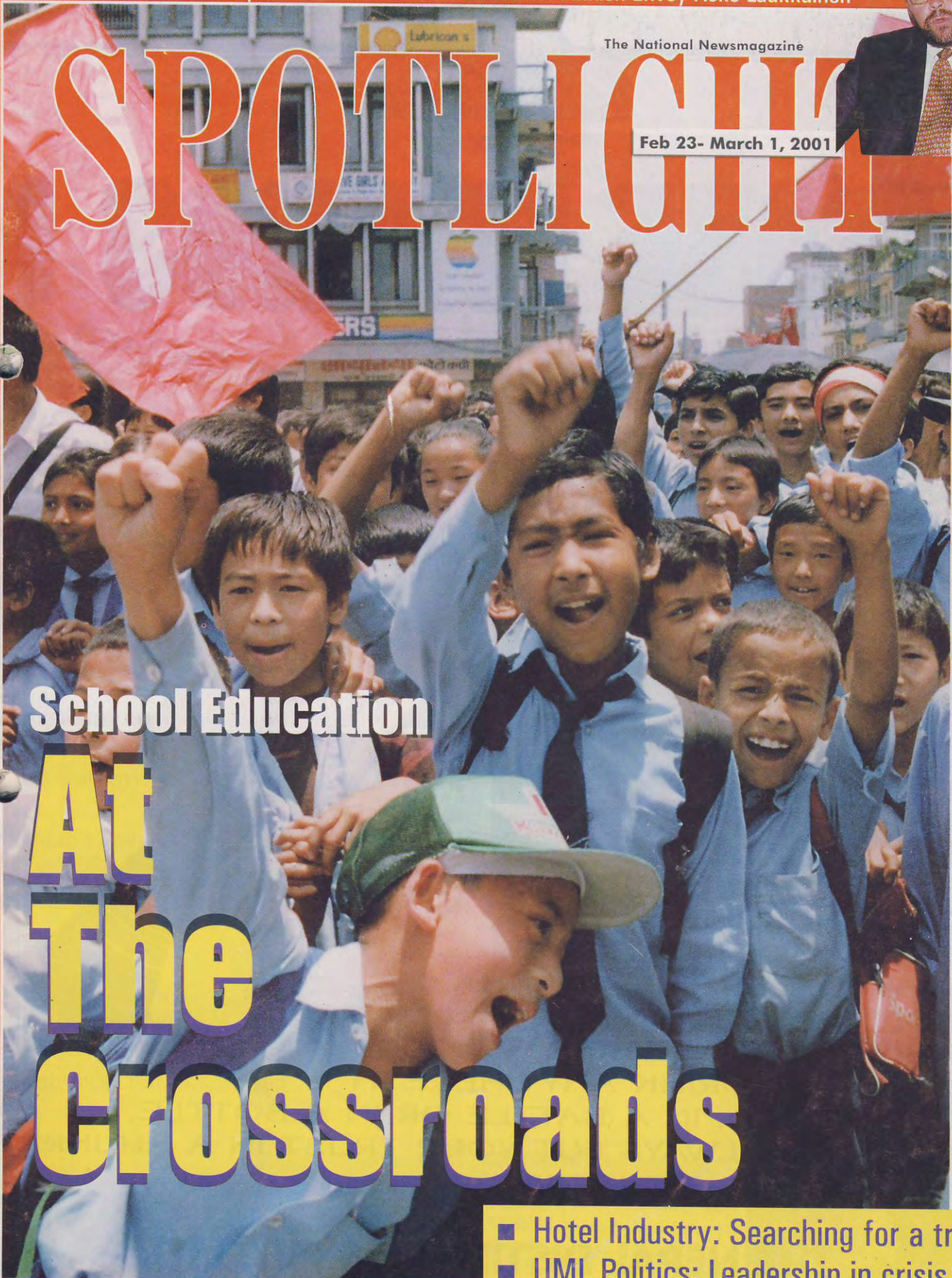




The National Newsmagazine

Feb 23- March 1, 2001

SPOTLIGHT



School Education

At The Crossroads

- Hotel Industry: Searching for a truce
- UML Politics: Leadership in crisis
- Agitation in Parliament

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COVER STORY: Learning The Lessons

Amidst the gradual erosion of teaching-learning environment, the school education system needs to ponder its shortcomings to build on the achievements it made in the past five decades.

Cover Photo : Shyam Chitracar

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PARLIAMENT : Politics of Agitation

MPs use their fists to make their point.

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INTERVIEW :

ASKO LUUKKAINEN

Finnish Charge d'Affaires says Nepal can gain a lot from Information Technology sector.

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SPOTLIGHT

THE NATIONAL NEWSMAGAZINE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The fifty first anniversary of democracy was celebrated in Nepal a few days back. Except a few corrupt politicians and their henchmen hardly any Nepalese was in the mood of celebrating the day. Almost the whole nation was enveloped in gloom and despair. Even those who sacrificed their most precious lives must be turning in their graves (if they have one) at the shameless and abominable behavior of their so called leaders. It seems, even King Birendra who is a stickler in constitutional monarchy, has started worrying at the state of affairs in the nation. If one were to read between the lines the Democracy Day Message he gave the other day, one will not miss his concern. Here we quote a part of the message. "The objectives of a democratic polity are the overall prosperity of the nation and the welfare of its people. In our country, we have been engaged for 50 years in the exercise of democracy. Democracy should not be confined only to the philosophical realm; it must be reflected in our political conduct as well as in our way of life." Nothing could be more straightforward and poignant. But, for those who understand only the language of brute force, the language of the stick and the gun, these kinds of sophisticated messages mean nothing. Moreover those men who had their orientation in politics in an alien land and all their political gurus were aliens, how are they supposed to understand our language? And how are we to hope that they will be loyal to our country and our people? Anyway, it has lessened our concern to find that all our exhortations had not fallen flat. Now, we see a definite light in the tunnel that our good King is equally perturbed and may not shirk from taking stronger measures to defend the integrity of the country. Since these men, we feel ashamed to call them leaders, have betrayed the nation and the people they must be treated as criminals. It is time the poor and innocent peoples of this hapless country woke up and dealt with them the way they deserve. We cannot afford to miss the bus again.

* * *

His Majesty King Birendra's ensuing State visit to People's Republic of China must be seen in the correct perspective to understand Nepal's national and South Asian regional politics. That PRC prefers to deal rather with a patriotic constitutional monarch than an anti-national democratically elected all powerful government must be read as the serious concern felt by Nepal's northern friend for her safety and welfare. It comes as a sharp contrast to the behavior of Nepal's friend in the South who has, for some time past, been blaming Nepal for posing a great threat to her security and consequently punishing her by hurting her tourism industry, one of the pillars of her economy. China is undoubtedly one of the few Nepal's most dependable friends, who has never tried to interfere in Nepal's domestic affairs, nor has pressurized her in any manner. We do trust this visit of King Birendra will provide the Chinese leaders an opportunity to understand Nepal's problems in a better way. We do wish Their Majesties a very happy visit.

* * *

It is very gratifying to see that King Birendra has sent the anti-national citizenship amendment bill to the Supreme Court for its advice. The only fact that the government wanted to pressurize the Head of State to give his assent to the bill by labeling it as "finance bill" should be more than sufficient to prove the *mala fide* of Koirala government. The whole nation has heaved a sigh of relief. We are quite hopeful of the outcome. There cannot be even a jot of doubt that the judges of Nepal's Supreme Court will not fail to rise to the occasion to defend the sovereignty of the country by calling the bill unconstitutional and expose the true character of the anti-national government. ■



Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher

ENCOUNTER: Santosh Panta INTERVIEW: Norwegian Ambassador Ingrid Ofstad

The National News Magazine

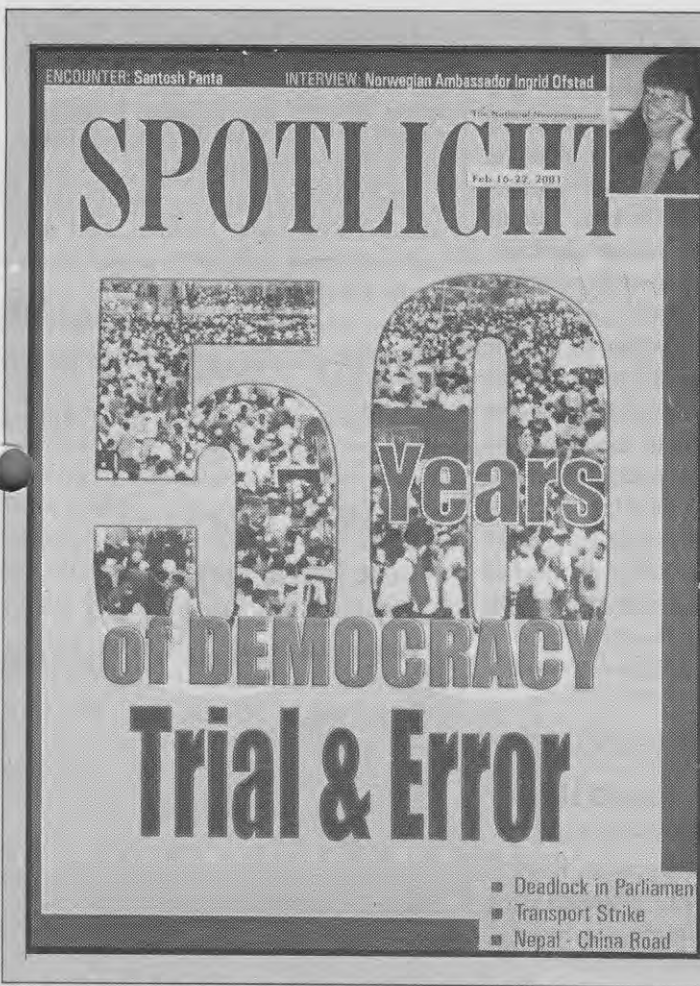
Feb. 16-22, 2001

SPOTLIGHT

50 Years OF DEMOCRACY

Trial & Error

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



Mirror Of Nation

Your cover story, "50 years of Democracy: Trial AND Error", (SPOTLIGHT, February 16-22) was rich in information about different facets of Nepal's 50-year-old democracy. Overall, the issue was a remarkable one, covering all the essential aspects of the nation's performance in various spheres. Your story has also encouraged the young to demonstrate a real commitment to strengthening the roots of democracy. I would like to thank your team for helping to raise awareness about the people role in developing a functioning democratic polity.

Iswar Pokharel
Vijay Chowk, Kathmandu

Golf Is Not Green

I guess tourism is only one of the benefits that come with a huge cost from the golf courses ("Face To Face" SPOTLIGHT February 2). First, they occupy an unbelievably huge amount of land. Take Gokarna, for example. It's located in the middle of the woods, which means that although the golf course may officially take about a thousand acre, it's affecting another five thousand acres around it. That's because of habitat fragmentation and the edge effects it creates on the surrounding areas. But my main concern is with the amount of pesticides they use in "maintaining" their lawn. God forbid, if they even find a single dandelion among their acres of manicured grasses. Pesticides are poured in just unbelievable amounts (I don't know about Gokarna but that's the practice at most golf courses)! Of course, that means that all the pesticide runoffs go to the most "holy" Bagmati river. And grasses have their own stories. These are not your garden variety grasses. Most of the species are engineered especially for the purpose and their lengths are maintained at a fraction of an inch! Can you imagine how much manpower it takes to maintain all this? It's safe to say that there are no other sports that puts so much toll to both human and natural resources. Anyway, that's my one-sided opinion about this senseless "sport." I just fail to understand what people get out of this beside the show off of their obscene wealth on ridiculously expensive equipment.

Kalyan Pande
Madison, Wisconsin, USA
via email

At The Crossroads

In the 50th year of democracy, the country is at the crossroads again. Many hopes are yet to be met and promises remain unfulfilled. Without economic prosperity, the Nepalese people will not be able to really enjoy the dividends of democracy and freedom. It is clear that the present breed of leadership is utterly unqualified to steer the nation clear of the mess. This is indeed disturbing. Unless we have able leaders, no kind of political system will work here.

Nabin Dahal
Samakhushi

Maintain Faith

As your cover story succinctly indicated, the most important challenge today is

to maintain the people's faith in the democratic system of governance. Thanks to our immature and corrupt politicians, the system is getting a bad name among the people. Who could have thought that the leaders who fought their whole life for the cause of democracy would, in the end, work towards its destruction?

Rajan Amatya
New Baneshwor

Indian Tourists In Nepal

For more than a year, since the hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft, the flow of Indian tourists into Nepal has gone down considerably. This has adversely affected Nepal, as the tourism industry is one of the main pillars of the

country's economic structure. The Indian media is reporting these facts with glee. The Indian media has never been friendly to Nepal. With its multi-billion-dollar publicity paraphernalia, the Indian media has always spread rumors about Nepal. It is believed that they receive active cooperation from the Indian establishment in this sinister move. Nepal can in no way match such behavior with its meager resources. Now, the Indian government is further aggravating the situation by harassing citizens who want to travel to Nepal. How should the Nepalese people take all this — as a traditional and friendly gesture or a vindictive act?

A hotelier
Kathmandu

15 Killed In Stampede

At least 15 people were killed and two dozen others injured in the aftermath of a fire that swept through a Muslim religious fair at Nawalparasi, nearly 200 km west of Kathmandu, on Thursday night (February 16), officials said. The stampede occurred when the fire started from a thatched hut at the hill at Kодиya village development committee in the district at about 8 p.m. The 15 people were killed when thousands of Muslim pilgrims started running away to protect themselves. Among those killed were three children and nine women, said Chief District Officer of Nawalparasi Bishnu Raj Kusum. Thousands of people from India and Nepal had gathered at the annual Madar Baba Fair that began on Thursday. This is the first time such an accident occurred in this religious gathering. *Leading dailies report Feb. 17.*

Relief Material Sent To Gujarat

A Royal Nepal Army plane left here for Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Thursday carrying 2.5 tonnes of relief materials to be handed over to victims of the recent earthquake there. Six organizations, including the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), had collected the relief materials, including medicine and tents, to assist the earthquake victims in the neighboring country. The FNCCI had previously sent relief materials worth Rs 5 million to the quake victims. Chairperson of the international coordination council of the FNCCI, Suraj Vaidya, said the plane would bring back Nepalese nationals seriously injured in the quake for medical treatment. Nine Nepalese died and at least 400 others were injured in the quake. Thousands of Nepalese were believed to have been working in the area when the quake struck. Vaidya said his team would try to learn lessons from the earthquake. Nepal lies in a highly active seismic zone. Experts say casualties, both human and physical, could be enormous in Nepal if a major earthquake hit the kingdom. *Compiled from reports Feb. 16.*

Two Rebels Killed

Two suspected Maoist rebels were killed when police opened fire at a group of Maoist activists enjoying a picnic at Baguwa village development committee in western district of Gorkha. Human rights activist Krishna Subedi of INSEC in Pokhara was quoted as saying that two rebels, including a girl student, were killed when police opened fire on them. The police later set on fire the bodies of the rebels at Bauwa Khola near the site of the encounter. In a separate incident, suspected Maoist rebels hacked to death Shanta Devi Rawal, wife of Lok Bahadur Rawal, at her house at Narayanpur VDC in Kailali district. The Rawal couple had rented out their house to the Ilaka Administration Office in the district. *Compiled from reports Feb. 15.*

Tourism Entrepreneurs Worried By 'Bandhs'

