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# CONTENTS

	Page
LETTERS	3
NEWS NOTES	4
BRIEFS	6
QUOTE UNQUOTE/TRANSITION	7
OPINION : Dr. A.B. Thapa	8
NC (D) CONVENTION: Deuba In Leadership	11
ARTICLE: Vishnu Dev Sharma	18
EDUCATION: Victim of Political Disturbances	20
RPP: On The Verge Of Split	21
BOOK : Powerful Prose	22
PERSPECTIVE: Shiv Shankar Mukherjee	23
PROFILE : Sheela Bahadur Moktan	24



## COVERSTORY : Trade Tangle

The year 2006 will witness the enforcement of SAFTA and BIMSTEC along with Doha Development Agenda of WTO. However, due to poor internal situation, Nepal may have to face tough challenges to be able to benefit from these trading arrangements  
Page 12



## DEMOCRACY: Evergreen Popularity

From King to parties and commoners, everybody talks about democracy along with their separate interpretations  
Page 10



## INTERVIEW:

### Taranath Ranabhat

Speaker of the House of Representatives speaks about the urgent need for reconciliation to restore democratic processes  
Page 16

**SPOTLIGHT**

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People are the real bases of politics of any country. All concepts of sovereignty like right of self-determination and freedom make people the focal point. In a confusing situation of political contradictions in Nepal, the mass of the people who are actively taking part in rallies organized by the King and the political parties are the real indicators. If they are made the base, a synthesis of view will emerge, which would again remind us that the point of unity is greater than that of conflicts and disruptions.

If the people are given free chances to exercise their rights guaranteed by the constitution to choose their governance, most of the problems in Nepal could be resolved to a large extent. The context of the problem at present lies upon the full operation of the constitution again. The King has already instructed the government to complete the elections for municipal and to the parliament level within mid 2007 in whatever the circumstances may come. That has brought the political parties into the agitation again to foil the elections without any viable alternative. However, the mood of confrontation may hardly help to achieve their need.

Mysticism has come into the political predictions that a Tsunami like mass upheaval would bring the change that they desire. A liberal democratic party like Nepali Congress seems to have fallen into a well-laid trap by communists-dominated alliance, which has the declared goal to achieve republican state through the decision of constituent assembly. But, it is not clear who will decide to overthrow the present constitution and hold an election for such constituent assembly. One is not sure if the constituent assembly overwhelmingly decides in favor of active monarchy, whether that decision would be respected by varied brands of communists. At least one thing is very clear, these Romanists in politics would never permit to reactivate the constitution by means of elections from local level to the parliament.

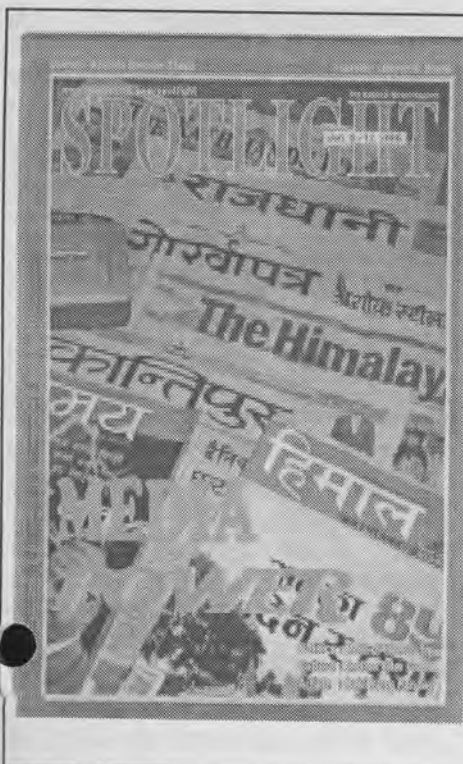
Days are under the countdown for the elections of the municipal level. More than one fifth of the enlightened population of the urban areas may get involved in the elections. Considering responses to the past elections, people in Nepal have always given positive response for any kind of mass participation in the elections process. Even they who don't come to the polling booth may hardly support any disruptive move by agitating parties. Even if parties disrupt the elections, people may consider it against the sanctity of the elections. It would be very difficult to justify obstructing the people from going to vote and it will not appear as a sound democratic practice. One may simply wish that political parties resist the temptation of creating disturbances at the polling time. It is equally true that this kind of elections will not have the support and respectability as it has been seen in the past.

Some people say that the elections in Afghanistan and Iraq have some lessons to Nepal but elections of those countries were held under the control of foreign army occupying those countries. That is not the case here in Nepal. It would have definitely a better chance for credibility. However controversial the actions of the King might have been, monarchy is still a highly revered institution. So, despite protests and dissensions, some edifice of elected bodies may come into operation.

In fact, holding municipal election is not the real solution of the present problem. The country has to get united within the framework of the constitution. For that purpose, every segment of politics has to realize the commonalities of interest in democracy. Sandwiched between two big military powers, Nepal cannot afford to remain a divided house. Conflicts of interests have to be resolved. Even the loud thinking of constituent assembly is not a ready-made solution that can work like a machine to produce desired results instantly without any chaos or conflict. Considering all pros and cons of the situation, let the constitution be reactivated and let all these controversies put into its agenda. The reactivation of the constitution can be done through only two ways: either go to the elections under credible political arrangement or let the previous house be a begin with. The precondition of the revival of the parliament seems to have been already hinted, time and again, by the King to find out a commonality of interest of all. The King has a clear indication that the national interest be the meeting point of all political forces. Unfortunately, that has gone unheeded in the mood of anger and agitation. Politics need a cool-headed approach at this critical time. Compared with any other controversial schemes, this could be less controversial because most of the political parties have commitment in the present constitution and they participated in three subsequent general elections without any reservations about the constitution in the recent past.

But there must be restraint from both the sides. Political parties have to resist their temptation to declare that the revival of the previous parliament would be a stepping stone for republic. That kind of extremist views would do more harm to the cause of democracy than any. The politicians who declare that the revival of the parliament would facilitate them to do away with the institution of monarchy are, in fact, promoting the cause championed by some hardliners who have been lately ushered into the power game. Sensible leaders have to protect their parties from provocateurs who are making the task more and more difficult.

*Keshab*  
**Keshab Poudel**  
Managing Editor



## Media Should Practice Impartiality

The readers have felt that Nepalese media has shied away from professional ethics since the royal take over on October 4, 2002 "MEDIA POWER: At A Critical Juncture" (SPOTLIGHT January 6). They seem to have forgotten basic doctrines of journalism such as impartiality and objectivity. They have started taking sides of certain power centers rather than standing firm on professional ethics. You have raised these issues very analytically and convincingly in this issue. I think it is high time that the media people ought to pay heed to people's call for impartial and responsible coverage.

*Sheela Acharya*  
Naya Bazar

## Unfair Practice

You have raised a very relevant issue that media is clearly divided into two sides and it is hard to get objective information from them at present, through your cover story "MEDIA POWER: At A Critical Juncture" (SPOTLIGHT January 6). Not to mention the prioritization of news, there is a wide contrast in the information provided even of the same event, in state owned media and private media. They choose issues that suit their interest rather than giving information that are useful to the audience. To make matters worse, often the news items are distorted to match their interest. This practice is very unfair to the public. They deserve the right to proper information.

*Rudra Chapagain*  
Kalimati

## Work For An Accountable Media

The Nepalese media has become quite irresponsible lately "MEDIA POWER: At A Critical Juncture" (SPOTLIGHT January 6). Even a proper mechanism to control the media does not seem to be in place at present. While the

impact the media has on the society is clear to all, who the media is accountable to is still not clear. Journalists and media houses themselves are expected to be responsible for the matter they cover. But, at present, they are not working responsibly. They are not thinking much about what effect their coverage will have on society both in the long term and short term. Interestingly, media highlights positive impact of its previous coverage itself, but shuts its eyes to the adverse activities induced by its coverage. So, the professional organizations, the government and the journalists themselves should start thinking about how the media can be made more accountable for its coverage.

*Bikash Pradhan*  
Tripureshwore

## Shame On Us

It is a shame on us all to boast ourselves as one of the richest countries in water resources when we are facing acute power shortage as well as shortage of drinking water "The Plan Will Have Short Term, Middle Term And Long Term Strategy On Water Resources

Development" (SPOTLIGHT January 6). I read the interview with the assistant minister for water resources Binod Kumar Shaha. He has attempted to give some explanations defending the load shedding the people are facing nowadays and has revealed some strategies for power supplies in the future. But people are tired of hearing such assurances. It is now time to work seriously than paying mere lip service. The government should work on all the short term, mid term and long term strategies for power supplies so that the future generation will not suffer from the kinds of problems we are suffering now.

*Hira Regmi*  
Koteshwore

## Government's Failure

I have a different point of view regarding the withdrawal of the unilateral ceasefire by the Maoists "MAOIST TRUCE WITHDRAWAL: The Great Game" (SPOTLIGHT January 6). The end of the truce might have given the government some relief in that it will face fewer criticisms for its armed operations, but it will add more sufferings to the public. The government has failed to understand the intensity of the Maoist problem in rural areas of the country. It has also exposed its superficial opinion regarding the Maoists. The activities of the Maoists are certainly uncivilized, but we should not ignore the fact that such activities were ignited because of social evils prevailing in our society. To put it more simply, their activities are desperate means for social justice. The government has persistently ignored this fact and tried to prove that the Maoists are evils at heart. The government's reluctance to reciprocate the truce has forced them to end the truce. The government might have 'heaved a sigh of relief', as you have put it, but the people have started to agonize. If the government wants the welfare of the people it should immediately initiate for peaceful measures to end violence, for the sake of people if not for the Maoists.

