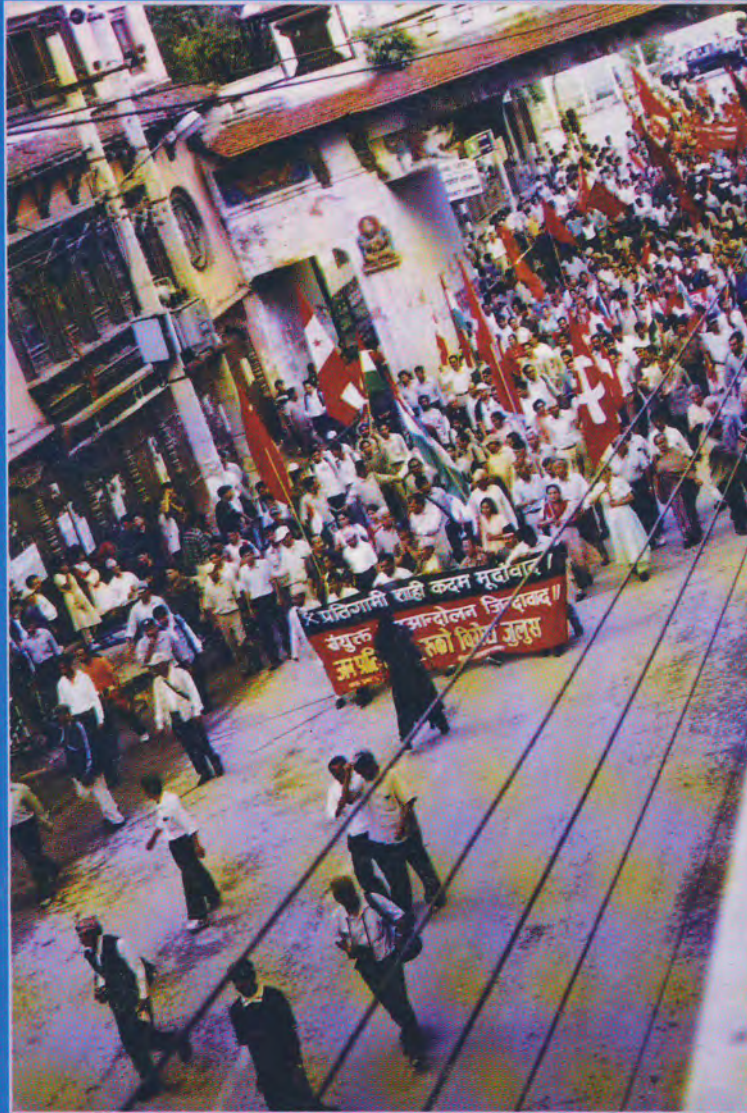


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The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

Fob 03-16, 2006



Talking Politics All The Time

King's Address
Election
Maoists

: Unable to Bridge the Gap
 : Escalating Violence

C.I.D. Regd. No. 151957-1
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COVER STORY : Talking Politics All The Time

As all the political forces and civil society spend their time harping political slogans, core economic and social problems of the people are being grossly overlooked Page 12



KING'S ADDRESS: Stressing His Roadmap

In his recent royal proclamation, King Gyanendra expresses determination to hold parliamentary elections and calls parties for reconciliation making patriotism a meeting point Page 10



CIVIC POLLS: Desperate Exercise

In the absence of participation by the major political parties, the municipal elections - which could have been first step towards restoring elected governance - has turned into a desperate exercise that can serve no purpose Page 17

SPOTLIGHT

THE WEEKLY NATIONAL NEWSMAGAZINE

Vol. 25, No 23, February 10, 2006
Magh 28, 2062

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Cover Design : Digi-Tech Scanning & Pre-Press Pvt. Ltd.
P.O. Box : 1655, Jwagal, Kuponsole,
Lalitpur, Nepal
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Distribution : R.B. News Paper Traders
New Road, Kathmandu, Nepal
Ph : 4232784, 2020247, 4244679
E-mail : rbnewspaper@hotmail.com

Printers : Printers World
Maitidevi, Kathmandu
Ph : 4423904
E-mail : printerworld@wlink.com.np

C.D.O.Regd. No
151/039-40
Postal Regd. No
42/61/62
U.S. Library of Congress
Catalogue No. 91-905060

In his recent Royal Proclamation, King Gyanendra has again reiterated his commitment to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. King Gyanendra's words and languages used in the proclamation have many points of unity with the country's organized political forces. Despite his commitments towards constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy, King Gyanendra, too, has shown his own limitations and constraints while leaders of other organized political parties are, knowingly and unknowingly, inching towards irrelevant and uncompromising path harping the political slogans to the extent of demanding republic. Similarly, King Gyanendra has not shown flexibility towards organized political parties insisting to continue to follow his own three years road map. What is inevitable now is country's major political forces - the monarchy and the organized political parties - will head towards the confrontational course. As Nepal's geo-strategic position demands unity and coexistence among political forces to remain as an independent state, no one can follow the extremism for longer period of time. History has taught us that division and confrontation is going to be costly for nation as well as for political forces.

Personally, there may be some likes or dislikes and the King may have personal grudges against the behavior of political leaders but these leaders represent organized political parties with mass following. Some leaders of political parties, too, may have likes and dislikes on the functioning style of particular individual King but they cannot discard the importance of the institution of monarchy - which guarantees Nepal's independence, stability and unity. Whether one likes it or not, monarchy is an institution originated and gradually evolved in Nepal and it has strong roots in this country. Despite taking most unpopular actions in recent years, the overwhelming majority of people still abide by its legitimate order. This is what shows the deep-rooted feeling towards monarchy in Nepal.

At the time of national crisis, Nepalese are fortunate to have the institution of monarchy - which saves the country from heading towards chaos. Leaders of organized political parties must realize this political reality and give up speaking rhetoric and political jargons against the institution of monarchy to the extent of calling to remove it. Not humiliation but respect to the King and institution of monarchy will bring the substantial political change. The country has gained nothing but extreme results in the three years' campaign of hatred against monarchy.

The King and his followers, too, must keep in mind that organized political parties are also originated in Nepal and they have been gradually evolving in this society. The role of organized political forces that are mobilizing a large number of people cannot be minimized just on the basis of certain likes or dislikes or on the basis of behavior of certain individual leaders. Instead of humiliating each other, the King and the political parties must find out ways to solve the political problems following the concept of live and let live. The King in his proclamation shows the way out for broader alliance for the sake of the country's independence and sovereignty. As the King says patriotism can be made a common meeting point with organized political forces, it needs to be further clarified. For the resumption of meaningful agreement, political parties also need to show their commitment towards the common cause that is patriotism. The time now is whatever the proclamation the King has made; it needs to be translated into action. Nepali Congress as a major centrist party appears to have few differences with the message of the King. The King- who has legitimized the dissolution of previous parliament - may have the moral pressure not to undo that. Instead, the King seems to be determined to hold the elections of parliament within a definite period. Let whatever may come, he is determined to hold the elections. And that is quite plausible and in accordance with the letter and spirit of the institution. The Congress party, on the one hand, does not see the elections can possibly be held and on the other hand, believes that it can do away with the (despotic monarchy). The tragedy with them is that whatever is possible in accordance with the constitution they don't want to accomplish - that is holding the elections of parliament - whereas what is not possible that is removing the monarchy, they want to achieve. Till the party come to the realistic and pragmatic agenda, there appears no chance that these two nearest political forces could unite and work together for the promotion of democratic process in the country. Whatever the numerical strength of the communists in the street, the vast majority of the silent masses may not support them. If the King and democratic parties prominently the Nepali Congress reach into some sort of understanding and agree to work together, other political forces would automatically follow the suit.

As King Gyanendra said "the essence of Nepal's glorious history is fact that the Nepalese people themselves determine Nepal's national agenda in the interest of the country and their own." The most pertinent question in this context is the initiative has to come from the King and being a moderate political force, leaders of Nepali Congress must have positive mindset to respond. Time is passing away very fast for them to act in accordance with the call of each other's duty. ■

Keshab Poudel
Keshab Poudel
Managing Editor



Rise Above Self Interest

The cover story this issue provides an analytical and detailed argument about why national reconciliation is must to rescue the country out of its present crisis "Question of Political Commitment" (SPOTLIGHT January 27). As you have written in cover at times of national crisis, all the forces including the citizens must boldly be able to risk their lives for the cause of the nation. Unfortunately, what is happening now is quite to the contrary. Let alone the common people, even the leaders of the political parties, the Maoist leaders and the King, who have vowed, time and again, in public forums that their interest is the interest of the people, have not done what they preach in practice. This is a very grave issue and can be a threat to the national sovereignty. It is now time that all of us contribute for the national interest from our respective sides before it is too late.

Rudra Nyaupane
Hattigaunda

parties can be included through peaceful negotiations.

Hemant Shrestha
Kalimati

Skeptical Argument

I do not quite agree with Rabindra Nath Sharma's version that Koirala and the King can rescue the country out of its current crisis "If The King And Koirala Discuss Face To Face, They Will Find Out Broader Agreement" (SPOTLIGHT January 27). Koirala is certainly the most prominent of the leaders of the democratic parties and the King is the traditional power with military at his command, but in the developing scenario we cannot ignore the insurgent Maoists and other political parties. In the current situation it is likely that other democratic parties might cooperate with Koirala, but it is very unlikely that the Maoists, who themselves have the political base like parties and military force that could challenge the government's army, will become Koirala's puppet.

Sagun Shrestha
Sanepa

Work For The People

You have raised a very pertinent issue in the cover story this issue "Question of Political Commitment" (SPOTLIGHT January 27). The activities and the expressions of the current leaders clearly show that they lack a commitment for nation building. Although, they repeat innumerable times in their speeches that they are committed to public welfare, their activities are contrary to what they say. For example, what kind of public welfare are they doing by calling forced bandhs continually for seven days. They have never cared to understand the people's needs and problems but have persistently thrown one after another program that disrupts normal life to show their presence. The leaders should show some political commitment and some flexibility to pull the country out of the quagmire. Likewise, the political parties should also end the current trend of protests that are forceful and disrupts normal life. Protest programs should be

based on voluntary participation of the people and not by intimidation and vandalism.

Chetan Bhatta
Lainchaur

Hold Talks

The interview with Rabindra Nath Sharma was insightful "If The King And Koirala Discuss Face To Face, They Will Find Out Broader Agreement" (SPOTLIGHT January 27). As he has put it, if the King and Nepali congress president Girija Prasad Koirala sit together and talk about the current situation of the country, they could reach a certain agreement and drive the country out of the crisis it is currently facing. Koirala still leads the movement of the liberal parties and holds a popular support of the people. Likewise, the King represents a traditional force and holds the military power. So, if these two 'leaders' come to an agreement, the other forces such as the Maoists and other

Sad Reality

It is depressing to know about the tragic demise of the melody queen of Nepal, Tara Devi "TARA DEVI: Melody Queen" (SPOTLIGHT January 27). Her untimely demise is an irreparable loss to the Nepalese music industry. Such talented and dedicated artiste are seldom born these days, and even if some people do come with exceptional talents they do not hone themselves and opt for easy popularity for commercial success. It is the duty of the nation to protect the creations of artistes like Tara Devi. However, it was disappointing to know about her tragic incident with the Radio Nepal. If a nation does not learn to honor its artistes it loses its identity. Its art and culture vanishes and it will have nothing to take pride in future. The concerned agencies of the government should not repeat such mistakes and should not hurt the feelings of artistes who have earned so much respect from the people.

Sanjeev Dahal
New York, Via Email.