Tourism entrepreneurs have expressed concern over frequent 'bandhs' (shutdown strikes) and 'chakka jam' (transport strike) taking place in the country. Participating in an interaction program organized here by Nepal Tour Operators' Association (NATO) Wednesday, they said it had had a very adverse impact on country's tourism industry. A veteran tourism entrepreneur, Tek Chandra Pokhrel, said time had come for tourism entrepreneurs to knock the doors of the court to ban frequent 'bandhs.' He referred to a court verdict in the southern

Indian state of Kerala banning 'bandhs'. He said a case should be filed against those who call for 'bandhs'. Organizers should be compelled to pay compensation for any damage that take place during the protest programs. A senior police official, Rup Sagar Moktan, said there had been more than 100 transport strikes in the eastern development region over the last one year. Secretary of NATO, Basanta Raj Mishra, called upon all members of society to become serious to resolve the issue. *Compiled from reports Feb. 15.*

Chinese Workers Seek Security

Chinese nationals working at the Indrawati III Hydro Electricity Project have demanded security from the local administration, reports said. The Chinese workers have reportedly warned that they would abandon their work and return to China if adequate security arrangements were not made, an official with the district administration office at Sindhupalchok said. The request was made after a group of Maoist rebels attacked a vehicle carrying explosives for the hydro power project, injuring 11 persons, including a Chinese national, last week. *Compiled from reports Feb. 15.*

Maoists Take Out A Rally In Delhi

Indian police disrupted a rally taken out by Nepal in New Delhi Tuesday supporting the Maoist 'people's war' in Nepal. At least 100 people were injured when police resorted to baton charge in the rally, which was participated in by around 1,000 people. Organizers of the rally later handed over a memorandum to the Royal Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi



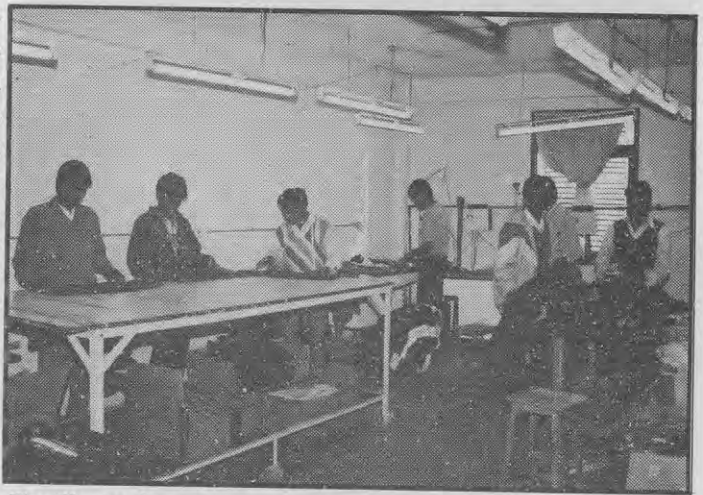
A bandh scene

demanding an end to the ongoing violence in Nepal and alleged atrocities committed by Nepal Police against Maoist supporters, among others. The Nepalese community in the Indian cities of Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai also took out similar rallies. *Compiled from reports Feb. 14.*

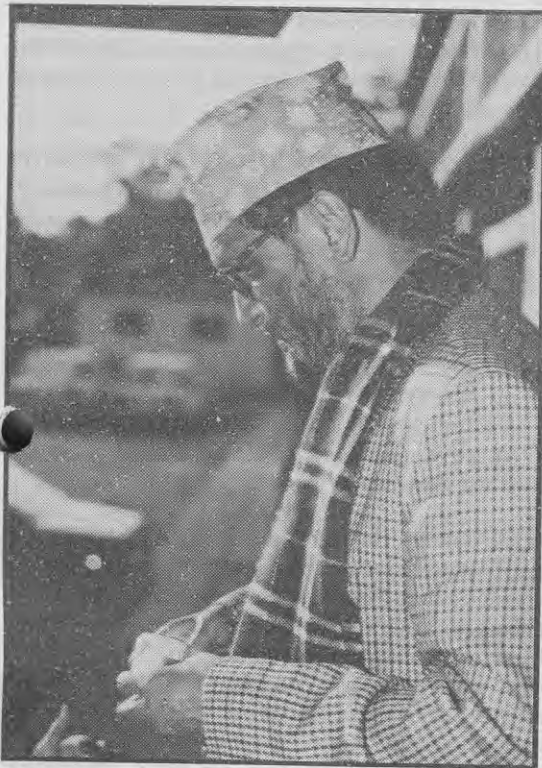
Financial Crisis In The Offing : Mahat

A day after assuming office, Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat said the country could fall into a financial crisis if the present trend of widening budget deficit continued. Addressing a seminar on "Improvement in Management of Public Expenditures" organized jointly

the budgetary allocations being made at present. He said a poor country like Nepal was spending a huge amount on internal security because of the deteriorating law-and-order situation. NPC member Dr. Shanker Sharma said there was a need for fixing the priority of development projects and completing them on time. Finance Secretary Dr. Bimal Koirala said the significance of public expenditure management has increased because of the pressure on general expenditure caused by the compulsion of making investments in development works and maintaining law-and-order in the country. *Leading dailies report Feb. 14.*



Textile workers



Mahat

by the National Planning Commission (NPC), the Finance Ministry and Public Expenditure Review Commission (PERC) here Tuesday, Mahat said, as revenues had not increased in proportion to increasing public expenditures, there was a possibility of such a crisis. The minister said many projects would not be completed even in the next 50 years with

in search of menial jobs. *Gorkhapatra Feb. 18.*

Textile Employees Laid Off

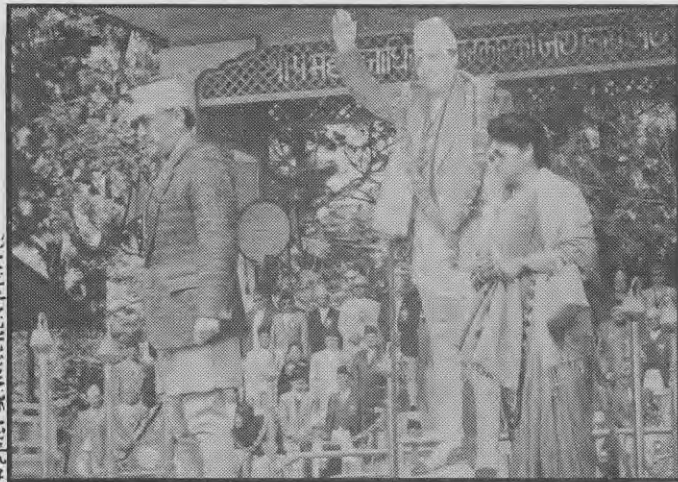
The government has decided to lay off more than 1,000 employees of the loss-making Hetauda Textile Mills

(HTM) from Monday. 1,092 workers and officials at the mill have been relieved of their posts with compensation in accordance with a cabinet decision. About 40 people have been retained temporarily to settle the accounts and for security purposes.

Bijaya Kumar Upadhyay, general manager of HTM, said the mill would be able to settle the employees' dues within a month. The government decided to retrench all the workers at the factory and had allocated Rs 250 million in compensation. The government has not made public any plan on the future of the mill. *Compiled from reports.*

RNAC Denies News Report

The State-owned Royal Nepal Airlines has clarified that it has completed the payment of all the installments of the second Boeing 757 (9M-CB) it had lease purchased, in time. In a statement issued Wednesday, the RNAC said as the loan from the Lyonnaise Bank of France has been paid on time, there would be no additional financial burden on it except the legal fee to the consultant for the completion of the hand-over process. The state-owned airlines refuted a news report published in Kantipur daily Wednesday, which said that the last installment of the lease-purchase remains to be paid. 'The news report is wrong and misleading,' the airlines said. *Leading dailies report.*



King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at the Democracy Day program at Royal Nepal Army pavilion

SOME INDIAN NATIONALS HAVE ENCROACHED ON Nepalese land at the village of Maheshpur, some 400 meters from the Indian border, reports said. Tuesday's Kantipur daily quoted Rohit Rajvanshi, chairman of the village development committee as saying that seven Indian families have started making houses inside Nepalese territory. The portion of land falls under Nepal after the Nepal-India Joint Survey Team separated the dividing line between the two countries and raised bamboo pieces as landmark. The Indian state government of Bihar had reportedly provided Rs20,000 each to the families to build houses under the Indira housing plan. The construction of the houses has been stopped temporarily after local people protested. However, they fear that it could resume soon if the authorities did not act.

THE GOVERNMENT IS WORKING TO BRING ALL INTELLIGENCE agencies under the National Security Council (NSC), Kantipur daily reported Monday quoting a highly placed source. Considered as a cabinet sub-committee, the prime minister, defense minister and chief of the Royal Nepal Army are the members of the NSC. The NSC is being activated to coordinate intelligence reports compiled by Department of Military Intelligence of the Royal Nepal Army, National Intelligence Department and the police. The daily quoted Defense Minister Mahesh Acharya as saying that security advisers will be appointed at the NSC to coordinate and manage all activities related to national security. The NSC will also devise policies analyzing the internal, regional and international situation.

NEPAL HAS FORMALLY APPLIED TO JOIN BIMST-EC, THE five-member regional economic cooperation group comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand touching the Bay of Bengal. Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola made this request at the meeting of the regional body in Yangon, Myanmar, Thursday, Gorkhapatra daily reported Monday. Nepal is participating in the meeting an observer. Officials said Nepal is lobbying for the BIMST-EC membership as its trade and economy is significantly linked with the five-nation group. "India and Thailand are our significant trade partners. We are trying to improve trade with Bangladesh," said Gyan Chandra Acharya, spokesman at the Foreign Ministry, before leaving for Myanmar.

A TEAM OF INDIAN WATER RESOURCES OFFICIALS HAS arrived in Nepal to explore the possibility of setting up medium-sized hydel project and left for the sites. The four-member team from the

Central Water Commission of India arrived in Kathmandu on Thursday for their week-long visit to Nepal. According to Bishnu Bahadur Thapa, Deputy Director-General at the Department of Electricity Development (DED), the team left for Butwal Friday en route to prospective site at Naumure. The site is about two kilometers below the point where the Jhimruk and Modi rivers confluence. The Indian team is also scheduled to visit the site of Budhi Gandaki later next week.

ROYAL NEPAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (RONAST) and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences have agreed to encourage scientific cooperation between the two academies in areas of mutual interest. A letter to this effect was signed by Vice-Chancellor of RONAST Prof. Dayananda Bajracharya and President of the Swedish Academy Prof. J. Carlsson at a function in Stockholm last week. Prof. Bajracharya, who is visiting Stockholm, also delivered a lecture on the theme "Science and Technology in Nepal," a statement issued by RONAST said.

NEPAL HAS BEEN EXPORTING HANDICRAFTS WORTH US\$ 1 million per annum, entrepreneurs said. President of Handicrafts Association Nepal (HAN) Indra Bahadur Shakya said Nepal used to export little more than \$500,000 worth of handicrafts three decades back. He said this industry has been helping the process of reducing poverty. Addressing the function organized to mark the inauguration of a HAN building Friday, Shakya said the government should provide training to the people involved in the business to enhance their competitiveness.

THE OPEC FUND FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT has agreed to provide a loan assistance of US\$ 10 million ((about Rs 743.5 million) for the implementation of a rural electrification, distribution and transmission project. The loan will be used for the development of a 32 KV transmission system in Kathmandu Valley and for the provision of a new transmission interconnection with India under the project. A separate loan agreement to the tune of US\$ 200 million was concluded between the Nepal government and the Asian Development Bank in July last year. The loan, to be paid over a period of 17 years that includes a grace period of five years, carries one percent interest and one percent service charge per annum on the principal amount of the loan portion withdrawn and outstanding from time to time.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR AT THE NEPAL RASTRA BANK BIJAY Nath Bhattarai said Nepalese exchange rate policy has been guided by the need for exchange rate stability in the face of an open and porous border with India. As Nepal has very limited restrictions of capital flow with her southern neighbor, the Nepalese currency remains pegged with the Indian currency, he said. This has served well to maintain price and external sector stability of Nepalese economy, said Bhattarai. Thirteen bankers from six South Asian nations and experts from the International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and other international agencies are taking part in a three-day seminar on "Issues in Exchange Rate Management."

NEPAL AND MYANMAR AGREED TO START DIRECT FLIGHTS between the two countries during a meeting between Foreign Minister Chakra P. Bastola and Myanmar Foreign Minister Win Aung in Yangon Friday. According to the Foreign Ministry, Myanmar has offered Nepal the use of Mandalay International Airport as an option for air connection between the two countries or beyond. Myanmar officials said arrangement for operations of private-sector airlines could also be made between the two countries. Both sides also discussed the possibility of using land and sea routes for increasing bilateral trade. ■

“I can read and write perfectly — nobody should snatch away that right from me. I am still in a position to be my own spokesperson.”

Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, denying controversial news reports quoting sources close to him, in Kantipur.

* * *

“I have indications that if the present situation (in the parliament) persists for seven or ten more days, our 10-year-old democracy may come to an end.”

Taranath Rana Bhat, speaker of the House of Representatives, in Kantipur.

* * *

“I was never a cashier (Khajanchi). I worked as an assistant in Nepal Bank Limited.”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, main opposition leader, denying persistent reports that he once worked as a Khajanchi, in Chhahalfal.

* * *

“What is true nature of the UML fight’s — against corruption or for commission? If its fight is for commission, the government should make it clear.”

Radha Krishna Mainali, former minister and leader of Marxist Leninist, in Bimarsha.

* * *

“The PM has no right to stay in power for even a single minute if he cares for ethics.”

Rabindra Nath Sharma, leader of Rastriya Prajatantra Party, in Nepalipatra.

* * *

“The coming days are dark for the Nepali Congress. How many times will the people give a majority to NC?”

Khum Bahadur Khadka, central member of Nepali Congress, in Ghatana Ra Bichar.

* * *

“I am not much interested in that dispute. I don’t know the reasons for the dispute, either.”

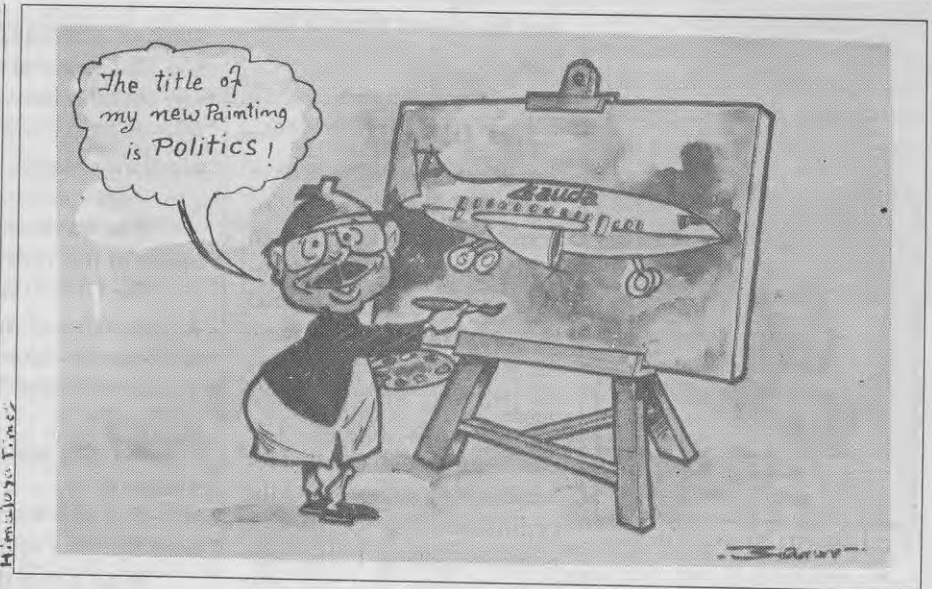
Pashupati SJB Rana, RPP leader and son-in-law of Vijaya Raje Scindia, India’s BJP leader and former Maharani of Gwalior, who died recently, commenting on Scindia’s will which debars her only son Madhavrao Scindia from her property, in Jana Aastha.

