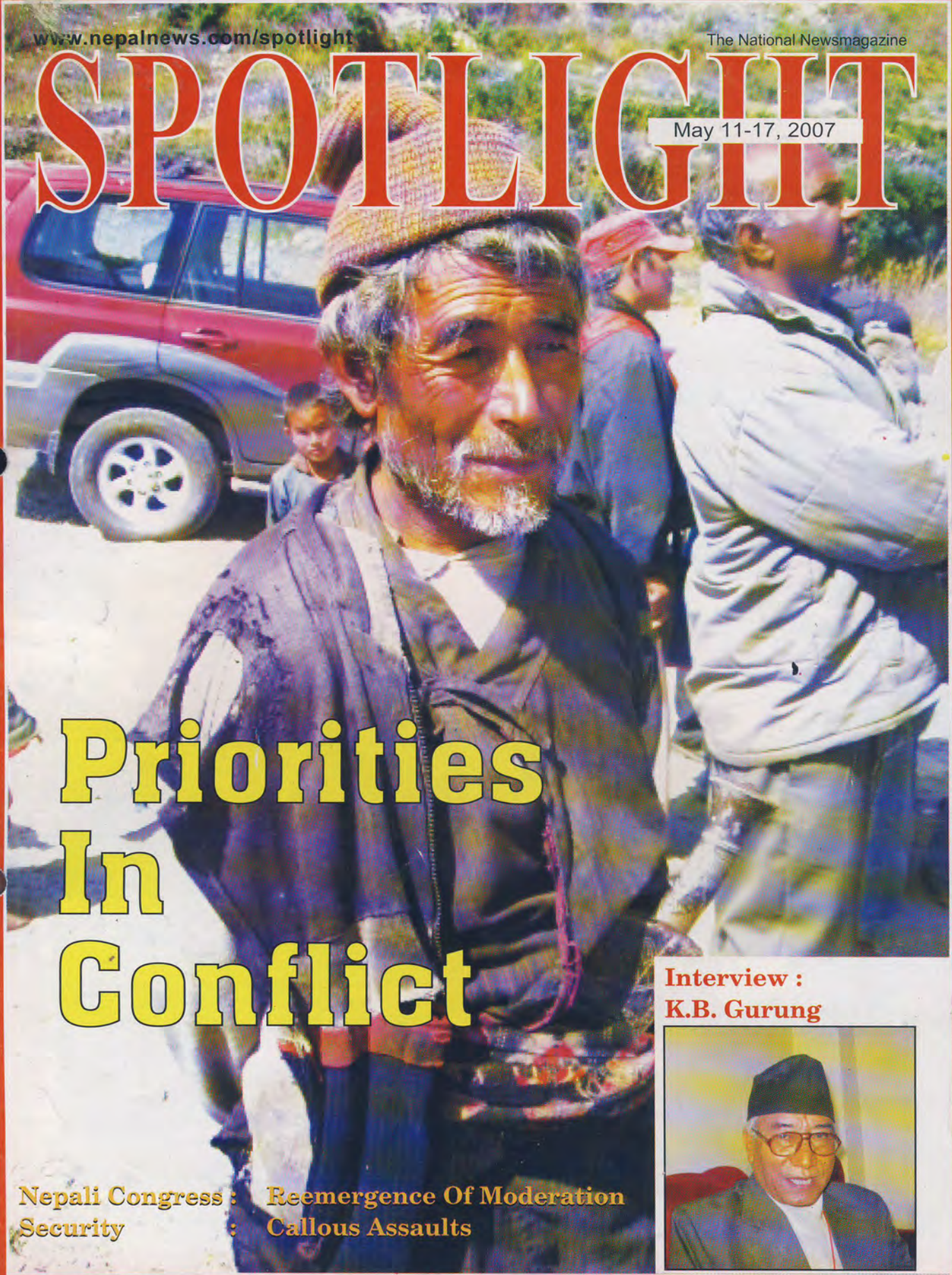


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The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

May 11-17, 2007



Priorities In Conflict

Interview :
K.B. Gurung



Nepali Congress : Reemergence Of Moderation
Security : Callous Assaults

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COVER STORY: Priorities In Conflict

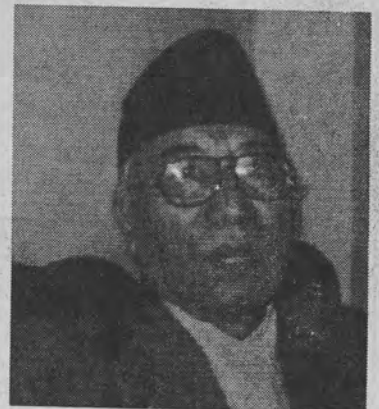
While debates in urban centers focus on politics and CA, people of rural region desire for rapid development

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NEPALI CONGRESS: Re-emergence of Moderation Slowly but steadily, NC is finding its ground in the centrist path

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INTERVIEW: K.B. Gurung

NC general secretary Gurung talks about the NC's centrist approach and its rejection of any form of autocracy

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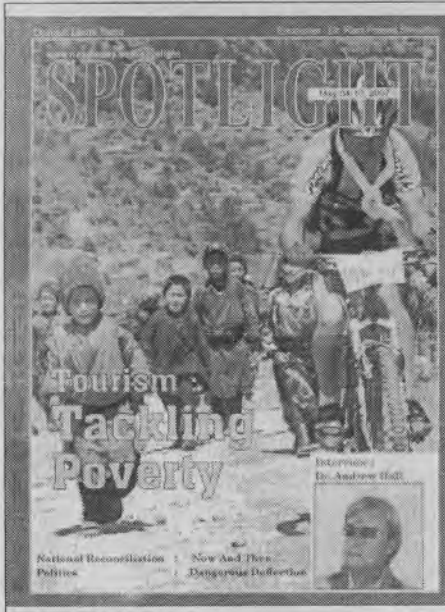
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After visiting some remote districts, we have seen new conflicts emerging within society. This conflict is between common people who want development along with the peace and political leadership who prefer political debate as the dividend of peace. One of the challenges now is how to strike a balance between settling political questions and carrying out development activities. If country's policy makers ignore the basic needs of community, the country will see another conflict. Despite restoring peace, rural people are yet to taste fruits of development. Along with settlement of political question, people want employment, education, health and road. We have made efforts to highlight this new debate.

Frustrated by long association with extremists, some second generation leaders in Nepali Congress have expressed their dissensions publicly this week in their meeting. These views were shared by a large number of moderates in Congress who know that tilting towards one extremist against the other will ruin their party. Facing all kinds of charges and rejections from a small coterie within the Congress, these second generation leaders expressed their views and generated a debate on how to bring the Congress back to its right position as a centrist party. There is a reemergence of the idea of national reconciliation between democratic forces as well as nationalists. Monarchy or republic is not a choice for them. The original line of reconciliation as practiced and propagated by B.P. Koirala embraces all the political elements of the society, which is partly traditional and partly modern, under the prerequisites of nationalism and democracy. Absolute monarchy is as much discarded as totalitarian ideology of communists. The balance of centrist party like Nepali Congress cannot be maintained by associating with one extremist against the other. Although the leadership is yet to embrace this view, the voices of moderation raised by a group of second generation leader will help to retain Congress identity as a centrist party. According to a political analyst, the most noticeable change and trend seen in Nepali Congress is not any dramatic show but the slow and gradual emergence of next generation of leadership through dissensions and discontents. Democracy thrives only in moderation and extremism of any kind encourages only the totalitarianism.