*Kedar Nepal*  
Samakhushi

## Cold Wave In Terai

The dense fog that has enveloped the Terai region has triggered bitter cold wave in the region. According to Weather Forecasting Division, the whole of Terai except far-western region are under the dense fog. Due to low visibility, flights have been disrupted. "There is a possibility that the fog will continue to cover most of Terai region for three to four more days," said weather expert Jagadish Karmacharya of the Division. "This fog is slowly shifting from west to east. This fog has triggered cold wave," he said. Even parts of Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are under cold wave. Weather expert K. B. Malla said that the fog was triggered by a heavy snowfall in Jammu- Kashmir region last Sunday. Lessening difference between maximum and minimum temperature has resulted in bitter cold in the region. Reports say three people have died in Dhanusha due to cold wave. Three old people including a pilgrim from India died in Janakpur on Saturday (January 7). *Kantipur daily reports.*

## UML Condemns Army Presence In Its Program

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), has condemned the incident in Baglung where army personnel in civilian dress had barged into UML meeting. "This is a grave and condemnable act. I want to draw the attention of army chief into this incident," Nepal said. He claimed that the incident could be a part of big conspiracy of the state. On January 7 in Baglung, two unidentified masked men had also accompanied the army men. They claimed as being Maoist and wanted to speak at the program. But a journalist present at the program recognized those in civil dress to be army personnel following which the army personnel took away the journalist to barrack and released him three hours later. In another report, a group of security personnel barged into a meeting organized by UML in Malangawa of Sarlahi district and noted down names of the participants. This action made the participants flee with fear. The meeting was being organized as a

part of the party's boycott the poll campaign. *Kantipur daily reports.*

## RPP To Take Action Against Ministers

The party establishment of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has sought written explanation within 24 hours from 10 of its leaders including six ministers in the current government. "If they do not furnish satisfactory explanation, the party will take strict action and even oust them from ordinary membership," said Khem Raj Pandit, co-general secretary of the party. Those facing actions include Kamal Thapa, Brijesh Kumar Gupta, Roshan Karki, Toran Gurung, Bhuwan Pathak, Pratap Ram Lohar (all ministers in the current cabinet) as well as central members Padma Sundar Lawati, Durga Shrestha, Rajib Parajuli and Jagat Gauchan. The dissident faction led by Lawati and Thapa have already called a special convention of the party on January 10-11. These developments suggest that RPP could be heading for another split. *Leading dailies report.*

## Kids Killed In Explosion

In Dolpa, two kids were killed in an explosion caused by the Maoists, reports Nepal Samacharpatra daily. Last week, two children of Chhiring Thundup Ghale – a 5-year-old boy and a 2-year-old girl – were killed when the Maoists exploded bomb in his house, according to the Royal Nepalese Army Public Relations Directorate. Likewise, an eleven-year-old kid has been killed in Ramechhap district in an explosion of a bomb left behind by the Maoists. Jangbu Sherpa of Gumdel-3, Techhim was killed a month ago in the explosion. This information was received in the district headquarters Manthali only last week, according to Kantipur daily. *Leading dailies report.*

## Four Nepali Students Die In Accident In US

Four Nepalese students died in a car accident in Texas, US on Saturday (January 7). Amrit Dhital, 21, Pralhad Gurung, 22, Pushkar Acharya, 21 and

Subas Gurung, 20, were killed when their car traveling from New York to Dallas met with an accident in Texas. This tragic incident has been reported less than a week after a similar car accident had claimed the lives of three Nepali students in the US. *Leading dailies report.*

## Sister Nirmala Arriving In City

Sister Nirmala, the head of the Kolkata-based Missionaries of Charity, is scheduled to visit Nepal from January 13. This will be her first visit to the country after she was picked up as a worthy successor of Mother Teresa in 1997. Sister Nirmala, who is now touring north-east India, is a Nepali by birth. The visit is being billed a milestone in the annals of the Missionaries of Charity movement in Nepal. Church sources revealed that activists of the mission will be according a warm welcome to her at the Tribhuvan International Airport before she is driven to the Assumption Church at Dhobighat, Jawalakhel where she will attend a mass. The visit, which has been kept a well-guarded secret by her followers in Nepal, could be officially announced just two days before she actually arrives. The visit, meant to explore the possibility of extending Nepal network of the order, is expected to culminate in the nun visiting Pokhara. Sister Nirmala, who is now past 78, was initially picked up to succeed Mother Teresa for a period of six years. Later, she reportedly was retained as the permanent head of the order. *The Himalayan Times daily reports.*

## Maoists Step Up Attack

Three police personnel of Armed Police Force (APF) were killed when a group of Maoists opened fire at Rajha chowk near Nepalgunj airport on Thursday (Jan 5) evening. The clash occurred at 6 in the evening and continued for one and a half hours. Two civilians were injured in the incident. After the clash erupted the scheduled flights of Buddha Air and Yeti Air were delayed even as passengers stayed within the airport. Following the incident, the whole area in and around Nepalgunj airport remained tense. In a separate incident, six soldiers and a civilian were injured when the Maoists exploded a bomb targeting a patrolling unit of army in

Tersapatti in Pokhara. Likewise, a civilian was injured in a bomb explosion in Tansen, Palpa. Two civilians were injured in another bomb explosion in Biratnagar. Maoists had exploded a bomb at district education office in Biratnagar. *Kantipur daily reports.*

## Army Returns From Rolpa

Coinciding with the withdrawal of ceasefire by the Maoists, the team of Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) soldiers returned from their three-week-long operation in Rolpa. An army official said that the soldiers returned after accomplishing their mission. He said, "The army reached the place that was said to be under Maoist control. This, in itself, was a major success." The army had reached places such as Thawang, Thawang, Jangkot, Kureli and Oat — claimed by the Maoists to be under their firm control. Following the withdrawal of ceasefire, RNA soldiers returned to urban areas and district headquarters. During the operation, a large number of Maoists had come down to Terai regions. They even conducted a mass meeting in Bardiya on Tuesday (Jan 3) where central member of the Maoists Ram Charan Chaudhary said that they have completed the first phase of 'strategic offensive' and would now be starting the second phase. *Leading dailies report.*

## US Flays Maoist Bombings

The United States has condemned the Maoist bombing of government office buildings. Sean McCormack, a spokesperson for the US State Department, in a press statement on Wednesday, said the US has also urged the government to urgently reach out to the political parties and find a way back to democracy. It has expressed concern over the withdrawal of unilateral ceasefire by the Maoists calling it as 'unhelpful.' *Leading dailies report.*

## 25 Year Water Plan Unveiled

The government has unveiled a 25-year Water Plan promising to provide electricity to all by 2027 at the total investment of Rs 1218 billion. The plan consists of five-year short term; 15-year

mid term; and 25-year long term strategies. The plan was unveiled by the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS). The plan includes various sectors like water-induced disaster mechanism; quality drinking water; sanitation and health; irrigation for agriculture development; hydro power; industry; tourism; fisheries and water transport. The plan aims to install hydro power plants totaling the capacity of 4000 MW by 2027. Around 75% of households would be connected to national grade; 20% would enjoy electricity generated by local micro hydro plants; and 5% would benefit from alternative energy sources. *Nepal Samacharpatra daily reports.*

## Hydropower Invest Mart In The Offing

With the objective of promoting investment in hydropower sector, the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), in cooperation with German Technical Agency (GTZ) and Winrock International, is going to organize the Hydropower Invest Mart (HIM) in Kathmandu later this month. Addressing a press meet in Kathmandu on Sunday (January 8), president of CNI, Binod Kumar Chaudhary, expressed hope that HIM would be a 'match-making forum' bringing together private sector power developers, financiers, investors and technocrats. He said the Mart was taking place at a time when Nepal was reeling through load-shedding. Sridhar Devkota of the Small Hydropower Promotion Project, GTZ, said small hydropower was only a drop in the bucket but that every drop counted while talking of electricity. Suman Basnet of Winrock International (WI)—an INGO specializing in micro-hydro development, said a number of stakeholders would be involved in the Mart and are expected to take up some of the more attractive projects for financing. Ratna Sansar Shrestha, a Chartered Accountant who is also affiliated to Winrock International, said Nepal had the liquidity of around 300 billion rupees in its financial system. "If only 5 percent of that money could be invested in hydropower sector, Nepal

could herself develop power plants of up to 30 MW every year," he said. Shrestha said private sector financing in the hydro-power sector was still a comparatively new phenomenon around the world and that there was the need for Nepali financiers, including banks, to take up the idea of project financial without asking for individual or corporate guarantee. According to officials, Nepal will need up to 100 million US dollar annual investment just to meet the domestic demand for power after 2008. Nepali banks have so far made an investment amounting to four billion rupees only in the hydropower sector. Experts say Nepali banks, however, have the capacity to invest up to US\$ 20 million annually. According to CNI, would-be investors from India are also expected to take part in the three-day Mart (January 24-26). The Mart will have technical sessions and will also showcase products and services of various organizations working in the small hydropower sector. Considered to be the second highest in terms of hydropower potential in the world, Nepal has so far been able to generate only 2 percent of its 43,000 MW of hydropower potential, according to studies. *Compiled from reports.*

## SC Puts Off RCCC Decision

The Supreme Court (SC) has put off the final decision on the fate of Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC) till February 13. The apex court had earlier stated it would announce the decision on January 5. Sources said that the postponement was caused by the delay in the submission of written statement by pleading sides. Legal practitioners have expressed dissatisfaction over the postponement. Currently, former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is under detention following the decision by the RCCC that he committed corruption in Melamchi project. Various legal experts have been saying that the RCCC itself is an unconstitutional body. A petition had thus been filed at the SC demanding the abrogation of RCCC. *Leading dailies report.*



King Gyanendra meets with people during his visit to eastern region

Gorkhapatra

**ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT HAS HANDED OVER** the ownership of small roads to the local bodies, the latter have not been able to handle the responsibility. Since last six months, not only the road extension but even repair and maintenance have remained disrupted. Since this year, the government had handed over all roads except highways and VIP roads to the local bodies. However, the government has neither released adequate budget nor technical expertise and equipment to the local bodies for the purpose. "At present, we do not have materials and resources for road maintenance. But we are developing new system for the purpose," said Sanjay Raj Upadhyaya, chief of construction department of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). The Road Board has provided Rs 7.5 million to KMC but Upadhyaya says it is highly inadequate. Likewise, the board has provided Rs 3 million to Lalitpur sub-metropolitan city. The amount, according to Ashok Shrestha, senior officer of Lalitpur sub-metropolitan, is not enough even for the maintenance of a single road.

**THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR** Human Rights Louise Arbour called for full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in Nepal's armed conflict, following the end of a four-month unilateral ceasefire by the Maoists. "It is a tragedy for the people of Nepal that full-scale armed conflict may now resume. But there need not and must not be the same gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights standards that have been perpetrated during previous phases of the conflict," said Arbour in a press statement. She said: "Nepal is a party to the Geneva Conventions as well as to most international human rights treaties: Its security forces are aware of and must fully respect their legal obligations. The leader of the CPN (Maoist) has made general commitments to observe international humanitarian law and respect human rights: I call on them to declare publicly their acceptance of all that these principles require, and to explain to their cadres their responsibility to respect them in practice." She also said that

those on either side of the conflict who commit violations must be held accountable: not only the perpetrators but also those in command of forces which commit such acts may be subject to individual criminal responsibility before a court of law. "I remind the CPN (Maoist) that this includes government officials, the families of security personnel, and persons alleged to be informers." Arbour added: "I remind the state security forces that this includes unarmed persons thought to be Maoists or to have aided the Maoists." "My Office in Nepal will be closely monitoring the conduct of both parties in the period ahead, and I will be reporting accordingly to the Commission on Human Rights," the High Commissioner said.

#### A TEAM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Commission (NHRC) located 14 'disappeared' persons when it conducted a sudden and unannounced inspection of Mahabir and Jagadal battalion of Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) in Chhauni. The commission has made the list of the 14 persons public. The NHRC team had found nine such persons including a woman in Jagadal and five persons in Mahabir battalion. "During the visit, majority of the persons complained that they were kept in detention for a prolonged period without allowing any outside contact including with their family members," said a statement released by the NHRC. Those discovered during the inspection include Dutta Bahadur Budha, Harish Chandra Budha and Bharat Pandey of Jumla; Balaram Chaudhary and Krishna Prasad Mainali of Kailali; Ganesh Prasad Sharma of Dailekh; Buddhiman Sarki of Dolpa; Chhabisara Sunar of Bardiya; Jit Bahadur Thapa of Palpa; Hom Prakash Shrestha of Rukum; Man Bahadur Malla and Chakra Bahadur Thapa of Salyan; and Jaya Bahadur Gharti and Kul Bahadur Gharti of Rolpa district.