FNJ Raises Objection Against Ministers' Remarks

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) has raised objection against remarks by Home Minister Kamal Thapa and Information State Minister Shrish SJB Rana that a section of media was being operated by remote control and was helping the rebels. The Federation has issued a statement accusing the ministers of casting aspersions against media in order to tarnish their image and prestige. "Remarks made by persons engaged in unsuccessful efforts to institutionalize authoritarian regime will have no meaning and significance among the people," the statement said. *Leading dailies report.*

'Few Newspapers Operated By Remote Control': Minister Thapa

Home Minister Kamal Thapa has alleged that few newspapers in the country were being operated by 'remote control.' Without naming the papers, the minister said 'the newspapers which wanted instability in the country' were being operated by the remote control. Speaking at 'Bahas' program in Kantipur Television, Thapa said the 'remote control' was the element that wanted instability in Nepal. Minister Thapa also accused the seven parties of being operated. "Those who have provided materials and resources are operating the seven parties," he said, without elaborating. Minister Thapa claimed tens of millions of rupees were being spent on carrying out agitation of the parties. When asked who provides the money, Thapa said, "Not the Nepali people." He also accused the workers of seven parties of cooperating with the Maoists in threatening the candidates of the forthcoming municipal polls and subjecting them to mental torture. Claiming that the polls would be an important step towards peace, Thapa said the elections would be conducted peacefully. He said that the Maoists spread across the country since the time when local bodies were without elected representatives. Thapa added that the Maoists' strength had, indeed, weakened. "The confusing situation has arisen because of exaggerated presentation of their strength and their position." When asked why doesn't the government call the Maoists for dialogue instead of holding polls,

Thapa said, "Maoists have no faith in peace or dialogue." He added that increasingly it was getting difficult to distinguish between the Maoists and the parties. *Kantipur daily reports.*

UN Has No Right To Advise Govt: Mainali

Education and Sports Minister Radha Krishna Mainali said the United Nations (UN) has no authority to advise the government whether the polling booths should be set up in schools or not. Addressing a program at Reporters' Club on Saturday, he said, "UN is not going to rule Nepal. Why should it dictate us?" According to him, all schools are the nation's property and the government can use them when it needs them for certain period. Earlier, the UNICEF had shown concern on Election Commission's decision to locate polling stations in schools. Meanwhile, students belonging to the Joint Students' Agitating Committee, Sunsari, have started a hunger strike from Saturday at the Mahendra Multiple Campus in Dharan protesting the decision to set up polling booths in academic institutions. "The setting up of polling booths in academic institutions is against academic norms and values," the committee said in a statement. *The Himalayan Times daily reports.*

Reconciliation Key For Nepal's Security: US General

A senior American military official wrapped up his brief visit to Nepal after meeting with King Gyanendra, ministers, army chief, political representatives and civil society leaders. "Admiral William J. Fallon, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), completed his visit to Nepal on Thursday (February 2) after gaining a better understanding of the situation in the country," said a statement issued by the American Embassy. "The Admiral noted serious U.S. concerns about the King's decision to seize governmental power on February 1, 2005 and the Maoist insurgency threat. He urged all parties with a common interest in a stable and peaceful Nepal to sit together to discuss and agree on a way forward to establish a truly participatory government." Furthermore, the admiral said reconciliation between the King and

the parties is "not only indispensable to bring back democracy but also to effectively address the insurgency by the Maoists, which given their continued use of violence, could not be viewed as a legitimate political actor." Admiral Fallon met with the King, senior Army officers, political party leaders, and civil society, and also visited RNA troops and facilities in some areas of the country. The Admiral said that the political division between the King and the political parties has encouraged the Maoist insurgents. As PACOM chief, the Admiral commands some 300,000 U.S. military personnel in an area reaching from the west coast of the United States to the east coast of Africa. Admiral Fallon, who arrived in Kathmandu on Wednesday, departed Nepal on Thursday afternoon. His visit was part of a three-country visit to Nepal, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, the statement said. *Compiled from reports.*

Govt. Approves Three Hydropower Projects

The government has approved the immediate construction program of three hydropower projects. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) – which has been unable to add a single MW of power in the past four years – has been asked to carry out the construction of Kulekhani III immediately. A recent board meeting of NEA chaired by vice chairman Dr. Tulsi Giri approved the Kulekhani III, Chameliya and Upper Tamakoshi projects. "Now the construction of Kulekhani III (14 MW), Chameliya (32 MW) and Upper Tamakoshi (309 MW) will kick off soon," said a member of the board. For the purpose of developing Kulekhani III project, the government would make use of Rs 1 billion from the Power Development Fund. The government would re-start the stalled process of inviting constructors for Chameliya project. The Chilime hydropower center, which has successfully developed the 20 MW Chilime project based wholly on Nepalese capital and human resources, has already formally requested the government to develop Upper Tamakoshi. "Since the concerned researchers have said that resources can be generated domestically and domestic expertise can be used, the government is positive towards this," said Mahendra Nath Aryal, Secretary at the Ministry of

Water Resources. *Nepal Samacharpatra daily reports.*

Leaders And Cadres Arrested

On the eve of February 1 – the first anniversary of royal takeover of power – police across the country have arrested hundreds of leaders and cadres of political parties who have come down to the streets in order to actively boycott the forthcoming municipal polls of February 8. As per the decision of central security council, police resorted to arrests on Tuesday since morning. Sources said the police are arresting those leaders and cadres who can mobilize other cadres to hold demonstrations. Meanwhile, in Tinkune area police arrested 40 women leaders of political parties – who were demonstrating. Likewise, police intervened the student protest within the premises of Tribhuvan University and arrested around 30 of them. Police had resorted to indiscriminate lathicharge hurting not only the demonstrating students but also the passers-by and teachers. Reports say police have arrested leaders and cadres across the country in Dang, Syangja, Mahendranagar, Birgunj and so on. *Kantipur daily reports.*

Opinion Poll Predicts 43 Percent Voting

At a time when the Election Commission is not being able to find a single candidate for over a thousand seats and scores of municipalities had one-seat one-candidate results, a public opinion poll released on Tuesday (January 31) predicted 43 percent voting in the forthcoming municipal polls. According to the poll, conducted as part of a nationwide poll by Interdisciplinary Analysts, a Kathmandu-based research organization with ACNielsen, a marketing research organization and supported financially by The Asia Foundation, 42.9 percent of the respondents said they would vote, 19.5 percent said they would not and 30.7 percent said they are yet to decide on it. Also 46.9 percent said they don't think the exercise will be free and fair. "The poll indicates that people intend to vote even though they know it is not going to be fair," said Pawan Kumar Sen, co-researcher of the opinion poll. Another researcher, Dr. Sudhindra Sharma said the opinion poll only represents a limited number of people

in a given time. A questionnaire was distributed to 3000 respondents in randomly selected 25 districts between January 5 and 25. Of the respondents, 1500 were randomly selected from 32 municipalities of their districts. Thirty-two percent of them said the elections are important and 24 percent dismissed them. Among those willing to vote, 36.2 percent preferred to vote for independent candidates, while only 15.7 percent said they would vote for party candidates. Among those who did not intend to vote, 26.2 percent said they think it is unsafe to go to polling centers and 23.1 percent said the election is unconstitutional. *The Himalayan Times daily reports.*

A Taxi Driver Killed For Defying Bandh

In a blatant and inhuman act of terrorism, suspected Maoists have shot to death an innocent taxi driver in Gwarko, Lalitpur on Monday evening. According to witnesses, two suspected Maoists who reportedly had boarded the taxi from unknown place posing as common travelers made the driver Jitendra Shrestha stop the taxi in Gwarko before pumping bullet into his body and fleeing. Shrestha, a student hailing from Dhading, who was making his ends meet by working as taxi driver, succumbed to the injuries moments later at B&B hospital. "Because of poor economic condition, he had plied the taxi in order to earn something," said Ram Sharan Shrestha, brother of the slain driver. The incident occurred on the second day of the Maoist-imposed Nepal Bandh. Meanwhile, traffic movement was better even as majority of shops and businesses remained thoroughly affected in Kathmandu on Monday. In a separate incident, one Armed Police Force (APF) personnel was killed and four others injured when a bomb exploded in a Mahendranagar-Dhangadi road section in Kanchanpur district. The bomb planted by the Maoists exploded when the police were trying to remove it. *Compiled from reports.*

Maoists Hint They Are Willing For Peace Talks

In an exclusive interview they gave to editors of Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post dailies, Maoist chairman Prachanda and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai have indicated that they are willing to engage in peace

talks with the King's government if the King calls them for talks by announcing ceasefire. They said such talks should also be participated by political parties. This is the first time after February 1, 2005 that the Maoists have hinted of peace talks with the royal government. Talking to the editors in undisclosed location, the two Maoist leaders said they were ready to accept the result of election of constituent assembly. Prachanda said that they would accept even if the people voted for active monarchy, constitutional monarchy or multi party democracy through constituent assembly. He, however, added that his party remained confident that the assembly would usher in democratic republic. This is the first time the Maoist leaders have given interview to mainstream Nepalese newspaper since the start of their "people's war" ten years ago. *Kantipur daily reports.*

"This Election Could Have Been Better": Rana

Minister of State for Information and Communication Shrish JNB Rana has conceded that the forthcoming municipal elections could have been held in a better manner with better turn out of voters. "If all the people had cooperated with the government's efforts, definitely the elections would have been better as was the government's desire," he said at a press meet organized at the Department of Information. He blasted political parties for hindering the elections. "First they said the King would not hold elections. After the King announced polls, they said the King would not be able to hold elections. And after the King set the date for the polls, they said they will not allow the polls to be held," said Rana. He said that despite killing, threats and intimidation, many candidates had risked their lives to take part in the elections. "Similarly, the brave people will come to cast votes. Definitely, the government had wanted to hold election in a better manner with wider participation, but due to the obvious reasons, it could not be so," he said. Rana also stated that the government was preparing laws to ensure and encourage 'professional journalism' in the country. He also said that although there were efforts to make Nepal into either a 'pliant state' or a 'rogue state', the government would make sure that it doesn't become either of the two. *Compiled from reports.* ■



Gorkhapatra

King Gyanendra graces Basanta Panchami festival

THE NEPAL TELECOM (NT) IS ALL SET TO START ITS wireless telephone service based on CDMA technology beginning from February 5. The NT is going to start the service after the Supreme Court (SC) recently thrashed out petition demanding that it not do so. NT officials say the wireless phone service based on new technology would be economical as well as convenient to expand across the country despite the difficult terrain. Meanwhile, Shrish SJB Rana, Minister of State for Information and Communication, inaugurating the second anniversary of NT, said that the government was forced to suspend the operation of prepaid mobile due to security reasons. "Based on needs, postpaid and other forms of communication, too, could be suspended for required period," he told reporters. "The most important thing is human security. We have seen Maoists wielding guns with prepaid mobile in their pockets. The government was forced to suspend its operation since it was found to be used for destructive purposes," he added. Rana also expressed uncertainty when the services would resume.

EU HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR COMMON FOREIGN AND Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, has urged King Gyanendra to 'show necessary leadership and foresight' by restoring all political and civil liberties by beginning dialogue with the major political parties and taking steps towards a ceasefire and inclusive national dialogue to bring an end to the conflict. Solana, in a statement from Brussels, has also condemned the Maoist attack on Tansen terming it as 'senseless, which we condemn unreservedly.' Saying that the EU will continue to monitor closely the situation in Nepal and to press for early progress towards peace and genuine democracy, Solana in the statement said, "One year on, I remain concerned by the lack of progress towards a return to democratic government at a time when Nepal faces many challenges to its stability."