Keshab
Keshab Poudel
Managing Editor



Tourism Trails

The cover story "Tackling Poverty" (SPOTLIGHT May 4) gives a positive insight into how tourism can be used to tackle the national problem of poverty. It is a rewarding story that provides enough lessons that can be learned and applied elsewhere. There are thousands of reasons how tourism can help to promote socio-economic development of backward regions. The story provides establishes some of those reasons.

*Kiran Bista
Sallaghari*

as a powerful tool for word of mouth publicity of Nepal as well.

*Jitendra Shrestha
Thamel*

Mustang Magic

In recent days, wonderful news regarding the discovery of magical caves in Mustang have come to light. The discovery of ancient mural dating back to 13th century, according to some experts, is wonderful news. The location of hundreds of caves and the findings of ancient mural will definitely contribute to enrich the disciplines of history, geography, prehistoric human settlement, anthropology and tourism. The Mustang caves can be a big attraction to tourists for their rich history and unique geography. The place should be promoted to bring in tourists. Mustang itself is a region known very well among the tourists. It has been drawing thousands of tourists. Still, there is a need to promote the place so that it can draw tens of thousands of tourists providing jobs and socio-economic opportunities to the people. The discovery of the caves should further enhance Mustang's potentials.

*Jeewan Gurung
Chhetrapati*

Exploit Potentials

The backward and inaccessible regions of Nepal are filled with natural beauty. The untouched hills, virgin forests, wonderful biodiversity etc are found in those remote regions ("Tackling Poverty" SPOTLIGHT May 4). They can become a magnet to the tourists from all over the world. Plans like the ones formulated by the TRPAP can be applied to exploit their potentials for the benefit of the rural population. However, one must not forget that in order to ensure sustainability, these areas should not be subjected to haphazard tourism. A planned approach with enough respect to environmental and cultural responsibilities will reap rich dividends.

*Hansa Rai
Dillibazaar*

New Trekking Routes

It is important to open new trekking routes to attract trekkers from around the world ("Tackling Poverty" SPOTLIGHT May 4). Nepal's prominent trekking routes like Everest, Langtang and Annapurna have attracted tens of thousands of tourists. In order to attract these tourists to visit the country again, the planners should identify newer routes and trails with enough lure. Then they should be marketed in a systematic

manner. For tourism to survive and thrive in this age, marketing is going to be an essential tool. Without marketing, even best of places will not get the deserved attention. Therefore, we cannot simply sit idle and hope for tourists to amble along. We have to package our material and market them in a professional manner.

*Bibas Gurung
Sitapaila*

Adventure Tourism

As the cover story "Tackling Poverty" (SPOTLIGHT May 4) indicated, adventure tourism like mountain biking, rafting, can be developed in different places across the country. There are millions of adventure tourists around the world who travel millions of miles to experience the thrill. They travel long distance for white water rafting, mountain biking, trekking, bungy jumping and so on. Nepal has tremendous potential to attract such thrill-seekers. Its high mountains, rugged hills, deadly ravines, thick forests and tumultuous rivers provide ample opportunities to develop adventure tourism. The discipline of adventure tourism is very wide and comprehensive. It has millions of followers around the world. If harnessed properly, it can act

Don't Push CA

The article "Dangerous Deflection" (SPOTLIGHT May 4) points out to the disturbingly growing row between Nepali Congress and Maoists. These are the two parties whose roles are going to be extremely crucial in the coming days as the country prepares to pass through the historic test. The test will be done through the Constituent Assembly elections. So, the two parties must not squabble over any other issue and, instead, concentrate on the need to consolidate party unity at least till the CA is complete and the nation finds itself in a new path.

*Kaushal Kumar Thapa
Koteshwore*

Speaker To Try To Smoothen House Proceedings

Speaker Subas Nemwang has said that he will start consultations to ensure that House will proceed smoothly. After he returned from Indonesia (on May 6), where he attended the Inter Parliamentary Union conference, he appealed to all to allow smooth functioning of the legislative parliament. Nemwang said that in order to fulfill demands like declaring republic through the parliament, the first condition was to allow its smooth functioning. The Maoist lawmakers as well as Madhesi MPs have stalled the proceedings of the parliament for the past three weeks. The Maoists have said that the parliament must declare republic. The Madhesi MPs have demanded fresh census and fresh delimitation of constituencies based on that census ahead of CA elections. The next meeting of parliament is scheduled for May 9. "As long as the parliament remains stalled, no agenda will enter into its discussion. I urge friends who have made demands for parliament's action to first allow it to run normally," Nemwang said referring to the Maoists. *Compiled from reports*

Passports Of Royalist Ministers Frozen

The government has informed that it has 'frozen' the passports of royalist ministers to stop their travel. The government informed the Supreme Court (SC) on Sunday (May 6) that their passports were 'frozen' owing to their role in the repression of People's Movement. The government has also informed the apex court that the ministers have been implicated by the report of Rayamajhi commission and that they are facing actions. The government submitted its position in response to the apex court's order for explanation regarding the case filed by former minister Dr. Roop Jyoti. Dr. Jyoti, who was Minister of State for

Finance during royal regime, had filed a writ petition at the apex court saying that his fundamental right has been violated as he was forced to return from the airport as authorities did not allow him to travel abroad. *Compiled from reports*

Yami Wants Transparency In Melamchi Contract

Minister for Physical Planning and Works Hisila Yami, on Sunday (May 6), said transparency in the contract between the government and Severn Trent (ST) is needed for the foreign company to manage Nepal's water management system. "We know that the Melamchi project is a must. However, we also need to know how the contract is being given," she said, addressing an interaction in the ministry. She said the decision was made in haste when the Maoists were yet to join the government. She said the government did not have the mandate to take decisions on major issues like that, adding that "a strong monitoring mechanism is essential to let any party take over the water management's responsibility." Yami also said the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) was a major department for all physical planning ministers to recruit political cadres. On the development of the controversial water project, she said the work is so slow that only 16 per cent of it has been completed in the last six years. Suman Sharma, the executive director of Melamchi water supply project, said the project has spent Rs 3,677,235,000 till date and a major work of building a 27-km tunnel and changing the pipeline network in the valley is yet to be carried out. PS Joshi, the vice-president of the NGO Forum for Urban Water and Sanitation (NGOFUWS), said the government should think once again before the contract with the Severn Trent is finalized as, according to him, the company has a bad

international record. "It was penalized in England, sent back from Guyana, Trinidad, and their performance in other countries was also unsatisfactory," he said. He demanded the government study the company's documents carefully and make them public before taking a decision. In March 2006, Severn Trent was forced to repay £40 million to 3.5 million of its UK customers after water regulator Ofwat found that the company had provided data "that were either deliberately miscalculated or poorly supported", resulting in inflated water bills, according to the NGOFUWS. Meanwhile, sources said the Asian Development Bank loan for the project will expire soon and the government may be bound to accept Severn Trent without pre-conditions before that. *The Himalayan Times daily reports*

EC Gives Three Options For New Polls Date

Election Commissioner Usha Nepal has informed that mid-November after Dashain, Tihar and Chhath festival will be the most appropriate date for holding the Constituent Assembly (CA). She said that the EC has provided three options to the government regarding tentative date for CA polls. "One is before the festival (festival season is in October), one is between Dashain and Tihar (late October) and the third is after the festival (mid November). We think the third option will be the most appropriate one. However, we also cannot go any further than mid-November as winter will then set in making it difficult for logistics movement in mountain districts," she said. On Friday, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala also held consultations with the officials of EC regarding fresh election date. All the five election commissioners including Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Bhoj Raj Pokharel attended the consultation

held at the PM's residence in Baluwatar. At the meeting, EC officials are said to have asked the government to clarify uncertainty regarding electoral constituencies and enact electoral legislations soon. Earlier, on Friday, PM Koirala, inaugurating the three-day district presidents' meet of the Congress party, said that he is fully committed to hold the polls. "Some have blamed me for the delay in the elections. As a prime minister, I am willing to share the blame. But I want to make it clear that I have full commitment to hold the Constituent Assembly elections," he said. Pointing at other parties who had pinned the blame solely on the PM for the polls delay, Koirala said he does not want to comment on such statements. "The blame will ultimately bounce back to those who are making it," he said.