* * *

“The parliament is constituted to discuss and find solutions to problems. By obstructing parliament and by preventing discussions, democracy will be weakened.”

Purna Man Shakya, constitutional expert, in Deshanter.

* * *



Himalayan Times



Sany

Matter Of Degrees

In Nepalese politics, it does not matter whether you are a graduate of Thakur Ram Campus or Oxford. If they want to survive, Western-educated leaders have to follow the tactics used by homegrown graduates. RPP leaders Pashupati Sumsher Rana and Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani seem to have understood this



Dr. Lohani : No use of degree

reality very well. This may be why they are taking part in opposition protests launched by CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Evergreen Intellectuals

In Nepal, advice is available in abundance. Not only that, from many of our intellectuals, you can get exactly what you want to hear. Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has developed a habit of assembling intellectuals whenever he feels something is wrong in politics. His brigade of evergreen intellectuals can often be mistaken for hired consultants. Some of our big brains are known for their intellectual acrobatics in keeping with the political winds. A few months ago, when CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal said there was no need to amend

the constitution, a group of intellectuals backed his contention. When Nepal later did a U-turn, the same intellectuals endorsed his new views. In the case of Bhattarai, nobody knows what his real intentions in meeting intellectuals are. And that makes things a little tricky for our thinkers.

Tit For Tat

When opposition leaders insist on the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Minister for Education, Youth and Sports Amod Upadhyaya lectures them on the parliamentary procedures for removing the top elected official of the country. Upadhyaya cannot be faulted for emphasizing adherence to the constitution. But when ANFA president Ganesh Thapa, who is the brother of a key RPP leader, demands due process in the conduct of his organisation's affairs, he has to put up with a government-imposed rival Geeta Rana. In the political playground that our sports sector has become, there is always a tit for every tat.

ANFA Games

There must be few countries in the world where sports



Gita Rana : Setback to football

REVELATION

'The People Know Who Started The Violence'

— OMKAR SHRESTHA

OMKAR SHRESTHA, Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, who was slightly injured in this week's violence in parliament, spoke to reporters about the episode. Excerpts:



Who was responsible for the outbreak of the violence?

The CPN-UML was responsible. As a member of a democratic party, I always believe in peaceful ways of sorting out problems. I believe in the principles of parliamentary democracy.

But the main opposition party said you started the violence?

That is a completely false accusation against me. They were the ones who pushed me from behind.

What proof do you have?

Since parliament has a video recording of the proceedings, we can see who used force first.

But CPN-UML whip Rajendra Pandey was injured?

As you know, the CPN-UML is known for its ability to dramatize events in their favor. After the problem, I spoke with Pandey in the speaker's room and he was alright. Two hours after the incident, he was sent to hospital as if he was seriously injured. One cannot fool the people. They can see through the UML's drama. ■

are as politicized as in Nepal. Our politicians do not hesitate to set up dozens of associations as long as they get to fill them with henchman. But experience has shown that henchmen cannot rule. When Ganesh Thapa left for Kuala Lumpur to take part in FIFA's general meeting, the government-promoted ANFA led by Geeta Rana found itself busy scheming to grab FIFA's recognition. The kicks and shoves within the nation's premier football organisation/s have drawn a sizeable number of spectators.

Screen Test

Nepalese beauty pageant winners are in a long queue to take a plunge into the film industry. With the boom in the local film land, new actors and actresses are in great demand.

People like Ruby Rana, Jharna Bajracharya and Poonam Ghimire have yet to establish themselves in the industry. Nevertheless, there are countless other aspirants who are closely watching how these women fare before they decide to take their own plunge. ■

Role Of The Standing Committees In The Legislative Procedures

By BISHNU DUTTA UPRETY

Background : The functions of a modern welfare government have considerably enlarged in respect of their volume, nature and scope. In the same way enormous volume of work appear before the Parliament. But many limitations including limited time at the disposal of the Parliament make it impossible to consider the issues at length on the floor of the House. At this juncture if the Parliamentary work is to be accomplished the responsibility for considerations on various issues must be entrusted to some other organs in which the whole House has confidence. In this reference most practical method devised is the formation of committees composed of a small number of members of the respective House of the parliament. Now a days, conduct of legislative business have become practically impossible without these organs named the Parliamentary Committees.

In a parliamentary democracy like ours, the present constitution has opened the door to form the committees for each House and the joint parliamentary committees. The history and practice of the old parliaments like U.K., India, Japan and the history of American congress clearly shows that committees are the strong arms of the legislatures. The performance of the parliament really lies to the great extent on the effectiveness of such committees. It is evident that one of the major task of the committees is to discuss the bills. Committees are the places where bills are discussed with clause by clause and experts are consulted whenever felt necessary which is not possible at the floor of the House. Another equally important task of the committees is to study the reports tabled before the House by the constitutional bodies through His Majesty the King. The Committees after going through such reports are required to suggest & recommend the decision to the concerned Ministry/Dept. of the government. Mindful of the importance of the Parliamentary Committees, each of the committee is constituted in such a way that there is proportional representation of almost all the parties as far as possible.

As stated above with the evolution of the democratic institutions and political environment the roles of the Parliamentary Committees have been changing gradually. The number and functions of the Parliamentary Committees are also increasing with the development of the sphere of the governmental activities.

While observing the importance of the Parliamentary committees the constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990 has given due emphasis to constitute the committees in both the Houses of the Parliament. Ever since the commencement of the present constitution the committees in Nepal Parliament have been formed, strengthened, and rationalized steadily. However, we have not been able to claim to have a well-knit committee system working under a uniform body of rules. The good work done by the committees and its salutary effect on the administration have been slowly recognized. While exercising the powers conferred by the constitution and the rules of the procedure of the concerned House some of the committees have fallen in controversy with the decision taken by them. Quite recently, the Public Accounts committee has been very much in the picture with respect to the decisions taken by it. In some occasions the activities and the working style of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) have been critical and even questioned by some quarters of the society.

It is the fact that Nepal's endeavour in the experiment of the multi-party system of democracy for the last eleven years have come across with some bottlenecks. We have been struggling hard to emerge as a stable system. Despite maturity shown by the voters, time and again the political leaders have not been able to understand the exertion of the people. The rough and meshy politics have naturally been reflected

into the floor of the House and the committee debate of the Parliament.

Functions of the Committees

Apart from other functions, following are the main functions to be performed by the committees of the Parliament:

1. Legislative function
2. Function of evaluation of Govt. work performance
3. Function of Examination of Govt. assurances
4. Function of Examination of Public Accounts
5. Function of Examination of Delegated Legislation
6. Function of Examination of the annual reports of the constitutional Bodies. (Annual Report of Attorney General, Annual Report of the Commission of the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, Annual Report of the Public Service Commission).
7. Function Assigned by the House/Assembly from time to time.

At present it has been felt that committees have been contesting to each other to expand their jurisdiction and functions in their own way. A tendency of expanding roles and scope has been increased. They are diverted to fulfill the political ends rather than accomplishing works within their jurisdiction. In this context, it can be suggested that the members should precisely define the scope and functions of the committees so that they would not be dragged into the controversy and thereby saving the Parliamentary Institution from blaming and criticizing.

Categorization of the Committee:

Under the Article 64 and 65 of the constitution and the Rules of procedures of the Houses, Parliamentary Committees can be constituted. Under this provision both the Houses have constituted Standing Committees, ad hoc Committees and the joint committees. The standing committees is constituted for the whole period of the Parliament whereas the standing committee of the National Assembly terminates in every two years. The members of the standing committees are nominated by the Speaker/Chairman with the consent of the House. The maximum number of members for the House standing committees including the ex-officio member is twenty five and for the standing committee of the National Assembly is fifteen. There is not the provision of the ex-officio member in the standing committees of the National Assembly. The House standing committee are the subject committees whereas the Assembly standing committees are assigned responsibilities in a different way.

In a broader term the various committees can be categories in the following categories as per their nature and scope:

1. Committees to inquire: Committee on privileges, committee on petitions, and Ethics Committee,
2. Committees to advise: Business Advisory Committee,
3. House Keeping Committees: Canteen committee (Informal),
4. Committees to scrutinize and control: Govt. Assurances committee, Delegated Legislation Committee, Public Accounts Committee.

Advantages of the Committees

Committees have a great importance in the country like ours where multi party system of democracy has been gradually taking its roots. A system of Parliamentary government which we have adopted certainly need some advanced and modern mechanism to run the Parliament



smoothly. In this regard committees as a living postulate can contribute in scrutinizing, controlling and supervising the function of the Executive and making it accountable to a reasonable degree. When we give due importance to the parliamentary committees, at the same time we should not take them and treat them for postponing or absorbing political tension or take one issue from the arena of controversy to a more protected and sheltered situation. If the debatable and controversial issues are brought in to the committee floor they would get momentum and the issues should be clarified in the proper manner so that the committees could sustain as a trustworthy and competent organ of the parliament.

In reference to the Nepalese Parliamentary Committees apart from the obvious advantage of saving floor time and rescuing the House from getting lost in details, the standing committees have been found eminently suited for proper scrutiny of various complex and technical matters.

The other advantage can be listed as below:

1. More elaborate and detailed discussions can be processed.
2. Every aspect of the subject matter can be discussed with minutely & accurately.
3. A thorough scrutiny of the subject matter can be done above party politics.
4. House could give time in formulating and shaping the national policy of delegating its tasks to the concerned committees.
5. Experts of various fields can be invited in the committee discussion which is not possible in floor of the House
6. Committee functioning and deliberating can be arranged away from the glare of publicity.
7. A cooperative and friendly atmosphere can be developed among the members even though they may belong to different parties and groups.
8. A sufficient number of members of all parties can take real interest in the subjects be dealt with.
9. Continuous association with the committees also helps to develop an element of specialization among the members.

Legislative Roles of the Standing Committees

Making laws is the main duty of the Parliament which is complicated and time consuming. Before a bill becomes law, it must undergo thorough study, debate and often alteration by the Parliament or the Parliamentary committees. After a long exercise and making the bills worth while in the committees, the bills may consume the time of the floor of the Houses. The proposed legislation (Bill) then passes to the other House for more debate and changes. As we have experienced many bills are transmitted between the House of Representatives and the National Assembly at the same time. If each House produces a substantially different version of the bill, the legislation undergoes still more debate and then compromise by a joint Committee, a select group of members from both Houses. If the bill survives from all of these complex and laborious steps, it finally goes to His Majesty who either signs (Assent) it into law or sends back to the Parliament for reconsiderations.

It has been widely heard that the Nepalese Legislators have not been serious and studious in the part of legislation. They also have not been able to introduce the bills related with the contemporary issues and basic needs of the society. In view of this it is not a satisfactory aspect that the Parliament has passed only 253 bills during the 18 consecutive sessions of the Parliament. As we look into the multifarious problems of the country and the necessity of the legislation the number of new bills is very low which is only 133. The number of the Private Members bills also is very poor which is only three. The three private members bills two were passed in the tenth session and one was passed in the twelfth session of the Parliament.

General Discussion :

In the Nepalese parliamentary system there is no provision of introduction of bills into the committee. The first stage of business of the Bill in the House is its introduction and general discussion. The stage of the general discussion of a bill has an intrinsic value that is recognized

by most House members on the legislative process. The general discussion is both practical and symbolic. It assures both legislators and the public that the House makes its decisions in a democratic fashion with due respect for majority and minority opinion. The general debate which is the primary stage of a bill appropriately tests the conclusions of the member who introduces the bill. At the same time general debate forces members to come to grips with the issues at hand. At this stage if there are difficult and controversial sections in the bills they are explained. Members sentiments can be assessed by the floor leaders at the general debate of a bill. Constituents and interest group can be alerted through press coverage of the general debate. Similarly legislative history of a bill can be known and the intentions of proponents and opponents are also known at this stage. In other words, general debates enables members to gain a better understanding of complex issues and it may influence the collective decisions of the House. In this way, after an extensive debate and discussions in the House a bill may be sent to the concerned committee of the House for clausewise discussion.

Clausewise Discussion of the Bill

Standing (Permanent) committees are the basic organs of the both Houses of Parliament which deal the substantive matters. As compared to their duties and responsibilities the committees are not fully independent and autonomous. Nature, scope and the functions of the committees of two Houses are significantly different. The nine Standing Committees of the HOR are called the subject committees dealing with the matters of the Govt. line Ministries whereas the standing committees of the NA have separate responsibilities with having limited scope. It is because the committees of the HOR except the Public Accounts committee take the responsibility of clause by clause discussion of the Bills but the so called standing committee of the National Assembly do not have legislative function. The Table given below shows the clear picture of the parliamentary committees with or without legislative functions and powers.

Apart from other business of the committees they have an important and heavy roles and responsibilities in giving an appropriate shape to the bill. The committee process, therefore, acts as a kind of filtering system to weed out weak or worthless provisions of the bills.

In the Nepalese legislative system all legislation do not enter into the committees of the respective House. Only those bills which are complicated or contentious are referred to the committees otherwise legislations are occurred in the House specially the finance bills which are related with the Annual Budget. But it has been observed that this is not satisfactory arrangement. In legislation an obvious line of improvement is the process of increased reference of bills to committees. It is because the committee system in the legislative processes serves to improve the form as well as the contents of a bill within the framework of the broad policy outlined in the bill. The committee stage also provides opportunities to the government to give second thoughts to the controversial and complicated provisions of a bill without the glare of publicity which accompanies discussions in the House. At this stage, a bill must undergo thorough study, debate and often alteration by a legislative committee concerned (In this connection we can refer the bill "civil service amendment bill, 1995" undertaken by the Interior Affairs Committee).

We know, making laws is a complicated and time consuming task. In the processes of passage of the bill it travels through various difficult path sometimes even narrow and risky path. As the House sends the bill to the committee concerned it may take weeks or months for the clause by clause discussions.

The bills which inter into the committee stage it is not necessary that they all go through. Those bills which do not get passed from the committee during the tenure of the House they die in the committees and they must be reintroduced in a subsequent Sessions of the new Parliament.

(A paper presented in the workshop seminar on Legislative Drafting organized by NASC for the Under Secretaries of the Parliament Secretariat from January 23-27, 2001)

DISPUTE IN PARLIAMENT

Politics Of Agitation

The confrontational approach of opposition parties invites extremism and violence in parliament

By KESHAB POUDEL

Liberalism and extremism cannot go together. This was on display when CPN-UML whip Rajendra Prasad Pandey and Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Omkar Prasad Shrestha were involved in physical violence on Monday at the House of Representatives.

The tension erupted when Pandey ob-

tively. Even during the dissolved Rastriya Panchayat, Kirtinidhi Bista was beaten by Angdandi Lama.

But this time the position of opposition parties was different. As the main opposition party CPN-UML and its four allies continue to obstruct the proceedings of the house, the whole business of the winter session has suffered. The greater the agitational attitude shown by opposition



Opposition MPs : In attack mode

structed Minister Shrestha, who was heading to the rostrum with the permission of Speaker Taranath Ranabhat to make an official statement on the controversial Lauda Air deal. The opposition parties were disrupting the proceedings of parliament for the sixth consecutive day on Tuesday demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on his alleged involvement in the Lauda Air deal.

