate for water. Extra supply of water is however not enough, it is also important to have an efficient distribution system working so that you do not lose the costly water on its way to the consumers.

How will Norway's involvement in the hydropower sector change if the Norwegian company bags the Butwal Power Project (BPC)?

This is up to the private sector. A private Norwegian company is bidding for the BPC. As I understand it, a Nepalese-Norwegian consortium is interested in developing the electricity distribution system linked to hydropower development to enable more use of electricity locally to develop industries. As I understand it, they are keen on developing hydropower together with electricity distribution. That is why they are interested in BPC.

As Norway has a long experience in hydropower development, how do you think Nepal needs to manage its water resources?

Our country was developed through hydropower. That was not so long ago. Hydropower plants were linked to development of industry and the rural society around the plant. Now Norway does not have more hydropower resources to develop. The potential of the hydropower development in Nepal, is great. But you need to work on how to use hydropower - not only how to develop it. I hope you can use it for your own development. Of course, there is also the possibility of exporting power to India if you want to make big money. But I think you can use it more directly for your own development.

Frequent changes in the government's policy on hydropower are said to have discouraged potential investors. What do you say?

I do not think it is the hydropower policy that stops investment. It may be that the general climate for foreign investors is difficult. When it comes to a policy, you have a policy wanting to attract foreign investors. Therefore, the stumbling block may be the implementation, not the policy.

How do you assess the process of democratization in Nepal?

I feel democracy here is not yet very stable. There are many challenges in building a democratic society from the bottom. You have a parliament and you have elections. But democracy is much more than that. Democratic institutions, including an independent media, are vital parts. So is the participation of people in general. Still there are many exclusions based on caste, ethnicity and gender. If you want to build a true democratic society, you have to have everybody on board. And that is still a long way from here. I am worried

about the violent forces in this society. I hope to see more demands for peace and more demands for reconciliation. That is also important in terms of attracting foreign investment. I wish that the people were more active in demanding peace.

How about problems of good governance and corruption?

I agree with those demanding stronger anti-corruption measures in society and the strengthening of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC). A corruption-free society can also attract more foreign aid and investment. I think you have done a lot. But still there is much more to be done. The state will have to change, be more transparent and accountable, and the civil society, local government and private sector will have to play a greater role. When the Nepal Development Forum met last April in Paris, the issue of governance was brought up in a major way because it is seen as the major obstacle for poverty alleviation in the country.

Which is the bigger challenge for Nepal - corruption or poverty?

It is poverty. But you cannot fight poverty successfully if you have corruption in society.

Scandinavian countries, including Norway, have an impressive record in good governance and discouraging corruption. What is the reason?

I think it has a lot to do with equality in the society and the participation of the people who can control what the government does. A high level of education, strong participation of people, both men and women, are some of the reasons.

There is a lot of confusion in Nepal over whether it is the role of the government or of constitutional bodies to curb corruption. Can constitutional bodies like the CIAA alone curb corruption, or do we also need strong political commitment?

Of course, political commitment is necessary to curb corruption. Only when you have firm political commitment can you have strong institutions that can fight corruption.



You have a parliament and you have elections. But democracy is much more than that.

'My Program Has Become Part Of Viewers' Daily Life'

— SANTOSH PANTA

SANTOSH PANTA is the inimitable TV comedian whose weekly socio-satirical serial "Hijo Aajaka Kura" enjoys a cult-like following among Nepalese viewers cutting across age and community lines. The director/actor of the most watched program on Nepal Television, Panta is one of the best known faces in the country. The fabulous entertainer recently completed the 300th episode of his weekly program - the first such feat achieved by anyone in the history of Nepalese television - and is still going strong. He spoke to SANJAYA DHAKAL last week at his residence in Dhapasi about his work and success. Excerpts:

Many comedy-based programs have been shown on Nepal Television. But only you have managed to come up with them so consistently. What is the reason behind your success?