EXPRESSING ITS DEEP CONCERN THAT THE CONFLICT was increasingly damaging the school system in Nepal, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has expressed its concerns over Election Commission's decision to locate 75 percent of polling stations for the next week's municipal elections in schools. Plans to use schools as polling stations in forthcoming civic polls will put children at risk, a UNICEF statement warned. "IN countries where elections can result in violence, schools can then become the focus or target of that violence. Nepal does not have enough schools building at present. Its children cannot afford to lose any more school buildings to explosions," UNICEF said. "Even if the school itself is not damaged but if there is violence on

the premises, the school can become a very stressful place for children afterwards. Already in many areas, children and their parents are scared about going to school," the statement added. However, Election Commissioner told AFP that it was too late to change voting sites. "We have already fixed the venue and we cannot change that at this time," said Tej Muni Bajracharya, spokesperson of EC, adding, "We have been using schools as balloting centers in the past."

SENIOR ECONOMISTS AND EXPERTS TALKING ABOUT the existing economic scenario have expressed serious concerns over the possibility of the economy collapsing within three months, if the current scenario continues unaltered. Dr. Raghav Dhoj Pant, executive director of the Institute for Development Studies (IfDS), has warned the current government and political parties of 'stagflation' which is already bleeding the economy, due primarily to unresolved political problems and lack of initiatives by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), Ministry of Finance (MoF) and National Planning Commission (NPC). Dr. Pant blamed political parties for turning their heads from the flagging economic outlook. He mentioned that per capita income is stagnant, prices are rising and the balance of payment problem with major trading partners is deteriorating. He warned that the economy 'might collapse abruptly. He said there is a 'stagflation' in the economy due to low or even negative growth in real income combined with unprecedented rise in prices.

THE INDUSTRIAL SECURITY GROUP (ISG) HAS CONDEMNED the recent Maoist abduction of employees engaged in industrial and commercial activities and the Maoist threats against and forced closure of businesses. "Industries and their employees should be allowed to carry on their work freely and peacefully. These actions violate the human right to work and hurt the overall economy of Nepal. The abduction of employees harms those workers and their families and hurts the commercial interests of foreign investors in Nepal, driving away valuable foreign investment and jobs for Nepali people," states the press release issued by the US Embassy on behalf of ISG. "In the interests of the people of Nepal to promote peace and prosperity, the Maoists should release the abducted workers, cease their violent tactics and threats, and allow ISG businesses to operate freely and without fear." The Industrial Security Group comprises representatives of the Embassies of France, Germany, India, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Delegation of the European Commission, along with their bilateral Chambers of Commerce. The statement was issued by the United States Embassy in Kathmandu on behalf of the Industrial Security Group, of which the Embassy is Acting Chair.

MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE DR. ROOP JYOTI H blasted a recent finding published by Institute for Development Studies (IfDS) in which the Institute has predicted that the country's economy would totally collapse within next three months. "It is confusing, sensational, politically motivated and totally wrong," said Dr. Jyoti. At a press meet organized by the Department of Information, he clarified that the revenue collection, remittances, government expenditure, foreign exchange reserve and inflation were all under control. "In the first six months of the current fiscal year, the government collected revenue totaling over Rs 31 billion, which is more by Rs 1.75 billion than the amount collected during same period previous year. Likewise, the central bank has Rs 146 billion worth of foreign exchange reserve," said Dr. Roop Jyoti trashing the prediction by IfDS. He said the poverty was reducing and the per capita income had not decreased. Last week, executive director of IfDS Dr. Raghav Dhoj Pant had released the finding stating that the country was suffering from what he called as 'stagflation' – the combination of low economic growth and high inflation. ■

“The nefarious designs to portray Nepal as a failed state a year back has now begun to unravel with acts of terrorism being limited to petty crimes.”

King Gyanendra, in his royal address to the nation on February 1.

* * *

“You have become civil servants not due to anybody’s grace but due to your own qualification and skill. As honest servants of the nation, you have your responsibility not to an individual but to the nation.”

Girija Prasad Koirala, president of Nepali Congress (NC) and former prime minister, urging the civil servants to boycott the polls, through a press statement.

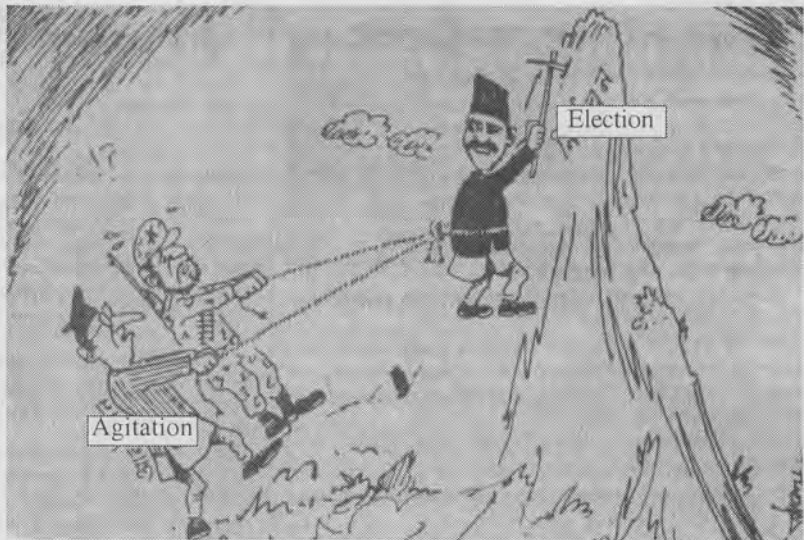
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“There would be a disaster if constitutional forces do not reconcile. But I have not seen any sign of dialogue.”

Pashupati SJB Rana, president of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), speaking at a face to face program at the Reporters’ Club.

* * *

“The seven parties disagree in most of the controversial comments of the



Jana Bhawana

king. The royal address cannot show way towards a strengthened Constitutional Monarchy and Multiparty Democracy.”

Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, joint general secretary of Nepali Congress (NC) in response to the royal address to the nation of February 1.

* * *

“Those who have provided materials and resources are operating the seven parties.”

Kamal Thapa, Home Minister, speaking in a Bahas program in Kantipur Television.

* * *

“I, being a person who obeys laws and constitution, let the F.M. stations broadcast news after the order of the court, even though I did not want it.”

Shrish Shumsher Rana, Minister of State for Information and Communications and the spokesperson of the government, talking to reporters.

* * *

“The royalists are spreading propaganda that ‘communism will come here if the king is toppled’.”

Rajendra Kharel, former minister, in Jana Astha.

* * *

TRANSITION

PROMULGATED: ‘Ordinance to amend some Nepal acts related to Education and Sports 2006’, by the King, in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990.

ACCREDITED: **Prajwal SJB Rana**, the Royal Nepalese Ambassador to the French Republic, also as the ambassador to Spain and the Republic of Portugal, by the King in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990.

Madhu Raman Acharya, permanent representative of Nepal to the United Nations, also as the ambassador to Brazil, by the King, in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990.

ABDUCTED: Production manager **Prabhakar Bikram Shah**, factory engineer **Sarbajeet Rana** and commercial manager **Dambar Mani Limbu**, of Surya Nepal Private Limited, by suspected Maoists, from Nitampur in Bara.

ELECTED: **Ramesh Budhathoki** as the president, **R. P. Pant**, **Laxmi Giri** and **Prakash Adhikari** as the vice-

presidents, **Mohan Niraula** as the general secretary, **Nabal Khadka** as the secretary, **Rupa Rana** as the treasurer, and **Hemanta Budathoki**, **Shusheel Pokhrel**, **Jayanta Regmi**, **Manoj K. C.** and **Reecha Ghimire** as the members of the central working committee of Nepal Film Artistes Association, unanimously, by the election of the general members of the association.

DIED: **Shambhu Ram Shrestha**, senior left leader, at the age of 87.

APPOINTED: **Shobhakar Parajuli**, as the chief secretary of Nepali Congress Office, by party president **Girija Prasad Koirala**. ■

Resolving Present Power Shortage Crisis

By DR. AB THAPA

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has already started load shedding. Now we are having daily interruption of power supply in rotation starting from early morning to late evening hours. The duration of the daily power supply cut is about 2.6 hours. The nature of the load shedding indicates that the NEA is now experiencing shortage of capacity (KW) as well as energy (KWh).

The power shortage crisis is going to deepen in the years to come because the demand for electricity in our national grid with a total firm capacity of about 500 MW is expected to grow steadily at an annual rate of at least about 5 to 7 percent. Except for the 70 MW Middle Marshyangdi Project, other major new power projects are nowhere near which would have come into operation within the next 5 to 7 years. Thus we are now being dragged into a whirlpool of deep power shortage crisis due to our shortsighted planning. However,

there might still be a way to soften the impact of this power shortage crisis if we launched a programme on war footing to utilize the full potential of the existing Kulekhani storage reservoir and hydropower stations (Kulekhani 1 & 2 hydropower) to generate extra power by diverting from Kathmandu valley the surplus flow of the Bagmati river and later on the Melamchi river into the Kulekhani reservoir. The design of the proposed Kulekhani 3

Hydropower should also be reviewed and perhaps its capacity might have to be raised to about 150 MW to meet the steadily growing peak load demand if it is decided to divert the Bagmati water into the Kulekhani reservoir.

The Kulekhani Reservoir and Power Stations

It is reported almost every year in local newspapers that the electricity generation of the Kulekhani hydropower stations is going to be reduced by a substantial margin because the Kulekhani storage reservoir is half-empty at the end of the monsoon season, with the result that the NEA would be forced to resort to load shedding in the coming dry season. This problem would certainly be solved if the surplus water from the rivers in the Kathmandu valley is pumped into the Kulekhani reservoir to be stored for the supply to the Kulekhani hydropower stations in the dry season.

The Kulekhani reservoir operation rule for the Kulekhani-1 with an installed capacity of 60MW is framed by a basic discharge pattern of 6.2 cum./sec. in the dry season from December to March and 2.1 cum./sec. in the wet season from April to November. The former is designed to generate four-hour peak power using the maximum discharge of 13.1 cum./sec. and 20-hour base load using 4.8 cum./sec. The latter is to utilize 6.55 cum./sec. for the peak power and 1.21 cum./sec. for the base load respectively.

Available water for the Kulekhani-2 power station with an installed capacity of 32 MW is comprised of the outflow from the Kulekhani-1 and the runoff of the Mandu river. The firm discharge of the latter with 90% dependability at the intake is estimated to be 0.2 cum./sec. both in winter and summer. Thus the maximum Kulekhani-2 discharge is designed to be 13.3 cum./sec.

Diversion from Kathmandu to Kulekhani

It is reported almost every year in local newspapers that the electricity generation of the Kulekhani hydropower stations is going to be reduced by a substantial margin because the Kulekhani storage reservoir is half-empty at the end of the monsoon season, with the result that the NEA would be forced to resort to load shedding in the coming dry season. This problem would certainly be solved if the surplus water from the rivers in the Kathmandu valley is pumped into the Kulekhani reservoir to be stored for the supply to the Kulekhani hydropower stations in the dry season.

The Bagmati river water in surplus to the need in the Kathmandu valley could be diverted into the Kulekhani reservoir from a place near Chobhar gorge. Mean flow of the Bagmati river at Chobhar is quite abundant during the monsoon seasons. Even in the winter months of the dry season starting from December to the end of March when the demand for the electricity in Nepal is very high the average flow of the Bagmati is expected to be over 2 cum./sec. The

empty space of the Kulekhani storage reservoir (with an effective storage capacity of 73.3 million cubic meters) could be utilized to accommodate about 20 million cubic meters monsoon season flow of the Bagmati river. Thus the Kulekhani hydropower could be provided throughout the 4 winter months additional 4 cum./sec. flow. Out of this total flow, the water drawn directly from the Bagmati would be about 2 cum./sec. and the stored Bagmati water would provide the remaining 2 cum./sec.