Such vandalism is not new in Nepal's parliamentary history. Surya Bahadur Thapa and Ram Chandra Poudel were also beaten in parliament in 1992 and 1997 respec-

tively. Even during the dissolved Rastriya Panchayat, Kirtinidhi Bista was beaten by Angdandi Lama. But this time the position of opposition parties was different. As the main opposition party CPN-UML and its four allies continue to obstruct the proceedings of the house, the whole business of the winter session has suffered. The greater the agitational attitude shown by opposition

parties, the greater the possibility of violence in parliament. Interestingly, whenever a liberal political process seems to be on its way ahead, extremism and confrontational attitudes flare up. In the last 10 years, whenever agitation and extremism have emerged as dominant factors in politics, it has hit the process of liberalism. According to a political analyst, a cardinal rule of democracy is to adhere to parliamentary procedures and uphold the dignity and decorum of the chamber.

When the main opposition parties are no mood to follow established political

norms, it becomes virtually impossible to smoothly run parliament and conduct the wider task of governance by consent.

"As a democrat, I believe in the rule of the game and I cannot justify any opposition party's obstruction of the process though force," said advocate Harihar Dahal, who is close to the ruling Nepali Congress.

At a time when all the players in parliament start to play on their own, experts argue, one cannot save the essence of parliamentary practices.

In our decade-long exercise of multiparty democracy, political parties have spent most of their time in setting the wrong practices in parliament.

Nepal is still in a transitional phase, which is normally a difficult period. The democratic process can take roots by practice. A prerequisite to the success of democracy is discipline and responsibility towards one's role.

If we see the experience of Nepal, extremism has always hampered the liberalism process. Whether it was in 2004, 2017, 2023 or 2046, agitation brewed when the political atmosphere of the day was in the process being liberalized.

The vicious circle of agitation, extremism and violence is a constant threat to the blossoming of democracy.

The government, for its part, was put on the defensive and became repressive. Repression provokes further agitation and extremism. "The speaker of the House of Representatives must take action against those involved in the vandalism," said Bharat Mohan Adhiakary, chief whip of CPN-UML.

Although each political party is accusing the other for the vandalism, Pandey was slightly injured during the violence. Thanks to the prompt adjournment by Speaker Ranabhat, a worsening of the violent confrontation was averted. Despite the adjournment, the situation was tense.

"This is naked violation of the parliamentary code of conduct by the main opposition CPN-UML," said Minister Shrestha. "They were the first to use force. They manhandled me when I was on the way to the rostrum."

As the opposition parties and government are still locking horns with each other, the country is bracing for a long season of the politics of agitation and violence. ■

UML POLITICS

Leadership Style

As CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal finds himself in a precarious position, he is courting the party's extreme fringe

By KESHAB POUDEL

As the struggle for leadership in the party continues, CPN-UML general secretary Nepal has opted to ally himself with the extreme fringe of the organization. This is why he seems to be in no mood to allow parliament to function as long as Girija Prasad Koirala continues as prime minister.

Nepal's supporters control the most influential of the party's sister organizations, including the student, youth, peasant and intellectual fronts. But this is not enough for Nepal to retain the party's leadership.

The general secretary also must please a large number of radicals in the party to widen his support base, and that is precisely what he seems to be doing these days.

For the radicals, Nepal has already given two emotive slogans: The Purnagiri dam fiasco and the demand for the prime minister's resignation in the context of the controversial Lauda Air deal. These slogans are intended to rouse party workers to safeguard nationalism and fight corruption — and shore up Nepal's own position.

Known as a moderate, why has Nepal chosen to change tracks at the particular moment?

After the death of general secretary Madan Bhandary in 1993, Nepal's moderate image was seen as the glue that could hold all factions together. In his first term as general secretary, Nepal succeeded in turning the CPN-UML into the single largest party in parliament.

At the second general convention of the party, Nepal was re-elected. But his party suffered a

vertical split. Because of that crack, the UML's total strength in parliament saw a dramatic decline.

After the split, Nepal saw the departure of many strong rivals, including Bam Dev Gautam and C.P. Mainali. But Nepal's position remained far from stable.

As CPN-UML leader K.P. Sharma Oli is coming up with greater support within the party, Nepal has no choice but to appease the extreme fringe. The current campaign to force Prime Minister Koirala out of office seems to be part of this strategy of appeasement.

Nepal's threat to launch street demonstrations to force Koirala's resignation is

also seen in this light.

Political analysts believe Nepal's strategy could boomerang on the general secretary's political career. If Koirala — who still has a majority in parliament — eventually resigns under the UML's pressure, it would set a bad precedent in the house.

If Koirala manages to overcome this challenge, Nepal will lose face in the party, paving the way for the rise of Oli.

"Nepal needs an alliance with the radicals in the party to retain his position at this moment," said Dr. Surendra K.C., whose Ph.D. dissertation analyzed the communist movement in Nepal. "Factionalism is a tradition in Nepal's communist movement," he said.

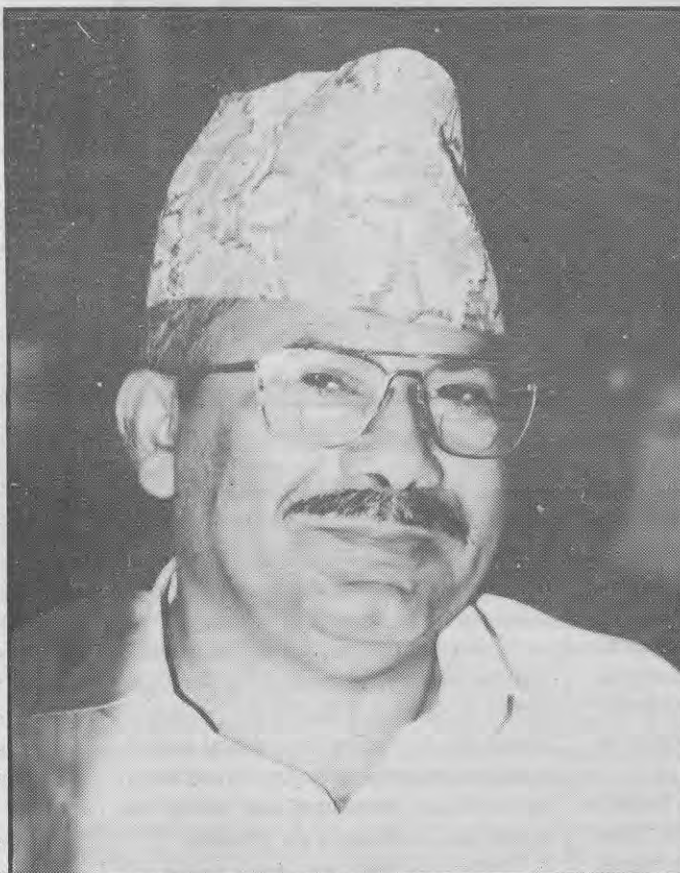
Nepal may feel more secure if Oli is defeated in the recounting of votes in his Jhapa constituency. Oli won over his Nepali Congress rival by a slender margin of 15 votes. This may be one reason behind the RPP's move to support the UML's proposal to force the government to extend the tenure of Special Elections Court that is recounting votes in disputed constituencies.

Nepal projected such a moderate image until a few months ago that his party did not even raise the Lauda Air controversy then. Even Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai accused Nepal of being a government supporter.

"Madhavji knows every method of conspiracy needed to retain the party leadership and knows how to garner support from within the party," said Siddhi Lal Singh, CPN-ML leader.

The Nepal-Oli duo was at the forefront of the so-called 'Mahakali sell-out', but Nepal is now opposing the Purnagiri dam to prove his nationalist posture.

Whether it was Bhattarai's encouragement or its own decision, the CPN-UML has changed its stand in the current session of the parliament. The consequences could prove far-reaching for Nepal and his party. ■



Nepal : Can he meet expectations?

CITIZENSHIP ROW Renewed Controversy

Following a six-month dispute, King Birendra seeks the Supreme Court's opinion on the controversial citizenship bill

By KESHAB POUDEL

King Birendra's decision to send the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill 2021 to the Supreme Court, seeking its opinion on whether the bill should receive the royal seal, has sparked a new round of controversy. As usual, constitutional experts are divided along party lines on whether the monarch's action was in favor of or against the spirit of parliamen-

tional controversies, but he cannot throw every issue to the court.

According to Article 88 (5) of the constitution, if the King wishes to seek the apex court's advice or opinion on complications of constitutional and legal interpretations, he can do it.

This is not the first time the King has sought the suggestion of the court. The monarch sought the suggestion of the apex court in the case to form the Dasdhunga

Investigation Commission in 1993 and the proposal of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to dissolve the House of Representatives in 1998.

According to Article 88.5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, the King can seek advice from the court on constitutional matters. Passed unanimously by the House of Representatives as a

finance bill and rejected by the National Assembly, the bill was sent to the Royal Palace after it was passed again by the lower house.

According to Article 69 (5) of the constitution, the King does not have the authority to return a finance bill once it is passed by the House of Representatives.

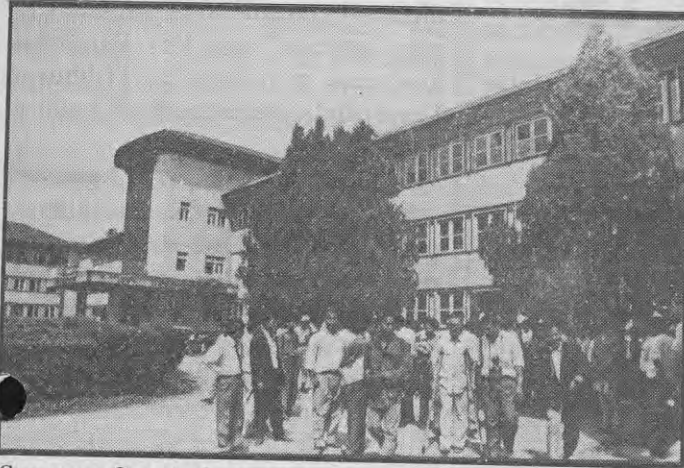
Although the main opposition CPN-UML earlier supported the bill in the House of Representatives, it opted to oppose it in

Maiden Century

Munik Shrestha, the young cricketer, entered his name as the first Nepalese to score a century in one-day international tournament. Shrestha scored an unbeaten 113 runs in the Under 17 Asia Cup match against Singapore on February 19. The tournament is being held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Nepal won the match by a stonishing 224 runs but failed to qualify to the second round of the tournament. In its group, Nepal could manage to become third after Pakistan and the host Bangladesh.

The Nepalese team had earlier defeated Kuwait. Shrestha's sparkling unbeaten 113 came off just 185 balls. He was declared the man of the match for his remarkable innings. The younger sibling of cricketers Monis Shrestha and Monir Shrestha, Monik was also declared man of the match in the earlier match against Kuwait. ■



Supreme Court : Law moves in

tary democracy.

Although the spirit of the present form of government is based on the theory that the king can do no wrong, if the monarch gets involved in a controversy, he has to defend himself.

"The move is against the spirit of the parliamentary form of government," said senior advocate Mukunda Neupane, who was a member of the commission that drafted the present constitution. "If the law is against the spirit of the constitution, the apex court can always declare it null and void," said Regmi.

Article 88 (5) of the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal contains a provision that allows the king to seek the court's opinion and advice on matters related to constitu-

the upper house and during the second vote in the lower house.

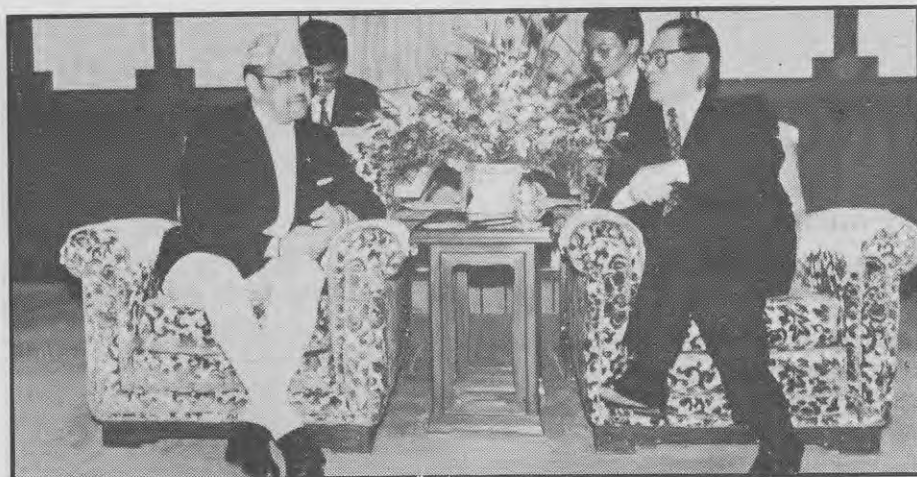
Although the bill was passed twice by the lower house, almost all opposition parties, including the CPN-UML, requested the King not give his assent, arguing that it violated the spirit of the constitution.

"The King has taken the right decision by sending the bill to the court. If the King had given his assent, thousands of non-Nepalis would have secured Nepali citizenship till the court declared the law null and void," said advocate Bal Krishna Neupane, who has fought three cases against citizenship regulations. "On the citizenship issue, the true face of all major parties has already been exposed."

As the matter now lies in the court, the focus of national attention is on what recommendation it will send to the King. ■

RPP PRESS MEET

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the third largest party in parliament, seems to be in a mood to enhance its public relations. The party organized an interaction with the representatives from the media in February 20. The reception was attended by all the top leaders of RPP including Surya Bahadur Thapa, Pashupati SJB Rana, Kamal Thapa, Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, among others. During the program a booklet titled "Mechi- Mahakali" was also launched.



King Birendra with Chinese President Jiang : Strengthening ties

NEPAL-CHINA

Growing Contacts

The visits of King Birendra and the Chinese defence minister will further consolidate the relations between two countries

By KESHAB POUDEL

If the announcement of King Birendra's forthcoming state visit to People's Republic of China is any indication, it shows the growing friendly contacts at the highest level between Nepal and China.

Before the visit of King Birendra, Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian is paying a four-day official visit to Nepal which will start from February 21. After Chinese President Jiang Zemin, defence minister is the first high-ranking official to pay official visit to Nepal following the restoration of democracy.

Just a fortnight before the visit, Chinese assistant minister of foreign affairs Wang Yi visited Nepal and signed an agreement to construct an alternative road to link the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. The alternative road will boost Nepal's trade volume with China.

Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Banstola also paid an official visit to China in July 2000 to mark the 45 years of establishment of diplomatic relations

between the two countries.

In the last few years, there has been frequent exchange of high-level contacts between two countries which has helped to strengthen Nepal-China relations.

Interestingly, no communist party, including CPN-UML, has publicly welcomed the agreement between Nepal and China to build a new road linking the two countries. The road, many analysts say, will provide a boost to Nepal's efforts to consolidate its independence.

Instead, Nepal's communist parties are busy trying to topple the government which has entered into the agreement with the People's Republic of China. Harping on anti-Indian slogans on the Purnagiri Dam issue, the CPN-UML is busy launching an agitation against the government just on the eve of high-level visit.

When Chinese Defense Minister Marshal Chen Yi visited Nepal in 1960, the situation in South Asia was tense. As Nepal lies in a strategically important zone in South Asia, China under-

stands the importance of Nepal's stability to maintain peace in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Nepal shares a 1,414-km border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China and one cannot ignore a big potential to tap the Chinese market across the Himalayas.

"The forthcoming visit to People's Republic of China by King Birendra and visit of Chinese defence minister will further strengthen Nepal-China relations," said Yuba Raj Singh Pradhan, former Royal Nepalese Ambassador to China.

"China does not want to bring Nepal into its own influence; what it wants to see is that Nepal remains independent. Because an independent Nepal has its own aspirations and will not be dictated by outside powers against Chinese interests," said Dev Raj Dahal, associate professor at Tribhuvan University's Department of Political Science.