Compiled from reports

Mahara Draws A Flak

Information and Communication Minister and government spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara has drawn flak for making comments attempting to justify past Maoist atrocities against journalists. Bishnu Nishthuri, president of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), raised objection against Mahara's comment that 'history might justify' the past atrocities against journalists. Likewise, member of the parliament and former journalist Raghuji Panta said Mahara's statements were dangerous. "The underlying meaning within his statement is highly dangerous," he said, adding, "What does he mean by saying that different pictures are seen when viewed from political and/or professional perspective?" They were speaking at an interaction program during the launching of state of press freedom report by the Forum of Development Journalists. At the program, Mahara had made some statements saying that not all the

atrocities against journalists by the Maoists in the past were unjustified. Stating that some actions would be justified if looked through political perspective even though they cannot be justified on professional terms, he said, "Future may justify them. After hundred years, their justification might be established." Mahara added that mere professional analysis would not lead to correct conclusion. Mahara, however, reiterated that his party stands for freedom of the press. "Our party has always stood behind freedom of press. We readily accept our mistakes and seek apologies," he said.

Compiled from reports

Nepal's First Catholic Bishop Ordained

Leading a flock of believers is not new to him. But on May 5, he was bestowed with a bigger responsibility: he was ordained the Bishop, and became Nepal's first Catholic Bishop. The Episcopal ordination of Msgr Anthony F Sharma, SJ, the First Apostolic Vicar of Nepal, was solemnized at the Assumption Church in Kathmandu, which was attended by hundreds. Born into a Hindu Brahmin family on December 20, 1937 in Gorkha district, Bishop-elect Anthony was educated in Kurseong, India where he converted into Christianity. After completing his education, he became a priest of the Jesuit order and has been leading the Catholics in Nepal since the country was made *sui iuris* (self-governing) Catholic mission by the Vatican in 1983. He was the first ethnic Nepali to be ordained a Jesuit priest. From 1984-96, he led the church in Nepal as its topmost leader as Ecclesiastical Superior, and he became the Apostolic Prefect in 1997. With Nepal being raised to the status of a Vicariate (church designated area) by Pope Benedict XVI, he has now become a Vicar. *The Himalayan Times daily reports*

Prachanda Criticises Ian Martin

Maoist chairman Prachanda, on Thursday (May 3), criticized UNMIN chief Ian Martin for saying that the Maoists had posed preconditions for allowing second stage of verification. "We had discussed with him a few days ago but he has said a few things beyond our agreement," Prachanda told reporters after a program where he launched a book by communist leader Shambhu Ram Shrestha. "We have not posed any precondition. We have just said that earlier understandings regarding cantonment management should be respected," he added. On Tuesday, Martin – who left the same day for New York to brief the Security Council – addressing a press meet had said that no precondition was acceptable to the UNMIN to start the second stage of verification of Maoist combatants. Martin had said that the Maoist leadership has not agreed to the process (of second stage verification) commencing until "other issues have been addressed: in particular, the improvement of conditions in the cantonments, government remuneration for those registered there, and the formation of the committee envisaged by Article 146 of the Interim Constitution to take responsibility for the future of the Maoist army." Martin said, "The obligation on the CPN(M) to allow verification to proceed is unconditional, and I have made clear to the Maoist leadership that UNMIN cannot accept its linkage to any preconditions." The UNMIN has been saying that it is ready to begin the second stage of registration and verification of personnel in the Maoist cantonment sites. The second stage verification is said to be essential for two purposes: to identify minors who under the agreement must be discharged, and to determine whether personnel were recruited after 25 May 2006, in breach of the ceasefire code of conduct. *nepalnews.com reports*



PM Koirala in a ceremony to lay foundation stone of Army Veterans' Hospital and Diagnostic Center
Gorkhapatra

ISSUING A STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION of 2551st Buddha Jayanti (on May 2), Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said sustainable peace is needed for the country to make progress and for safeguarding the overall interests of the people. Koirala said all must set aside small differences and move forward in building a new and prosperous Nepal. "Nepal's mountains, hills and the plains all have been nurtured by Lord Budhha's message of peace and goodwill," he said. Various programs are slated to be held to mark the Buddha Jayanti – the anniversary of Lord Buddha's birth. Lord Gautam Buddha, who was born in Lumbini of Nepal, is also known as Light of Asia.

THE MAOIST VICTIMS HAVE announced that they will launch third round of agitation to press for their 15-point demands. According to Bhojraj Timalsena, coordinator of the agitation committee, as per their agitation they will stage sit-in in front of Indian Embassy, US Embassy and UN office on May 9, May 11 and May 14, respectively. They have also announced that they will hold mass meeting in Tinkune on May 16, impose valley chakkajam (traffic obstruction) on May 17 and stage sit-in in front of OHCHR office on May 21. Earlier, the Maoists had launched two rounds of agitation to press for their demands including respectful rehabilitation, compensation, employment, identity cards and so on.

THE POSITIVE TREND IN INTERNATIONAL VISITORS' arrival figure to Nepal continues on a sharp upward curve with a staggering growth of 78.8% for the month of April 2007, according to Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). 33,024 visitors came to Nepal during the period, which is a record high for the number of international

visitors entering Nepal by air route in the month of April since 2002, the board states in its press release. Among the two major market segments, the Indian market rebounded strongly with 110% increase while the non-Indian market elevated by 70% on an average. This was based on the figures provided by Immigration Office, Tribhuvan International Airport, Nepal.

AS ROAD CONNECTIVITY HAS BEEN established linking Jumla to the rest of the country, the prices of daily consumer goods in the place have dropped. Everyday, over ten vehicles transport various consumer goods to Khalanga – headquarters of Jumla district. According to Bishnu Kathayat, who was involved in food trading in the district for last ten years, the prices of food stuffs have come down by Rs 15 to Rs 25 per kg since they were transported by road. The per kg price of Mansuli rice has come down from Rs 65 to Rs 50. The per kg price of wheat flour has come down from Rs 75 to Rs 60. Price of cement has decreased from Rs 2800 to Rs 1800. Earlier, goods had to be transported by air only. As vehicles have started transporting consumer goods from Surkhet, the activities in Khalanga market have increased. Kantipur daily reports

THE STATE-OWNED NEPAL OIL CORPORATION (NOC) has informed that its losses have crossed Rs 10 billion. At an interaction organized by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, joint secretary Purushottam Ojha informed that monthly losses of NOC stand at Rs 1.9 million currently. The NOC currently needs to pay total outstanding debts of over Rs 10 billion – Rs 5.95 billion to Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Rs 4.24 billion to banks. The huge loss is even more disturbing if seen in the backdrop of total authorized capital of NOC – which is just over Rs 500 million. Ojha said that cumulative losses since past many years and huge debts that create huge interest pressure on NOC have rendered its financial situation worse. At the interaction titled "Present Situation of Supplies of Petro Products: Problems and Challenges," Rajendra Mahato, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, urged all the political parties to come up with comprehensive plans to improve NOC's situation. However, leaders of political parties advised against any fuel price hike saying that could disturb the security situation ahead of CA elections. They asked the NOC to improve its internal management and check leakages and corruption, instead.