#### NEPAL TOPS THE LIST OF NATIONS WITH HIGHEST

instances of press censorship and China tops the list in the number of journalists kept in prison, says the annual report on press freedom published by the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF). The report enlists 567 cases of censorship in Nepal, which is more than half the number of cases reported globally (1006) in 2005. When it comes to the cases of physical attacks and threats, Bangladesh and Nepal are on the top of the list. "More than 1300 physical attacks and threats were recorded by RSF during the year – more than in the previous one," the report said. "The occurred almost daily in Bangladesh and Nepal and came from all sides – police, government or opposition party activists, and members of armed groups. The attackers are rarely punished and can thus continue to target journalists undeterred." Iraq remains the most dangerous country for the third consecutive year with 24 journalists and five media assistants having been killed there. According to the reports, two journalists were killed in Nepal. China is still the world's biggest prison for journalists with 32 journalists being kept in jail this year. ■



“The King has pushed the Maoists back to their violent ways.”

**Madhav Kumar Nepal**, General Secretary of the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), addressing a mass meeting in Birgunj.

\* \* \*

“It will not be difficult for the RNA (Royal Nepalese Army) soldiers, who have already helped conduct several elections in foreign lands as peace keepers, to help conduct elections in 58 municipalities.”

**Tanka Dhakal**, Minister for Local Development, speaking at an interaction with some political parties, in *The Kathmandu Post*.

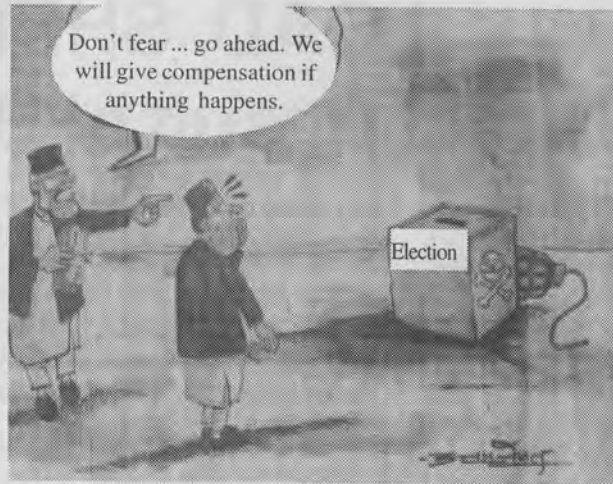
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“As seven parties have no discrepancies in agendas and activities, it would be wiser for the alliance now to make do with the single office, staffs and logistics as it would save their expenses.”

**Bal Krishna Nyaupane**, senior advocate, expressing his irony over the activities of the seven-political parties’ alliance, speaking in ‘Bahas’ program at Nepal Television.

\* \* \*

“Though elections are fundamentals of democracy, it may not be credible in a situation where political parties are calling for its active boycott. The most sane, non-violent and practical way out is for the



Rajdhani

palace to reach out to parties and together bring Maoists to mainstream.”

**Shiv Shankar Mukherjee**, Indian ambassador to Nepal, in an interview with *Frontline* talk show at Kantipur Television.

\* \* \*

“The nation should go for a constituent assembly to bring the rebels into mainstream politics, end their violence, and to take a decision about the monarchy’s position as well.”

**Daman Nath Dhungana**, former speaker and one of the drafters of the 1990 constitution, speaking at a program in Kathmandu.

\* \* \*

“We will not let the polls be successful at any cost. Let the government put prices

on our heads and issue red corner notices against us.”

**Bamdev Gautam**, standing committee member of the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), speaking at a mass meeting in Birgunj.

\* \* \*

“Maoists are trained and armed by India.”

**Satchit SJB Rana**, member of Raj Parishad Standing Committee, at Reporters’ Club.

\* \* \*

“If I could I would take half the Nepalese population to Europe.”

**Anil Sangraula**, Nepali feature film director, in *Rajdhani*.

\* \* \*

## TRANSITION

**NOMINATED: Meera Rana** and **Ruby Joshi**, as the Board members of Radio Broadcast Development Committee; **Madhusudhan Pradhan** as the board member of the National Film Development Board; **Purna Ratna Bajracharya**, **Kiran Pande** and **Jal Shah** as the board members of Film Censor Board; and **Manohari Thapa** and **Jasuda Pradhan** as the board members of Nepal Television, by the government.

**AWARDED: Sangeeta Shakya**, with the ‘Narayan Gopal Youth Music Award’ of this year, by the National Youth Fund.

Butwal Power Company (BPC) Ltd., with the International Blue Planet Award, for Andhikhola hydropower project, by UNESCO.

**Shiva Regmi**, literary journalist, with the ‘Press Council Literary Journalism Award’ of this year, by the Press Council.

**Christine Winifred Preston**, a representative of the United Mission to Nepal, with the Order of the British Empire (OBE), by the British government,

for services to and development in Nepal and Bangladesh.

**ANNOUNCED: Dr. Khagendra Prasad Luintel**, associate professor at the Tribhuvan University, as the winner of the ‘Krishna Kumari Gurung Memorial Award’ of this year, by Chitwan Literary Council.

**Tirtha Niraula** and **Sudarshan Bikram Rana**, as winners of the ‘Arniko Yuwa Kala Award’ of this year, by the National Youth Fund.

**APPOINTED: Kishor Nepal**, as the editor of Nepal Weekly magazine, by Kantipur publications.

# LOAD SHEDDING: Direct Result of Bad Planning

By DR. AB THAPA

Just few days back the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has announced that it is immediately going to start load shedding. One of the vernacular dailies "Kantipur" has tried to explain why the NEA had to resort to load shedding. Needless to say that nobody expects newspapers would be able to explain the true cause of the present load shedding. The daily and other media, however, must be thanked for their efforts to highlight this serious issue.

For many of us closely following the activities related to Nepal's water resources development, in general, and the hydropower generation expansion, in particular, the news of the load shedding has not come as a complete surprise. Everybody knew that the NEA would be forced in very near future to resort to load shedding. An attempt was made to explain about it in one of the articles published in the journal "SPOTLIGHT" on the NEA's Annual Report 2003/4. The excerpt from that article is given hereinafter.

"The IPP owned hydropower plants are not going to be helpful to the NEA in future also to mitigate crisis of power shortage when the demand for electricity further increases. The total present firm capacity of all the IPP owned hydropower stations might be only about 60 MW during the critical dry season months when the demand for electricity is the highest despite the fact that the present total installed capacity of the IPP owned hydropower stations is about 140 MW. As a result, the real total generating capacity in the system would be only about 505 MW (excluding procurement from India) which is less than the maximum peak demand recorded at 515 MW last year. Thus in the coming winter season load shedding would be inevitable if electricity is not imported from India".

## Low-Valued Khimti Project Energy

Khimti Power Project deal with the private developer is a typical example that helps to a certain extent to explain why so quickly the present power shortage crisis precipitated, and why the NEA is now facing financial problems. Installed capacity of the Khimti Project is 60 MW whereas the firm capacity is only about 18 MW. It can readily be derived from the Karnali Project analysis that the actual power value of the Khimti Project would be less than half of the power value of any other similar type of run-of-the-

river type project. If such project is provided with a small daily storage pond that would allow to operate the hydropower station at full capacity even when the river discharge is sharply reduced (like Marshyangdi, Kali-Gandaki, Trishuli, Sundarikal projects).

It is relatively easy to determine the energy value for secondary energy. It is, however, quite a complex task to disaggregate the value of firm energy and firm capacity because the firm energy and the firm capacity are inextricably linked. Despite such difficulties the Karnali Multipurpose Project study provides a good analysis of such disaggregation. The result of disaggregation of benefits into capacity and energy values derived from the Karnali study report helps to understand how we were terribly wrong to purchase on a big scale at a high price electricity from the private developers that fetches insignificant value.

It should be explained that the Karnali Multipurpose Project would be having a power station with an installed capacity of 10.8 million KW. Firm capacity is expected to be 9 million KW. Average energy of the project would be 20842 GWh/year whereas the firm energy would be 15007 GWh/year. The values presented hereinafter have been discounted at 10% to the year 2001 though the whole analysis of the feasibility study has been discounted to the year 2003.

According to the Karnali Project feasibility study the firm power (capacity and energy) value of the Karnali Project is expected to be US\$ 81.9/MWh. Just the energy

value including both firm and secondary energy is expected to be only about US \$ 16.6/MWh. Thus the capacity value of the Karnali Project would be US\$ 65.3/MWh. In other words, the firm capacity value of the Karnali Project is going to be about 4 times greater than the energy value.

## Electricity Generation Expansion

Most of the foreign donors and development banks had helped Nepal to implement hydropower projects applying sound engineering practices. They have conducted on our behalf thorough studies of the mega projects like the Karnali High Dam Project. Unfortunately, we have not even cared to study carefully the reports of those very important projects. As a result, we are, in fact, misleading the country by pushing ahead to implement the 300 MW Upper Karnali Mini Project

*The IPP owned hydropower plants are not going to be helpful to the NEA in future also to mitigate crisis of power shortage when the demand for electricity further increases. The total present firm capacity of all the IPP owned hydropower stations might be only about 60 MW during the critical dry season months when the demand for electricity is the highest despite the fact that the present total installed capacity of the IPP owned hydropower stations is about 140 MW. As a result, the real total generating capacity in the system would be only about 505 MW*

that would preclude the viability of the 4000MW Upper Karnali Project, which is one of the most attractive hydropower projects, despite the clear warning contained in the World Bank supported feasibility study report.

It is certain that the demand for electricity in Nepal would be rapidly growing in future also. This trend is perhaps primarily due to shifting of the population from the rural to urban areas. Thus there is a need for launching a sound electricity generation expansion plan. It is feared that we might go terribly wrong if we did not correct in time our wrong perception that the hydropower can be planned and implemented without giving due regard to technical and economic matters.

Everybody knows that, at present, the actual generation capacity of our hydropower plants is greatly reduced during the winter seasons when the demand for electricity is the highest. It is quite clear that we are already experiencing a capacity deficit though we might still be running into significant energy surpluses. It, indeed, is a serious drawback. Concerned agencies and media are often providing incorrect information about the solution to these problems. It is not true that we cannot overcome this difficulty without building hydropower stations, like the Kulekhani, that have very large storage reservoir. Similarly we do not seem to care to pay attention to the fact that the type of power plant must be selected based on the nature of the power demand. It is a well known fact that for a certain type of load it is far more economic to build diesel plants than other types of power stations.

#### **Karnali Project Feasibility Study**

Power system study of India's northern grid was conducted under the Karnali Project feasibility study. The feasibility study has arrived at the conclusion that at capacity factors below 20% the diesel plants would be far more economic (for the year 2000) in terms of energy as well as capacity by comparison with combined cycle, coal based or other type of power stations.