"Nepal has historically been considered by the Chinese strategists as part of a chain of their nation's concentratic inner Asian defense system and even now bears no little importance for the security of its underbelly, Tibet, where a large number of anti-Chinese forces have cornering interests," writes Dahal in his article "Geopolitics of Nepal: Survival Strategies of a Small State".

"Chinese are sensitive to the possibility of Nepal serving as a spring board for Khampa-like anti-Chinese activities that continued until the mid 70s."

"Chinese diplomacy operates on a long-term basis which cannot manifest. Chinese actions can tell the intention," a foreign relations expert said on condition of anonymity. As Nepal's strategic importance is tremendous and it will be an asset for the country but it seems liability to the political leaders."

As the two countries are encouraging the high-level visit between two countries, Nepal-China relations are entering a new phase with an alternative road. ■

HOTEL EMPLOYEES VS. OWNERS

Time To Mend Fences

As a high-level committee presents a comprehensive report, both parties are forced to find a solution

By A CORRESPONDENT

A week after the report by the high-level committee was made public, government officials and hotel union leaders sat down at the Tourism Ministry Monday to find a solution to the months-long impasse. Though the meeting remained inconclusive, there were indications of some type of agreement between them.

"We have given four more days for the government to consider our demands," said Prem Pounji, a member of the joint action committee of the hotel unions. "The action committee will meet on February 24 and will decide our future course of action, including a nationwide strike, if our demands were not met by then."

Officials are, however, hopeful that an amicable solution would be found to the one-point demand put by the agitating workers that is, to introduce 10 percent service charge in a compulsory way. "I hope both hotel workers and hotel owners will come to a point of agreement in near future," said Prithvi Raj Ligal, vice-chairman of National Planning Commission (NPC), who headed a high-level committee formed more than three months ago to study the hotel workers' demands.

Though the committee has said the implementation of mandatory service charge is inappropriate at present, it has recommended gradual introduction of voluntary hospitality charge as the first step toward managing tips (See: Box). It has also recommended fixing and regulating the basic standard of services in hotels and restaurants and reform the labor laws, among others.

The recommendations have made hotel owners, who are dead against the introduction of compulsory service charge in all the services offered by hotels, happy. "The hotel workers' demand is not only impractical, if implemented it would push the

entire industry toward doom in a competitive global market like this," said Narendra Bajracharya, President of Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN). In response to a threat of strike by the workers, hotel owners closed down their hotels unilaterally for one day on December 11 last year.

Reports say the country loses nearly Rs 60 million every day due to closure of hotels. The fallout of bad name it gave to our hospitality industry, which was trying to overcome the setback in the aftermath of hijacking of Indian Airlines plane in December 1999, could be even enormous.

As the politically backed trade unions came face to face with the hotel owners, a

deadlock was inevitable. Hence, it may not have been an easy task for the high-level committee to dig into the controversial issue and come out with a handy solution. "We sought to answer the question: what is the rationale behind levying a service charge in the hotel industry?" said Dr. Narayan Manandhar, executive director at the Industrial Relations Forum (IRF) at the FNCCI, who was a member of the committee.

As there are wide variations in the practices related to service charge worldwide, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has prescribed a fixed wage system to guarantee the regular and secure income of hotel and restaurant workers.

"The service charge is a bipartite issue to be resolved by each and every enterprise at the unit level," said Dr. Manandhar. "The logical question is how to uphold the rights of the customer."

As the debate goes on, it would be better if the hotel owners and trade unions agreed to find a common ground that is not to harm the interests of the industry while bargaining for their collective interests. ■

Major Recommendations of the Ligal Committee

Looking at the declining competitive situation of Nepal in the tourism market and weak rate of return on investment on tourism, it does not look appropriate to introduce the mandatory service charge in a compulsory way. In order to gradually manage the tips system being practiced now following recommendations are made:

In the first phase, to introduce hospitality charge in a voluntary way as per the desire of the customer,

To collect the hospitality charge by mentioning in the bill to be delivered to the customer,

The customer should be informed about the provision of, and use of, the hospitality charge.

The customer has the right not to pay service charge if he/she is not satisfied with the services offered.

As banquet, conference and catering services in the hotels already charge service charges, these should be replaced by a certain percentage of hospitality charge as agreed upon between the management and workers.

There should be a separate 'hospitality fund' in each hotel and restaurant where the charge is levied. 20 percent of the fund should go to the breakage and other compensation, 30 percent in enhancing the level of service of the employees and rest 50 percent be distributed among the employees and their welfare works.

Lead-time should be given to adjust the hospitality charge in their transactions.

The committee recommends a fixed wage system to ensure a safe and reliable source of income for the workers. Each enterprise should work toward improving the basic pay scale rather than raising other benefits.

Nepal Tourism Board should be developed as a regulatory body to promote healthy competition in the hospitality industry while maintaining the quality of their services. The government should also work to regulate and manage the unhealthy competition seen in this area.

The concerned agency should take necessary steps to discourage practices strike, lockout etc. in a most sensitive industry like tourism.

To make timely amendments in the existing labor laws so as to develop cordial relations between the employer and employees and promote more domestic and foreign investment into this sector.

SCHOOL EDUCATION

Learning

Our

Lessons

Nepal has made tremendous progress in educating its citizens over the past five decades. The general literacy rate has jumped from 2 percent in 1950 to 53 percent today. Government investment in the sector has increased considerably, reaching around 15 percent of the total annual budget. More than five million students are enrolled in primary- and secondary-level schools. Enrollment in higher education, too, is growing by an average of nine percent a year. Despite such headway, the sector is still mired in problems. From strikes and political intervention to insurgency and sense of insecurity, the education sector is facing assaults from various fronts. In this dawn of the new millennium, Nepal's education sector is in dire need of a fresh impetus to move ahead.

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

As the country prepares to celebrate Education Day on Falgun 12 (February 23), it would be fitting to remember that day in 1975 when His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev in his coronation address to the nation underscored the importance of education for the development of the nation. Fresh from his

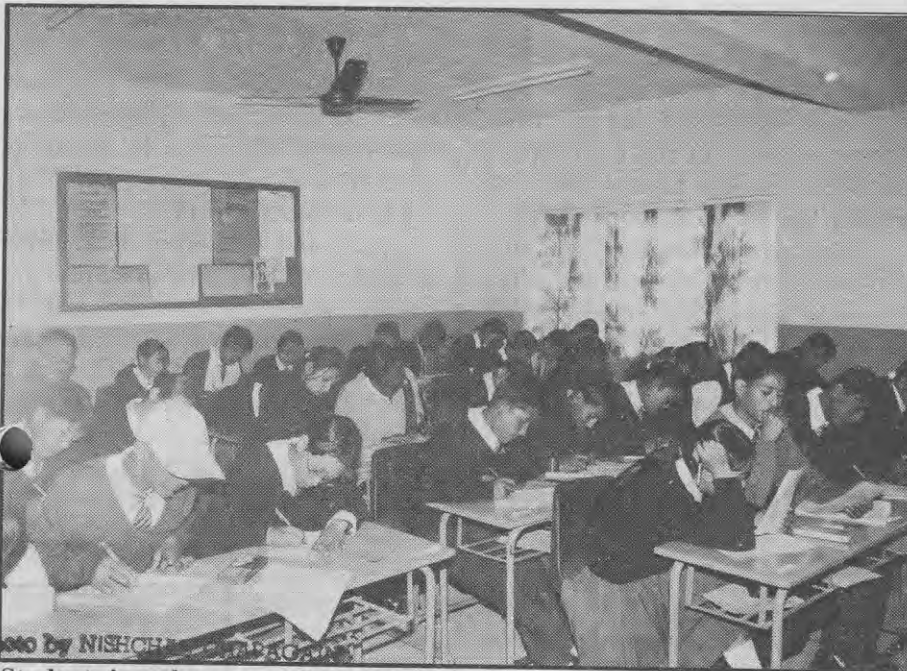
return from the West, where he acquired modern education, King Birendra declared primary education free in that speech. Ever since, Falgun 12 is celebrated as Education Day in Nepal.

From that day to February 6 this year, when thousands of students, frustrated with the growing tendency to close down schools on various political or other pretexts, took out a procession in the capital demanding a fair academic environment

and respect of children's right to study, the country's education system has seen many ups and downs.

Although the country has made some remarkable progress in education, recent incidents of growing political violence and strikes have come as a serious impediment to the smooth functioning of this sector. Dearth of clear-cut government policies is not helping the matter either.

While the situation of the country's



Students in a classroom : Better environment wanted

public schools is anybody's guess, the private ones, too, are feeling the heat. "This is a very unfortunate situation. It is true that in a democratic system of governance everybody has the right to protect their interests. But the tendency to target schools in any kind of strikes will prove fatal. We urge everybody concerned to refrain from disturbing the academic atmosphere," said Keshav Shrestha, senior vice-president of Private and Boarding Schools Organization Nepal (PABSON) and founding principal of Little Angel's School.

Thousands of schools across the country were forced to close down for a whole week in mid-December last year at the call of a pro-Maoist student organization. The ANNFSU (Revolutionary) had called the shutdown in support of its 15-point demand that included free school education, nationalization of private schools, making Sanskrit education optional and ending the practice of singing the national anthem in schools.

"We see that there is a gradual erosion in the school system as the teaching-learning atmosphere is being destroyed," said educationist Min Bahadur Bista.

But authorities deny such a situation exists. "It is true that problems have increased. But this does not mean there is a situation of anarchy. As we have to cater to

a growing number of students from our limited resources, these problems have surfaced," said Khagendra Basnet, Secretary at the Ministry of Education.

Arguments apart, the school education system in Nepal is clearly at the crossroads. With the private sector making some progress in quality and public schools widening their reach, the immediate challenge is to sustain and intensify the achievements made in the past five decades.

Strides Made

The literacy rate in Nepal when democracy was established in 2007 BS (1950 AD) was around 2 percent of the total population. Thanks to the anti-education policy of then Rana regime, schools were rare even in urban areas. There were a little more than 300 primary schools and a dozen secondary schools.

This dark situation has changed dramatically. There are now 25,599 schools in the country, with 8,547 being private ones (Education Statistics of Nepal 1999). The total enrollments up to the secondary level has risen to 5,071,643 from a couple of hundreds in the 1950s. "Over the past twenty-five years enrollments in secondary schooling have increased seven-fold," states the World Bank's report on Nepal Public Expenditure Review. "Overall, 72 percent of enrollments in grades 6-10 are

in public schools and 28 percent in private schools. Growth in private schools has been at a much higher rate in recent years."

Access to schools has improved substantially. The average walk from home to school takes about half an hour. Every Village Development Committee (VDC) has at least a couple of schools.

The literacy rate, too, has increased considerably. According to the government, 53 percent of Nepalis are literate. While donor agencies and others refuse to buy this claim, they, too, put the literacy rate at above 42 percent.

During the Rana regime, education was seen as a threat to the establishment. The policy then was to discourage education. Only a handful of upper class elites used to receive education by going as far away as Benaras, India.

After the establishment of democracy in 1950, the education sector began to flourish. In 2028 BS (1972), the government centralized this sector. In 2036 (1980) the private sector was allowed to open schools.

Downside

Although there is a gradual quantitative progress in education, quality remains to be achieved. The teacher/student attendance, pass rates and retention level in public schools are frustratingly low.

Drop-outs and repetition rates are very high. According to a recent National Achievement Survey conducted among students of Grades 3 to 5, it was seen that their achievement was in the average range of 27-50 percent. That is, the students secure marks in this average in exams. The pass rate of the SLC examination also has been unsatisfactorily low. Rarely does this rate cross 50 percent.

There could be various reasons for this inferior quality of education in public schools. Absence of adequate trained teachers, materials and resources constraints, lack of teaching-learning environment and dearth of proper monitoring could be some of the reasons.

"Unless the government introduces special programs to produce qualified teachers, the public schools will not be able to deliver quality," says Keshab Bhattarai, President of Nepal Teachers' Association (NTA). "When we see MPs

recruiting their cronies as teachers, how can we expect quality?"

That apart, the students who join public schools are from the lower-income group of the population. Naturally, there is a lesser tendency to engage in improving quality of education among this group as their overriding concern lies elsewhere.

"The quality is better in private schools because the students and parents there are more sincere, whereas the public schools suffer from lack of resources and qualified teachers," said Jal Krishna Singh,

principal of the Bani Bilas Secondary School, Pyangaun in Chapagaun VDC.

Private schools, on the other hand, have done well by stressing on quality. Almost 90 percent of SLC board toppers come from private schools. But these schools, too, are not free from ills.

"The private schools are developing into cram-schools. Their style of teaching is to make their students come out top in exams and that's all," says Bista. He says the government should first define what quality/decent education is all about. "Is it

merely about passing exams with good marks?"

Notwithstanding their ills, everybody agrees that private schools have offered a much-needed alternative to parents in search of quality.

Investment growth

The public investment in education has gradually increased over the past five decades. This sector now bags nearly 15 percent of the total annual budget. In the budget for the current fiscal year 2000/2001, the government has allocated more

'Anarchy Hurts The Teaching-Learning Environment'

— MIN BAHADUR BISTA

MIN BAHADUR BISTA is a well known educationist in the country. Bista is also the national coordinator of Institutional Linkage Program of Basic and Primary Education Program II (BPEP). He spoke to SANJAYA DHAKAL on the prevailing situation of education in the country. Excerpts :

What is the focus of BPEP and who is helping this project?

The main focus of the BPEP is to improve access of primary education especially to disadvantaged community, including girls, to enhance quality of education and to build the capacity of education management right from local to the ministry level. Currently, we are in the second phase of the program with the total budget of US\$106 million. Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, including the World Bank, EU, NORAD, DANIDA and FINNIDA, are helping the project. During its first phase (1992/93 - 1998/99) the focus was on development of school buildings, education materials and so on. It was more input-oriented and supply-driven. But the second phase is more in line with program mode and is outcome-oriented. It emphasizes on empowering local stakeholders like parents.

There is talk of allowing the community to run schools on their own. What do you say?

Until now, we see that all of the decisions are made from the center, whether it is curriculum development, training or management of schools. But the proposed seventh amendment bill to the Education Act includes some provisions to decentralize the system. It talks about community control of local schools by electing 50 percent of members in the school management board from among parents. There are also provisions regarding village education committee. These are positive developments. But even if we hand over the management to the community, we should not expect dramatic

results in the short term.

How do you judge the overall education policy of the government?

In the last one decade, the government has increased its investment in education. Almost 15 percent of its total budget is apportioned to this sector of which 55 percent is invested in primary education. On the one hand, you see the increase in investment, but on the other, confusion regarding its policy still persists. There are confusions on the role of the government, private sector, the relationship between the two, maintaining the regional imbalance, developing curriculum, improving teaching profession and various other things.

It is said there is an anarchy-like situation in the education sector today. What do you say?

To an extent this is the result of confusion in the government policy. There was a race among successive governments to make education free. Because of political compulsions, these governments declared education free without doing a financial analysis. As a result, on one hand, the government says education is free, while on the other, it asks public schools to charge up to a certain amount to sustain themselves. That apart, the failure to monitor and regulate private schools has resulted in further chaos. This anarchy is going to erode the school system as it hurts the teaching-learning environment.

Insurgency has also affected education in certain rural areas. What are your observations?

Because of these incidents, the effective instructional time has been reduced. The government states there should be 220 school days in a year out of which 180 days should be compulsorily set aside for instruction. But in parts of the country affected by insurgency, it is said that the instruction time has come down to 75 days. Government supervision,

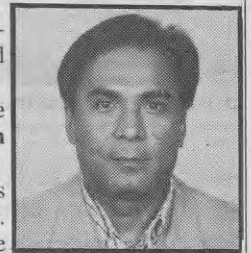
control and regulation has been affected in these regions.