My programs do not undermine the audience. I do not engage in cheap humor. You can make people laugh by painting your nose red, too. However, that does not last long. What I do in my programs is show the realities of our lives. Current affairs and things like politics and culture, which affect the lives of middle-class people - that is what I focus on. There is not merely laughter in it but also some message. The reason my program could run so well is that it has become a part of the day-to-day life of my viewers.

You have been faithfully coming up with your programs every Friday. How do you find fresh story ideas week after week?

There are many events and issues coming up every day. When even daily newspapers are finding enough issues to go on, mine is just a weekly program. The only thing is that you have to have the ability to grasp these issues and turn

them into programs that will be loved by the audience. Journalists like you see news in an incident while I see stories in them. That's how I am going on.

How do you find the state of humor-satire in Nepal? How viable has the sector become in terms of financial gain?

It has improved a lot compared to the past. It has come a long way. Nepalese artists are now able to survive



on their creative profession alone. They are getting the chance to show their talents abroad, too. Even if you are a little-known face, you have the chance to go overseas for shows and so on. There is also the chance to make money from overseas programs. There are many Nepalese living outside the country who invite Nepalese artistes from time to time. The number of Nepalese films is also growing. Though the remuneration from acting in Nepalese films is still poor, the artistes can expect to earn more by becoming involved in many of them at a time. So, this sector has become very good in terms of financial

gain, too.

This is said to be the age of satellite and cable TV. Most people in urban areas prefer foreign channels to Nepal Television. Still your program is one of the very few on NTV that is watched by many, including the urban youth. Why is that so?

I don't make programs that are exclusive for any one group of audience. I vary my stories so that I can cater to all people possible. I always receive comments from members of the older generation that I should focus more on socio-political aspects while youths tell me to show their side of stories, too. So, I try to strike a balance. I divide my programs among women, the elderly, working class and the youth. On some weeks, the program caters to the taste of women; on others, I focus on the concerns of employees and so on.

Your programs have been praised for their incisive display of social ills. What do you think of the present political and social problems of the country? Where is the country going?

I am confused whether there is a government or not here. The situation is so chaotic that if the leaders try to say this is how democracy looks like, then, I am afraid, the people will misunderstand democracy. While democracy is the system for the people, by the people and of the people, the situation here is such that one is forced to say the system is for the leader, by the leader and of the leader. In the last decade, the people have witnessed nothing more than corruption, economic decline and political instability. How are the people understanding democracy? Imagine a 10-year-old boy in 1990 who has grown up into a 20-year-old now. How has he perceived the democracy in the country? If you ask this question to him, the answer will probably be "chakka jam", "Nepal

Bandhs", strikes, corruption, scandals, inflation, infighting and so on. This could be one main reason why the youth are going away from the country. They don't see a future here. Only those proficient in the arts of deception and cunning can expect to rise here. But for those who wish to walk in the right direction, there is no track. The

situation, therefore, is a very sad one. If this kind of situation persists for some years, then the time will have come to rethink.

You have complained that while you were not recognized for your TV serials, the media associated your name with a certain controversial program in Kathmandu. Besides, you have also criticized the lack of respect for artistes here. What do you say?

Look, there is a strange way of respecting artistes in this country. They respect artistes by dividing the awards. The practice of giving awards is such that they give one honor to a particular artiste one year and give that to another artiste the following year. They divide awards to ensure everybody gets it, but not necessarily based on merit. In my case, I was given the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu in 1991. At that time, I hadn't even started my TV serial. But after so many years of producing the serial, I have not received any awards so far. So, in a way it is strange that you are not recognized when you are active in helping the society. It makes no sense recognizing me 20 years after I contributed to society.

Your program is aired through state-owned NTV. Do you find any difficulties such as censorship, as you often make fun of the government?

It happens at times. However, having gained so much experience in producing such serials, I know where their shoe pinches. I know how much of the satire will go uncensored and which ones have to be refined to get through without compromising on the message.

Do you plan to get involved on the big screen, especially after your vast experience in working on the small one?

The only difference between the small and big screen is in technology.