#### **Kulekhani-3 Confusion**

Government of Japan had provided financial assistance to conduct feasibility study of the Kulekhani-3 hydropower. Study team had considered various alternative capacities ranging from 15MW to 75 MW. They had rightly proposed that the capacity of the Kulekhani-3 Project should be raised to about 75 MW to supply electricity to meet the demand for peaking energy. Topography and other related conditions allow increasing the capacity of this project without undue rise in the project cost. The proposed 75 MW Kulekhani Project is not a complicated project and, thus, it could be implemented within a short period. Nepal was experiencing at that time acute shortage of electricity to meet the peaking demand.

Kulekhani-3, indeed, was the most suited project to meet our energy demand. It was a great surprise that our experts in the NEA, Planning Commission and Electricity Department did not seem to have any understanding about the capacity value. They were all the time insisting upon only the direct energy value solely in terms of generation cost of per KWh electricity. In their opinion the 15 MW Kulekhani-3 Project

was far better by comparison with the 75 MW Kulekhani-3. As a result, the 75 MW Kulekhani-3 Project was sidelined.

India, too, like Nepal, is experiencing acute shortage of peaking energy for decades. In several states the load shedding has become a regular phenomenon. Now India is even planning to implement on a grand scale pumped storage plants to resolve the peaking power shortage problem.

#### **Why India Chooses Pumped Storage Plants**

At present, India is experiencing an acute shortage of peaking energy. At the beginning of the Eight Plan, the total peaking shortage was 20% whereas the energy shortage was only 9% of the total power generation. The thermal and nuclear power stations are suitable to supply electricity to meet the base load demand of the system. It is not economic to use them to supply peaking energy. Unlike Nepal, India is trying to resolve its power shortage problem based on sound engineering principles. It is making every effort to improve the hydrothermal mix for ensuring better system operating condition. However, the share of hydropower in the overall power generating capacity has steadily declined since the last few decades. The share of the hydropower in the overall power generating capacity was 50.6% in 1963. But few years before it has come down to only 25.66%.

Most of the good sites for the hydropower development have already been developed in the Northern India. There are even now several good sites for hydropower development in the North-Eastern India which have not as yet been used. However, such sites are at locations far away from the load centers. As a result, the Government of India in recent years had to embark on a plan to develop the pump storage schemes. ■

*(Dr. Thapa writes on water resources)*

## **Optical Fibre Project Starts**

East West Optical Fiber SDH Project, a Nepal-India joint project was jointly launched by information secretary Kumar Prasad Poudel and ambassador of India to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee at the office of Nepal Telecom in Jawalakhel on Monday. According to officials of NT, after the completion of the project, the capacity of carrying trunk calls would be tripled and people would benefit with much more effective telephone lines. The Project is a part of 7<sup>th</sup> telecom project to provide an optical fibre backbone to the telecom information superhighway along the East Wet Highway from Bhadrapur in the east to Nepalgunj in the west covering 79 stations en route. Issuing a press statement, Embassy of India has said that the project, amounting to Rs 1.18 billion has been funded by India and was executed by Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL).

# DEMOCRACY

## Evergreen Popularity

From the King to the political parties and commoners, all have their own interpretation of democracy

By KESHAB POUDEL

A democracy is a cap in Nepal, which fits everybody's head. From the King to the commoner and the political leaders, all of them love the word democracy. Wherever he visits, King Gyanendra expresses his commitment to democracy and democratic system.

Similarly, leaders of organized political parties also claim that their agitation is for the restoration of democracy and democratic system. Backing the cause of democracy, common people attend the meeting of both the King and political parties. Interestingly, everybody feels there is severe lacking on the other side. Persons in the government believe that they are committed to democracy and are sincerely observing its rules.

"This government is committed to democratic process," said Home Minister Kamal Thapa. "Holding elections of municipalities is a first step towards restoring it."

They blame opposition parties for going against democracy by boycotting the ensuing municipal elections by all means at their disposal. The opponents of the government have more forceful arguments when they say that the people are not represented in the government and, thus, the persons in the government are not accountable to the people.

"How can we participate the elections when the persons in the government do not have any accountability to the people," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of CPN-UML. "This election is just a part of drama."

Contrary to the claims by rival groups, people in general are supportive

to both attending the programs organized by both sides. The same mass of people welcomes the King in one program and attend the next program organized by political parties.

Government side is enthusiastic at seeing the huge presence of crowd welcoming the King Gyanendra in his visits to different parts of the country. "People are with the King. Don't you see such a large number crowd coming from far away places to welcome him. This



Mass attending meeting of political parties: People power

shows people are with the King and not the political leaders who misruled the country," said former chief of the army staff and a member of Raj Parishad Standing Committee Satchit Sumsher Rana.

Huge attendance of crowd in public meetings also inspire leaders of organized political parties who say that people are against the monarchy. "Our recent mass meeting showed that the people are with us. People have shown their strong commitments towards democracy," said Nepal addressing a mass meeting in Chitwan. "This agitation will not end as long as absolute democracy is restored."

The situation confuses the political forces. "It might seem either the people are fool or too much ignorant behaving like cattle who are made to move due to some fear of punishment or hope of reward. But both these assessments would be incorrect. People are too wise and understand the basic contents of democracy. In fact, they seem to be wiser than the people for whom they come to march and chant their slogans," said a political analyst.

People are the real bases of politics of any country. All concepts of sovereignty like right of self-determination and freedom make people the focal point. In a confusing situation of political contradictions in Nepal, the mass of the people who are actively taking part in rallies organized by the King and the political parties are the

indicators. If they are made the base, a synthesis of view will emerge, which would again remind us that the point of unity is greater than that of conflicts and disruptions.

If the people are given free chances to exercise their rights guaranteed by the constitution to choose their governance, most of the problems in Nepal could be resolved to a large extent. The context of the problem at present lies upon the full operation of the constitution again. The King has already instructed the government to

complete the elections for municipal a to the parliament level within mid 2007 in whatever the circumstances may come. That has brought the political parties into the agitation again to foil the elections without any viable alternative. However, the mood of confrontation may hardly help to achieve their need.

Whether one likes it or not, the geo-strategic nature of the country has taught common Nepalese where their interest really lies. Their choice is clear as they want both the King as well as the organized political forces to safely exercise their democratic rights by protecting the sovereignty and independence of the country. ■

# NC DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

## Deuba In Leadership

Nepali Congress (Democratic) concludes its general convention without proving the need of its existence

By KESHAB POUDEL

After completion of party convention, leaders and workers of Nepali Congress (Democratic) showed that they could as dramatically assimilate into their mother party as they split. Their recently concluded convention indicated that they don't have any different ideology or spirit challenge their mother party.

Concluded after four days of colorful gathering by electing former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who had initiated the process to get support from western country including the United States to modernize Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) and who is now in prison for unknown crime in Melamchi Project, as the president, NC (D) termed its decision to omit constitutional monarchy from party statute as a revolutionary step.

As the fate of Deuba and Prakash

Man Singh, ex minister and son of Ganesh Man Singh, is uncertain as the apex court is yet to decide the constitutionality of Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC), it is certain that NC (D) will remain under the leadership of one or another acting presidents.

Democracy is itself an inclusive system. Nobody understands how the party, which has many doctorate political ideologues with degrees from Indian universities to American universities, agreed to experiment "new democracy of inclusiveness."

"We have taken some historic decision more progressive than any other democratic parties including Nepali Congress," said Gopal Man Shrestha, acting president of the party. "Our party has also taken some drastic steps to prove our credentials as a genuine democratic party."

Despite their intense pressure and request, founder member of Nepali Congress and former prime minister

decision. We have a bitter experience of making the party president all-powerful," said Shrestha, who is elected to the central committee. "Our clear perception on monarchy and democracy will benefit us."

Similar flags, similar faces and pamphlets with the pasted photographs of ideologues like B.P. Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai at the jamboree of NC (Democrat) convention showed that it did not have any separate identity and ideology to establish as a separate democratic party. Although it took no radical shift compared to mother party Nepali Congress on the issues like constitutional monarchy and democracy, the coverage by media of the convention of former prime minister Deuba's party was intensive. From government media to populist private media, there was wide coverage.



Convention of NC (Democratic): Same agenda, different party

Rajdhani

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai did not take part in the convention remaining neutral in the politics of two Nepali Congress.

NC (D) amended its party statute increasing the number of elected members in the party central committee including reservation for more than eight seats to women, Dalits, Janajatis and terai but the new statute has weakened the role of party president in such a way that he cannot take any decision on his own at the time of major political crisis.

"Our president has to consult with the party leaders at the time of taking major

"This party will survive as long as there is a requirement for the politics of extremism. The division of the party will help to pressure both of them to adopt extreme stand to continue present political stalemate," said a senior leader of Nepali Congress. "Otherwise, there is no sense to have a separate parties with similar name and similar ideology."

Attended by all eight senior leaders of present politics and some leaders of India's political parties, the message of the convention was clear that the politics of Nepal is heading towards extremism.

## SAFTA, BIMSTEC &amp; WTO

# Trade Tangle

The year 2006 could be a watershed for Nepal in terms of its trading relations with regional and international community. This is the year that will witness the enforcement of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Furthermore, the year 2006 is also expected to witness the completion of Doha Development Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) opening up untold trade potentials for countries like Nepal. However, the internal instability and conflict, poor economic growth, need for reforms in policies and laws along with inadequate preparations on the part of private sector mean that Nepal could be staring at absolutely nothing. On the top of it, the doubt surrounding the renewal of the key Transit Treaty with India has added to the uncertainty. If the country wishes to take advantage of these regional and multilateral free trading arrangements, it would be wise to set the house in order first

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

**J**ust as the year 2006 began with new and challenging trading prospects for Nepal, the news came that the transit treaty with India was not automatically renewed as was widely hoped for by the Nepalese business community and the government.

Indian officials refused to let the Transit Treaty renew automatically for

another seven years by presenting their concerns at the second review meeting on the treaty held in New Delhi last week. Instead of renewing it automatically for seven years, India has agreed to extend it for another three months and has proposed some amendments. The Indian proposals include that only specified transit points should be used in order to transport 'sensitive products.' Likewise, Indian side has also proposed three more

changes including reducing the existing 15 transit points; allowing Indian nationals to travel to Indian territory by using Nepali territory; and amending the railway procedures for the use of Inland Container Depot in Birgunj.

On the face of it, the Indian proposals seem to be guided primarily by some legitimate Indian economic concerns. But since they have come at a crucial time when political developments in Nepal are not seemingly palatable to



**Exportable garment products:** How will the future turn out for them?

the South Block, the apprehensions of 1989-like trade blockade could be in the offing gained currency.

Although Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee has publicly termed such apprehensions as 'unfounded' in his recent television interview, the fact that the transit treaty has come under uncertainty is likely to be a big setback for Nepali traders.

#### Trade Implications

From January 1, 2006, the SAFTA has formally come into effect. BIMSTEC is expected to come into force from July this year.

As per SAFTA provisions, the seven member states – Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives - will have to reduce custom tariffs. Nepal, too, will need to cut down its tariff by at least 10 percent on goods that are not in the Sensitive List by August, 2006. In the second phase of tariff slashing, Nepal would need to cut them by at least 30 percent within next two years and within 2016 it will need to bring them down between 0 to 5 percent.