What about the quality of education in public schools?

The facilities have expanded. Now, on average, the walking distance from home to school has come down to less than half an hour. But although the government celebrates the improvement in enrolment, retaining and achievement is quite another story. According to a study on the achievement of students from 3 to 5 grades, it was found that their average marks ranged between 27-50 percent, which was alarmingly low. SLC pass rate still hovers below 50 percent. This could be due to many reasons, including weakness of institutional leadership, lack of monitoring and support. Politicization of teachers is another problem. But this lack of quality not limited to public schools alone. Even the private ones are developing as "cram schools". They teach students with the sole objective of passing them. They are yet to give the overall decent education. Anyway, one has to praise the role of private schools as they are successful in creating teaching-learning environment and changing the public perception on the importance of quality education.

The quality of education is very different in public and private schools. What would happen if this gap is not bridged in time?

The division in education will bring about the division in society. There should be a comparable level of quality among these two brands of schools. Otherwise, there is a chance of creating another class caste, which could lead to conflict in future. Such big gap is destructive for civilized society. ■



than 11 billion rupees to education. The total budget for this fiscal year was above 91 billion rupees.

Expenditure on education was 1.4 percent of GDP and 9.4 of total government expenditure (TGE) in 1980/81. This rose to 2.6 percent of GDP and 13.1 percent of TGE in 1998/99.

"Of the total expenditure on education, 45 percent is for primary and non-formal education, 32 percent for secondary, 6 percent for technical and vocational, and 16 percent for tertiary educa-

tion," states the World Bank's report.

Over the last decade alone, investment in education has swollen to a great extent. In 1990, the government spent Rs 301 million in the regular budget and Rs 1.22 billion in the development budget for education. The budget has now increased by ten folds.

In 1991/92, the government's investment on a student was Rs 654 a year. Today it is spending more than Rs 2,500. A sample study by Min Bahadur Bista in 1998 showed that investment per student

in private schools was Rs 8,574.

As the investment growth clearly indicates the government's intention to develop the sector, there are still reasons to be more adamant in the pursuit for better education. Still, Nepal has some of the worst figures in terms of education statistics in South Asia. The literacy rate in 1995 was 36 percent in Nepal compared to 90 percent in Sri Lanka, 52 percent in India, 39 percent in Bangladesh and 35 percent in Pakistan.

Academic Environment Has To Be Improved'

— UMESH SHRESTHA

UMESH SHRESTHA, is the senior vice-president of the Private and Boarding Schools Organization of Nepal (PABSON). The founder principal of Little Angel's School, a leading private school, Shrestha talked to SANJAYA DHAKAL about the major issues and challenges of education in the country. Excerpts:

How do you find the present anarchy-like situation in the education sector, with bandhs and strikes being announced frequently?

Shutting down of schools for even a single day inflicts great damage to the whole nation. In financial terms, losses worth millions of rupees occur when schools are forced to close a week, like what happened here some months ago. I call it a national loss. This kind of situation must not be allowed to persist. A few weeks ago, thousands of students came out demanding a fair academic environment. When there was transport strike two weeks ago, there was a big pressure from parents to open the school. Such public pressure should increase.

A student outfit recently called a week-long closure of schools demanding, among other things, the nationalisation of all private schools. How do you see that demand?

The government talked with the students but we don't know what transpired. Privatization has become a global phenomenon. In Nepal, there are 8,000 private schools where 75,000 teachers work and one million students study. Among them, 24,000 students have obtained some kind of scholarships. Around five billion rupees worth of financial transaction occurs per year in this sector. So, it would be unwise to close all these schools in one go.

How big are the differences between

government and private schools?

Had the government/public schools done their job well, there would have been no need for the private sector. Due to the deterioration of quality in public schools, people became attracted to private schools. Parents are clear in their concept that private schools give quality education in an environment that is conducive to academic progress. But this does not mean that private schools are free of any ills. We are also accused of becoming more expensive and other things.

Despite progress in enrolment and access, schools, especially public ones, are yet to improve quality.

The first thing is there should be proper control and monitoring from the authorities. Merely building more schools will not deliver quality. The overall academic environment has to be improved. This is true also in the case of private schools. The mushrooming of private schools needs to be checked.

There is also an emerging concept of community-controlled schools. Clauses to that effect are also said to be included in the proposed 7th amendment bill to the Education Act. What are your observations?

Three decades ago when I studied in a school in a remote village in Bhojpur district, the parents and the community were very concerned about education. They used to bring teachers from India. But after the education policy of 1972 when government committed itself to all sectors of schools, community involvement vanished. These days we see that community involvement is more on party lines.

How do you find the government's policy toward private schools?

We have been telling the government since the last one decade that there should be strict monitoring and regularization of private

schools. Laws should be made in this regard. It should be clarified whether this is a service or service industry.

How can the gap between public and private school education be bridged?

Actually, the private sector has not covered the majority of the population. It only serves 30 percent of the population in the secondary level. It takes three to four decades to find out the impact of education. So, there is going to be a long-term impact of such gaps. Public schools, too, should be given the opportunity to improve. Introduction of concepts like model schools and public-private partnership could help.

What are the main functions of PABSON?

We are a professional organization working for the overall interest of private schools. We have demanded clear policies and regulations from the government. PABSON is also ready to rectify public grievances about private schools through more dialogue and interaction.

What are immediate challenges before the education sector?

Education being an international sector, we have to embrace global trends. The immediate challenge, therefore, is how to adjust our curriculum to match the global demands in sectors like Information Technology. Besides, we need to develop our human resources to meet the challenges of the country. Timely changes in syllabus are also important. ■



'Govt. Has Realized The Importance Of People's Participation'

— KHAGENDRA BASNET

KHAGENDRA BASNET is the Secretary at the Ministry of Education. He spoke to SANJAYA DHAKAL on the government's position on key issues facing the education sector. Excerpts:

It is said that there is a situation of uncertainty and anarchy in the education sector. How is the government looking at this situation?

I do not agree that there is a situation of anarchy or uncertainty. It is true that problems are increasing by the day. But that is because of growing enrolment which we have not been able to cater to properly because of lack of materials and resources. Many of the problems are also an indication that we will now have to move to solve them. The main problem at present is dearth of resources. Another thing is that, after the restoration of democracy, the people's expectation grew. But we couldn't fulfill all of them, which then led to some gloom. But this is not tantamount to anarchy.

What will be the long- and short-term affects of strikes and bandhs?

Strikes and bandhs affect all spheres of society, including tourism, transportation, communication and education. In fact, education is more susceptible to it. Schools are run on the basis of an academic calendar. We have provisions to open schools for 220 days in a year out of which 180 days should be compulsorily set aside for teaching. Strikes definitely hurt this calendar. The disturbances will hamper exams and other activities, too.

A few months ago, a student organization forced schools to close down for a week. The government later held talks with the group. Was any progress made?

We did talk with the students. Their demands, however, were not about the rights and interest of students but about the state's policy on education. Such demands could affect the government's policy and we could not agree to them. As a result, the dialogue could not succeed.

One of their demands included the nationalization of private schools. What was the government's response?

A country is run in accordance with the policy of the government. The current government of the Nepali Congress pursues an education policy that favors a partnership

with the private sector. To that extent, their demand was totally against the government's policy and we did not want to talk with them on that point.

It is alleged that the government's position is unclear as to whether it regards the operation of private schools as service or an service-industry. What do you say?

According to the government's policy, we have divided schools into three categories — public schools, trust-run schools and private professional schools. This categorization is included in the proposed seventh amendment bill to the Education Act, which is currently in parliament. So schools could be either a service-oriented or a business activity. What we have emphasized is that if a school falls in the latter category, it will have to be operated in accordance with existing laws and regulations.

How has the Maoist insurgency affected the operation of schools in areas where the rebels are active?

After studying their policies, I have come to understand that they are more vehement on closing down private schools rather than public ones. So, I have not found the insurgency affecting public schools.

In spite of progress in enrolment and access, the quality of education in public schools is still low. How can it be improved?

We have been saying that the constraints of resources, materials, trained teachers and various other things are responsible for the lack of improvement in quality. The government is keen on improving the quality and is trying hard in this direction.

How do you rate the changes in Nepal's education sector in the last five decades?

There has been a tremendous change in this sector. From a two percent literacy rate in pre-2007 BS era to about 53 percent literacy at present, we have come a long way. But still this pace of development was below the expected rate. Take, for instance, the goals set by the Ninth Five Year Plan. The plan had set the goal of taking the literacy rate to 70 percent, but as we stand now, we will not be able to reach 57/58 percent by the time the plan year ends. All in all, the progress has been remarkable.

How does the government find the concept of community-controlled schools?

The government has realized both from policy as well as practical experience that until and unless civil society participates, there cannot be effective control on the day-to-day administration of schools. The government is firm in its conviction that the rural community has a major role to play in the management of schools. In the amendment bill, we have proposed a drastic change in the structure of management boards of public schools. The proposed management board will have 51 percent of its members elected from among guardians. The concept of village education committee and education fund, which will also be under the control of guardians, is also included in it. The emphasis is on people's participation.

There is a big gap in the quality between students from public and private schools. How can we bridge this gap?

This does not mean that we have to curtail the quality provided by the private schools. In fact, that should be further enhanced. But the need of the hour is to improve the quality in public schools. The government has given special emphasis to the training of teachers. We have two separate provisions for basic and primary level and secondary level teachers. The training is regarded as the compulsory condition for teachers. We are also working on a strategy to introduce a system of giving license to qualified teachers.

There are reports that many teachers have entered the profession on the basis of fake education or citizen certificates. How does the government plan to check this?

So far as citizenship is concerned, that is the basic and compulsory condition to be recruited as teacher, and this is specified in acts and laws. As for fake certificates, our minister of state has also clarified that we have issued a 13-point directive two weeks ago. The directive asks the District Education Office to maintain the personal/professional record of each and every teacher working in the district. The record will have the original certificates. And if there are doubts as to the authenticity of some certificates, they will be immediately proceeded for further investigation and action. ■

Sense of insecurity

In the past few years, a sense of insecurity has gripped school education. In regions affected by the Maoist insurgency, the schools are almost paralyzed.

"They threaten teachers all the time. Some have even been murdered. The situation is really dangerous in some parts of the country," says Bhattarai.

The Maoist insurgents are said to have turned schools in certain regions as recruitment centers for cadres. Students, too, are kidnapped and turned into their cadres in districts like Rolpa, Rukum, Baniwaha and others, it is alleged.

According to Bista, the instructional time in schools from Maoist-affected regions has come down to 75 days a year.

As if the insurgency was not enough, various kind of strikes and bandhs regularly disrupt classes. From the Hritihik Roshan-episode to the transport strike, each had its impact on schools.

"As the students are constantly exposed to news of corruption, violence and strikes, there is a dearth of role models to follow. I am concerned about how these things will affect the mentality of our young students," says Bhattarai.

Frequent political interference in education, too, has added to the confusing scenario. From recruitment of teachers to the activities of teachers' union, politics has become a deep-rooted feature of the education sector.

The 140,000-odd teachers are divided among various political fronts. As politics start right from their recruitment, there is little the teachers can do without clinging to one or the other party.

Even a sitting State Minister for Education recently conceded that many teachers have been wrongfully recruited — on the basis of fake certificates.

The government's intention to make education free has also fallen victim of politics. Because of political compulsions, successive governments have declared education free up to the secondary level. But as the decision was made without conducting a financial analysis, this could not happen in reality. "On the one hand, the government makes a decision of free education while, on the other, it sends a circular to schools allowing them to charge



Students waiting for their bus : No more strikes, please

necessary money," said one headmaster of public school.

Future Ahead

As Nepal's school education systems stand at such a critical juncture, there is a need for some urgent changes. The proposed seventh amendment to the Education Act, which is currently before parliament, has proposed to encourage community-controlled schools.

"But in a society where a large section of the community is still uneducated, how efficient this control will be is still in doubt," said Jal Krishna Singh, a school principal. The basic and primary education project and the decentralization of management and financing of schools could be steps in the right direction. But the overriding challenge of the school education system remains the prevention of the further erosion of the teaching-learning environment.

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'Nepal's Hope Rests On Tourism and IT'

— ASKO LUUKKAINEN

ASKO LUUKKAINEN, charge d'affaires of Finland to Nepal, holds the view that Nepal needs to maintain law and order to promote foreign trade. Luukkainen, who arrived in Nepal six months ago, spoke to KESHAB POUDEL on various issues relating to Nepal's economic development. Excerpts from the half-hour interview:

How do you see the state of Nepal-Finland economic cooperation?

Unfortunately, it is quite low at the moment. Basically, this is because we don't have big infrastructure projects now. So we don't have many statistics to disclose. We are contributing a few million US dollar per year, which is a pity. But that is quite normal between Finland and countries so far away. Nepal produces mainly agriculture products, garments and carpets. The demand for these products is not high in Finland at this moment. But I see a future in the area of information technology. That is the thing I always talk about because we are very advanced in information technology, but there are not enough people in Finland to implement the plans we have. So Finland is trying to find partners from different countries. Nepal definitely seems to be a good place to cooperate with, as the Nepalese people are very talented in IT. They can easily be trained. After that, they can cooperate with Finnish companies via the Internet. So, I can really see a future there.

What are the areas of development cooperation?

Rural water supply and sanitation are the traditional ones. Now the environment is coming into prominence. We have already done the mapping of the whole of Nepal. We are also involved in the education sector through the Basic and Primary Education Project. We are providing funds in the areas of human rights, democracy and good governance and small environment programs. These are the main areas of cooperation. Actually, our idea is to go out of the valley because we really see the need of the people in rural areas. Our main emphasis is to go outside the valley for development projects.

Finland has been helping Nepal's economic development in a big way. Do you think Finnish cooperation is yielding results?

Many of the projects have been evaluated and the results are quite satisfactory. Everyone can see the changes when he or she visits the sites of our development projects. We have been active in areas of Lumbini

where we have made tangible change. In these areas, hundreds and thousands of people have benefited from Finnish projects. Khimti transmission line project is now bringing electricity. The mapping project will also yield results. In the education sector, we are financing through basket projects with other donors. Human rights, democracy and good governance are new areas for us. We have already funded many small projects. Many non-government organizations are applying for project grants. Small NGOs are implementing the projects themselves. This is going to the grass-roots level.

In the context of donors' severe criticism of Nepal's performance in aid projects, what is Finland's reaction?

Well, I have not heard so much criticism because I have been here for just a short time. So far, my impression is that Nepal is not very much different from other countries we are cooperating with. Some companies see the situation by applying European standards. So such difficulties come up. We have to understand the difference. Nepalese authorities should understand our standards and work more effectively.

What is Finland's aid strategy to Nepal?

We had bilateral discussions in November last year. We discussed future cooperation in the field of education. We are planning to increase our aid in the area of rural water supply. We want to become involved in these two areas and in the environment. After the completion of the mapping, our emphasis will be in these areas. It seems to me that there will be greater cooperation in the future.

How do you see Nepal's transition to democracy?

I think that everybody notices that democracy is not working perfectly yet. When you look at the sudden strikes launched by different pressure groups, it shows that democracy is not yet advanced. In advanced state of democracy, demonstrations are under control through agreement between unions and political parties. They use other peaceful means when the negotiating party ignores the agreements. Democracy in its advanced state has an organized system for that. There are still complications in Nepal's new democracy. That is not surprising at all. If you look at what happened to countries formerly under communist rule, many are in a state of disorder. Now they are slowly recovering. That is going to happen in Nepal, too, because the situation and process is completely new. You had multiparty democracy earlier for just a short period. For

"So far, my impression is that Nepal is not very much different from other countries we are cooperating with. Some companies see the situation by applying European standards. So such difficulties come up."

me, it is not surprising at all. When Finland became independent in 1917, we had a civil war in 1918. It took place because nobody knew how to run the country. The fight between supporters of communists and conservatives escalated the civil war. That is not happening in Nepal. So we have experienced quite a lot of difficulties on the road to democracy. We are now not where we were 85 years ago.