Making films demands huge investments, which I don't have at my disposal. I am happy and satisfied with my TV profession now. Maybe after some years when I decide to take rest from TV, I might become involved in films. But I am not the kind of person who will mortgage his house to invest in films. In my view, if artistes run after money, their talent will suffer.

There is a charge that you pick people from your own close circle to work in your serial and do not give chance to others. What do you say?

That is a baseless allegation. You can see for yourself. Rama Thapaliya, who frequently plays as my wife in the serial, is not related to me. In fact, my own wife has not played in a single TV serial so far. Nitesh Raj Panta, my nephew, who is the chief assistant director of Hijo Aajaka Kura is himself a talented artiste. Even then, I only give him a chance once in a couple of months. If you come to my house on Mondays, you can find a long queue of aspiring artistes. I have to give them a chance turn by turn.

How do you play different characters so well? Do you study the characters beforehand?

I do. Study of characters is important. You cannot portray characters unless you study them in real life. For example, if I have to play the role of a doctor, I need to know how doctors speak, what kind of terminology they use and so on.

How long does it take you to produce an episode?

Three days. Two days for shooting and one for editing. Three people — myself, Nitesh and Pramod Sharma — sit down and prepare the subject of the episode, drawing it from the major events of the week, and then shoot it.

Do you have your own equipment?

No, I use the equip-

ment, including the camera, of Nepal Television. They are quite costly to buy.

What about your earnings?

Well, I learn to my satisfaction. What I earn is enough to support my living standard. Overall, it is good.

How did you become involved in this sector?

In fact, I have been involved in this sector since I was seven years of age. At seven, I had already earned two medals from the King and the Queen. I started as child dancer.

Do you want to work in private channels, too?

Being a media person, I have no objection to working in private channels. But then, I would like to have the kind of viewership I am currently have through NTV, which airs my program on prime time.

How do you find the public response?

Very, very warm and respectful. I find people genuinely appreciating my efforts. If you look at people respecting politicians and ministers, it is out of fear and other things. But to people like us, the people give genuine respect. I am very satisfied by that. ■

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BOOK

Understanding Autonomy

Experts expand on the theoretical underpinnings of decentralization

By A CORRESPONDENT

Even after five decades of decentralization efforts, the officials and leaders of local bodies in Nepal do not understand its importance. The local bodies consider decentralization a way of salvation from central authority. Central bodies view the process as the transfer of authority from the local bodies.

Following the restoration of democracy, millions of rupees have been spent on seminars on decentralization, democracy, rule of law and violations of human rights. However, countries like Nepal have not benefited much from such exercises. Hundreds of books and articles have analyzed and evaluated the process and practice of

decentralization. Almost every issue faced during the implementation of the principles of decentralization have been covered in these papers. However, very few people have access to them. This book comes as a useful tool in broadening understanding of the theoretical approaches of decentralization.

In his article "Local Governance and Decentralization Programs: A Comparative Analysis in Legal Perspective", decentralization expert Tulsi Narayan Shrestha explains the core issues of local self-governance in Nepal's context. Shrestha also provides a wide historical perspective in analyzing the role of local bodies.

Ram Kumar Dahal's article, "Prospects of Good Governance", emphasizes the importance of good governance in running local bodies. Dahal argues in favour of measuring the performance of local bodies in keeping with the parameters of good governance.

Ganga Bahadur Thapa, who edited this volume, holds the view that the transitional nature of Nepal's democratic system is responsible for the present problems.

The local bodies' quest to become more powerful and assertive and the strong tendency of central units to hold on to authority create problems in the process of devolving authority. Over the past few years, several positive efforts have been made at the legislative, economic and political levels to realize the provisions of local self-governance in Nepal. However, the essential question remains: are the District Development Committees, Village Development Committees and Municipalities able to exercise the powers envisaged?

Although a new act on the local governance is in the process of implementation, the country is yet to find answers to problems related to the allocation of power and the role and duties of local bodies. There are very important articles in the

Collection of Historical Documents Vol. 1
Written by Dr. Surendra K.C
Published by Pairabi Publication
Price: Rs. 125
Pages: 210

Communist Evolution

Few published books have been able to highlight the different phases of the development of the Communist Party of Nepal. Dr. Surendra K.C.'s new work bridges this gap by providing a lucid overview of the various phases communist parties have gone through.