Within SAFTA, there are two categories – LDCs including Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Maldives and developing countries including rest of the member states. According to officials,

Nepal's Sensitive List for LDCs has 1300 products while that for developing member states has 1355 products.

The BIMSTEC is different to SAFTA in that it is much broader covering issues of trade in services, trade in goods as well as investment and technical cooperation. Furthermore, it also provides Nepal with possibilities to expand trade towards East Asian countries like Thailand and Myanmar. BIMSTEC member states include Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. For the first phase of the enforcement of the free trade pact, the BIMSTEC member states have reached an understanding on the framework related to 'trade in goods.'

On top of these, the new understanding reached at Sixth Hong Kong Ministerial of WTO also could help in improving the international trade scenario for Nepal. The developed countries have agreed to allow 97 percent of products from LDCs duty free and quota free access to their markets. Nepal is excitedly expecting that the readymade garment will be included in this 97 percent. The country has suffered a drop by 41 percent in the exports of readymade apparels to the United States in 2005 after the Multi Fiber Agreement

expired. Likewise, the commitment to simplify the Rules of Origin by the developed countries and their promise to extend technical cooperation could also turn out to be beneficial.

It is still unknown what the combined implications of the SAFTA, BIMSTEC and WTO will be on Nepal's trade status. "Each agreements are distinct. SAFTA is mainly concerned only on trade in goods. BIMSTEC is broader as it also includes trade in services and investment whereas WTO is a wide-ranging multilateral rule-based trading regime. Basically, Nepal needs to develop products and services that it can trade with others," said Navin Dahal, executive director of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE). According to him, these agreements could, at best, provide 'signaling effect' on the country's economy.

Agrees Rajendra Kumar Khetan, noted industrialist and vice president of Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI). "The combined effect cannot be predicted as such," he said, adding that the impact in real sense could be seen only after 3 to 5 years. He, however, laments the lack of awareness among private and academia on ways and means of taking advantage of the newly emerging situation.



**Handicraft item:** Competitive advantage

# "Combined Effect Cannot Be Predicted As Such"

— RAJENDRA KUMAR KHETAN

**RAJENDRA KUMAR KHETAN** is a noted industrialist. A vice president of Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), Khetan is also well-acquainted with international and regional trading practices. He recently took part in Sixth Hong Kong Ministerial of World Trade Organization (WTO) as a private sector representative. He spoke with **SANJAYA DHAKAL** on issues related to trading arrangements and their likely impact on Nepal. Excerpts:

**In 2006, Nepal will be embarking on a new path of trade with the introduction of SAFTA, BIMSTEC as well as renewed WTO commitments. How do you foresee the combined implications of these trading arrangements on Nepali trade and industry?**

The impact in real sense shall follow only after 3/5 years (2010 & beyond) when the economy will be really integrated with the inter and intra regional trading arrangements including SAFTA, BIMSTEC and WTO. We still have a lot of processes to complete like custom duties, infrastructure, opening of the sectors and reforms in law and policies. The combined effect cannot be predicted as such. The strategy to enter these major three trading arrangements are for different purposes. WTO's membership is aimed at integrating Nepalese economy with global economy. Membership of SAFTA is for the purpose of having one single inter and intra market within SAARC. And BIMSTEC's membership is to boost exports. However, it seems within private sector there is not much of awareness on all these. Such awareness is absent even at academia level.

**How will SAFTA, in particular, be beneficial to Nepal? How do you, as an**

**industrialist, see this regional free trade agreement?**

It will be pertinent here to quote the important provisions of SAFTA. The *Para 3(2) d* reads – "SAFTA shall involve the free movement of goods, between countries through, inter alia, the elimination of tariffs, para tariffs and non-tariff restrictions on the movement of goods, and any other equivalent measures. The *Para 3(2) f* reads – The special needs of the Least Developed Contracting States shall be clearly recognized by adopting concrete preferential measures in their favor on a non-reciprocal basis. Likewise, *Para 8(g)* reads – transit facilities for efficient intra-SAARC trade, especially for the land-locked Contracting States. These provisions show the aims and objectives of SAFTA. Now it is up to the governments and leaders to demonstrate political will to implement them.

**What about the impact of BIMSTEC agreement? Does it hold any promise to Nepali traders and entrepreneurs?**

Not much. But obviously, Nepal has expanded its market with BIMSTEC's membership both in trade and service sector. So we need to build products and competitiveness (to take advantage).

**You took part in Hong Kong ministerial of WTO recently. What are your observations? Has it been beneficial to Nepal?**

Basically, the issues in favor of LDCs were well represented. For example, the understanding reached to provide duty free and quota free market access for 32 LDCs and technical assistance under integrated framework for capacity building of needy economies and the issue of cutting off subsidy in agriculture by EU by 2013 are all welcome steps.

**At a time when we are talking about free trade and its benefits, there is an uncertainty over transit treaty with India. How do you see this?**



I think transit treaty with India will be renewed. Only the matter of Nepal becoming transit point between India and China will take some time (to materialize) since all three capitals have to be involved and there has to be political will, as well, among all.

**Don't you think Nepal needs to pursue the issue of 'guaranteed transit' for land-locked countries in the framework of WTO or other regional trading arrangements?**

The minimum requirement of one transit point for a land locked country is not a problem under many existing international understandings and conventions.

**What are your thoughts on the recent reports that the government may be planning to reduce custom tariffs substantially? Is it in line with our WTO commitments or does it have the potential to damage domestic industries?**

It is obviously in line with WTO, SAFTA and BIMSTEC commitments. However, it will have impact on domestic industries. Hence, we have three tools that should be properly utilized for national benefit. First one is anti dumping law and policy. Second one is to have the tariff bound cushion. And the third is to open up all sectors where there is no threat to domestic industries. After building capacity of domestic manufacturers, the sectors could be opened for free competition by next 10 years. ■

Dahal suggests development of institutional cooperation among government officials and private sector and civil society to better prepare the country for the tough future. "There are few officials that are knowledgeable about the nuts and bolts of global trading

regime. And this small team could suffer from negotiation fatigue as it has to engage in various negotiations frequently. It would, therefore, be better for all if cooperation among civil society, academia, private sector and dedicated government officials is institutionalized.

That will help in enriching mutual capacity as well," Dahal added.

In the days ahead, Nepalese trade is sure to encounter challenges as well as opportunities. The need of the hour is to overcome the challenges and tap the opportunities. ■



## ECONOMIC ORDINANCE

# Risky Game

Finance Minister plans to reinvigorate tax collections by bringing down the custom tariffs. Will it work or will it backfire?

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

The risks and rewards in the planned move by the Minister of State for Finance Dr. Roop Jyoti to substantially bring down custom tariffs reportedly in over 125 import products have been analyzed by many economists, traders and experts.

While cutting down tariffs is a necessary precondition that Nepal will have to fulfill sooner or later thanks to its membership in regional and multilateral trading arrangements like SAFTA, BIMSTEC & WTO, the sudden move by the Finance Minister has triggered diverse reactions. As per these understandings, Nepal will need to eventually bring down custom tariffs between 0 to 5 percent eventually.

The representatives of trade sector have welcomed the move whereas those from industrial and manufacturing sector have called for caution. The conservative officialdom is also not quite enthusiastic about the move as they fear it could drastically reduce revenue collection at a time when the country is facing a gloomy scenario in meeting its revenue targets this year.

On Monday (January 9), at the meeting of the Council of Ministers held at Royal Palace, the government decided to approve the economic ordinance proposed by Dr. Jyoti. The ordinance, which would renew the existing budget ordinance, has proposed some changes by cutting down custom tariffs on imported goods.

News reports claim that the renewed ordinance proposes to cut down custom tariffs on over 125 products, particularly those imported from third countries – eating up revenues worth Rs 1.7 billion. After this change, the average custom

tariff could come down to 8 percent from the existing 9.6 percent. Tariffs on products like electronic goods, two-wheelers and television would be decreased.

For a country like Nepal, which depends heavily on custom revenues, such move could, indeed, be risky. "And the trade agreements Nepal has signed did not require Nepal to immediately cut down the tariffs. They give us some



Trade activities: Source of revenue

cushion time to deal with our internal issues first," said an economist.

In fact, under WTO, Nepal does not need to lower custom tariffs much. In agriculture Nepal has bound for 42% percent tariff on average compared to the existing 14%. Likewise, in non-agriculture products it has bound for 24% tariff on average compared to the existing 11%. On 148 IT products, Nepal has committed to bring down tariff rate

to 0 within five years. It bound the tariff rate of 480 products on existing applied rate; for 58 products, it bound their rate lower than the existing one. So, there will be revenue implications (of around Rs 192 million as per studies) for Nepal on these 58 products plus 148 IT products.

Likewise, as per its obligations, Nepal will also need to do away with Other Duties and Charges at the Custom point. At present, it is imposing Special Tax, Local Development Tax and Agriculture Improvement Tax at the custom point, which will have to be gotten rid of within 10 years. Ridding ODCs will result in losses worth Rs 430 million.

The fact that the government presently earns 30 percent of total revenue from customs means our revenue is custom-based. Therefore, any decision aimed at reducing custom is likely to generate various misgivings.

Dr. Jyoti, whose family is involved in the importing/trading, last week defended his plans saying he had no other option to increase the revenue base. "I have no alternative other than to reduce custom tariff," he said, adding that the move could benefit VAT enforcement and overall tax collection, when speaking at an interaction with business community during the program organized to submit the recommendations of Revenue Advisory Committee.

Even as trading associations like Nepal Chamber of Commerce have welcomed the plan, the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) have expressed their apprehensions that the move could negatively hurt domestic industries.

However, Dr. Jyoti, has tried to allay fears that domestic industries could be hurt by the move. "I want to assure (the domestic industries) that the government will not take any step detrimental to their interests and concerns," he said.

How the confidence of Dr. Jyoti plays out in the real world remains to be seen even as business community and the government officials are keeping their fingers crossed. ■

# "If This Constitution Is Scrapped, Nepali Congress Will Be The First Victim"

— TARANATH RANABHAT

*"There is a section of people who want to see active monarchy. Such people have clear agenda of extracting benefits in the name of active monarchy. There is another section of people that wants to teach a lesson to the King by pressing him to bow down before them. These both sections of people have similar intentions, as they want to weaken the monarchy for their own benefit."*

*Speaker of House of Representatives TARANATH RANABHAT is the only remaining elected representative of the parliament. When almost all members of his Nepali Congress (NC) party colleagues have given up century-old stand for national reconciliation, speaker Ranabhat have shown strong commitments towards the policy pursued by B.P. Koirala. Ranabhat spoke with KESHAB POUDEL and SANJAYA DHAKAL at his office in the House of Representatives regarding his political stand. Excerpts:*

## **How do you see the political situation at present?**

Well, the political situation is in a very crucial stage. Nepal had not faced such a dangerous situation ever before. All the political forces are prisoners of indecision and the gap of mistrust among them has widened. There is a crisis of confidence among them. I have never experienced the situation like now in my political career. Instead of solving the political problems, they are becoming more and more complex.