How do you see the future of Nepal?

I believe Nepal has good prospects. The Nepalese people are very friendly and there are many things to offer foreigners. Tourism will be one of the major areas to uplift the economy. Information Technology gives a lot of hope to this country because it does not require access to the sea. After the emergence of the Internet and e-mail, you are no more a landlocked country. That will be big change for Nepal.

Is democracy an easy process or does it need time to evolve?

It takes a lot of time to evolve. Even in 1950, after 30 years of democracy, we had a general strike and people were out on the streets. But we were able to manage our problems.

What are the problems of democracy in Nepal? Is it the political process or the institutions?

The problem is that the people are not yet experienced in running a democracy. There are many different thoughts and ideas about democracy. There is no consensus yet on how to run the country. Normally, the government is chosen through parliamentary elections. After that, it stays in power until the next elections. You can change part of the country during that time. There is a certain provision to choose the government and change the government in a constitutional way. In elections, it is the people who can decide which party they want. This is the way democracy normally works. But here I have sometimes seen strange things like strikes and demonstrations.

Most donor countries are openly talking about corruption in Nepal. How do you look at it?

This is a subject everybody has been talking about. I am a newcomer, so I can not draw a conclusion from that. Controlling corruption is a difficult task for the government, but it is not an impossible task. That has been done in other countries. Here I must proudly say that according to Transparency International, Finland is the least corrupt country in the world. We are proud of this reputation and we want to keep it. How to eradicate corruption is a big question. Now you have democracy and you have many political parties. So the parties themselves need to become active to control it. Political parties should choose candidates who don't have a tainted character.

Western democracies are promoting the rights and freedom of the people. At the same time, they are also proposing the creation of authoritarian institutions to lead the fight against corruption. Isn't this a contradictory approach?

I believe in a system where elected people are responsible to the voters. If the voters think that their



representatives are corrupt, they will not vote for them again. That is the system we like to follow. The party also has to take an initiative to control corruption.

We have a Westminster-style government and a first-past-the-post system. But we have many donors that are following the proportional-representation system. When different countries are promoting their own systems, won't it be confusing?

In my opinion, you have a democratic system of governance and elections. The basics are there. Nepal is not like Finland, so we can not impose our views. Every country has its own tradition and habits. If you have a democratic system, as a donor we are your partners. If you follow the rule of law, we don't have anything to say.

How do you see the law-and-order problem in Nepal?

We all know what is happening in the western part of Nepal — and that the situation is not good. The Maoists are also taking advantage of the poverty and backwardness of the people. Their movement is not being launched in a democratic way, as innocent people are being killed. A couple of children were killed a few days ago. The situation is very difficult there. According to newspaper reports, the government is virtually non-existent there. In such a situation, how can government deliver? This is the time for the government to start negotiations. I met Padma Ratna Tuladhar who mediated talks a few months back. The government can once again ask him to play the role of a mediator. If the situation continues in the remote areas, donors may have to pull out their programs. No one will send people to unsafe areas.

Donor countries have been talking about the deteriorating law-and-order situation in Nepal. But at the same time they continue working in places where the situation is much worse. No country pulls out from Sri Lanka or Colombia. Why they are so concerned about Nepal?

Finland was active in Sri Lanka for quite a long time, but finally we pulled out. That is what could happen here if the violence escalates. ■

“Tourism will be one of the major areas to uplift the economy. Information Technology gives a lot of hope to this country because it does not require access to the sea. After the emergence of the Internet and e-mail, you are no more a landlocked country.”

NEPALESE ABROAD

Cultural Unity

Time has come to unify Nepalese living abroad to their motherland

By A CORRESPONDENT

What do Nepalese working in different parts of the world want from Nepal? "National pride and a sense of cultural unification," found Chintamani Yogi, Principal of Hindu Vidyapeeth-Nepal (HVP), an educational institute run on a non-profit basis, during his recent visit to the USA.

During his three-week-long stay in the US (Jan 15 -Feb 8, 2001), Yogi attended several meetings and delivered talks at programs organized by US orga-

world.

"Spirituality does not have any language, it's the matter of feeling and realization. He said that when spirituality gets the language, it becomes religion which creates discrimination among the people which is unfortunately taking place at every corner of the globe," he said.

At a talk program on 'Essence of Hindu Philosophy' was organized in Washington D.C. on behalf of George Mason University - Nepalese Students Association (GMU - NSA), Yogi said Hindu philosophy is based on Veda which

does not include any caste system and is not biased toward any race, sex, color and nationality. He also urged all the Nepalese living there to work with the spirit of unity to preserve Nepali culture and spiritual values.

In Boston, Yogi warned that if once cultural and religious harmony and integrity of Nepal were broken down, then it

would be almost impossible for us to restore that beauty of Nepal. Right from the day the cultural harmony in Nepal starts fragmenting, the ill fate of Nepal will begin and we have all realized that it has more or less started in Nepal, which is about to engulf the whole country.

As the world is now becoming a global village, it has become utmost important to preserve and maintain our identity to lead a happy, prosperous and prestigious life as a Nepali all over the world, he said. ■



Yogi (3rd from left) with Nepalese in U.S. : Disseminating the message of unity

nizations as well as organizations of the Nepalese living in the US.

He attended conferences organized by 'Spiritual Forum for the United Nations' in New York, 'Soul Support System' in Vermont and 'Inter-religious and International Federation for World Peace' in New York. In all the meetings he attended Mr. Yogi spoke about the significance of the eastern philosophy and spirituality and also highlighted upon the Nepalese culture and the message which Nepal can pass on to the entire

BUTWAL POWER COMPANY

Toward Private Hands

The largest privatization bid in the country is finally on track

With two companies vying to buy 75 percent stakes in the state-owned Butwal Power Company (BPC), the largest ever privatization offer by the government is finally under way. The Finance Ministry formally received two technical proposals from Interkraft Nepal and Independent Power Corporation in connection with privatization of the Butwal Power Company (BPC) last week. While Jyoti Group is the local partner of Interkraft, a Norwegian company, Chaudhary Group is the local partner of Independent Power Company/PLC, a US-UK company. Secretary at the Finance Ministry, Dr. Bimal Koirala said after technical evaluation, the financial proposal of the selected company will be opened in the next two weeks. The government had initiated the process of privatization of BPC — that runs 19 projects generating 30 MW of power, among others — nearly three years ago but could not decide on the case due to pressures and conditions from the bidding parties. BPC is the largest-ever company being privatized by Nepal and the first power company being sold to private parties.

Established jointly by HMG Nepal and United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in 1966, BPC manages and operates two hydro power stations with a total capacity of 17 MW, and owns 14.9% of Himal Power Limited. Himal Power is currently the owner and operator of US\$135 million Khimti hydropower project. The privatization of the BPC had derailed for sometime after IPC decided to withdraw its application sometime back alleging lack of transparency in the bid. Officials refuted the allegations. It, however, participated in the latest bid opened by the government last year. ■

MUSIC

Pied Pipers At The Capital

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and Ustad Sultan Khan on the sarangi held the audience captivated on February 3

By AKSHAY SHARMA

Since its formation, the B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation (BPKF) has organized several cultural and musical programs to strengthen the cultural relations between two countries. As part of this endeavor, the organization recently organized a concert on tabla and sarangi

The foundation in association with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Embassy of India, presented BPKF Concert 2001. Zakir Hussain, the famous tabla maestro, and Ustad Sultan Khan on the sarangi held the audience captivated for two hours. The event, held on February 13 at the Royal Nepal Academy, was the apple of the eye for the audience.

Talking to the press before the concert, Zakir Hussain said, "I just arrived from Mumbai, but I've been in Nepal as a tourist before. This is my second performance in Nepal. I was here before and played with Hari Prasad Chaurasiya (the renowned flute player)." Speaking about his music, he said, "I beat my own drum. I play the tabla and have managed to gain recognition around the world. When I was a wee lad, maybe of 2-3 years old, I started learning from my guru. He is my guru. He has come to Nepal and played with maestros like Ravi Shanker."

"Hussain is today a large figure in music around the world, especially in the field of percussion, and he himself is an international phenomenon," says a music expert.

Highlighting the performance of the show, Ustad Khan mentioned the importance of rhythm and time. "Rhythm and time are the two sides of a coin," Ustad Khan explained. "I have seen some good tabla players in Nepal. Music is a subject that is best approached through belief. It's my meditation. Ever since my childhood, I wanted to be a musician. I have a pupil here and his name is Kumar Kancha."

"Music is concerned with love and friendship. Music doesn't have any barriers. God gave us the world. But it is up to us to build a home," says Khan, who is one of the most popular sarangi players in the Indian sub-continent. He learnt from his father, Ustad Gulab Khan. He belongs to the ninth generation of his family who has nurtured the art of the sarangi. He is famous around the world and has sung in many Hindi movies. Hussain can be called the tabla virtuoso of the highest order. He is consistently brilliant and his exciting performances have not only established him as a national treasure in his own

country, India, but he has managed to gain recognition around the world.

Nepalese audiences enjoyed two-hour concert. "The program seems to be the mother of all concerts," said Ajay Singh Basnyet, police inspector at Durbarmarg Police Center.

Hussein said, "I have seen some good tabla players in Nepal. It's an inspiration to see that tabla is played in Nepal. Music is derived from the earth and if he's playing it he's taking it serious he's taking it in the right way. The musicians express feelings with their talents. Music is magical, it's my Shangri-La."

Zakir Hussain is considered the favorite of many of the classical musicians and dancers in



Hussein (left) & Khan : Magic of music

India like Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shanker and Birju Maharaj. But his genius does not rest there. His tabla playing is marked by uncanny intuition and masterful improvisations that is founded in formidable knowledge and study.

"You can express yourself and the way you see things through the music you play," and makes tabla-like sounds by tapping his fingers on his cheek. "It's unique to hear Nepalese maestros play on the madal. It definitely sounds unique in India," Zakir Hussein said.

Considered the architect of contemporary music, Zakir has been performing shows since he was 12 years old. His contribution to music has been immense like Shakti, which he founded with John McLaughlin and L. Shankar. Other masterpieces created by Hussain include the Diga Rhythm Band, Making Music, Planet Drum with Mikey Hart. And has done recordings and performances with artists as diverse as George Harrison, Joe Henderson, Van Morrison, Jack Bruce, Tito Puente, Pharoah Sanders, Billy Cobham, the Honk Kong Symphony and the New Orleans Symphony.

Zakir embarked on his international career in 1970 when he went to the United States of

America and played no fewer than 150 concert dates every year. His recorded albums and soundtracks for famous films like 'Little Buddha' directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, Ismail Merchant's directorial debut and 'Vanaprastham', that was chosen and screened at the Cannes Film festival in May 1999. He has received widespread recognition as a composer for his many ensembles and historic collaborations.

"God has blessed us with music. And it feels like a miracle while I play. It's seen in different cultures like the American Indians have what they call the Rain Dance." He is a staunch believer in music, saying, "Music has a certain kind of frequency. It has an effect on the environment you are in. You start to unwind to another environment listening to the kinds of music. Music has been used in therapy for sick people. And they have started to play music at green houses for plants."

Defining his philosophy he says, "When we sing the rainy raga it is possible that it may rain which makes one believe that music provided us with that instance. Lord Shiva came down upon earth and played his damaru and drove away the demons and Ganesh with his Shankha (Conch shell) later did the same. We musicians believe that musical vibrations possess great power. The bells in the temples and that every country has one kind of drum. These sounds have a meaning and maybe mythical power. "Later that evening, the maestros magical fingers created the sounds of the Shanka and the drums while Ustad Sultan Khan accompanied him with his sarangi. When asked about his famous song "Piya Basanti" Hussain said, "Ustad Khan was a bit tired so I dragged him out of bed. I sat outside his door and sang, "Piya Basanti."

"Basanti is basant (spring) it is full of colors. You can put your own meaning to the song," Sultan said, "It is talking about holi which is the festival of colors. Basanti is a symbol."

Although Khan spoke no more on the topic but Hussain comically created amazing musical sounds beating around his mouth, "Basanti may be a girl he has stashed away there somewhere in the song."

"It is very important to understand all the musicians around the world. The world is getting smaller everyday. It is important and beautiful to have cultural interactions between different cultures. Westerners come here to learn yoga and music," Hussein says.

Asked why Western music and culture seems so interested by the Eastern culture, "Why do you wear shirts, pants and tie, it's not your national attire?"

"We should continue to learn. Music is a divine blessing. When Lord Shiva drove the demons away he played the damaru and his son Ganesh developed the first syllables on his instrument the conch shell," Hussain suggests, as his fingers reverberated on his tabla creating similar sounds. "We're trying to play old and new compositions," he said during the program. The maestros are gone but not forgotten. The people at the Royal Nepal Academy sat on floors because tickets sold out more than expected. ■

BOOK

Lyrics Of Life

Giri's poems portray the realities of Nepalese women in moving words

By KESHAB POUDEL

E Reading the poems of Banira Giri is always inspiring. Her strong words and forceful logical exposition probe the depths of human wounds and carry the inner voice of the victim. In many ways, Giri's poems are a compendium of the society and culture she lives in.

Her poems are powerful in their reflection of social realities. In "Women", her metaphor ranges from a lake of great water to the creator of the world. Giri uses her powerful language



From The Lake, Love

By Banira Giri

Edited with an introduction

by Wayne Amtzis

Published by Himshikhar Publication,
Kathmandu Nepal

Price: US\$ 10/Rs. 500 (hard cover)

US\$ 8/Rs.300 (paperback)

and perfect imagination to capture diverse subjects within the confines of lucid comprehension.

Making every new discovery from the poems of Giri is both fascinating and heart-warming to the reader. The force of her ideas and words stimulate the mind. The reality she portrays goads the reader not only to see but also to perceive.

Giri is at her best when she speaks of women. In "Pashugayatri", she uses the allegory of the desecration of the holy Bagmati river to portray the degeneration of culture. The poetess touches every issue of women and highlights the scale of the brutality they face in society. She is clearly impatient with the slow process of social transformation.

Some of her descriptions are literary gems. Most of the poems in this book are based on the life of woman and her pain, sorrows and happiness. The poetess probes the distasteful life of a woman and the eyes society uses to look at her. Her words capture and then radiate social realities over a wide area.

Giri paints dominant images of violence against women in Kathmandu. In "Kathmandu", she describes the sorrowful story of a woman who was beaten unconsciousness.

Wayne Amtzis writes in the introduction: "For

Giri and for the culture, she seeks to reclaim in her poetry, a crime more consequently than violation is abandonment. Within her writing the ideal of wholeness, of man and woman complementing and completing, of world and beings sustaining and surpassing, is seen well, when understood, is taken up and affirmed in human creation and in culture."

Although the poems are translated from Nepali to English, the translators have maintained the charm of the Nepali language and the original spirit of the situation.

Wayne Amtzis, Ann Hunkins, Michael Hutt and Manjushree Thapa have tried and generally succeeded in maintaining the originality of the poetess. In many cases, the translators appear to have veered away from the original, but without diminishing the spirit of the message.

An acclaimed personality in Nepali literature, Giri has allowed her creativity to cover an immensely larger — and grateful — audience. ■


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TRANSITION

APPOINTED : Dr. Madhav Sharan Upadhyaya, as rector of Mahendra Sanskrit University, by His Majesty the King in his capacity as Chancellor of the university.