Dr. K.C., whose Ph.D. dissertation focused on the evolution of communism in Nepal, includes some very valuable documents as well as declarations of the party. The authenticity of Dr. K.C.'s book is confirmed by the respect he commands as an independent scholar.

Dr. K.C. has included almost all documents, hand-written notes and correspondence exchanged by leaders during various periods of Nepal's communist movement. This has given a sound basis for understanding how Nepalese communists have struggled to establish themselves as a formidable power in the country.


The author also has compiled newspaper reports and texts published in the mouthpiece of the Communist Party. The documents and related matters help readers understand the distance Nepal's communist movement has traveled to reach where it is today. ■

book that deal with the internal viability and autonomy of local bodies and their initiative to strengthen local self-governance. They also evaluate the mechanisms of the responsiveness of authorities and their transparency and accountability as well as issues of coordination between different bodies.

At a time of confusion over the scope and range of decentralization, the articles in this book try to simplify the core issues for the general reader. ■

DECENTRALIZATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

Editor
GANGA BHADUR THAPA


POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION OF NEPAL
FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG, GERMANY
1999

Decentralization and Good Governance in Nepal
Published by the Political Science Association
of Nepal and
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany
Edited by Ganga Bahadur Thapa
Price: Rs. 200/US\$5, Pages: 123

By M.S.KHOKNA



TRANSITION

HONORED : Swami Prapannacharya, by Purna Chandra Dhungel, vice-chancellor at the Mahendra Sanskrit University, for conducting various research on Vedas.

HOSPITALIZED : Keshav Sthapit, mayor of the Kathmandu Municipal Corpo-

ration, to the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, after suffering from stomach ailments.

Madhav Prasad Ghimire, senior poet, to the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, after suffering from high blood pressure.

CONSTITUTED : A judicial probe committee, headed by **Gobinda Kumar Shrestha**,

judge at the Appellate Court, Patan, to investigate the riots and communal clashes that gripped some parts of the country last December.

AWARDED: **Narayan Dhakal**, with the Mainali Story Award, by the Association of Literary Journalists.

ELECTED: **Dr. Mrigendra Raj Pandey**, as the president, **Dr. Awani Bhusan**

Upadhyaya, as the vice-president and **Dr. Arun Sayami**, as the general secretary of the Cardiac Society of Nepal, by the society's general assembly.

Rajesh Khadka, as the president and **Umesh Shrestha**, as the senior vice-president of the Public and Boarding Schools Association of Nepal, by the association's sixth general assembly. ■

Building Pillars Of Peace From The Ground Up

By KOFI ANNAN

Peace-building in the broadest sense is about helping a country to put back in place the rudiments of normal life after a period of conflict.

Peace-building is about the resumption of economic activity, the rejuvenation of institutions, the restoration of basic services, the reconstruction of clinics and schools, the revamping of public administration, and the resolution of differences through dialogue, not violence. The over-arching challenge is to move societies towards sustainable peace.

Peace-building done well is a powerful deterrent to violent conflict. But it is not powerful in the way an army can be powerful; rather it is the sum of many initiatives, projects, activities and sensitivities. Peace-building is not the dramatic imposition of a grand plan. Rather, it is the process of building the pillars of peace from the ground up, bit by bit.

The instruments of peace-building are as varied as the United Nations system itself. Indeed, virtually every part of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, is currently engaged in one form of peace-building or another.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; human rights education; the repatriation of refugees; the promotion of conflict resolution and reconciliation techniques — this is just a short list of activities. We are also promoting cultural exchanges designed to link states in networks of enterprise and opportunity, not in webs of mutual antagonism.

And to ensure the coherence of these efforts, we are also trying to improve our own internal arrangements, so that peace-building is not only comprehensive, but done in an integrated way.

With an increasing number of UN entities establishing peace-building units and funds, we will need a major effort of coordination if we are to reinforce one another's efforts and avoid duplication and confusion.