“(NC has to be careful) whether this slogan is aimed at pushing NC into a republic camp after which the international community would look us from a different perspective.”

Prime Minister and president of Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala, addressing the closing session of the meeting of party's district chiefs.

“How can we talk about leftist unity when even our senior comrade Amrit Bohara's properties have not been returned (by the Maoists)?”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), at a press meet.

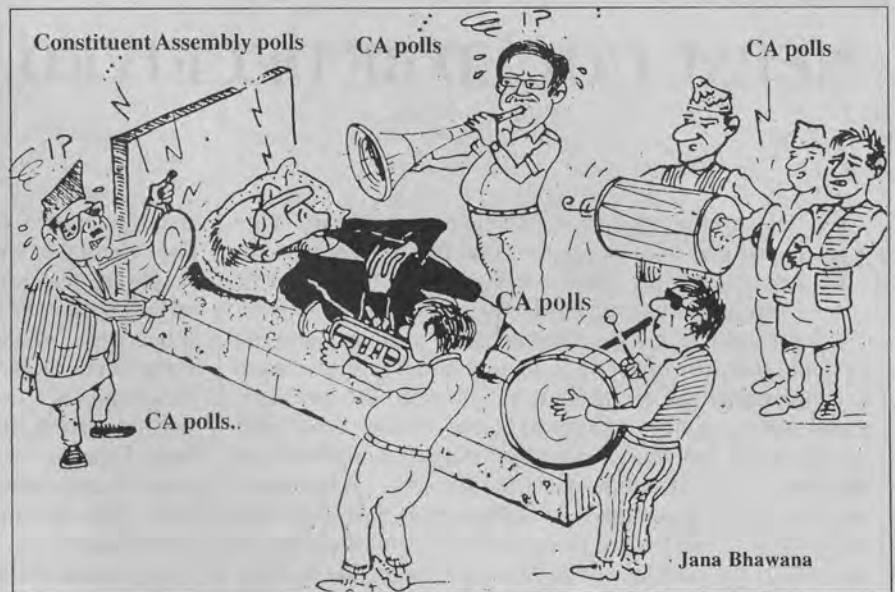
“Nepali Congress is a party of landlords.”

Mohan Baidya 'Kiran', senior Maoist leader, in Nepal FM.

“You can announce republic from the parliament only if you first allow it to run.”

Speaker Subas Nemwang, urging all concerned to allow the parliament session to proceed smoothly, at an interaction with the press.

“Future may justify them. After



hundred years, their justification might be established.”

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Minister of Information and Communication and government spokesperson, saying that past atrocities by the Maoists against journalists could be justified in future if looked through appropriate political perspective, addressing a public program.

“The underlying meaning within his statement is highly dangerous.”

Raghuji Pant, former minister and

UML MP, reacting to Mahara's comments.

“One is before the festival (festival season is in October), one is between Dashain and Tihar (late October) and the third is after the festival (mid November). We think the third option will be the most appropriate one. However, we also cannot go any further than mid-November as winter will then set in making it difficult for logistics movement in mountain districts.”

Usha Nepal, election commissioner, saying that the EC has given three alternative dates for CA.

TRANSITION

PASSES AWAY: Satchit SJB Rana, former army chief and royal advisor, passed away, Friday morning, at a hospital in Kathmandu. He was 74 years of age. He was suffering from cancer.

FORMED: The Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP-Anandidevi) has formed a three member talks committee to proceed with the unity with the NSP. The committee is led by co-general secretary Anil Jha and includes Surendra Kurmi and Kasim Ali Siddiqui as members.

Kathmandu Valley Drinking Water Limited, by the government, in order to hand over the distribution and management of valley's drinking water to private sector. The Limited is headed by Birendra Man Shakya, senior divisional engineer at Melamchi project. It has representatives from municipalities and chamber: Indra Man Singh Suwa (Kathmandu metropolitan), Rudra Gautam (Lalitpur sub metropolitan), Suresh Basnet (Nepal Chamber of Commerce) and two independent engineers Dhruba Bahadur Shrestha and Kamallesh

Kumar Agrawal.

SUBMITTED: The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), 15-point memorandum, to the Prime Minister, asking the government to create fearless environment and end uncertainty regarding Constituent Assembly polls.

RETURNED: Subas Nemwang, Speaker of the legislative parliament, after completing 9-day visit to Bali, Indonesia, where he led Nepali delegation at the conference of Inter Parliamentary Union.

NEPAL COULD BE DECEIVED: *West Seti Project*

-By Dr. AB Thapa

After a prolonged silence, again voices are heard in the corridors of power to give fresh impetus to implement the controversial West Seti Project. Unfortunately, even until now almost all of us in the government, media, various NGOs or other concerned institutions are still unaware of various critical issues related to implementation of the West Seti Project. We would be greatly harming the vital interest of our country if we failed to address the following three issues before taking the final decision to implement the West Seti Project. Those issues are recovery of downstream irrigation benefits, realignment of the Saryu Canal built in Indian territory, which is going to be virtually the extension of the West Seti Project, to prevent from flooding of the Banke district, and through checking of the engineering design of the West Seti dam, which appears to be riddled with a great deal of uncertainties.

The West Seti High Dam Project

The West Seti high dam project is among the very few schemes in Nepal which have been extensively studied. It has two major components. They are the irrigation and power. A study at feasibility level on power was carried out by SOGREAH of France, whereas the Karnali Multipurpose Project study fully covers the irrigation component of this project. Feasibility level study of the Karnali Multipurpose Project had been done thrice in the past. One of the main objectives of the latest feasibility study was to involve India in the studies to determine the magnitude of the irrigation benefits accruable to that country from the regulated flow of the Karnali River and obviously it also denotes the regulated flow of the West Seti River which is a tributary of the Karnali River.

It has been proposed to build a 187 meters high gravel filled dam across the West Seti river in the feasibility study carried out by the SOGREAH. The total storage capacity of the reservoir will be 1,600 million cubic meters. The power station will be underground type. The power station will produce 2202 GWh firm energy annually. The total annual energy production will be 2,402 GWh. After the regulation of the West Seti run-off the present dry season flow at the dam site of about 45 cubic meters per second will be increased to about 135 cubic meters per second. Thus the net augmentation of the dry season flow could be about 90 cubic meters per second which is about 40% dry season flow of the Karnali river.