**When your party colleagues seem to have forgotten the importance of national reconciliation, you have been consistently defending it. Is it something you have faith in or is it only a political stunt?**

What I have been speaking in the public is based on my inner commitments towards national reconciliation propounded by our great leader B.P. Koirala. I am a self-made politician. Three generations in my family have sacrificed for the cause of democracy. Even if I am alone, I will not abandon my conviction on national reconciliation.

**Why do you see national reconciliation as so important?**

In the context of Nepal, there are no other alternatives other than reconciliation. If we want to see independent Nepal, we must accept the presence of constitutional monarchy. Only our debate can be - whether the King should be autocrat or not and whether to compromise with the active monarch or not. There is a section of people who want to see active monarchy. Such people have clear agenda of extracting benefits in the name of active monarchy. There is another section of people that wants to teach a lesson to the King by pressing him to bow down before them. These both sections of people have similar intentions, as they want to weaken the monarchy for their own benefit. Both ideas are absolutely wrong. Whatever the circumstances, I cannot imagine the country without constitutional monarchy.

**How do you view the stand of Nepali Congress now?**

I think Nepali Congress has lost its identity by giving up its century-old stand on constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. Even in past situations when then King had taken all kinds of actions to demoralize it, Nepali Congress did not give up its stand on constitutional monarchy. We firmly stood behind monarchy when King Tribhuvan took refuge in India. The continuity of

institution of monarchy as well as the prestige and glory of the institution is important for us. In true sense, institution of monarchy is emotional unifying factor of Nepal and it is an institution of national unity. Whatever the situation we face, our party firmly held this view. After amending the party statute, we seem to have forgotten these vital aspects of monarchy.

**After the amendment of the statute, what does your party stand for now?**

Following the amendment, our position now looks like that of other communist parties. What makes us different than other political parties including Maoists? It looks no different than other irresponsible political parties. I have different values and commitments towards the institution of monarchy. I firmly believe that Nepal do not have any alternative other than to follow constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. I wish Nepali Congress would correct its mistake and deviation. I don't want the active King. We have to be vigilant whether King is moving towards the direction of active monarchy or not.

**In your recent public meeting, you said don't want to do politics by climbing over the shoulder of the King but rather do it by carrying King on your shoulder. What do you mean by it?**

Present cabinet ministers are doing politics by climbing the King's shoulder as they don't have to take any responsibility for the actions of the King. Instead of that, I want to do politics carrying King on shoulder taking all responsibilities of the actions taken in the name of the King. The King is safe and secure on our shoulders rather than in company of the politicians who do politics climbing on his shoulder. There are many democratic forces in Nepal but Nepali Congress has its own identity and stand. Ours is the only party with time-tested faith and commitments towards constitutional monarchy. Other parties and individuals do not have such firm commitments. Many of the persons in present cabinet put all the blames on the King when they are summoned to take responsibility for the actions committed by them. Frankly speaking, the communists do not have any faith in constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy since they are in their grand strategy of 'using the system.' This is not my accusation against them. What I am honestly saying is their own philosophy. Even regarding this constitution, the communists have said they only support it along with 'criticisms.' For Nepali Congress, the present constitution is the ultimate objective. As long as there was good understanding among our senior leaders, our party was successful. Unfortunately, Ganeshmanji was later isolated as is Kishunji now. Girijababu is also facing similar situation. His own men are trying to isolate him.

**How do you see the present situation when two forces are taking opposite stand on the elections?**

The government and political parties are on the extreme sides. Of course, everyone likes elections and the election is a way to activate the present constitution. The



political leaders in my party with whom I have a long association do not have any negative attitude towards the elections. Their demands only seem to be in the process of holding it. The ruling side announced the elections hoping that parties will be compelled to take part in it. This was their wrong assumption. Had the government announced elections by creating conducive environment by consulting them, the parties would not have boycotted it. Technically and legally, the present government can hold the elections mobilizing all the forces but it will not have political legitimacy. This is the government's mistake. At a time when there is widespread protests throughout the country, there is no political sense in holding the municipal elections.

**Don't you think political parties can expose fairness and impartiality of the government by participating in the elections?**

The thinking of the government side to sideline major political parties is non-political and irresponsible strategy. At a time when the government is already in war with Maoists, widening political gap with major political parties will be unbearable. The opposition parties, too, failed to accept it as a political challenge. Of course, this is a good opportunity to show international community and people and to test their own strength. If all seven agitating political parties had taken part in the election by naming collective candidates, they could have swept the elections. In case the government rigged the elections, parties would have gotten good opportunity to expose the government.

**But the seven agitating parties have already announced that they will boycott the elections. How do you look at it?**

It is a democratic right of the people to boycott the elections. If one has right to vote, other has right to boycott it. In a peaceful manner, individually and collectively, one can boycott the elections. However, it would be grossly wrong to talk about disrupting the elections. It will be counter productive for the leaders of major political parties to announce the disruption of elections. If they do so, people will see them as anti-democratic. I know that major political parties will not disrupt the elections but their mere announcement would create a situation where certain elements could enter the scene and disrupt the polls making the parties unpopular.

**How do you see the overwhelming gathering of people in the rallies of the political parties as well as the King?**

I see crowd in all political fronts. We can see large crowd in the rallies organized by seven parties. We can see the same people in the King's meeting. Except some diehard supporters and workers, almost all the people who come

to attend the rallies and royal visit are from the same stock. You cannot judge popularity on the basis of head count in the program. Our people are traditional. There is no single meanings of this gathering. Nobody can claim they are the force behind them. In fact, they are the silent majority. They have strong commitments towards democracy.

**It was widely reported about two years ago that the King had offered you the post of prime minister. Was it true?**

It is true that the King offered me the position of prime minister. I declined to be a prime minister by vacating the position of Speaker of House of Representatives. In fact, the King had agreed to appoint me as a prime minister keeping the position of Speaker intact. However, when palace officials demanded my resignation to become prime minister, I had to decline the offer. Since then, I started saying that the King and palace are two different things.

**How do you see the possibility of revival of the House of Representatives?**

The King was very positive towards the demand to revive the House of Representatives when Lokendra Bahadur Chand was prime minister. At that time, the King had even asked me to arrange a meeting with our leader Girija Prasad Koirala to discuss the issue. The King also asked me to fix the venue and date for the meeting with Koirala through prime minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand. When I enthusiastically took this message to Girijababu, he did not make any comment. When Lokendra Bahadur Chand made similar effort, again Girijababu did not respond. The possibility of revival ended when seven party alliances endorsed 18-points agenda with a demand to scrap the royal prerogative.

**As the Speaker of House of Representatives, you frequently meet with the King. How do you see his commitments to democracy?**

My impression about King Gyanendra is extremely positive. He sincerely expresses his commitments to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy and the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990. I had a conversation with the King along with several senior leaders; King firmly said that he does not have any interest to scrap the constitution and be an active king.

**Some of your party leaders and workers openly say that you are defending the institution of monarchy to continue as Speaker of House of Representatives?**

(Laughs) This is just a false allegation against me. There are certain vested interest people in our party who even misguide our party leader Girija Prasad Koirala. I have sacrificed whole of my career for the cause of democracy and I am here as a worker of Nepali Congress. If you ask me personally, I am not interested to continue as a Speaker. As long as I am here as a speaker, the demand of my party to revive the House of Representatives will have some meaning. I continue as a speaker because of my leader Girija Prasad Koirala's suggestion.

**How do you see the demand of your party leaders about the election of constituent assembly?**

If this constitution is scrapped, a liberal party like Nepali Congress will be the first victim. As I have mentioned earlier, followers of active monarchists and republican communists will be the happiest ones to see the back of this constitution. I don't think constituent assembly will bring a better constitution than the present one.

*"My impression about King Gyanendra is extremely positive. He sincerely expresses his commitments to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy and the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990. I had a conversation with the King along with several senior leaders; King firmly said that he does not have any interest to scrap the constitution and be an active king."*

## WOMEN

# Hard Work

### Bote families go hungry when women do not crush stones

By VISHNU PRASAD SHARMA

Throughout the day, women of the Bote community crush stones on the banks of the Kali Gandaki and turn them into gravel used in construction. Their children are with them in their work. They say that the whole day's hard labor is barely enough for survival of the family. The family goes hungry when the gravel they put together does not sell. Meanwhile, the men stay home idling their time by the whole day, only to enter the bhatti, or local pubs, in the evenings.

By occupation, theirs is the job of finding gold using a sieve to separate fine sand from the courses on the river banks. They are hardly aware that they are bleeding through raw wounds on their fingers while breaking large stones into pebbles. They shovel out sand from the river daring to go waist deep in the water risking life itself. These courageous women put their babies to sleep on the piles of gravel they have accumulated and go on hammering down more rocks into small pieces throughout the day, all this just to resolve their hand-to-mouth problem.

It becomes unbearable for them only when the months of hard labor, the piles of gravel and the separated sand, does not sell and they have to go hungry. It is then that hunger haunts them. It is not just themselves

and their children; they will have to look after their husbands as well. This is a place where men live on the earnings of women even today. This is the story of women in the Bote community who live by the Kali Gandaki in Maldhunga near Baglung.

These women come out at the break of dawn in search of stones and

*These women come out at the break of dawn in search of stones and sand. They do not know whether their wares processed in the midst of the mid-day sun and pouring rains will sell at all. Their routine is to eke out a living on the river banks with bloody fingers, blistered palms, empty stomach and dried lips. Extreme poverty has come in the way of their social, education and mental development, but what is more, the utter neglect and irresponsibility thus exhibited by the concerned authority and the state itself means that they are excluded from so many aspects of human freedom.*

sand. They do not know whether their wares processed in the midst of the mid-day sun and pouring rains will sell at all. Their routine is to eke out a living on the river banks with bloody fingers, blistered palms, empty stomach and dried lips. Extreme poverty has come in the way of their social, education and mental development, but what is more, the utter neglect and irresponsibility thus exhibited by the concerned authority and the state itself means that they are excluded from so many aspects of human freedom.

Anyone visiting their settlement can easily witness their plight. Dozens of huts made from branches and leaves of trees patched up with mud line up the settlement. The small huts that allow in the sun's rays, rainwater and even dewdrops made to accommodate three persons have to house in seven or eight persons of a family. "This is a compulsion," says 61 year old Sunkali Bote. It is difficult to meet their basic needs. In fact, they have been habituated to go to bed hungry on days when they cannot sell their broken stones. "We eat if the stones sell, otherwise go to bed hungry," says Sunkali in a serious tone, "Still, it might just sell."

Most of those living in the settlement are middle-aged. The youth has left for jobs elsewhere but they do not know where. The men at home have not taken up any income generating activities because of lack of education and awareness. It is their women they order to work day and night.