We tend to think of peace-building as taking place primarily in post-conflict settings. Here the goals are to consolidate peace, to reinforce an often hard-won and fragile stability, and above all to prevent a slide back into conflict.

But I also see peace-building as a preventive instrument, which can address the underlying, root causes of conflict and which can also be used before the actual outbreak of war. A society on the brink of breakdown is as much in need of them as one where disaster has already struck. Their timely deployment at that stage could save many lives and avoid much misery. The political, economic and human logic of such an approach is impeccable. The problem is that we don't practice prevention as often as we could or should.

Whether started before, after or during the eruption of conflict, peace-building must be seen as a long-term exercise. At the same time, there is an unmistakable element of urgency — a need to achieve tangible progress on a number of fronts in a short period of time.

Peace-building must be, above all, the work of the society which is threatened by conflict or has succumbed to it. International efforts to promote peace or development must support — and not supplant — national ones.

Peace-building is an extremely difficult undertaking. All too often, countries emerging from prolonged conflicts are starting almost from ground zero, under clouds of bitterness and loss. It requires persistence and vision, as well as the courage to pursue reconciliation in societies still fractured by suspicion and mistrust.

Here I would like to say a word about the fundamentally political character of peace-building, which makes it distinct from normal development activities in non-crisis situations. When a country is sliding into conflict, or emerging from war, its needs are qualitatively

different from those of a stable society.

This requires a reordering of normal developmental, humanitarian and other activities, so that their first objective is to contribute to the paramount goal of preventing the outbreak or recurrence of conflict.

Some have described this as looking at developmental and humanitarian work through a "conflict prevention lens". Others have spoken of "peace-friendly" adjustment programs, with the flexibility to take account of the exceptional needs of countries emerging from, or on the verge of, conflict.

Indeed, at times, peace-building may mean giving preferential treatment to some groups in a society, in order to redress pre-existing inequalities that may have bred explosive tensions. And in turn, this may involve allocations of resources that might not be optimal from a purely economic point of view.

During the last decade, both the General Assembly and the Security Council have recognized the importance of peace-building, and the need to work with a range of partners, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

The Council has rightly recognized that peace-building can be a vital component of peacekeeping missions, and that it needs to include such preventive tools as early warning, diplomacy, preventive deployment and disarmament.

In countries as diverse as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia and Mozambique, peace-building has helped to smooth the implementation and prevent the breakdown of peace agreements. In countries like Haiti, Guinea-Bissau or the Central African Republic, peace-building activities have contributed to the maintenance of fragile stability.

In response to growing demand, the United Nations has opened, on a pilot basis, Peace-Building Support Offices in the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Tajikistan.

Although these outposts are relatively new, and are constrained by limited resources, they have helped Governments to destroy weapons, build institutions and mobilize international support for their societies' needs. As you know, we are now exploring the possibility of establishing a peace-building presence in Somalia.

This Council has a prime role to play. Among the major challenges of peace-building is the mobilization of sustained political will and resources on the part of the international community. A number of good ideas have been put forward in key areas such as the implementation of peace agreements and the design of peacekeeping operations, which the Council could incorporate into its future mandates. Further contributions can be expected from our meeting with regional organizations.

Peace-building presents complex and diverse challenges. I will do my utmost operationally — to improve the peace-building projects in which we engage, and exploit to the best possible effect the expertise that exists in the UN system and among our many partners.

But I will also ask the members to do more politically — to give peace-building a higher priority and a higher profile, by bringing it closer to the forefront of your awareness.