The diversion of the surplus Bagmati water from Kathmandu valley to the Kulekhani reservoir could be a very simple and at the same time the most cost effective proposition despite the fact that at first glance it might appear to be a somewhat complicated engineering task. Let us consider that we are going to draw about 4 cum./sec. Bagmati water from

somewhere near Chobar. It is explained hereinafter that the total power generation of the Kulekhani 1& 2 hydropower plants would almost be doubled by investing about US \$ 20 million in the construction of the proposed diversion structures including a pumping station.

The Proposed Design

We might have to build a 15 MW pump station at Chobar to lift 4 cum./sec water to a height of about 300 meters which might be equivalent in height to the full supply level (FSL) of the Kulekhani storage reservoir. It is equally possible that instead of one big pump station we might need several small pump stations with a total capacity of about 15 MW if the topography does not allow to provide single stage pumping. A 15 km long waterway might be needed to carry the water into the Kulekhani storage reservoir out of it the length of the tunnel could be about 9 kilometers. The total cost of such diversion could be about US \$ 20 million.

The construction of the proposed Bagmati diversion works could be completed within 2 years with one additional year for the initial preparatory works. The NEA might not require external foreign investment. It could mobilize its own resources to finance this project.

After the completion of the proposed Melamchi river diversion into the Kathmandu valley there would be substantial increase in flow of the Bagmati river at Chobar. As a result, the electricity generation of the Kulekhani 1&2 hydropower stations would be further increased.

Rationale Behind the Bagmati Diversion

The proposed Bagmati diversion could be implemented within a very short period to meet the ever growing demand for power in our national grid. The proposed diversion is going to be perhaps the most economic project because we do not need to invest on construction of the reservoir, power stations and transmission lines. We are going to utilize the existing power stations, reservoir and other structures. For pumping surplus monsoon period water from the Bagmati river into the Kulekhani reservoir we can use seasonal energy generated by our run-of-the-river hydropower projects. At present the seasonal energy is almost entirely wasted.

Kulekhani-3 Hydropower

At present the Kulekhani-1&2 hydropower stations are operating at a capacity factor of about 25 percent. After the diversion of the Bagmati into the Kulekhani reservoir the capacity factor of the Kulekhani 1&2 hydropower stations would be increased. So it would be desirable as soon as possible to implement the Kulekhani-3 hydropower also to fulfill the demand for very short duration peaking load. The capacity cost of the 75 MW Kulekhani-3 hydropower would be more than 2 times cheaper than then any other projects such as the Kali-Gandaki-A, Modi, Bhote-Kosi etc. Central location, proximity to existing transmission lines and highways are the added advantages in favour of implementing the Kulekhani-3 hydropower in very near future. ■

(Dr. Thapa writes on water resources)

Fostering Result-Oriented Approach: ADB

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will help the Governments of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan to build, strengthen, and reform their systems and practices to enable the adoption of a results-oriented approach to poverty reduction.

According to a press release by the ADB, the project, which will promote the practice of managing for development results (MfDR), will be funded by a US\$1.8 million technical assistance (TA) grant from the United Kingdom's Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund.

"MfDR, adopted by ADB in 2004, is a means of improving the planning, monitoring and evaluation of operations to achieve and sustain the intended results. One of the main features of ADB's MfDR action plan is to help its developing member countries better manage for results," states the release.

"Improving development outcomes, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals, is clearly a shared responsibility of developing member countries and their development partners," says John Samy, Deputy Director General of ADB's South Asia Department.

"Of crucial importance to ADB and other development partners is that, while we build our internal capacity for implementing the MfDR approach, we also develop a similar capacity within our developing member countries."

The TA will assess the readiness of the three countries to adopt MfDR practices and then develop an action plan for each. It will also test some readily implementable MfDR initiatives under ADB-financed projects.

"Through this project, our development partners will be able to rely more confidently on their own systems for the planning, resource allocation, and accountability of their development resources, thus allowing the delivery of more flexible and relevant forms of development assistance," adds Ziba Farhadian-Lorie, an ADB Principal Economist.

The participating governments will contribute \$100,000 in the form of counterpart staff, office accommodation, and utilities toward the TA's total cost of \$1.9 million. The project will be carried out over about two years.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through pro-poor sustainable economic growth, social development, and good governance. Established in 1966, it is owned by 64 members – 46 from the region. In 2004, it approved loans and technical assistance totaling \$5.3 billion and \$196.6 million, respectively. ■

KING'S PROCLAMATION Stresses His Roadmap

Though it seems inflexible, King Gyanendra's second proclamation also consists of some points of unity to resume democratic process and reconciliation

By KESHAB POUDEL

“Patriotism is the only means of creating a democratic society. We, therefore, call upon all Nepalese to consign mutual recrimination to the bitter past and build a secure and prosperous future for the nation and people, while upholding democratic norms,” states King Gyanendra in his annual proclamation addressing Nepalese people. “While history will be sole judge of an individual or a generation, it should be our endeavor to ensure that the present generation of Nepalese is given due credit.”

Following his takeover a year ago in February 1, 2005, this is King Gyanendra's second proclamation delivered through government media to the people. Though King Gyanendra is not a popularly elected leader who has to face periodical elections, monarchy is also traditionally a civilian institution and accountable to the people. Thus, King Gyanendra's proclamation does reflect a sense of responsibility.

As elected parliament is not there and the King has been exercising extraordinary power, it was due upon him to explain his performance and commitment to the people. King Gyanendra reminded the US president's State of the Union address in which the nation is informed about the balance sheet of governance.

“We have no desire other than Nepalese people's welfare and the responsibility towards Nepal's glorious history,” said King Gyanendra. “Guided by a national perspective that upholds our political, administrative and civic traditions, we are confident that by April 2007, all popularly elected bodies will be active in ensuring a bright future for the Nepalese people through a dedicated exercise in

democracy so as to create a welfare society.”

Along with many rhetoric and political jargons prepared to address different stakeholders, King Gyanendra's determination to hold elections for the House of Representatives can be one of the important point of unity. The common meeting point for all of them, as King Gyanendra expresses, is patriotism.

Since King Gyanendra is at the helm of power, he has to take wider initiative inviting other stakeholders including leaders of organized political parties to fulfill his noble proclamation. His call “to



King Gyanendra: Staying the Course

consign mutual recrimination to the bitter past and build a secure and prosperous future for the nation and people, while upholding democratic norms” show signs of possibility for national unity.

At a time when the country is bitterly divided and there is a gap of mutual trust, there is a need to show real sincerity in actions. Only united house can save Nepal's unity and integrity while bitter division will benefit none.

One of the noticeable things in the King's proclamation is that there is a strong will and determination to follow the roadmap to restore normalcy in the country. For that he has repeatedly declared his commitment to the

constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy - which are the basic elements of the constitution. From top to bottom, King Gyanendra has reiterated his commitment to constitutional monarchy and democracy and stated that patriotism is a common meeting point. “We wish to emphasize that all differences can be resolved within the framework of the Nepalese psyche, which has never had to put up with subjugation throughout history,” said King Gyanendra.

Difference In the Last Two

The recent proclamation of the King and the last February's proclamation cannot be compared. On February 1, 2005, major provisions of the constitution were suspended and press freedom was curtailed. All telephones were disconnected and several stringent measures were adopted. Anybody in politics was arrested and put into detention. None of these things happened last week.

“Extremely harsh and offensive materials are getting published in the press everyday these days. It is not that persons are not in detentions but they have been detained for taking part in street demonstration in defiance of prohibition order,” claims Minister of State for Information and Communication and spokesperson of the government Shrish Sumsher Rana.

Within a span of one year, many negative aspects of February 1, 2005

have been corrected. The freedom has been tolerated even in extreme provocation. Things that were declared at that time were shadowed by harsh measures of control and censorship. The same thing has now been repeated in the changed and relaxed situation. The main thing is the continued commitment of the King for constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy.

In this proclamation, the King has repeatedly mentioned the role of people as supreme decision maker and the center of all political powers. In so many words, he was reiterating his commitment for the right of the people and right of self-governance of the people.

"Democracy flourishes only through the enfranchisement of the people and democrats are never losers when democracy is upheld. Therefore, the first and foremost preconditions for consolidating democracy are to gain the support of the people through the ballot and respect their mandate," said King Gyanendra.

On these points any sensible politician from opposition side can pick up the threat of dialogue, which need to be within the four walls of Royal Palace and face to face with the King. Facilities are there with all to initiate a dialogue through the press and electronic media. Any sensible person can see that the King has initiated this with several ifs and buts. Such ifs and buts might also be in the tone of leaders of political parties - but the main issue is to empower the people to decide and begin the full-fledged parliamentary politics.

It depends upon the attitude of politicians to read or undermine a sign of hope. As a spectator, one can see the possibilities of negotiation in the Royal proclamation. Unfortunately, a game plan of divisive elements has been even now successful to create confusion all around. Even astute diplomatic community, which has greater access with palace and political parties, are not immune from the typical Nepalese bizarre propaganda.

However, by now one has listened to many commitments and determinations to safeguard country and democracy - what is required now is the action to translate King's proclamation into practice. At a time when the King, too, is surrounded by hardliners who don't want to see the revival of liberal system, it also requires cool headed response from leaders of organized political forces.

"If political parties want to support the King, they have to accept King's three years roadmap and participate in the elections," said Home Minister and president of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) Kamal Thapa.

To fully activate the constitution, the King has said this could be done by the decision of the people only. For that, he has given time schedule of election of parliament within the middle of 2007.

As King Gyanendra is chairing the government with all his nominees as ministers, it is for him to show credible evidence to the parties that the elections will be free, fair and impartial. Unless the

King takes the confidence of organized political force, his election commitment will end up a fiasco. At present, despite being a monarch committed to multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy, he continues to be condemned as a despotic and unpopular monarch.

Although many people have reservations over inflexible stand taken by King Gyanendra, the institution of monarchy still is a popular institution that is able to handle such unpopular steps. "At a time when the country has been passing through a very critical time, Nepal has a powerful entrenched institution of monarchy based upon traditional faith and belief of the common people," said an analyst.

Unlike other popular forces like organized political parties, which have to renew their popularity through periodical elections, the institution of monarchy, which is based on belief and faith, can sometime take very unpopular decisions.

"However unpopular that may appear, one of the justifications of having this institution is that it could take on unpopular decision also in case it is required in the interest of the nation," said the analyst.

This institution could be helpful to keep support to the popularly elected institution like the parliament. Even if that is absent at present, the King could not afford to ignore the strength and backing of a functioning parliament for a longer period of time. Whatever the King has described in his Royal Proclamation in its face value, he seems to have that awareness. Now the result has to be seen by its implementation.

"Guided by a national perspective that upholds our political administrative and civic traditions, we are confident that by April 2007, all popularly elected bodies will be active in ensuring a bright future of the Nepalese people through a dedicated exercise in democracy so as to create a welfare society," said King Gyanendra.

As he is exercising enormous power of the state, King Gyanendra cannot remain immune from criticism. The way the press and media are exercising power and privilege of criticism, it has been unprecedented in Nepal.

After the royal proclamation, King Gyanendra and his government have been severely criticized for taking hard stand and ignoring the organized

political forces. From leaders of organized political forces to international community, there are wide spread criticisms. "King Gyanendra's proclamation is nothing more than a continuity towards his regressive steps. We don't think the King will easily hand over the power to the people and what we require is nationwide agitation to bow him down," said CPN-UML leader K.P. Sharma Oli. "Our struggle will continue till the establishment of absolute Loktantra."

From the opposition political parties to national and international media, the government has never been under such an extreme attack from all side - the amount of pressure would have been impossible even during the functioning of the parliament to handle.

"One can see the freedom to the extent of anarchy but this is all during an abnormal period of the country in which the regime has been scandalized all over the world as despotic and the King as a despot," said an analyst. "If freedom of expression recently exercised by press is a barometer to gauge the degree of democracy, Nepal at present enjoys absolute freedom."