Whether it is the freezing morning cold or the mid-day sun on the banks of the Kali Gandaki, women look busy hammering stones to little pieces. Due to lack of awareness and the means to send the children to schools, the Bote

children accompany their mothers in the hard work. The government's school enrolment campaign has not even touched the Bote children. When asked about the enrollment campaign, they did not know if it was fish or fowl. But the District Education Office claims to have included children of all deprived and backward communities in the campaign. The Maldhunga women say that they had to take up the occupation since nine years ago because of sheer poverty.

"We buy rice, pulses and salt with the earning from the day's work to

barely make a hand-to-mouth survival. We have to feed the children and the husband first even if we have to go half hungry" says Majrad Bote while hitting a stone with her hammer. They say that it is easier to do the work early in the morning in an empty stomach. "We get a maximum of 18 rupees for the whole day's work, if the gravel sells," says Gauri Bote. "From that that we have to pay two rupees along with two kattha of the gravel to the contractor."

It is when the stones do not sell after months of hard labor with bloody fingers that they become frustrated. "We do not know when it will sell—sometimes we have to wait for months," says Deusari Bote. Borrowing gets them through their survival needs during such long and arduous waits. They pay back only when they are able to sell. But fate plays a dirty trick on them when festivals like Dashain and Tihar arrive, when spending is a must for various festive activities. They only dream of having good food and wearing new clothes even during Dashain. The Bote who survive on fish, herbs and wild tubers settled here around 1992 after the Pokhara-Baglung highway was constructed. They were living in Khaniyaghat and Adubari of Parbat prior to this. They arrived here on the river banks after they were displaced from the earlier settlement by the Malhunga-Beni road. They have nothing but the shacks made of branches and leaves in their name today.

The Bote women face huge problems for lack of appropriate means of earning. "How can families be raised with only women working stone," they ask? The sale of their products has declined this year making it even more difficult to take care of their families. "Last year we sold sand at 30 rupees per kattha, this year no one is buying it even at 15," says 21 year old Nauli Bote.

The government's behavior towards the women and children of this disappearing community, which remains ignorant of the state's social,

political and economic policies, makes the narrow political culture in the country quite obvious. If the state continues to ignore the basic social, economic and political rights of these people the Bote community is destined to exist only in history. They are uneducated, have little social awareness, and have not developed their faculties enough to distinguish between right and wrong. The concerned authority must come up with social awareness and income generating activities to free them from their oppressive conditions and their all round development.

It is necessary educate the Bote men, dependent on their women, regarding independence and self-confidence. The urban oriented school enrollment campaign needs to

focus its attention on the children of the excluded, oppressed and the poor. The numerous government and non-government organizations set up in Baglung to uplift women's status have not worked to raise the awareness of the Bote women so far.

If the government does not take initiatives to elevate the lifestyle of the Bote women, it will prove to be an unpardonable crime. And, ultimately, the slogans of equality among genders and races will remain mere slogans. Only when the Bote women and children are on a path to all round development can the country cross the Rubicon of equality and equity. ■

(Courtesy Sancharika Samuha's Feature Service)

## FNCCI Urges For Promotion Of Industries

The Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) has urged the government to concentrate on promoting the domestic industries rather than reducing custom tariffs.

At a press meet on Saturday (January 7), FNCCI has urged the government to bring in industry-friendly policies. FNCCI vice president Diwakar Golchha said that the country could prosper if industry, rather than trade, flourishes. He urged the government to take care not to affect domestic industries when reducing tariff rates as per WTO obligations.

"The upcoming economic ordinance should concentrate on industry promotion, export increase and employment growth," FNCCI states. It has urged the government to provide tax holiday for 15 years to industries set up in remote regions. Likewise, it has asked the government to reduce tariff of raw materials required for domestic industries. "The tariff rate of these raw materials should be at least one level below that of finished goods," Golchha said.

The federation has asked for some waiver on income tax to retail entrepreneurs. Other demands include giving VAT waiver to agro-based industries; complete waiver of export tax on products where there is more than 20 percent value addition; and tariff of maximum 2.5 percent on the import of machineries.

Earlier, Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), too, had urged the government not to reduce custom tariff that could hurt domestic industries. The confederation - referring to news reports that the government was likely to announce substantial reduction in custom tariffs in imports in the upcoming economic ordinance - has said the move could be counterproductive for the country's economy. It even alleged that such move was being planned in collusion with vested interest groups.

## EDUCATION

**Victim Of Political Disturbances**

Intensification of violent insurgency and political agitation has badly hampered education at all levels

By A CORRESPONDENT

**C**olleges under Tribhuvan University, Nepal's oldest university with largest number of enrolment of students - hardly run a single day in the year not affected by political agitations. Similarly, the government and private boarding schools in the rural areas see frequent disturbances from the insurgents. The abduction of students and teachers are commonplace.

In the urban areas, student wings of agitating political parties exploit schools and colleges for political purposes. Political agitation of any kind is virtually impossible without active participation of young students. Despite huge investments, these kinds of disturbances have affected the quality of education.

According to Tribhuvan University's annual report, 180 days of regular classes are required before the annual examination - but classes are hardly conducted for more than 90 days.

Because of regular threats by Maoists, the schools in rural and urban regions, too, often face closures. The school days, too, have reduced from 180 to about 130-140 days last year. Schools are closed down from weeks to months under the call of Maoists.

Similarly, schools in rural areas have painful story to tell. As the insurgency intensifies, fundamental rights of children to get education are denied. In many districts, classes are so infrequent that the students are upgraded without attending annual examination. For the younger students, it is very risky to go to the schools, as there is high possibility for abduction. Although the government has made no study on the overall quality of school education, the pass percentage secured by schools from

remote parts of the country in School Leaving Certificate Examination shows the pathetic situation.

More than eighty percent of the students in remote schools failed at the final examinations thanks to the irregular classes and unavailability of qualified teachers. Those schoolteachers serving in the remote parts of Nepal live under constant threat of abduction and physical attack. According to a study, the positions



**A rural school:** Conflict interferes into the classroom

of 30,000 teachers in government schools still lie vacant.

Frequent strikes and other kinds of disruptive activities have already damaged the education sector in terms of quality and quantity. The private schools, too, are facing the crisis.

If present political chaos in urban areas and insurgency in rural parts of Nepal continues unabated, Nepal's education system might even collapse. The low quality of students produced by the institution of higher education will

reduce the quality of country's overall delivery system.

At a time when a country like Nepal requires efficient and talented pool of manpower to compete in the global market, Nepal's educational institutions are producing low quality students, who are mostly politically motivated.

As almost all major political parties have student wings as nationwide organization running parallel with the mother party, they start recruiting younger students from colleges. The Maoists and other communist outfits recruit students from secondary level and begin the process of radicalization of social and political nature.

"Hardly a week passes by without a news of some classes getting disrupted somewhere," said a university teacher in condition of anonymity. "From King's rally

to rally of opposition political parties, all need young students in their parade."

In recent days, whether it is King's rally or rally of political parties, one can see huge participation of younger students. Unlike the college students, who are mobilized for destructive act, the school students are used as showpiece in the rallies.

These practices are leaving an indelible imprint on the mindset of whole set of new generations. If the political leaders of the country do not address this problem collectively, the nation's future does not look bright.

RPP

# On The Verge Of Split

In its one and a half decade long history, Rastriya Prajatantra Party finds itself again staring at another split

By A CORRESPONDENT

**A**fter a long debate between two factions in the party over how to respond to the ensuing municipal elections, RPP finally is heading towards split. The process has started following the announcement by party dissidents - mostly ministers of present cabinet - to call the special general assembly.

When party president and majority of central committee members declined to summon the general assembly as demanded by the faction led by vice president Padma Sunder Lawati, a hardliner former Pancha, and Home Minister Kamal Thapa, the dissidents have themselves announced the general convention to capture the party leadership.

"It is very unfortunate to say that the ministers have misused all the government machinery to bring their supporters and press district and local level party workers



**Lawati:** Gunning for RPP leadership?

to join the so-called unconstitutional general convention," said Pasupati Sumsher Rana, president of the party.

The party's high command also suspended eight central committee members of RPP including home minister Kamal Thapa, vice president Padma Sunder Lawati, central committee member and assistant minister of Sports and Education Bhuvan Pathak and former spokesman of the party and assistant minister of Local Development Roshan Karki.

"We are holding the general convention to seek mandate from party workers against the Hukumiraj (dictatorship) of party president Pashupati Sumsher Rana. More than two third members of general conventions are with us," said Lawati.

With the majority of members representing erstwhile Panchas, RPP was born as a twin and later it merged into single party securing the position of third largest political party after the first general elections. The party again split in 1997 under the leadership of two former prime ministers Surya Bahadur Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

After dismissal of elected prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in October 4, 2003, King Gyanendra had again appointed Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa as prime ministers. Home Minister Kamal Thapa, who has a track record of shifting his side several times, was with prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, who now heads a separate party.

For RPP, factionalism is not a new thing and individualism has always prevailed over the party whenever the question of sharing power came. Two of its central committee members were appointed by the senior ministers in the first government formed after February 1, 2005 actions of the King.

This time home minister Thapa, vice president Lawati and other ministers constantly demanded to support King's move of February 1, 2005 but the establishment led by Rana declined. In the process of appointment of district level presidents, vice president and members, the government led by King picked up the RPP workers who can easily stand with the King. Ignoring what is happening at the local level, RPP central committee, however, has been stressing the need for reconciliation between the King and the political parties.

With the announcement of municipal and central elections by the King, the faction led by Lawati had consistently demanded the decision of party to take part in the elections. In the last central committee meeting, the party gave this right to decide whether to contest the municipal elections to the district committees. But, home minister Thapa and vice president Lawati found this as an excuse to choose their own path.



**Rana:** "We will not budge from party ideals"

## BOOK

# Powerful Prose

**D**r. Banira Giri establishes herself as one of the best women writers depicting strong inner ideological feelings through her powerful expression and human characters.

Whether they are poems, stories or other literary works of any kind, Dr. Banira Giri's writings express reality. Following the publication of *Karagar* (*The Prison*), Dr. Giri established herself as the best woman fiction writer of Nepal.

Translated by Ann Hunkins, Dr. Banira Giri's fiction 'The Prison' portrays a feeling of liberated woman and her determination. Dr. Giri's powerful expression gives life to the book.

"The Prison' has left behind Parijat's Shrish Ko Phool at every step like in story, poetic expression, establishing powerful human characters and ideology, as well as equally powerful liberated woman character, a character which did not need even a name but strongly made an impact in the hearts of reader," writes Madan Mani Dixit, eminent writer, editor and former vice chancellor of Royal Nepalese Academy.

As Dixit observes, *The Prison* is a fiction based on philosophical thought. Although many writers have already written many fictions over the years, *The Prison* is first of its kind, which is based on powerful ideology of liberation.

First published in 1979 in Nepali, the book explains how a woman live in a society like prison with little choices. The book is so popular that it has already been reprinted five times.

One of the important aspects of the fiction is that it retains its popularity for more

than two and a half decades. The nameless narrator of *Karagar* is an intelligent, educated and unmarried woman living alone with an affair with married man. Explaining the 1970s conservative society, the woman shows courage and determination to change the society widening her choices. In the course of narration, the book also gives vivid scenarios of contemporary Nepalese society, which still exists.