Peace-building must not be seen as an add-on or afterthought, something to save for later when conditions or resources or politics permit. It is a central tool of proven worth. Let us together pledge to develop and improve it, and then let us use it in good time. ■

This article is adapted from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement to the Security Council on Peace-Building on February 5, 2001

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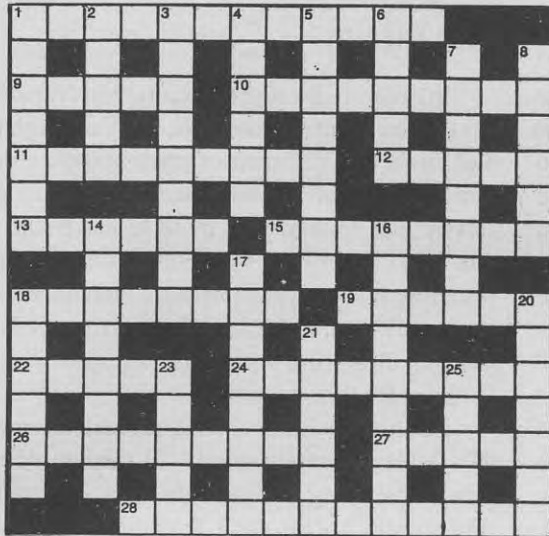
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CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Maintain boy's about to become independent-minded (8)
5. Nervous leaders of army facing assault (6)
10. Retrospective of passion play (4,4,2,5)
11. Jet's designer had to make repeated cuts (7)
12. Alcove for statue made of clay, intrinsically effective (7)
13. Joker, say, can be a match for any character (4,4)
15. No end of sweat, using this tool? (5)
18. I must leave recount, to return after an interval (5)
20. Attractive fields taking long to cross (8)
20. Cut corners in room that's fine for bachelor (7)
25. Conductor's strange variation (7)
26. Admitting recreation I preferred for a spell? (15)
27. Old fool injecting almost extinct bird with preservative (6)
28. Lack of air sounded a difficulty where highest peaks are (8)

DOWN

1. Find a wife in African country or another (6)
2. I'll shoulder my equipment, stay with the leader, and make notes (9)
3. Given some money back as disputant switches sides (7)
4. Secret source of timeless prestige (5)
6. Flatter type of fabric (7)
7. What green may mean, in painting's special language (5)
8. Delighted, possibly having ended on the rocks, welcoming rescue craft (8)
9. Idle dogs resolved to knock off (8)
14. First appearance of Hook, or second, in theatre (8)
16. Two types of wood that may be used for kindling (9)
17. Parliamentary officer threatening the bar (5,3)
19. One clarifying limits of rule right to support penalty? (7)
21. Withdraw as reaction to superficial irritation (7)
22. One-time goddess describing progress in AA? (6)
24. Somewhere to sleep, when starting a course (5)
25. In South Africa, general signs of pollution (5)

ACROSS : 1. Maverick 5. Afraid 10. Look back in anger 11. Whittle 12. Lunette 13. Wild card
 15. Lathe 18. Later 20. Pleasant 23. Chamfer 25. Sargent 26. Reconstructible 27. Dorard 28.
 Asphyxia
 DOWN : 1. malawi 2. Violinist 3. Rebased 4. Cache 6. Fiannee 7. Argot 8. Darkened 9. Dislodge
 14. Aspirate 16. tinderbox 17. Black rod 19. Rifiner 21. Stratch 22. Athena 24. Ascot 25. Smuts

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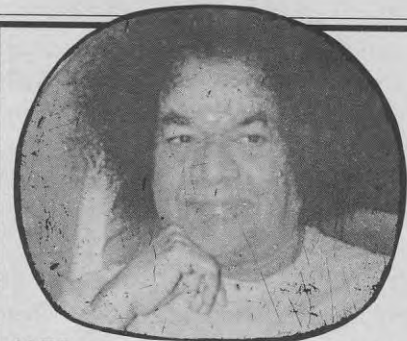
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 of Veda.”*

SATHYA SAI BABA

Floriculture Development In Nepal

By DR. DIBYA DEO BHATT

Floriculture is a neat industry. It is also a high value added product whose market is growing. In order to be a successful floriculturist, one should have trained and highly motivated manpower and equipment; above all, a new entrant should be able to correctly assess the requirements for becoming a successful floriculturist. Then comes the question of selecting suitable flowers that would grow in the locality. Roses are always popular, as are gladiolus, carnation, lily, chrysanthemum, aster, dahlia, orchids etc.