After King's proclamation, some international reports published in foreign media compared the King's rule in Nepal as equivalent to military regime of Myanmar and some other Asian military regimes. Nobody knows whether these kinds of freedom to criticize the regime exists there or not.

It is an irony of this situation in Nepal that the copies of such media freely circulated in Nepal in which the institution of monarchy and monarch have been branded as a despot and despotic regime. Are these kinds of publications possible to circulate when criticizing neighboring Bhutan's 'model King'?

Although hour-long proclamation of King Gyanendra has many rhetoric and political jargons, it has many points of unity where monarchy and organized political forces can sit together to bring the present constitution back to track. Whether the US admiral who visited Nepal recently or other foreigners and overwhelming majority of Nepalese, all firmly believe that monarchy, a unifying factor and symbol of national identity and political stability, and organized political forces, foundation of democracy, need to reconcile together for the prosperous and stable Nepal. ■

Talking Politics All Season

After the dissolution of the elected House of Representatives in June 2002 and the dismissal of elected prime minister in October 2002 by King Gyanendra, the streets of urban centers of Nepal continues to witness all kinds of political debates and agitations all the time. The political forces are talking politics all season ignoring the festering problems like growing unemployment, deteriorating quality of education, scarcity of health institutions and disruption in economic development. As long as the elected parliament - though it used to be frequently disrupted by political agitations by main opposition parties - was functional, members of parliament raised the agenda of development. At a time when Nepal's two big neighbors India and China are moving rapidly towards round development buoyed by high economic growth, how long can Nepal continue to afford to ignore the real and core agenda of all round development remains to be seen

By KESHAB POUDEL

A recent news report in Kantipur daily (February 5) said a group of women had to wait for up to twenty hours just to see a doctor for check up. In a camp organized to check up women's health in Myagdi district, 300 kilometers west of capital, the long queue of women forced the organizers to open the camp whole day.

According to the Asian Development Bank, Nepal needs to restart and accelerate growth to create employment for its burgeoning population. Nepal's unemployment problems are unexpectedly higher as a recent survey published by an international organization has revealed that one third of population are unemployed.

Schools and colleges - which need to complete 180 days of class annually -

were hardly open for half of the period affecting the quality of education. In rural areas, the education sector is thoroughly hit by ongoing conflict.

Exports of garment and carpet continue to decline coupled with low tourist arrivals, which have already made tens of thousands of people jobless.

Nepal Electricity Authority has announced 17 hours long weekly load shedding since mid of January and it is expected to increase further in April and



Party workers in demonstration: One-point agenda

May. Future of Melamchi Drinking Water Project, a mega project aimed at supply drinking water to capital, is uncertain. The only running Middle Marsyangdi project has overshot its targeted time of completion due to frequent strikes and disruptions.

Although these major agenda have many long-term and short-term implications, they hardly surface in the agenda of political forces – which have been launching different kinds of political programs.

Where Are Other Agenda?

Talking politics all the time has become a pastime of urban elites and politicians in Nepal and nobody has any time to talk about the agenda of health, employment and development that touches the everyday lives of millions of people. Situated between two vibrant and economically powerful countries India and China, how long can Nepalese afford the luxury of talking politics and politics all the time?

There seems to be minimum awareness and concern on other vital problems of the country such as unemployment, illiteracy, poor health and other several such economic issues at political level.

According to a report, Nepal's one third of working population are jobless. It is unfortunate to say that these jobless

people in the country don't have their spokesmen in politics. It seems that political forces have used them as easily available cheap slogan shouters and violent and unruly agitators.

The ways the education environment have been disrupted indicate that the country will have a very low quality of students in future who will not be able to compete in the regional and international market. If the government does not invest sufficient resources to help them, the country's burgeoning jobless people will have no option other than to disrupt the day-to-day life.

"We have very learned, experienced and dedicated economists who reveal that the country's economy is in alarming situation but that debate don't go further than that. There is no buyer of that opinion or concern in the organized politics. It requires a bit of serious study and knowledge of some basic facts - which the city centered populist elites find distasteful and boring," said a political analyst.

The most thrilling and exciting debate is centered around political issues that have distracted even professionals who are supposed to join the genuine debates. Among persons of the academic career - who talk about sensitizing against the Royal Regime

and the constitution – who are in high demand in debating forums and media, nobody has the time to raise the issues of interest of broader group of people.

"I have been saying for quite a long time that the economy of this nation has been adversely affected by non-economic factors. Unless these elements are resolved, the economy will not take a positive turn. The major players in this country did not give appropriate and timely attention to the timely resolution of this problem, that is conflict - which has ruined the economy. Now the situation is such that we cannot do much on the economic front even if we try to do so. In the meantime, no concerted efforts seem to be forthcoming to resolve the decade long crisis," said former governor of Nepal Rastra Bank Dr. Tilak Rawal,

Persons who are seriously concerned about the economic problems of the country, deterioration of education, job and health don't find prominence in interviews in newspapers and public gatherings. What entertains the people is politics – that, too, of highly inflamed, sadistic and intense nature.

It requires a little homework and a little sense and logic to arise from this quagmire. Being a pluralistic society, which has been guaranteed by the constitution, anybody has the right to dissent against whole society and spread hatred and disaffection even to a document of faith like constitution. To that extent debates are understandable.

But it is quite unusual to see such debates bring in the prominence such issues, which have no relevance with the broad spectrum of the moments. And one fails to understand how the change of the constitution will ensure the stability and respect of the new constitution. One is hardly provided convincing illustration based upon serious and logical thinking.

"We are talking politics all the time to bring the economic prosperity. The economic development has no meaning without political freedom," said CPN-UML leader K.P. Sharma Oli. "Talking about non-essential issues like economy, education will only strengthen the hand of regressive move of the King."

Debating all the time about the forms of the constitution and, thus, changing the constitution one after another has become a common phenomenon. The agenda of economic development, creating job opportunities and making the quality of life happier and arresting the economic debacle has become nobody's agenda though it is related to the basic needs of the people who have been taken for granted as an instrument to destabilize one political system after another and one constitution after another.

"A complex political setting with Palace, government and political parties and CPN/M vying for state control and power made it more difficult for government to focus the country's development challenges," states Asian Development Bank's Country Strategy and Program 2005-2009.

Development Left To Donors

Development needs of the people have been completely left to the concerned departments of the government as well as bewildered donor agencies. Sometime politicians must have to take up the economic problem - which is much related to the problems in the country. Many political parties were established as socialist or equalitarian or welfare but now such things are rarely found in the speeches of politicians.



Street Agitation: Focus is on Politics

"One of the important parts of the present time is that politics receive more priority and economic sector is pushed into shadow. There is a need to take political risk to address the real problems but we are unable to take such risk," said former chief secretary Dr. Bimal Koirala to Agenda, a weekly tabloid. "Country's economy has been passing through a very critical phase and there requires immediate steps to bring the economy right in the track."

What has made dysfunctional the role of political parties is the lopsided,

city-centered populist tendencies to maintain the popularity. After all the common people at the grass roots are the real base of power but the articulation of the urban centered middle class elites ignore them.

The Role of Elections

The absence of elections in the last few years has widened the gap. The more the elections remain distant, the more the grasp of the urban elites strengthen compared with the grass root interests.

Thanks to the activation of elected system, Nepal had made major strides in the area of economic development. Prepared by the experts from the World Bank and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the Nepal Living Standard Survey II revealed that popular participation of people can bring about the desired changes. Despite frequent changes in the government, political violence and anarchy, the poverty had drastically reduced during the period of 1996-2003.

Keeping in view the functioning of three parliaments in the past, the lesson is that the people get their issues in prominence as long as periodical elections are held. Presently, as there is no election, there is no relevance of the political debate with the real interest of common people.

When sensible persons have failed to grasp the gravity of the situation, they have also missed the opportunity to act



Health workers administering vaccine: Core concerns overshadowed

realistically. Politics is not merely a game of war and conflicts for the sake of power, - but it is also a game of negotiation and compromises directed at the welfare of people. One of the vital rules of the democracy is to accommodate conflicting interests to deliver change to the basic life of the people.

All Politics

From economy to development, trade to health and education to employment sectors and energy, all have been passing through a very critical time, as overall development programs remain virtually standstill. But, city-based political forces and urban elites have a little time to perceive the country's major problems. Political agitations and political agenda are dominating country. Political forces - which are mostly city-centric - have been enjoying the irrelevant political debates using political jargons like absolute democracy, ceremonial monarchy, Constituent Assembly, active monarchy, meaningful democracy, monarch of 21st century, inclusive Loktantra etc sidelining the country's most burning agenda.

"In the 1990s, Nepal's annual economic growth averaged around a healthy 4.9 percent but the escalating insurgency saw this drop to an average of 1.9 percent between 2002 to 2004. Given that this conflict is persisting and that there are chances it might actually deteriorate, Nepal could lose significantly more than two percentage points of GDP per annum," said Sultan Hafeez Rahman, country director of Asian Development Bank recently. "With 31 percent of the population living below absolute poverty line and with an average income of just less than \$300 a year, the troubled Himalayan Kingdom cannot afford this kind of loss."

Not only the head of Asian Development Bank but also heads of other international donor

agencies have been expressing similar concerns about Nepal's overall position in terms of health, education, economy and other development indicators. But, these warning and predictions have little effect on country's political forces - which are more concerned about their own political agenda.

As the country does not have elected institutions accountable to the people, such vital issues of day to day concern are nobody's agenda. Had there been elected and accountable body like parliament functional, the issue would have disrupted the proceeding compelling the government to take certain drastic steps.

When the country's political forces are fighting to justify their own political agenda and pursuing irrelevant political jargons, genuine problems and issues faced by common people have been completely sidelined. All these

bandh - and by suppressing the voices of organized political forces.

These troubles don't indicate a symptom related to the common people who have been all the time used as a commodity to inflate the crisis. The priority of overwhelming majority of common people is to see the reconciliation between the country's political forces to achieve the economic development.

The villagers in Sunsari district, the constituency of Nepali Congress (NC) leader Girija Prasad Koirala, do not sleep in night because of threat from the armed



A drinking water pipeline: Rare infrastructure

political controversies have overshadowed other serious problems of the country.

In fact, the political controversies are not coming up from the bottom - the grass root people - but being imposed from the top professionals in politics who have manipulated, sponsored and guided the unrealistic debates. Irrelevant political debates are being generated in society.

One cannot reach into any realistic conclusion about the situation of the country and mood of the people by these high sounding political rhetoric - which are being underlined by burning tires in the streets, disrupting the educational calendar and bringing the country now and then into a standstill by the call of

robbers. The schools are irregular as well as irrigation canals have dried up due to interruption of water supply from Kosi. Out of 180 class days, the educational institutions run for less than half the time.

Although King Gyanendra stayed at Itahari (a few weeks ago), just 30 kilometers north of the village, and although Nepali Congress leader Koirala frequently visited his house in Biratnagar, 20 kilometers east of the village - the problems of the villagers continue unresolved. In the current round of battle, talking politics seem to be the only agenda for them.

How Much And How Long Of Political Debate?

Nobody knows how long and how much the country can afford the luxury



Water distributed by tanker: When will Melamchi come?

of political debates ignoring the country's major agenda concerning the people. For the past five decades, Nepalese spent most of their time in raising the fundamental political questions – which are yet to be settled.

Following the revolution of 1951, debate on Nepal's core political issue, which was attempted to settle at least a couple of times in the past, continues to remain unresolved giving opportunity for the force of instability to gain maximum benefit out of the rift between Nepal's internal political forces. Accepting the constitution given by then King, Nepali Congress leader B.P. Koirala had formed the first elected government winning the majority in the first free and fair elections in 1958. In mysterious circumstances, the elected government was dismissed and prime minister sent to prison paving the way to revive old political agenda of sharing the power.