Downstream Irrigation Benefit

There will be a significantly large downstream irrigation benefit accruable to India after the completion of the West Seti Storage Dam Project. Such benefit has been quite thoroughly evaluated in the Karnali Multipurpose Project study. Agricultural production over a vast area adjoining the Karnali river in the Indian territory is at present greatly constrained by the scarcity

of water needed for irrigation particularly in dry seasons. The regulated West Seti flow could be used for increasing the cropping intensities of the Sarda Sahayak irrigation system or the Saryu irrigation system already in operation in the Utter Pradesh province of India. It is not necessary to build a new barrage for the diversion. The West Seti regulated flow could be diverted for irrigation from the existing Girjapur barrage into the Sarda Sahayak canal or the Saryu canal. Additional canal network also would not be needed for the delivery of water. The existing capacity of the canal system would be adequate.

According to the study carried out by the SOGREAH, if the year 2003 is taken as the reference year and the 1989 price level is adopted at a discount rate of 10%, the total discounted power benefit of the West Seti project would be 912 million US Dollars against a discounted cost of the project estimated at 456 million US Dollars. Thus the total net discounted power benefit of the project could be 456 million US Dollars. Based on the feasibility study of the Karnali High Dam project the total net discounted irrigation benefit of the West Seti project at 1989 price level for the reference year 2003 could be as high as 720 million US Dollars. It implies that the net irrigation benefit of the West Seti project could be greater than the net power benefit. Now a very big question arises. Should we ignore the West Seti downstream benefit? Will we be morally right to do so?

Sharing West Seti Downstream Benefits

India must be approached to share with Nepal a certain percentage of downstream benefits to accrue to that country from the use of the regulated flow of the West Seti. It is a practice followed by the USA and Canada while implementing the Columbia river dams in Canada. At present Canada is receiving 50% of the net downstream benefits from the USA in perpetuity for the use of the regulated flow of the Columbia river in the USA. It should be noted that Canada had declined to take a decision to implement the Columbia river projects until the USA agreed to sign a treaty on downstream benefit sharing.

Why Nepal is hesitating to raise downstream benefit issues in bilateral summit meetings? The USA President and the Canadian Prime Minister were themselves directly involved in the process of resolving various issues of the Columbia River Treaty. We should learn from the experience of the USA and Canada.

India Willing to Pay for Water

Few years back two important news had appeared in the Indian news media. It was reported that the Government of India had appointed a three-member task force headed by the former power minister Suresh Prabhu. The task force was expected to address the issue to obtain the consent of Nepal (also Bhutan) through a revenue sharing pact to divert water of the major rivers for irrigation

across the India. Until that time India was seen to be hesitating to accept the idea of buying water stored in the reservoirs proposed to be built in Nepal.

Nepal has not yet taken up the downstream benefit matters very seriously despite the fact that India already appears to be taking interest to find a way to share benefits accruable from the water delivered from Nepal for distribution across India. Thus, we would be doing a great injustice to the people of our country if it is decided to implement the West Seti Project totally ignoring its downstream benefit component.

Saryu Canal Operation Depends on West Seti Project

There are two irrigation canals taking off from the Girjapur barrage built across the Karnali river in Indian territory. On the left is the Saryu canal running to the east beyond the Banganga river and on the right is the Link Canal connected with the Sarda Sahayak canal planned to irrigate about 2 million ha of lands. At present only the right bank canal is operational because the dry season flow of the Karnali river is quite insufficient for both the canals and there are technical difficulties to utilize the monsoon flow of this river.

The year round operation of the Saryu canal depends entirely on availability of the regulated flow from the proposed storage reservoirs in Nepal. The construction of the Saryu canal, that started a long time ago, is still continuing at a snail's pace perhaps due to uncertainty about the date when the West Seti project would be ready for operation. Nevertheless, it appears that the Saryu canal could be made fully operational at short notice after the completion of the West Seti Storage Project because most of the structures of the Saryu canal might be already ready. After that our people near the border area would be forced to live virtually in swamps throughout the year.

Submergence of Nepal's Western Terai

The total length of the Saryu canal running almost parallel to Indo-Nepal border is about 230 km. In the original design the barrage across the Saryu river was at a location about 328 meters to the south of the railway bridge at Nanpara. Later, the design was modified and the location of the barrage was shifted 10 km to the north from the original site. The longitudinal gradient of the Saryu canal has been reduced to a minimum. It is only one meter on a stretch of 9 km. The adoption of such extremely mild slope permitted the alignment of the canal to be pushed as far as possible to the north very close to Indo-Nepal border specially in its middle and lower reaches.

Normally siphons are provided to deliver canal water across a river. A much higher average slope of the canal is required for the operation of this type of cross drainage structure, which has to operate under pressurized condition. A free flow hydraulic regime needs to be maintained at the river crossing if the average gradient of the canal is to be reduced. For reducing the average slope of the Saryu canal altogether a different type of structures has been devised, which at first glance drives anybody crazy. Barrages have been built across the rivers to elevate

the river water to such a level that would allow free passage of canal water across the river into the canal taking off from the other side of the river. The contentious Laxmanpur barrage is one of such structures devised to deliver the water from the Girjapur barrage across the West Rapti river.

It would be necessary to maintain all the time pond water upstream of the barrage above certain fixed level to keep the Saryu canal running at desired capacity. Thus the pond would always be full, with the result that a sizeable area of lands in Nepalese territory could remain perpetually submerged. When the river is in flood, the water would be spreading out onto the lands that were never before regarded prone to flooding.

The Saryu canal is expected to cross innumerable small rivers and drains on its way. Embankments and dikes are needed to train these drains and small rivers for the protection of the Saryu canal. These river training structures could also result in widespread flooding inside Nepal where the canal route is close to the border.

Question of Dam Safety

The West Seti dam project appears to be ridden with serious technical problems that concern the safety of its most important structure, the high dam itself. The WECS had few years back sent its opinion to the Water Resources Ministry stating that the type of the high dam proposed for the West Seti by the private developer could be risky. Some of the evidences put forward by the developers to justify their selection do not appear to tally with the information contained in the recently published scientific documents.

The proposed West Seti Dam is going to be highest in the World among the CFRD. Needless to say that there is a need for great caution in adopting very high CFRD. According to J. Barry Cooks, Consultant USA (Development in High CFRDs, Hydropower & Dams, Issue Four 1997), this type of dams are of empirical design and based on precedent design and experience. Unfortunately only very recently relatively high CFRDs have been introduced.

WECS had suggested to constitute a panel of few renowned international experts recognized to be the authority on their respective discipline to seek their opinion. Any further action in the direction of taking the decision to award the project to the private developer should be deferred until the panel gives its absolutely positive opinion. It is not known who had approved the technical design of the West Seti project on behalf of the government to vouch for the correctness.

The incidence of the Kulekhani high dam should not be allowed to be once more repeated. At that time the Kulekhani dam could be saved which was on the verge of collapse resulting into one of the biggest man made disasters in the world. In case of the West Seti reservoir because the volume of the West Seti reservoir might be about 15 times greater than the volume of the Kulekhani reservoir.

(Dr. Thapa writes on water resources)

NEPALI CONGRESS

Reemergence of Moderation

After tilting too much towards extremism, there appears re-emergence of moderation in Nepali Congress

By KESHAB POUDEL

Late Keshar Bahadur K.C., a well known Nepalese anthropologist and diplomat, had diagnosed the positive aspect of Nepalese society. According to him, one of Nepal's compulsions is to exist with heterogeneity as a *Samyak Samaj* - that is a moderate society.

The preaching of Buddha had basic tenets as 'SAMYAK' which is moderation. Despite all these dramatic exercises of extremisms, Nepal's peculiarity is always reflected in its moderation.