According to Hindu tradition, women are given very limited role in her

family with limited space to choose their life. Once woman gets married, they are part of husband's family.

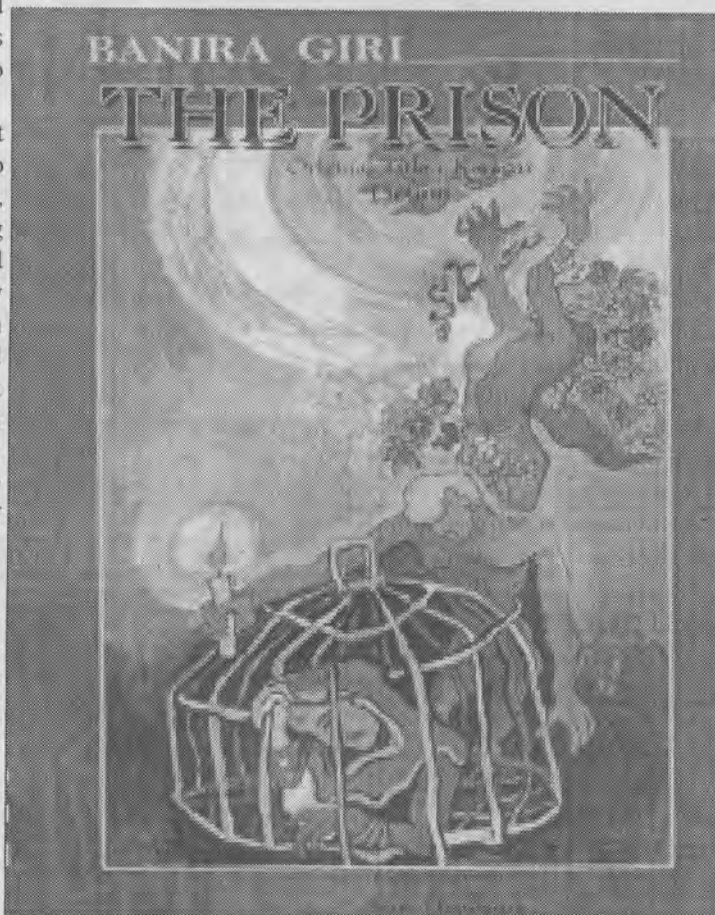
"Extramarital affairs were not spoken of publicly and were seldom subject of a literary novel, especially by a woman. Women writers in Nepal are often presumed to be writing autobiography, which probably keeps many potential books from being written. Social pressure can be intense, so this female protagonist was seen as breaking new ground in choosing the kind of life she did. Her works are often strongly feminist and acutely observant of social situations in Nepal. She is one of the very few Nepali women writers who has established a reputation outside Nepal, having read her work from Tashkent to

Tokyo, Nepal to New York and Pakistan to Paris observe translator Hunkins.

Despite increasing level of awareness and high literacy, women are yet to be liberated, as their world is still small. Dr. Giri's courage to write on woman's life and social surrounding two and a half decade ago was a brave job. For western writers, the situation depicted in the fiction may seem like something out of imagination.

"Banira Giri is an established name in fiction writing. In the range of her fictions, *The Prison* has occupied an extraordinary place in the panorama of Nepali novels to justify its representative materials in style, approach, content and what not," writes publisher Lamichhane.

Thanks to Dr. Banira Giri, other people living in different parts of the world also can now read about and understand the situation of Nepalese women and their small world.



*The Prison, By: Banira Giri*  
 Edited and Translated from Nepali  
 With an Introduction by Ann Hunkins  
 Published by: Jiba Lamichhane,  
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## MUKHERJEE SPEAKS

# “Blame Game Is Not An Answer: Mukherjee”

While saying that India was ‘very concerned’ about the situation in Nepal, Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, added that ‘the situation has gone out of the point where finger-pointing is an answer.’ He was referring to the continuing allegations and counter-allegations among the parties and the palace, which has been obstructing prospect for real reconciliation.

“If the stalemate continues, if the gap continues and becomes unbridgeable, we are in for more violence,” said Mukherjee, in an interview to Vijaya Kumar of Frontline talk show in Kantipur Television on Sunday. “We applaud anybody breaking the ice. I personally think His Majesty’s Government should start peace process (without further delay),” he added. Mukherjee said that the constitutional monarchy should remain the symbol of unity, continuity and integrity of the nation and should not compete with the political parties for political space.

Mukherjee said the withdrawal of unilateral ceasefire by the Maoists last week was “unfortunate.” “To our mind, ceasefire should have been extended, reciprocated by the government and made permanent. If everybody wants peace, they should stop the blame game.”

According to the topmost priority to ‘peace,’ the envoy said that everything else, including political settlement, would come out of such peace. Reacting to queries regarding municipal polls, Mukherjee said that though elections are ‘fundamentals of democracy,’ it may not be ‘credible’ in a situation where political

parties are calling for its active boycott. “The most sane, non-violent and practical way out is for the palace to reach out to parties and together bring Maoists to mainstream,” said Mukherjee.

When asked about alleged role of India in bringing the seven-party opposition alliance and Nepali Maoists together, the Indian envoy said (India) did not have any role in it. He, however, said, “We don’t want to interfere in contacts developing between parties and the Maoists.” Responding to a query on the Indian embargo on arms supply to Nepal, ambassador Mukherjee said, “We had helped Royal Nepalese Army to battle insurgency. After February 1, 2005, it was no longer the previous situation.” Ambassador Mukherjee refused to buy the argument that Nepal was trying to use “China card” against India. He, however, said, “We expect all members of the international community, including China, not to add to complications.”

When asked about reports that India might impose 1988-89 kind of trade embargo on Nepal when the now extended bilateral transit treaty expires in the next three months, ambassador Mukherjee said those reports were unfounded. “We always have been and will be positive on issues that are linked to Nepalese economy,” he added. ■



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# SHEELA BAHADUR MOKTAN

## Creating Melodies

As a prominent music director and an arranger, Moktan has enriched Nepali music with his beautiful compositions

By THAKUR AMGAI

**H**is days, mornings and evenings all are musical. During the day he arranges music for prepared melodies. During the fresh morning air, he creates his own melodies and adds various musical instruments in them. Even at the off hours, when the family gathers together, most of the talk spins around the issues of music as all members of the family are into music. We could probably say this gentleman eats music, talks music and sleeps music.

Sheela Bahadur Moktan, who was born in the beautiful Darjeeling city about half a century ago, started becoming recognized as a talented music director immediately after his first song 'Kahile Kahin Malai Pani Herideu Hai Pharkiyara, Sandhai Bhari Najau Timi Ma Dekhi Tarkiyera' was recorded in Radio Nepal in 2039. Although, he had written this song by himself and has also penned a couple of other songs, he started focusing on music arranging, music direction and teaching music in the latter part of his career.

Moktan began his musical career from All India Radio as a casual singer. He passed the voice test for singing at Kharsang broadcasting station of All India Radio in 2036 and recorded about two dozen songs such as 'Hoina Maile Takeko, Baduli Lageko', 'Ankha Kahilyai Najudhos', 'Aja Dekhi Ma' and 'Pheri Yad Ayo'. Moktan himself wrote and composed these songs.

In his childhood Moktan was very fond of singing and playing flute. "We used to listen to Premdhaj Pradhan's songs like 'Goreto Tyo Gaunko' and

'Ghumtima Naau Hai'; Bhakta Raj Acharya's songs like 'Maya Meri Sanjh Bani' from gramophone disc records and Hindi songs from the All India Radio and sing them at various religious and social functions such as weddings and village fairs," reminisces Moktan.

The musical ambience of Darjeeling certainly had a positive impact on nurturing his flair in music. He vividly remembers carving holes in bamboo canes to resemble it with a flute and playing it. He did all this, singing and playing music out of sheer interest and never thought that he would continue to be engaged in this field, let alone become a popular artiste of the entire nation one day.

Later, as his interest towards music grew stronger, he started learning classical music. Initially, he learned

classical in Darjeeling with J. C. Rai and later with Surya Kant Goit. When he came to Kathmandu he recorded a couple of classical hymns in his voice.

After he came to Kathmandu in 2040, he started composing and arranging music in Radio Nepal. "In those days Radio Nepal used to be the meeting point of all the singers, music directors and lyricists. So, we too, used to gather at the premises of Radio Nepal and write and compose songs. Apart from our regular dates, we used to prepare and record filler songs instantly whenever the studio was available," said Moktan.

Moktan's encounter with Kunti Sundas, who later got married to him, was a pleasant co-incidence, which has helped a lot to boost Moktan's musical career.

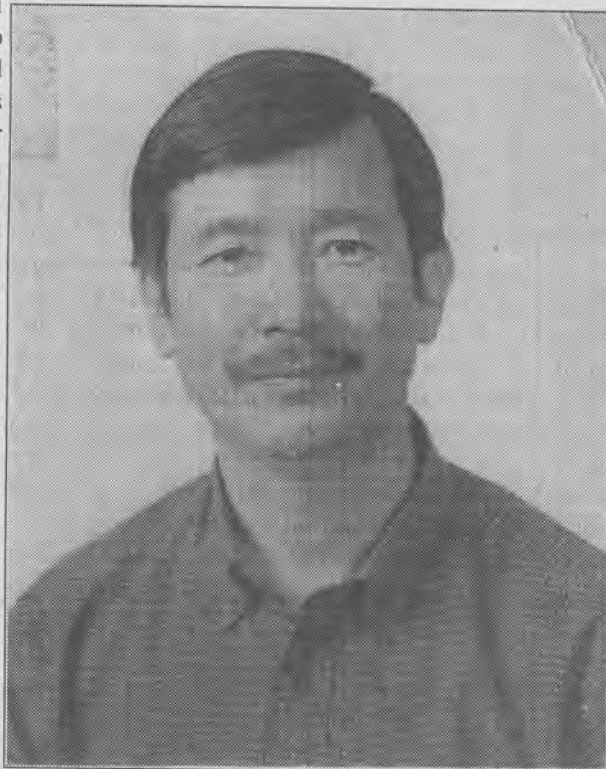
"Two of us used to sing Bhajans on every full moon day with Shambhu Prasad Mishra and Nara Raj Dhakal at a temple at the Royal palace. That gave us a good earning in those days," says Moktan recalling the good old days.

While he continued working as a music director, Moktan also taught music at various schools for almost a decade. He joined Music Nepal as a part-time music arranger in 2045 and worked for three years.

He rejoined the job as a full-timer, where Moktan is working till date.

Over the years, Moktan has given melodies to more than five hundred songs including modern, folk, devotional (Bhajans) and patriotic songs. Most of these songs are sung by his wife Kunti Moktan. Selected songs composed by Moktan has been collected in fifteen different solo albums and a number of collection albums. Likewise, Moktan has also composed music for the songs of two Nepali feature films 'Jwala' and 'Jalan'.

Through his music Moktan is widely known among the audience and earns a lot of respect and love from them. "This warmth and love the audience provide is my greatest achievement from being a musical personality," Moktan. "As a public figure, I also feel that my responsibility has increased further."



**Moktan:** Master composer

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