After functioning 30 years despite stiff oppositions, the last days of Panchayat brought some real debate concerning people. When Panchayat was itself in the process of settling the political debate, a new political turmoil of 1990 finally succeeded to usher a new era of power sharing through political consensus between the King and the organized political forces. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 was promulgated hoping to end the debate of power sharing between the political forces. The question against the fundamental values of democracy was raised by the Maoists in 1996 by raising arms against the

Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 - demanding to decide the fate of power sharing through the elections of Constituent Assembly.

Major organized political forces faced the violent rebellion launched against the system. One local and national level election were successfully held despite the threat of insurgents in 1997 and 1998. The new political courses emerged following the Royal massacre and accession to the throne by King Gyanendra in 2001. Leaders of political parties, knowingly or unknowingly, pushed the situation to this level in just one year that prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala was replaced by his colleague Sher Bahadur Deuba under whose recommendation the King dissolved the House of Representatives. King Gyanendra, who dismissed Deuba in October 2, 2002 instead of accepting his proposal to postpone general elections, took over absolute executive power.

In his three year long reign, King Gyanendra appointed three different prime ministers and finally he took control of executive power on February 2, 2005 constituting the cabinet under his chairmanship.

Although irrelevant political debates were there all the time, it was just confined to small groups and there were hardly any debate on the core constitutional issues as long as the elected House of Representatives was functional.

During the one decade of elected government, the country did witness a new upsurge of economic development with the establishment of high quality educational institutions, transformation in agriculture and infrastructure development.

Even the CPN-UML – which conspired against the Arun III mega hydro-electricity project - introduced a Build Your Village Yourself Program that generated a new wave of development program in the country. Although organized political forces had made several mistakes thanks to inexperience, they had competed on the basis of their plans in accordance with their own agenda for the development.

As the debate has gradually shifted on power sharing, the streets of urban centers are now full of political agenda ignoring the vast and important area of economic development. "The inability to resolve the locus of ultimate state authority is causing all kinds of political problems. As long as the core political issues remain unsettled, power contestants will confine their struggle in power generating continual instability. External elements will then find proper time to instigate various contestant of power against each other to maximize their benefits," said sociologist Sauvagya Jung Shaha. "Because of this kind of unsettled locus of authority, we hardly find time to pursue economic and other agenda and all will involve in political debates and talks politics all the time."

As long as real political power to choose their representatives is not given to the people, talking politics will be the one and only agenda of elites and politicians and nobody will be there to speak the voices of grass root people. ■

MUNICIPAL POLLS

Desperate Exercise

The elections for the municipalities turned into a desperate exercise as the government and the political forces engage in bitter struggle

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

Thanks to bitter differences over its justification and fairness, the municipal polls of February 8 – which should have become an important step towards restoring the governance by elected representatives – has turned into a desperate exercise without any hope of restoring normalcy in the country.

Ever since King Gyanendra announced municipal polls, there was a growing differences among the government and the major political parties. Since the government failed to take the parties into confidence and was seen as 'imposing' the elections, the latter decided not only to boycott it but do it so 'actively.'

On the other hand, the Maoists had already drawn their daggers threatening to 'reduce by six inches' anyone standing in the election. They have 'kept their promise' by killing one candidate Bijaya Lal Das of Nepal Sadbhavana Party who was going to contest for the position of mayor of Janakpur city and seriously injuring another candidate Dal Bahadur Rai of Rastriya Janamukti Party who was the candidate for the position of mayor of Lalitpur. Reports of abductions, physical attacks, threats and intimidations of candidates and/or their supporters have continued to make headlines of newspapers in recent days.

In such an unprecedented environment of fear, apathy and disillusionment, the government, however, had decided to go with its poll plan come hail or sunshine.

"This is the first time in the history of Nepal that an election has been tarnished and dragged to such controversy. Amid the fear from the Maoists and boycott call by the major parties, the poll has been rendered into a useless exercise that is not going to serve any purpose," said a political analyst.

Furthermore, even the international community – which had shown lukewarm



Candidates campaigning: Rare scene

Rajdhani

response to the announcement of polls last year – have now started urging the government to withdraw it as it would only serve to further 'widen or polarize' the political forces.

The adamant posturing and hardening of positions has resulted in an atmosphere of unparalleled confusion. Till the day of official ending of election campaigning, rarely any candidate ventured out in the open to appeal for votes. Apart from few lesser known parties like the recently splintered Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) led by Home Minister Kamal Thapa; Nepal Samata Party led by Works and Physical Planning Minister Narayan Singh Pun; Democratic Nepal Party led by

Agriculture Minister Keshar Bahadur Bista; and Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) led by Forest Minister Badri Prasad Mandal, no known political outfit has entered into the electoral fray.

The people, therefore, seem largely apathetic to the whole exercise even as the Maoists called weeklong Nepal bandh from February 5-11.

Perhaps alarmed by the evolving scenario and eventual low turn out of voters, the Election Commission (EC) has issued a guideline directing election officers to allow persons without Voters' ID, too, to cast their ballot. Earlier, in cities only the people with proper Voters' ID were allowed to vote.

The municipal elections cover 58 municipalities in 43 districts including Kathmandu metropolitan. There are 4146 seats up for grabs (including mayor, deputy mayor, ward chairman and ward members). But of the total seats, no one filed nominations for 2104 positions. According to EC, out of 3654 contestants who filed their nominations for various posts on January 26, 647 including 60 mayoral, 52 deputy mayoral, 250 ward chairmen and 285 ward members, withdrew their candidature a few days later. Twenty-two mayors and 20 deputy mayors have already been elected unopposed in 22 municipalities. In Kathmandu

out of 144 candidates, 69 ward members, female members and chairmen have already been elected unopposed.

There are over 1.9 million voters in 58 municipalities across the country. There are over 300,000 voters in Kathmandu alone. Nearly 200 polling centers have been fixed for the capital valley, according to EC.

The municipal that will be seen as 'historic' for all the wrong reasons, at the end of the day, will have served no purpose other than dividing the political forces and further pushing the possibilities of reconciliation, which remains the only viable way out of the present imbroglio that threatens to gobble up the whole nation. ■

VISIT OF CHINESE STATE COUNCILOR Significant Trip

As Nepal's internal crisis grows and violence intensifies, the upcoming visit by Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan has great significance

By KESHAB POUDEL

At a time when the violent insurgency has intensified coinciding with deepening political crisis with no sign of immediate solution, Nepal's two neighbors India and China are keeping a very close watch on the evolving internal situation here. Their concerns are understandable as both of them share a long border with the Himalayan Kingdom and the prolonging instability here could have long-term and short-term security implications to them.

Coming amid this backdrop the proposed visit by Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan could have significant ramifications. He is scheduled to visit the country on February 16-18. He will meet with high-level government officials and political leaders. He is also visiting Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

More than a month after the visit by Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran, a very high level Chinese delegation led by the State Councilor and former foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan, who is also the advisor to Chinese president Hu Jintao on foreign affairs, is coming to the capital next week.

The visit reportedly will focus on bilateral issues particularly on the progress on the bilateral cooperation and Nepal's problems.

"As an important person playing influential role in overall Chinese foreign policy, this visit has big significance," said a China expert on condition of anonymity. "This visit is taking place at the initiative of China."

Although China always backs Nepal's efforts to assert its independence and sovereignty and has termed February 1, Royal takeover as an internal affair of Nepal, the northern neighbor seems to have certain displeasures over delays in the implementations of the projects agreed by Nepal five years ago.

Despite signing agreement on several development projects between Nepal and China, the present government, which has been fighting violent insurgency and facing political agitation, has shown little

enthusiasm towards them. During the visit of Chinese premier Zhu Rongji in 2001, Nepal and China had signed agreement to build Syaphrubeshi-Kerung, the second road to link Nepal with Tibet; construct Civil Servant Hospital and Polytechnic Institute.

China has already completed the construction of the section of Syaphrubeshi road on the Chinese side but the Department of Road in Nepal is yet to submit its reports regarding the quality of geology and soil of the construction site on Nepal side. China is reportedly waiting to get report from Nepal to begin helping in the construction of the road. In five years, Nepal has seen five different governments including the present one but the construction of the road and the implementation of other projects are yet to begin.

Not only the newly proposed road, even the existing 18 kilometer portion of Barabishe-Kodari, the first road to link the capital with Tibet, is in bad condition and Nepal government has not yet started its renovation.

"Engaging in closer connection and economic cooperation between the two capitals can not only place themselves better off, but also presumably leads to a change of geopolitical outlook. Unfortunately, the pace of materializing these agreements and projects remains slow given the instability in Nepal," said Hua Han, scholar of School of International Studies Peking University in her article "The Strategic Dimension in Sino-Nepalese Relations."

Like Nepal's southern neighbor, which has been permitted to open Consulate General Office in Birgunj two years ago, China also reportedly expressed willingness to open Consulate General Office in Biratnagar in case Nepalese request them to do so. They have already proposed to build optical fiber through Kathmandu-Kodari highway. Under Indian cooperation, an optical fiber network has recently been completed in the East West highway.

"We are ready to provide support as much as we can in the overall developmental process of Nepal. China always wants to see prosperous and independent Nepal. First

of all your government needs to execute the agreed projects including the construction of Syaphrubeshi-Kerung road and renovation of 18 kilometer portion of Barabishe-Kodari road. Only after completing these works, Chinese government can consider other proposals," said a senior Chinese diplomat. "If Nepal government and people of Nepal request us, we are ready to do more for Nepal."

No specific agenda has been announced yet but sources said the senior Chinese official will discuss a wide range of bilateral issues with government ministers. Although China also pursues the policy of calling for the unity between Nepal's political forces, this is the first time leader of China's high-level delegation is meeting with senior opposition political leaders.

China has recently urged all political forces to narrow down their differences. "China hopes that Nepal can be stabilized as soon as possible," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan recently commenting on Nepal's crisis.

"Nepal is one of China's friendly neighboring countries and China is concerned about the current insurgency in Nepal. China hopes that all parties involved in Nepal will narrow down their differences through dialogue so as to contribute to the country's development and prosperity," said Kong Quan.

Nepal's two-neighbors - India and China - who fought a brief border war in 1962, are cautiously monitoring the situation in Nepal as both the neighbors have vital stakes. At any moment one may be provoked by other to lose its restraint. The more the situation in Nepal is becoming unstable and volatile, the more one apprehends the involvement of one against the other in Nepal.

"Being Nepal's close neighbor, Beijing also shares its own concerns on the domestic instability in Nepal, simply because it is likely to have a spill-over effect on the security environment in China's frontier areas," said Hua Han. "For Beijing, Nepal's strategic disposition is of tremendous value to its South Asia Policy and to the stability in its frontier region."

"In recent weeks, there were positive indications to show that they (India and China) have started to talk about Nepal and discuss whatever the complaints that they may have against each other in Nepal. They are having constant dialogue without any provocative propaganda," said an analyst.

The visit of senior Chinese official indicates how important Nepal's geo-strategic position is in their agenda. ■

LATE KRISHNA BAHADUR AMATYA

Pioneer Foreign Exchanger

Very few people of the present young generation know about the role late Krishna Bahadur Amatya played in the foreign currency exchange market in the past

By KESHAB POUDEL

In the process of modernization of five decades, Kathmandu valley has seen many transformations. From banking sector to commercial sectors, the modern management system has replaced the old indigenous system.

Along with being the heart of the city for all kinds of business activities, Indrachowk remained a major center for currency exchange till 1970s but only a few people can find any trace how foreign currency market was regulated from this dingy and crowded marketplace.