Nepali Congress leader B.P. Koirala, who spent his entire political career championing the cause of moderation through national reconciliation, knew this tenet but its senior leaders in recent times gave up this ideological stand siding with one extremist against the other.



Joshi: Leading New Trend

Thanks to the courage of second generation leaders like Govinda Raj Joshi, who faced all kinds of humiliation, turmoil and painful sufferings for his moderate views including corruption charges, a group of second generation leaders have raised the voice of moderation in the party. General secretary K.B. Gurung, central committee member Sunil Bhandari,

Binaya Dhoj Chand, former speaker and Nepali Congress leader Taranath Ranabhat, central committee member Laxman Prasad Ghimire and other number of district committee presidents and members of parliament strongly came out in favor of moderation.

"Extremism can neither work as a political force nor can it survive as a social force. The conversion of extremist Maoist into a peaceful multi-party democratic side is the latest example. Though they may have to prove their worth through non-violent competitive politics, whether they will survive as a political force or not depends much upon the caliber and commitment to get transformed. In the meantime, a new trend has emerged in moderate politics through the second rankers in the leadership. It showed that whatever party leader Koirala says and does as a prime minister, too, might not reflect the real feelings of even his close party men," said a political analyst.

A group of people could be used for any heinous purposes for a certain period to promote ulterior interests but ultimately that does not last.

"Their leader G.P. Koirala may have his visions and compulsions. Without denouncing his integrity and zeal, these people have come out from psychological, family or hierarchical dominations in the party as that of Indian Congress Party in which dynasty prevails over all. Koiralas have been accepted by their own merits and contributions. But, the way the monarchical ethos have been established in republican India within the Indian National Congress is not going to be successful in Nepal. This is one of most

unique and positive scenes emerging within the leadership of Nepali Congress," said the political analyst.

"The mandate of People's movement II is to make people sovereign. For this, we must hold the elections of Constituent Assembly. We will lose our identity associating with one extremist against other. If we do not follow our own course of moderation, it will be suicidal for us," said Joshi.

They have started speaking out their



Ranabhat: Defending Moderation

minds in the party forum as well as press also with different emphasis. "Their main emphasis is upon the maintenance of the moderate democratic trends which the party had in legacy under the leadership of late B.P. Koirala. They don't subscribe to the unilateral views either of democracy or nationalism. Most of them want to keep both these objectives in priority to keep the party base intact in the people," said the analyst. "The perversion of Indian Congress was the trend of the post independence period which only the power nothing else counted. But in Nepal, these people with democratic commitments have seen a lot from persecution to power and test and turmoil, pains and sufferings, sacrifice for the career they opted; the ideals they have held and the organization they have built-up."

One cannot predict whether they will succeed or not but they are determined to take stand and assure the people that Nepal still has chance to get a proper leadership to complete this transition from uncertain and unknown situation to stable and predictable democratic regime. ■

SECURITY

Callous Assaults

In flagrant violation of peace pact and undermining the norms of ruling party, Maoist activists attack security posts

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

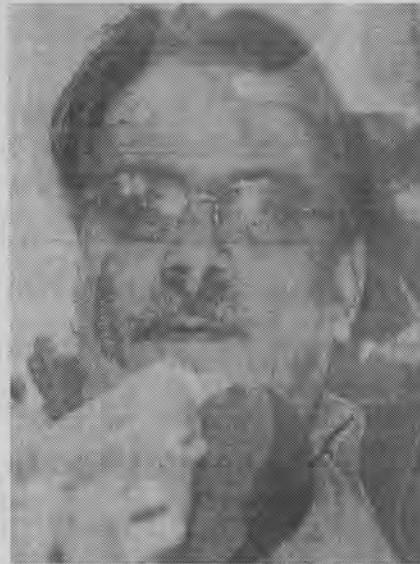
Three incidents of past one week have dampened the spirits of not only the peace-loving people but also compelled parties to sit back and ponder over the heightened attacks by Maoist activists.

Last Monday (April 30), in the eastern region of Banke district, hundreds of Maoists stormed a border police post in Suiya area in the night and looted three rifles and abducted police in-charge there.

Over 500 Maoists led by local area in-charge and district president of Madhesi Mukti Morcha Nanda Kishore Pandeya stormed the police post and set its furniture and other items to fire. Seven policemen fled to safety while post in charge Mukesh Kunwar was abducted and detained for 14 hours.

Later, the rifles and Kunwar were discovered at the house of Pandeya and freed. Armed with domestic weapons like swords, the Maoists also physically attacked and injured Kunwar as well as three other policemen. According to Kunwar, Pandeya and police constable Tek Bahadur Rana entered into an argument after the former refused to let the policeman frisk him during a regular check. This led to the attack subsequently.

Two days after the incident in Banke, Maoist activists led freed Kamaiyas and landless squatters to attack a post of Armed Police Force (APF) in Sanoshree of Bardiya district. They were demonstrating protesting the APF's move to place policemen at a godown of the Cotton Development Committee building in Sanoshree



Prachanda: Mounting criticisms

where cadres of Young Communist League (YCL) used to stay earlier. Following the violence, curfew had to be imposed for four days in Ward No 3, 4 and 5 of Sanoshree VDC.

Later in Gulariya of Baridya district, police arrested 46 – of which 38 have been slapped with charges under Public Offense law - cadres of YCL. The YCL had led an irate crowd of freed Kamaiyas and landless squatters and burnt down the office of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and land revenue. They vandalized the offices burning down vehicles, furniture and documents there.

The Tharu Liberation Front (TLF) imposed two-day bandh in five districts of far and mid western region including Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur and Dang on Friday and Saturday (May 4 and 5). The bandh

was imposed in order to protest the clash between Armed Police Force and Maoist activists in Sanoshree of Bardiya two days ago.

On Sunday (May 6) in Tulsipur of Dang district, activists of Maoists resorted to vandalism refusing to return seized properties to owners. A group of people led by Maoist activists and including those who were currently enjoying the properties and lands of displaced persons, vandalized municipality office of Tulsipur where senior leaders of Maoists and Nepali Congress (NC) were discussing ways to return the properties. The group also severely thrashed Lokmani Giri, a local NC leader who had been displaced due to the conflict.

Given the seriousness of these three incidents, the UNMIN has been asked to launch a probe to find out if it constituted violation of peace pact or not.

Meanwhile, the YCL of the Maoists has come under severe criticism from leaders of other political parties. NC vice president Sushil Koirala has been quite vocal in deploring the YCL for 'terrorizing the people.'

Even UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal criticized the YCL for continuing violent activities.

On the other hand, comrade Sagar, who is the valley commander of YCL, said that they are now engaged in organizational expansion drive. "The main objective of YCL is to bring the youths together on a plank to build a new republican Nepal," he said.

Reacting to criticisms against his organization, Sagar said, "As Lenin had once said, one should feel that one is heading on a right direction if one attracts criticisms from opponents."