FORMED : An 11-member Woman Human Rights Protection and Promotion Com-

mittee, under the convenorship of Indira Rana, a member of National Human Rights Commission.

RELIEVED : Khum Bahadur Khadka, Minister for Construction and Physical Planning, of his post, by His Majesty the King, as per the recommendation of the prime minister and in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal.

AWARDED : Tarabir Basnet, with a cash prize of Rs 20,000, by Maiti Nepal, for his direct cooperation which led to the arrest of Rudra Bahadur Katuwal, alleged to have sold more than 100 Nepalese girls.

LEFT : Prof. Dr. Dayananda Bajracharya, Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technol-

ogy, for Sweden, at the invitation of Royal Swiss Academy of Sciences, to explore possibilities of expanding scientific relations between the two institutions.

DETERIORATED : The health condition of Dr. Dilli Raman Regmi, senior politician, who is receiving treatment in a hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. ■

'There Is Lack of Seriousness In The Govt. To Resolve The Maoist Insurgency'

— PROF. DHRUVA KUMAR

A political scientist and acclaimed strategic analyst at the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) of Tribhuvan University, PROF. DHRUVA KUMAR has been studying and closely watching the 'people's war' launched by the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) right from the beginning. On the eve of the completion of five years of the 'people's war,' he spoke to BHAGIRATH YOGI on the future of insurgency, prospects of talks and issues related to conflict resolution in Nepal. Excerpts:

How do you assess the present state of domestic conflict in Nepal?

The credibility of our democratic leadership has collapsed over the last 10 years. The side effect has been that extremely marginalized forces have come to the national mainstream. This has further eroded the legitimacy of our leaders. In the context of a domestic conflict, the situation is supposed to be that of a win-win type, not a zero-sum game. The government seems to be bent on employing repressive measures (to contain the Maoist insurgency), which may pose a difficulty in managing the present conflict. There is a need for efforts to bring them into a mutually agreed upon standard framework. Both sides should work for this. In the absence of such efforts, the conflict may worsen, as we are seeing today in Kashmir.

So what could be the way out?

When both sides go on stepping up violence, they may be forced to agree to a ceasefire. But that will never lead to peace. In an ideal context, both parties need to undertake voluntary compliance. If the government is really committed, most of the 40 demands put forward by the Maoists can be easily met. Of course, some of their demands are of a non-negotiable type. But those demands can be put aside for future.

How can a point of agreement be reached when the rebels are demanding no less than a constituent assembly?

Recently, there has been some sort of flexibility in the Nepali Congress and the UML regarding the Maoist's proposal of amending the constitution. If we go for (elections to) constituent assembly it will be tantamount to accepting that the decade-long democratic exercise has failed. This will mean a win-win situation for the Maoist only.

How do you see the role of the govern-

ment in resolving this conflict?

The role of the government is to find out how to accommodate Maoists' demands within the purview of the constitution. Democracy means dialogue. We have to see whether a demand like scrapping the special privileges of the royal family helps to resolve the immediate problems facing the country or aggravates it. The government should make initiatives looking at the geo-political situation or people's perception. It should see whether agreement at certain level could be reached by putting off certain issues. Politics is also a human relationship. As the government is a responsible party, it must have a serious commitment toward conflict resolution. Unfortunately, we haven't seen such seriousness in the government yet. If the government had seriousness, this conflict could have been resolved way back in 1996.

How do you see the nature of the conflict right now?

An enforced and managed conflict can never be resolved. It'll be very temporal. In a country like ours, the prevention of a conflict is more important than resolving it. In the beginning, the Maoists were limited in number, their organizational strength was weak, public sympathy was almost nil and they were a little-known force. Their dramatic rise in strength is an outcome of governmental crime. The governments over the last 10 years are the producers of the conflict. In a situation of instability, the culprit is the government and political parties. The problem, which could be resolved easily, has now been aggravated because of the government's inefficiency.

What should the government focus on now?

The government's decision to set up an Armed Police Force has shown that violence is inevitable. It also showed that there is a probability of civil war in the country. The government's decision is a positive step in terms of strengthening security, but where is the cut-off point? What should be the government's priority—to stress on negotiations or employ repressive measures if the conflict goes out of control? Of course, it's not easy to bring the rebels to the table of negotiation, but if we employ repressive measures it will lead into continuity of the problem and violence will escalate. So, the best way for the government is to create an environment for talks.

How justified will it be to use force to suppress the rebellion?

In a democracy, you can't always have a legitimate opposition. But you need to accommodate those who are adopting extra-constitutional means as witnessed in France, Britain or the US in the seventies. To enter into a negotiation, the government should create a congenial environment. The government can establish its credibility only if it is able to garner popular support. So, the time has come for the government to engage in self-assessment. The best way out should be tried first. If they (the rebels) go on increasing violence, then the government has every right to suppress them through use of force. In that situation, the people will also support the government.

How would you assess the external dimensions of the present conflict?

Neither the Indians nor Chinese will tolerate severe instability in Nepal. We can see that Tibet, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand are under-developed and poverty-stricken areas. They don't want to see an insurgency growing in these areas. New Delhi becomes more sensitive to disturbances in the cove-belt rather than in the peninsula.

Do you see the probability of Maoist-related violence escalating?

I don't see the probability of the Maoist movement escalating. Of course, sporadic violence may be there. We can assume that Maoists groups in India are supporting the movement in Nepal, not the central Indian government. India is well aware that the escalation of conflict in Nepal could aggravate the situation in Kashmir. It's a well-known fact that when a conflict escalates it is no more localized. So, we must look into such a situation carefully. So, the government must show its commitment. The government has failed to manage even small problems like garbage or shortage of kerosene, cooking gas and sugar. A responsible government must address these issues. Since the government has been ignoring these issues the rebellion has completed five years. Of course while dealing with the insurgency the government should exhibit its strength and also use it in a proper way. It should be decided crucially how the necessary budget will be mobilized and a system of command, control, communication and information be set up. The most important thing to fight an insurgency is determination on part of the government. ■

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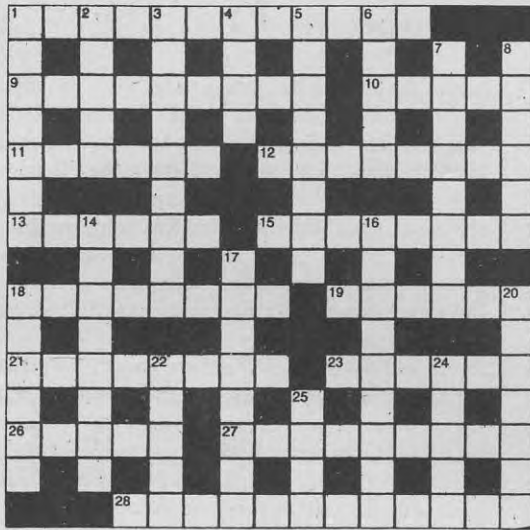
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ACROSS

1. Incredibly cheap drinks for supporters in skirts (12)
9. New conductor's function almost a disaster (4,5)
10. Booth's seat in the theatre (5)
11. Opening carriage occupied by doctor (6)
12. Thick characters showing brazen impudence (4,4)
13. Bather's cry when noticing water rising? (6)
15. Confident, or ruddy hopeful? (8)
16. Generator, for example, needs improved casing (8)
19. Exhibit type of jam (4-2)
21. In conversation, bring up rodents and bats (8)
23. I may do casting, having one settled as English king (6)
26. Losing wife, went and died (5)
27. Month spent producing ceremonial parade (5,4)
28. Jewel that one may be putting on to provide colour (7,5)

DOWN

1. Dishonestly obtain data about horse (7)
2. Peers are possessed by this field of study (5)
3. Knock on gate to get out? (3,6)
4. Secure northern beer, when told (4)
5. Degree one didn't turn up to receive (8)
6. Oiled, or became less tight (5)
7. Tree found by river in north of Devon (8)
8. Cheat to avoid church (6)
14. Clothing business distributing garter ad (3,5)
16. Burrowing animal could be selfish user of land (9)
17. Recent arrival of Nemo and crew at sea (8)
18. North African prickly shrub is eradicated (6)
20. Joke about girl being narrowminded (7)
22. Precocious girl, or woman, embraced by males (5)
24. Desert holiday (5)
25. Exam taken, as the Georgics were long ago omitted (4)

ACROSS : 1. Farthingales 9. ar thing 10. Stall 11. Gambit 12. Bold face 13. Eureka 15. Sanguine 18. Begetter 19. Hold up 21. Reremice 23. Angler 26. Ended 27. March past 28. Emerald green
 DOWN : 1. Finagle 2. Realm 3. Hit wicket 4. Nail 5. Aegrotat 6. Eased 7. Tamarind 8. Fleece 14. Rag-trade 16. Groundhog 17. Newcomer 18. Berber 20. Puritan 22. Madam 24. Leave 25. Oral

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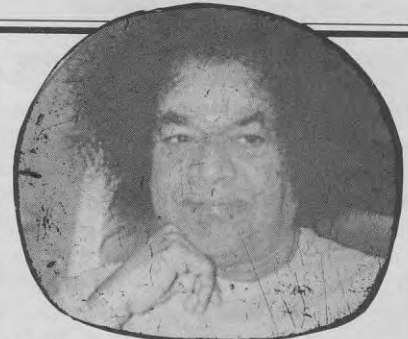
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SATHYA SAI BABA

Kashmir Solidarity Day In Pakistan

By MADHAV KUMAR RIMAL

Inaugurating the seminar on Kashmir Solidarity Day on 4 Feb., 2001 Abdul Sattar, the foreign minister of Pakistan said "On this day we are brought together by a shared feeling — a sentiment, if you will — of solidarity with the people of Kashmir, a decent, cultured and tolerant people, historically content to live peaceful lives in their beautiful land, who never coveted conquest, who never imposed suffering on another people and who want nothing more than the ordinary chance to enjoy freedom and dignity. That is the birth right of every human being. Sadly it has been denied to the people of Kashmir." More than seventy scholars including representatives from eighteen countries of Europe, America, Asia and Africa participated in the seminar. Almost all the participants expressed their serious concern at the ongoing violence in the India held Kashmir and were unambiguously solicitous for a peaceful resolution as early as possible. Since war and bloodshed, suppression and oppression, they emphasized, have never brought peace anywhere, all the parties concerned must sit together and start a dialogue without losing any more time. If all the parties cannot agree for a dialogue, they think, the other alternative is only the plebiscite. It is reported in little more than a decade almost 75,000 people have been killed by the Indian security forces. This kind of carnage cannot and should not be permitted to continue.

The seminar that was held in Islamabad on 4 February 2001 deliberated on the Kashmir issue but few delegates did come out with concrete suggestions for a quick settlement of over half a century long vexing problem. However the majority of delegates were of the opinion that no country or international authority were directly making any sincere attempt to pressurize India to agree to a just settlement based on basic human rights of the Kashmiri people for self-determination. "Any solution of the Kashmir issue must be agreed to by the Kashmiri people" said one refugee at a refugee camp. "We are not toys to be catapulted by either India or Pakistan." Unlike in the occupied Kashmir we have an elected President and elected Prime Minister, "he asserted vehemently.

This scribe was invited by the government of Pakistan to attend the seminar and visit the refugee camps. If the mood of the Pakistani delegates at the seminar was morose and belligerent, the international participants seemed completely overwhelmed to hear the harrowing experiences of the refugees. Only on humanitarian ground, this uncertain situation where lives of millions of unfortunate people hang on the whims of the aggressors, cannot be permitted to linger even for a day. Talking to the delegates, the Chief Executive of Pakistan General Pervez Muzharraf said, "Time for initiatives is gone. Thaw has taken place. Time to start talking has come." But India is adamant. Her refusal even to issue passports to the All Parties Hurriyat Conference leaders has exposed the chink in her armor. The Hurriyat leaders in both the countries are in close contact everyday. One of the executive members of APHC, Syed Faiz Naqshbandi told this scribe "We, the Hurriyat leaders in both parts of Kashmir are in dialogue everyday. There is complete understanding between us. India's refusal to let the leaders of APHC from occupied Kashmir to come to Pakistan can in no way be justified. This should clearly tell the world that they don't want peace. It is immaterial as far as we are concerned." What India refuses to understand is that it cannot hold Kashmiri freedom fighters by force. Terrorism being carried out by Indian security forces in the valley and else where will lead New Delhi no where. India's assertion that Pakistan is helping the Kashmiri Mujahideens could have some truth if not the whole truth. Would not India have done the same thing if the situation were reversed? If India could be harsh with her weaker neighbors whom she calls traditionally friendly countries and forcibly impose unequal bilateral agreements to make them compliant to their policy goals, what

would she do with her enemy neighbor is for anybody to guess.

One refugee in Pakistan held Kashmir, near Chakhoti village by the side of Jhelum river just a couple of miles from the Line of Control was utterly pessimistic when he told this scribe, "India will never give up the occupied Kashmir. It is neither the people nor the territory. It is the water she needs. If she loses occupied Kashmir, she loses the water. And she will never do that." And perhaps, he has given a very strong argument in favor of Indian aggression. Talking about the unilateral cease-fire by India a senior politician in Islamabad said, "It is the financial crunch that has forced them to call for this cease-fire. They have to maintain 7 lakh forces in Kashmir and it is not easy. It is undoubtedly the highest concentration of armed forces anywhere in the world. And in a difficult terrain maintenance becomes prohibitive."

Kashmir problem is directly influencing the destiny of over 1.25 billion poor people of South Asia. No power including the United States or no international organization including the United Nations can any more stay complacent humoring India or Pakistan and totally disregard the poor billions. If they fail to take appropriate steps to resolve this issue, once for all, they will not only expose their hypocrisy and their vacant rhetorics about preservation of human rights, they will also force the poor oppressed people to lose faith in all human protestations and dignity. Pakistan's endeavors to arouse world opinion by holding international seminars on Kashmir's Solidarity may not be sufficient. The powers that be have to be convinced if they could take action in East Timor, Kosovo and Bosnia why not in Kashmir. The inadmissible Indian attempt to violate and break her obligation should never be accepted. The reports of the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 1995 is still not dead and needs to be implemented. To quote the report says, "The peoples of the State of Jammu and Kashmir acquired a right of self-determination at the time of the partition of India. The right has neither been exercised nor abandoned and therefore remains capable of exercise. The right belongs to the people of the State and not to Pakistan, and is therefore not affected by the act of Government of Pakistan. The parties should be encouraged to seek a negotiated solution to be put to the people of the state for ratification in a referendum."

"Both Pakistan and India should recognize and respond the call for self determination for the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir within its 1947 boundaries, inherent in the relevant United Nations resolutions. The United Nations should reactivate its role as a catalyst in this process unquote." As long both Pakistan and India sincerely do not make up their minds to resolve this issue, there is little chance of peace returning to the troubled land of Jammu and Kashmir. Sattar has stated in his address, "The United Nations Charter provides for the use of all peaceful means, including enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication. Besides, any member has the right to bring any dispute to the attention of the Security Council and the charter provides for the Security Council to promote adjustment of disputes." Nothing more could have been a fairer proposition, but India has not shown any signs of obliging the Security Council. Today, even though the Kashmir problem has become one of the darkest examples of human rights violations, neither the Security Council nor the only super power which boasts itself to be the champion of human rights, are making any sincere attempts to find a final solution. Since this issue is very adversely affecting the destiny of the poorest peoples of this region, all the nations of South Asia must come together and work in unison to restore their basic human right of self-determination to the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir, so that this troubled region may enjoy a lasting peace. ■

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