When few months back Krishna Bahadur Amatya, father of industrialist Piush Bahadur Amatya died, only a few people noticed information published regarding his contribution in the area of foreign exchange. Unlike today's society where dozens of private commercial banks, finance companies and scores of money exchangers are operating adhering to electronic and modern banking practice, late Amatya and some of his colleagues had a virtual monopoly in their indigenous method to regulate the market in the past.

Unfortunately, in the process of transformation, many such historically important traces of economic development have evaporated. Even no one has ever made to trace the record and update persons involved in the sector.

Although the place (from where Amatya operated) in Indrachowk has already vanished and only a few old generation people know how an open floor at Indrachowk used to act as a foreign currency market for quite a long time. Fewer still recognize the

role played by late Krishna Bahadur Amatya, founder of Amatya Group of Industries, for quite a long time.

It was after Dr. Bhekha Bahadur Thapa became governor of Nepal Rastra Bank back in 1968 that the traditional system of fixing the rate of foreign exchange by businessmen like late Amatya came to an end.

In his time, Amatya was a legend in the foreign currency exchange market. "The rate of foreign currency used to be decided by Amatya and his some colleagues. What they fixed would be the rate for the day," remembers Dr. Thapa. "When Nepal Rastra Bank took control of the foreign exchange, I gave them option to start private bank but late

Amatya did not accept our proposal. He was a nice person."

The system of fixing the foreign currency rate from Indrachowk ended a long time back but the place did have many historical contributions in shaping the Nepal's indigenous system of banking.

Although then Rana prime minister Juddha Sumsher Rana established Nepal Bank (the first bank in Nepal) about 70 years ago, a group of businessmen led by late Amatya was responsible to fix the foreign currency rate up to 1967 when a Foreign Currency Exchange Act finally ended their centuries-old indigenous banking system.

Till 1960s, Indian currency was the only foreign currency that could be exchanged in the valley. India was the sole supplier of other foreign currencies to Nepal till 1960.

"I still remember that a senior staff of Nepal Bank used to visit my fathers to know the currency rate. The market of the currency were decided on the basis of demand and supply," said industrialist and son of late Amatya, Piush Bahadur Amatya. Famously known as Mailabhai in the

business sector, late Amatya's words on foreign exchange were regarded as final and authoritative.

As remittances were the main source of Indian currency, the number of arrival of Indian soldiers and the amount of money they brought into the country fluctuated the supply side of the currency.

On some days, the exchange rate fluctuated sharply witnessing ups and downs. Although modern concrete buildings are gradually vanishing the old importance of Indrachowk, it was like the original Wall Street of Nepal. "Indrachowk used to be everything from wholesale market to money exchanging place," said industrialist Amatya.

The country needs to recognize the importance of the place and persons involved in it. Such persons and their contribution are a part of rich heritage in Nepal's process of modernization. ■



Amatya: Unforgettable role

MAOISTS ATTACK

Clear And Present Danger

For Maoists, the current polarization and division among constitutional forces seem to be the God-sent opportunity, as they continue to run amok across the nation

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

It was Tansen last week. The tiny town of historic popularity known for lush green hills and breathtaking natural beauties did not deserve the mindless attack that not only drew precious blood of Nepalese but also destroyed historic buildings.

On January 31, the Maoists launched a massive attack in the famous hill station in western Nepal – timed carefully to ensure that it hugged the headlines of the following day when the King's government would be observing the first anniversary since February 1, 2005 takeover of executive powers.

Furthermore, the attack also came on the eve of the significant visit by Admiral William J. Fallon, commander of the US Pacific Command. Admiral Fallon is the senior most American military official visiting Nepal since royal takeover last year.

At least, four Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) soldiers, seven police personnel

and four Maoists have died after the latter launched heavy attack against Tansen – headquarters of Palpa district on Tuesday night. Following the nightlong attack, over 100 police personnel went missing but later came into contact.

Few days after the attack, the Maoists set free most of the persons they abducted after the attack and handed them over to human rights activists and journalists. The freed persons included Chief District Officer Laxman Thapa.

In a frighteningly similar tactics that they have been employing to such regular success, the Maoists came in thousands armed with modern weapons, launched simultaneous attacks in several security positions in the cover of darkness, ran amok the town, killed some, abducted few and melted away before the security forces could get them. And in eerily similar manner, the security forces could not be deployed to nab the fleeing Maoists who seem to have

vanished into thin air after the attack. A day later the Maoists came up with statement claiming huge setback to the government forces and seizure of large number of weapons. They also claimed that two government officials including CDO Thapa, 20 police personnel and three army personnel were captured after the attack.

The Maoists had concentrated their attack at District Police Office, District Administration Office and District Prison. Over 130 prisoners were set free after the attack at the prison. The attack left Tansen Palace, the main administrative building that has historic archaeological significance, in ruins.

After visiting the town in shambles, Home Minister Kamal Thapa said that the Maoists lacked sense of humanity or patriotism. "Their barbaric and condemnable attack in Tansen exposes their inhuman character," said Thapa. The district administration office, district police office, prison, Bal Mandir (Child orphanage run by the government) lay in ruins as the security forces accused the Maoists of taking cover of private residences and using human shields while launching their attack. "I want to praise the bravery of our security personnel who laid down their lives and applied restraint even as they successfully repelled the attackers," said Thapa.

In recent months since the escalation of dispute among the constitutional forces – the monarchy and the political parties – the Maoists have been extracting advantages to further their violent rebellion.

After withdrawing their unilateral ceasefire, the Maoists even launched an attack against Thankot police post in Kathmandu killing one dozen police personnel. They have stepped up their activities exploding bombs in Pokhara, Biratnagar, Kathmandu, Chitwan, Nepalgunj and so on.

In Nepalgunj, the Maoists have been regularly attacking police posts at their will. They even attacked Nepalgunj airport and killed security personnel posted there. Clearly, they are becoming emboldened with every passing day even as the constitutional forces fail to



Tansen: Bloody aftermath

Rajdhani



Freed abductees: Unpleasant experience

Rajdhani

reconcile their differences forgetting the fact that the festering problem could end up destroying them altogether.

It is not for nothing that the international community including the United States, the United Kingdom, the EU, India and now even China are calling for the political forces to resolve their differences and get together to face the Maoist menace. Unfortunately, these calls are not being heeded at all.

This week, the Maoists called a weeklong Nepal Bandh (February 5-11) paralyzing the normal life across the country. Traffic was sparse even in Kathmandu valley whereas the schools, factories and businesses remained shut. The Maoists had announced the bandh to disrupt the February 8 municipal polls. They planted bombs in different parts of Kathmandu during bandh.

Already the Maoists have unveiled their plans to 'climb the spine to smash the head.' According to them, the spine means peripheral cities and highways whereas head means the Kathmandu-centric regime. They have vowed to carry out their activities to topple the central government in what they term as 'strategic offensive' phase in which they say they are at present.

Strangely, however, the bickering political forces in the capital seem to be minimizing this 'clear and present danger.' They seem content fighting each other even as the third force is slowly but surely building up its strength. While the government could be confident of defeating the Maoists

militarily, the political parties seem happy with the fact that the Maoist leaders have 'promised' to them that they will join the 'competitive democratic practice.' After the signing of 12-point understanding reportedly in New Delhi,

India, the political parties have stopped worrying about the Maoists. Whether their indifference is justified or not, only they may know. But for the nation, the unbridled growth of violent politics is surely going to cost high.

As the country continues to become killing fields, the apathy shown by key political actors to arrest the further slide of the situation has hurt the millions of peace-loving Nepalese. Given the prevailing atmosphere it is clear that the Maoists would be able to further strengthen their violent activities and even gain political recognition by inciting a section of political force and by driving wedge to further divide the constitutional forces. The advantage, unfortunately, is clearly going in their favor due to the recalcitrant and short-sighted behavior shown by the legitimate political forces. ■

Govt. Increases Compensation

In order to encourage the transporters to ply during bandh days, the authorities have decided to dangle a carrot. The government will give extra 20 percent on insurance amount the owners of damaged vehicles (during bandh) are entitled to, reported The Himalayan Times daily. Owners of those without insurance will get proper compensation.

This was decided at a meeting of transport entrepreneurs and other concerned bodies chaired by the state minister for Labor and Transport Management, Rabindra Khanal. "In case of death of driver, co-driver or helper of a vehicle plying during the bandh the government will give additional cent percent amount besides compensation due from the insurance firms," said a release from the Ministry.

Drivers are insured for Rs 150,000 each while the co-driver and helper are insured for Rs 100,000 each. Vice-president of the Federation of Nepalese Transport Entrepreneurs, Tulsi Ram Maharjan, said the government has assured the federation of forming a probe panel to inspect all damaged vehicles and find whether they got compensation.

To provide immediate compensation, the government has decided to give either approximately 40 percent of the total damage cost after inspection of the vehicle or a maximum of Rs 50,000 that will be deducted from compensation due.

According to the Ministry spokesperson Dhruba Kumar Sharma, there will be 50 percent exemption on customs duty on vehicles to replace those totally damaged during the bandh. The new ones will also be allowed to ply on the previous routes. Vehicles plying on bandh days will get all these benefits even if they are damaged within the next one year's duration.

On the eve of weeklong Nepal Bandh called by the Maoists, a series of bombs exploded in Pokhara on Saturday (February 4) evening. Five explosions occurred simultaneously in Pokhara bazaar followed by sounds of firing by the security personnel plunging the city into grip of fear. ■

Load-shedding – IPPs are not to be blamed!

This is with reference to the article published in the January 13th 2006 edition of Spotlight magazine placing the onus of the current predicament of load-shedding squarely on bad planning and also on Independent Power Producers (IPPs). The erudite author seems to have mixed up the issues and has ended up with a number of assertions that are at best misleading. The Independent Power Producers' Association, Nepal (IPPAN) would like to refute the assertions made by the author that "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." Rather than getting into a theoretical discussion on the definition of firm capacity, firm energy, primary energy and secondary energy, IPPAN would like to set the record straight with respect to assertions made in context to IPP generation and its contribution in the past, present and future. Definition of these specific capacity and energy terms are best left for the system operator to define as these are truly dependent on the prevailing and forecasted system requirements.

As we are all aware, Nepal's integrated power system is almost hundred percent hydro-based. We also know that electricity demand is not constant and changes hourly, daily and seasonally. Similarly, river flow also changes hourly, daily and seasonally. Presently, in the Integrated Nepal Power System (INPS), the maximum power demand occurs during times when there is minimum flow in the rivers. It is a well-known fact that run-of-river (ROR) projects are planned to take care of base load where as peak load is to be met by storage projects and that both types of projects are complimentary to each other for meeting the system power demand effectively. Therefore, for a power system like that in Nepal, proper combination of ROR projects and storage projects is required to meet short term as well as long term power demand efficiently and in an economic manner.

In Nepal, there are plenty of sites where ROR type projects can be developed in the small (1-10 MW) to medium range (10-500 MW). Since these sites don't require building of very high dams, adverse environmental effect is also minimum for these type of projects. However, there are a limited number of sites for storage project because some of the best agricultural land would be submerged and large-scale resettlement and rehabilitation of the population will have to be conducted for construction of high dams for developing these reservoirs. Adverse environmental impacts of some of the best storage projects is deemed to be insurmountable. Looking at the load demand in the INPS, a quick assessment shows that only medium-size storage projects are required to optimize the power system in the short to medium term. But considering the silt flow in the rivers of Nepal, large dead volumes are required in the reservoir, making smaller storage project less cost-effective. On the other hand, the finance requirement of bigger storage project are large and power markets inside Nepal for utilizing such generation does not exist. After completion of the Kulekhani Projects, any other storage projects could not be financed despite continuous attempts by the public sector utility with full support of the government. The reason seems to be the lack of interest by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies in financing storage projects due to the above-mentioned factors.