The YCL, which was formed just over three months ago, is preparing to attract half a million membership across 75 districts. Maoist leaders have clearly said that YCL will be mobilized if they decide to launch another agitation. ■

POST CONFLICT

Priorities In Conflict

Although the violent Maoist conflict, more or less, has come to an end, a new kind of conflict is appearing - the conflict of priority. Barred for voting for more than eight years, people living in remote parts of Nepal want elected representatives at grass root organizations and development. Rural people want predictable situation to carry out development activities and to bring about complete normalcy. Despite restoration of police posts and other state institutions in the villages, there is a long way to go to attain development, which will enhance the livelihood of people. At a time when political leaders are stressing on settling the date for CA polls, they don't have time to show concern for the development desire

By KESHAB POUDEL

reporting from Solukhumbu and Dhunche

Maila B.K, 45, a porter of Salleri, 400 kilometers north east of capital, wants school, road and health posts nearby his home, which were blown away by Maoists during the conflict in the past. In absence of elected representatives at his village development committee, Maila's day to day work is affected.

Maila - who does not know about the jargons being harped by urban elites like right to self determination, federal structure on the basis of castes and ethnicity and the elections for constituent assembly on the basis of

proportional representation - simply wants to vote for his own candidate for Village Development Committee. "I don't know what CA is but I want to vote my candidate in village development committee," said Maila, who has cast his vote twice in the past.

Maila, who fetches essentials goods from Jiri to Salleri and other northern parts of Solukhumbu, spends half a year as a porter. "I don't want to be a porter but I don't have other options to feed my family," he said. Father of two sons and a daughter, B.K. charges Rs.15 per kilo for carrying loads from Jiri to Salleri. "It takes us generally five days to bring goods from Jiri. When I

was young, I could carry up to 100 kgs of goods but now, I can carry only 60-70 kgs."

Although political parties and other various groups have been organizing rallies in the district headquarters, a large number of rural area is yet to know about the new political developments and possible date for elections.

On the way to Junabesi from district headquarter Salleri; one can see few posters regarding the constituent assembly along the road. The posters are courtesy of Democratic Strengthening Project supported by Canadian Cooperation.

Rural people have similar expressions in Goljung and Gatlang Villages of Rasuwa district where people want elections and development together. Even leaders of political parties want to continue development programs. Politics is confined to district headquarters Dhunche where all the political parties have district offices. In rural areas one can see some youths covering their head by red scarf with a sign of star; - Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) is making some difference.

"Many young people are joining YCL hoping that it will bring much needed development in our village," said Chersing Tamang of Gatlang village.

Following the construction of Trishuli-Somdang road and Chilime Hydropower project, development entered into the northern parts of Rasuwa. For the eastern part of Rasuwa, trekkers going to Langtang trekking have been bringing prosperity but this is not the case with north-west Rasuwa.

Instead of political agenda, education, health and road are still the major concerns for the people. "Road, education and employment are what we want," said Chersing.

The road linking Syaphrubesi to



A high school in Junabesi: Rare rural infrastructure

China's Kerung and Trishuli is another hope for the population of Rasuwa. However, there is no sign for the immediate construction of road even seven years after signing the agreement between Nepal and China.

"Rasuwa's future lies on Kerung-Syaphrubesi and Trisuli road. This road will bring prosperity to our region," said Bal Bahadur Nagarkoti district president of Nepali Congress Democratic.

For Karma Tamang, a resident of Goljung Village Development

Committee of Rasuwa district, economic issues are main concern. "I don't much care about whether there will be elections for Constituent Assembly or not. People in village are deeply concerned over pulling out of Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) from next month. After pulling out of this program, we don't have other programs directed to bring prosperity in our village," said Tamang.

Following the postponement of the elections for Constituent Assembly, Nepal's political situation is fluid and unstable as nobody can predict what will happen next. New emerging dispute between political parties on constituent assembly is sidelining the development agenda.

Development projects in the village level were virtually stopped since the dissolution of local bodies in 2002 and intensification of Maoist insurgency. Although many programs were implemented by District Development Committees through the participation of local communities and political parties, they were very insignificant.

"We have not seen any major



Cultural troupe in Rasuwa: Rich heritage

development works carried out in our areas," said B.K. whose team of porters also carried cement, steel, iron and other construction materials.

"With the dissolution of local bodies, the pace of development activities have drastically reduced as DDCs run by the government employees lack the legitimacy like the elected bodies," said Binod Kumar Singh, Local Development Officer at Rasuwa. "After signing the agreement, every one is now talking about the development. People want the development activities to move fast along with the elections for CA."

Similar situation is there in Solukhumbu where there is pressure to carry on development activities. "I have been carrying out projects like improvement of trekking trails, small irrigation projects and renovation of school buildings," said Bharat Bahadur Dhungana local development officer of Solukhumbu District. "With the consensus of eight political parties, I am trying to implement development programs as much as possible."

Although the government has allocated certain amount of budget to carry out development activities, their priority now is to maintain law and order and hold the elections for Constituent Assembly.

"District administration is more concerned now to maintain law and order situation in the country and to hold the elections for CA in credible and peaceful manner. Our whole effort is directed towards it," said Laxman Bahadur Hamal, Chief District Officer of Solukhumbu district.

In its interim strategy note, the World Bank has indicated how development activities will be affected in the country. "Even in the best scenario, there is a considerable risk that Nepal's leadership will be preoccupied with the political agenda. Ignoring the development agenda could prove damaging not only for the

long term needs of the country but also for the near term," writes The World Bank's Nepal Interim Strategy Note. "Since a new political order will not emerge for at least 12-18 months, the Bank's strategy will have to be flexible in the near term, while not losing sight of Nepal's overall development needs. Therefore, while this is an Interim Strategy Note (ISN), it continues to focus on a longer term development agenda for Nepal," writes Nepal Interim

Strategy Note published by the World Bank.

Despite signing of peace agreement, the law and order situation is yet to improve in the country. As the state authority is not in a position to impose the law, whims of certain leaders are determining every course.

As there is a lack of rule of law, rule of whim is prevailing in the districts making the situation more unpredictable and unstable. For the development to be carried out, stability and predictability are must. The new emerging trends indicate that country's situation is very much unpredictable and uncertain as nobody knows when road will be blocked disrupting the normal lives of the people.

This is the reason many of Nepal's development partners are shifting their policies in Nepal from development-focused to election-focused. "Most important thing my government wants to support is the current peace process and help the government of Nepal to succeed in that. Successful



A public tap in a village: Precious service

development comes when you hold constituent assembly elections," said Dr. Andrew Hall, British ambassador to Nepal. (See Spotlight May 4-10)

With per capita income just over US\$270, Nepal is one of the least developed countries of the world. The continual uncertainty prevailed in the country following the dismissal of elected government in 2002 by King Gyanendra. The long term development process was completely stalled following the dismissal of accountable government.

Thanks to the successful implementation of development projects by community groups like forest user groups, community mobilized works have proved as a viable scheme in Nepal.

For the people living in Solukhumbu and Rasuwa who prefer development as their first priority, the World Bank's interim strategy note gives some positive insight. In the conflict between development and peace, Nepal needs to strike right balance. ■

POLITICS

Swift Undercurrents

As the eight parties continue to be in a state of limbo, swift undercurrents are felt with the recent remarks by Koirala and Nepal

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

At the closing session of the meeting of the district presidents of his party, Prime Minister and president of Nepali Congress (NC) Girija Prasad Koirala made a telling remark on the issue of republic.

In the wake of increasing tempo of demands by the Maoists in favor of immediate proclamation of republic, PM Koirala advised that the republic is not something that can be announced outright "without careful considerations of all aspects."

Referring to the latest incident whereupon PM, for the first time in country's history, received credentials from foreign ambassador, Koirala the republic will be gradually established by clipping the authorities of the King one by one.