In the Nepalese climate, European summer flowers can be grown successfully, which would be profitable also. Many of the flowering plant species that now adorn gardens in Europe remain neglected in Nepal. Among these are poppy, primula, lilies, gentian, potentilla, rhododendrons, *Cypripedium*, *Aerides*, *Gastrochilus* and orchids. Maintenance of green house, handling equipment, and post-harvest treatment is necessary. Some European florists provide training also and these could be availed. A training program would cost about US\$ 1,000, which would be good investment for a large company. Trained manpower and other facilities are lacking in the country. However, entrepreneurs have started cultivating flowers for which there is great demand locally, for example, flowers like carnation, roses and chrysanthemum, which constitute 60 percent of the trade.

Nepal being the home of some 350 species of orchids which belong to 90 genera, there is a high export potential for orchids. Some of the orchids are: *Cymbidium*, *Dendrobium*, *Calanthe*, *Coelogyne*, *Vanda*, *Cypripedium*, *Phajus*, *Paphiopedilum*, *Bulbophyllum* etc.

The rich plant life of Nepal and existence of different bioclimatic zones allows growth of different flowering species, many of these being found in the Alpine zones. Thus far, about 6000 species of flowering plants have been catalogued by the British Museum (Natural History). There is an urgent need to preserve this rich biodiversity but unfortunately many plants because of over exploitation, including those which have been declared as endangered by the CITES and listed as protected are smuggled out of the country. This is especially the case of those which have high medicinal value. There is thus an urgent need to conserve such species and use new technologies (biotechnology) for their propagation. A conifer (*Yew*, *Taxus baccata*) which is found in East Nepal has been subjected to intense destruction as its leaves yield a drug which has been found highly useful in the treatment of certain types of cancer.

Hence, there is all the more need to make available plants raised by tissue culture method. The Plant Research Division at Godavari has been successful in raising many plants, herbaceous as well as woody, in the laboratory through tissue culture. There is a compelling need to intensify this work.

In order to develop floriculture in Nepal, the government has to play an active role, especially through providing subsidies for the establishment of green houses, controlled temperature facilities at the airports, an efficient plant quarantine service and encouraging more research and development in this field. The role of the cooperative societies in promoting floriculture is considerable; in countries such as the Netherlands and Israel, which lead in exporting seeds, bulbs and other planting flowering materials, the government provides all facilities for this.

Training facilities should be created for training people in this field. At present nearly 70 percent of the need for cut flowers is being fulfilled through import from India; the flowers which are in great demand, such as rose and carnation are not available locally in required quantity. At the same time most of the nurseries in the Kathmandu Valley import nursery plants from India without any control over its quality, especially in regard to diseases. An open border makes the task of quarantine difficult but it is one which has not received enough attention thus far.

Nothing is more important for the development of floriculture in Nepal than develop proper facilities, such as green houses, land, transportation, essentially air freight, research and development (biotechnology) and regulatory laws. There is a growing demand all over the world for flowers. The world market for cut flowers, bulbs and seeds is over \$35 billion, to which the Indian market contributes \$60 million. The demand for cut flowers, bulbs, seeds and live plant material is mostly in Europe, North America, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore. In case of Nepal, internal production meets only 40 percent of the market demand. Some effort is now being made to introduce floriculture as crop substitute. There are 20 to 25 nurseries which are involved in this business. One of the complaints which the nurserymen have is about the unavailability of storage facility at the Tribhuvan International Airport and cargo space.

There is also shortage of trained manpower in this field. This need can be fulfilled by the Royal Botanical Garden at Godavari which would give practical training in gardening, including garden lay-out, cultivation of plants and other horticultural matters.

The Botanical Gardens have an important role to play in the development of plant industry. Besides undertaking research on plants suitable for garden, they should be able to fulfill the needs for plants, seeds and other material. Interest in flowers, both for home gardens and commercial purposes is now growing and the national Garden should be able to fulfill the needs of the growers, as well as home gardeners. ■

Dr. Bhatt is a former senior bureaucrat.

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