It is surprising to note that some water resources experts in Nepal do not differentiate between a ROR project and a storage project. Their attempt at comparing the parameters of a say 50/60

MW ROR project with a 10,000 MW storage project, without understanding the project parameters and the system parameters, is rather spurious. This partial comparison creates false impression in people's minds and hinders development of suitable projects.

Nepal's Electricity Act 1992 has opened up the electricity sector for private-sector investments. It is quite natural that, under the new environment for investments, IPPs are more interested in developing ROR projects for investment flexibility, to reduce investment risks and to reduce adverse environmental impacts. These ROR projects are optimized according to the site conditions and the system requirements. These projects are essentially developed to meet daily base load demand at a high load factor. It is essential to remind readers that the load-shedding, which was implemented extensively from 1990 to end 1999, was abolished once major IPP generation came on line from mid-2000. Had it not been for these IPP generations, load-shedding would have continued – in a more draconian manner – from 1990 till date and years beyond. Therefore, in effect, these IPP generations were able to help sustain the INPS and avoid load-shedding from 2000 till 2005.

Looking at the present load demand forecast in the INPS of increase in capacity of 50 to 60 MW per annum, there is need for more investment in power projects. It is quite obvious that the present load shedding is due to lack of sustained investments in this sector. As we all are aware, hydropower projects are capital intensive in nature. Nepal does not have adequate financial resources to finance the development of these projects, and hence, in the past has had to seek international donors and multilateral funding agencies. In recent times, the private sector has become increasingly active in project development, which is an encouraging sign. The highly-talked about potential of 42,000 MW of installed capacity will require at least a 100 billion dollars to develop. Neither the government nor the donor agencies are going to put up such large amounts for hydropower development, when there are other competing social requirements, e.g. health, transport and the education sector. There are no short-cuts and no free lunches; and these hydropower projects will have to be developed in a fully commercial manner. It is in this scenario that the private sector has to step in, and it is essential to recognize that the private sector will be the engine for growth for which the government has to create an enabling environment, and improve the legal and regulatory frameworks for attracting investment.

This also brings out a very pertinent question – why has IPP investment virtually dried up after the late 1990s? This is a topic for major discussion, and at the moment, the following simple reasons can be stated – the policies for investment in the country are good, but the implementation of these policies is weak and the investment climate is poor. Though power sector was opened for private investment since early 1990s, IPPs have faced many obstacles which are hindering private investment in power projects. Therefore, it goes beyond saying that unless private investments are encouraged, major investment is unlikely in the power sector. As a result, the present load shedding scenario will continue for a long time to come and will worsen day by day! ■

(This is an article by IPPAN in response to the article "Load Shedding: Direct Result of Bad Planning" by Dr. Ananda Bahadur Thapa, which was published on January 13, 2006 in SPOTLIGHT)

EXPOSITION

Memoirs of Time and Space

A Korean artist exhibits his creative works in Nepal

By A CORRESPONDENT

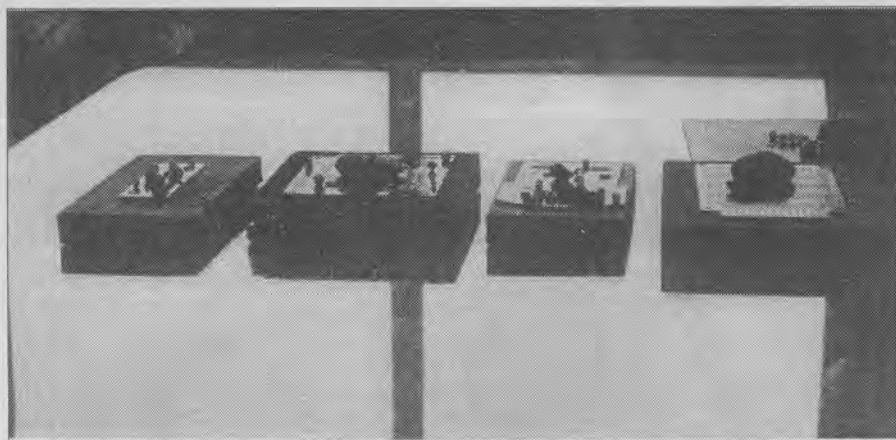
Looking at his work it seems everything around him inspires him to create something new and something artistic. Whether it may be the junks of used beer and cola cans or debris of haystacks, or red colored mud, his mind is focused on inventing, beautifying and revitalizing the materials into artistic piece, an installation or a painting on the wall.

Endowed with these creative ideas and persistent zeal, Korean artist

"These are a collage of blotting papers soaked in ink."

Lee says he mostly uses natural elements for his creations to show the relation between man and nature. He has used red soil in many of his creations in addition to the paintings. He paints garments and boots with mud to depict the power of land. Likewise in many of his paintings he uses traditional Korean paper instead of the canvas.

The installations and still life pictures are even more amazing. A cobweb kind piece made out of thread or



Lee's creations

Seong-Hyeong Lee, has traveled all the way from Korea to Nepal in search of more natural elements that he could use for creations. He exhibited the picture of some of his works at Buddha Art Galley from January 30 to February 3.

Explaining his creations and activities, Lee says, "I have tried to portray the man and nature in the backdrop of time and space." In doing this Lee uses a variety of materials, uncommon to common artists and practices odd styles.

"I used only mud as a color on this painting."

"I used natural plant pigments in this one."

beautiful garden made from hay in a wide area compels one to think that Lee's mind are in constant search for recreating things with whatever materials he finds around.

The ornament-like shapes from seeds of different plants give semi-morphological forms, to show the relationship between the survival of a human and the seeds.

"I feel very uneasy if I do not use the materials around me when creating art works," says Lee. Indeed, looking at his creations, it is hard to imagine any material around you that Lee has not used in his paintings. Probably, Lee has tried using everything possible in Korea

Relief Handed Over

The 'Solidarity Kangru', an organization formed in France, to support the bereaved families of the guides and porters who died in the avalanche at Kangru Mountain in October, has handed over relief to the family of the dead.

The French Ambassador to Nepal Michel Jolivet handed over the cash assistance of Rs. 40,000 each to the families of the eleven Nepalis who died in the tragic incident of October 3 after an avalanche swept their tents at the base of Kangru Mountain. An expedition of seven French mountaineers had traveled to the mountain with Nepalese assistants. Earlier, 'Solidarity Kangru' had provided Rs. 22,000 to each bereaved family.

At the function, it was also announced that 'Solidarity Kangru' would take responsibility of educating the children of the Nepalis who died in the incident. "The Association will give money to the families of the dead Nepalis, to admit their children to the school and continue supporting their education," said the French Ambassador at the function.

The expedition team met with the tragic accident after the weather suddenly turned violent followed by heavy snowfall. The bodies of most of the dead are yet to be recovered and have been abandoned till April because of the adverse weather. The deployed liaison officer was not present at the site during the time of the accident. Improper camping site is said to be the chief reason for the intensity of the damage. Similar accident had occurred in 1996 with an expedition team in Mt. Pisang.

"This is the most tragic incident in the fifty year long history of French-Nepalese mountaineering," said the Ambassador. ■

in his works. Not surprisingly, the primary objective of his travel to Nepal was to search for new materials and ideas he could use for his creations. ■

TIKA BHANDARI

The Melody Maker

A versatile musical talent, Bhandari has established his identity through the music he has directed for feature films

By THAKUR AMGAI

In the early 1980s, a boy, hardly the size of a guitar, used to sing and play music in almost all functions of the Mechinagar Multiple Campus in Ilam, an eastern district of Nepal. The students and the locals affectionately called him 'phuchche kalakar' (little artiste).

In a country, where scores of talents wane off in lack of opportunity, probably not many envisaged that the 'Phuchche Kalakar' (little artiste), would one day become a 'lokpriya kalakar' (popular artist) and the entire domain of Nepalese people would know their 'Phuchche Kalakar' as Tika Bhandari. His exceptional talents in music earned him a lot of praise and encouragement. But for a person with versatile talents a decision to take up music in future would not be considered wise. He had, ahead of him, a sound academic future that would easily open avenues for more promising careers while there was a grim prospects in music industry.

However, the strong desire and dedication towards music helped him become resolute. Without letting the academic strength die, Bhandari decided to put more focus on music studies. After passing high school, he went to Benaras to learn classical music from Guru Man Mohan. And interestingly, one and half decades down the line, Tika Bhandari became the gold medalist (university topper) M. A. (political science), a subject with no relation to his profession.

Born in 1965, in Jhapa, Bhandari was lucky to get a the support of his family, where talent in music would be encouraged at home. With music directors like Chandra Babu Bhandari and Rudra Babu Bhandari at home, little Bhandari's inclination towards music got flourished. It is these people who taught him to play musical instruments like violin, guitar and took him to college functions to perform.

After earning a musical degree from Benaras, Bhandari came to Kathmandu in 2044, and took a test for musicians at Radio Nepal. Proving his knowledge and skill in music he stood first out of dozens of

contestants. For the next half a decade Bhandari played music for scores of songs. He says he has played mandolin for almost 4,000 songs, the highest number in Nepal.

Soon after Bhandari joined Radio Nepal, he composed music for the song 'Saun Hainan Mera Najar' sung by Nagendra Shrestha. He also recorded a song 'Jeewanko Yatra Bhari' in his own voice. But, the trend of singing soon discontinued after his music composition



Bhandari: Career of Melodies

started to be better liked by the audience and the music fraternity.

However, Bhandari's musical course took a swift turn from composing music for modern songs and singing when he got a break to compose music for feature films. As he was composing music for 'Bahadur', a feature film directed by Ashok Shrestha, the producer of 'Bihani' also offered him to compose music for his film. Then came the 'Gaunle' with its super hit songs like 'Suna E Aakash, Suna E Dharti' among others. The release of these songs lifted Tika Bhandari to new heights of popularity. He soon became a sought after music director for producers who started

seeing their success in commissioning a popular music director.

The songs of 'Gaunle' became so popular that its sale crossed the five-figure number and it won the Highest Cassette Selling Award from music Nepal. Instantly, offers thronged Bhandari's desk. "At one time I composed music for up to six films," said Bhandari.

Bhandari got a break from the heightened momentum of his busy schedule, as the market of the Nepali feature films started to plummet. Bhandari utilized this time to resume his education.

Surprising most of his fans and fellow professionals he won the gold medal from Tribhuvan University in Masters in Political Science, not quite a common feat for artiste. Despite such bright prospects to pursue a career in academic sector, Bhandari is dedicated to his passion of music.

Last year, he traveled to America to participate in the conference Association of Nepalese of North America (ANNA). Bhandari performed various musical programs amongst the 3,500 participants in the conference. From instrumental shows of typical Nepali folk melodies like, 'Kafal Pakyo', 'Pahad Basi, Banma Hurki' and 'Kanchhi He Kanchhi' to evergreen classical of Narayan Gopal, Bachchu Kailash and Natikaji, Bhandari enthralled the Nepalese living in US and reminded them of their home country.

In return Bhandari, too, was induced to become more patriotic by the utter nostalgic feeling of the Nepali diaspora. "On visiting America and interacting with the people there I felt, in myself, an increased sense of responsibility to my society and the country," said Bhandari, who had one of his albums released at the same function in US. He also said that the changes in his feelings can be noticed in the songs to come.

Bhandari has composed music for over 400 songs including modern and songs for 25 different feature films. He has lent voice to about 3 dozen songs. In addition, as part of his profession, he has created scores of advertisement jingles and educational and health promos.

In recognition to his contribution to Nepali music Bhandari has been felicitated by several organizations, won ample contests and has bagged many awards. He stood first in All Nepal children songs music competition in 2053 and in All Nepal modern songs music competition in 2055. He is also the winner of prestigious awards like 'Narayan Gopal Youth Outstanding Music Award', 'MN Award', and 'Youth Excellence Award', among others. ■

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