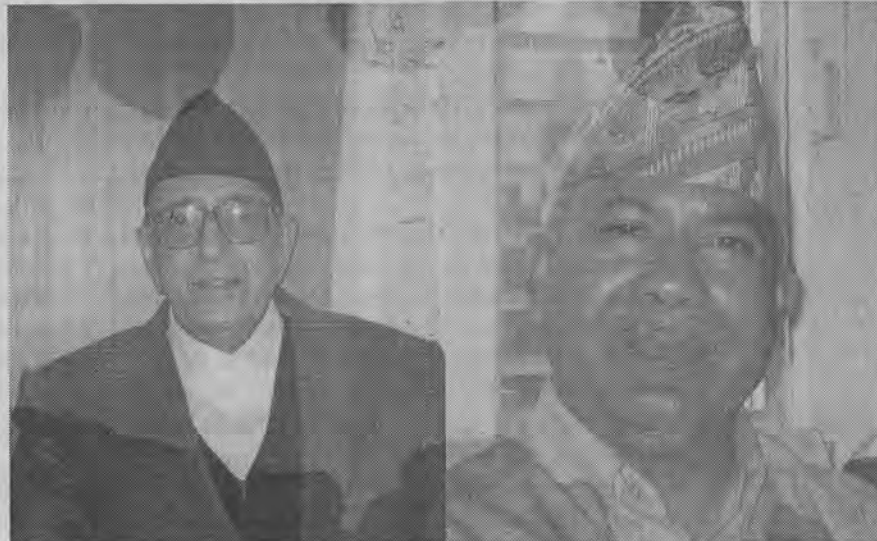
"Republic must not be declared outright. Gradually, the rights of the King will have to be clipped and one day we can announce republic," he said.

PM Koirala also made a meaningful remark when he said that NC will have to "weigh in all things before deciding on monarchy."

"It is not enough to just harp the slogan of republic," said Koirala, adding, "(NC has to be careful) whether this slogan is aimed at pushing NC into a republic camp after which the international community would look us from a different perspective."

Even as he made these remarks on monarchy and vowed to hold the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal poured cold water over the much-touted prospects for larger communist unity.

Addressing a press meet in the



Koirala (left) and Nepal: Subtle hints

capital, on Monday, Nepal said the proposal of broader leftist unity was meaningless. Nepal said, "How can we talk about leftist unity when even our senior comrade Amrit Bohara's properties have not been returned (by the Maoists)?" Furthermore, he said that CA cannot be overshadowed in the name of republic hinting his opposition to Maoist position that CA can be postponed for a long time if republic is declared.

In yet more meaningful remark, he even went on to appeal to all (read international community) to stop getting worried by the proposal of broader communist unity.

The proposal of leftist unity floated by the Maoist chairman Prachanda had triggered debates on the eventuality of new round of polarization between leftist and democratic forces.

Former prime minister and president of Rastriya Janashakti Party (RJP) Surya Bahadur Thapa, upon returning from his

sojourn to Indian capital, had also said there was a possibility of realignment among democrats and leftists. "But such alignment of democratic camp must be led by PM Koirala," he had said.

The proposal for communist unity gained currency after Maoist chairman Prachanda publicly said that his party was willing to abandon Prachandapath if there could be leftist unity.

However, as the proposal of leftist unity ruffled many a feathers, the

Maoists later rectified to include unity among all republican forces.

Prachanda has been pushing for the republic announcement saying only it can now salvage the eight party unity. Addressing a May Day celebrations in Khulla Manch, Prachanda threatened to unleash third wave of agitation from the government, parliament, streets and camps. "I warn them not to think that they have achieved everything by ushering us into the parliament and the government. It is not that easy for the reactionaries. We will explode within the cabinet, we will explode within the parliament and we will explode within the cantonments," he said during the "reactionaries to come out into the open if they want to see our ruthlessness."

In the wake of increasingly shriller warnings and statements the quiet turnaround marked by the speeches of Koirala and Nepal indicate the fierce undercurrents that could ultimately shape the political matters in the days to come. ■

“NC Will Contest Elections On The Basis Of Moderate Ideology Propounded By B.P. Koirala”

- K.B. Gurung

Nepali Congress general secretary K.B. GURUNG is a well known person in Congress party. Claimed as a true follower of B.P. Koirala's national reconciliation, Gurung's recent political paper has generated a new debate in Nepali politics. Gurung whose house and property in Ilam still remain seized by Maoists; spoke to KESHAB POUDEL on various issues regarding re-emergence of centrist line in Congress. Excerpts:

At a time when Maoist leaders are saying that the time has come to declare the republic from the interim parliament, what is the reaction of Nepali Congress?

Nepali Congress is a responsible Democratic Party and it cannot go against its commitments. As interim constitution has already stipulated that the fate of monarchy will be decided by the first meeting of constituent assembly, this kind of debate has no meaning now and it is just a politically motivated debate. Only the Nepali people can decide such dispute through the ballot - whether they want to retain monarchy or not.

But, Maoist leaders have been saying that this interim parliament has such mandate?

If this parliament has all these mandates, why do we then need to go for the elections for Constituent Assembly? As a democratic party, Nepali Congress always accepts the verdict of the people. We believe that people are supreme authority to decide. This interim parliament does not have such mandates.

Some of your communist allies have been accusing that Nepali Congress is protecting monarchy by delaying the elections of CA. How do you look at it?

Nepali Congress has already made it clear that only the people of this country has the right to decide the fate of monarchy. If people vote for monarchy, we have to accept it. Nepali Congress will follow the verdict of the people. Nepali Congress is always committed to hold the free and fair elections for CA but it is the activities of Maoist organizations like Young Communist League, which is terrorizing people, that are obstructing the elections.

Some of your party colleagues have been saying that the time has come to decide on republic. What is the status of Nepali Congress now?

As a democratic party, every individual has the right to speak his views. So far as our party's stand is concerned, only party general assembly can decide

on such issue. The last general assembly meeting of our party amended the constitution making our party's stand silent on monarchy. Even our party leader Girijababu has said that Nepali Congress has to look at international reactions before making any shift on the issue.

But, some of your party leaders including prime minister Koirala reportedly said that the country is heading towards republic. Is it not contradictory?

I have already mentioned to you that such decision cannot be taken on the whims of just a few handful of party workers. It is the issue to be decided by the people of Nepal. Girijababu's spirit is also similar like that of ours.

Is it not true that your party has deviated from 12-points agreement by signing new eight point agreement?

There have been certain deviations on the part of our party. Even prime minister Koirala acknowledged that the eight point agreement has created new problems. After signing the agreement, Girijababu personally shared his dissatisfaction with our party leaders. The 12 point agreement has clear mandate on how to hold the elections for Constituent Assembly. One of the essences of 12 points agreement is to revive House of Representatives, sign the peace agreement with Maoist and hold elections for Constituent Assembly. This is also the mandate of Janandolan II which was launched to end autocratic monarchy and establish complete democracy.

If that was the mandate, how all these new developments appeared by writing interim constitution and constituting new interim parliament?

Girijababu - who signed the new agreement on the eve of his departure to Bangkok for his medical treatment - expressed anger and dissatisfaction over the agreement. Some of our party leaders pressurized Girijababu in such a manner that he was compelled to sign it. Had we followed 12 points agreement honestly, we would have by now already elected Constituent Assembly and the country would have entered a new phase of political stability.

But, CPN-UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal and other communist leaders are now pointing their fingers against Girija Prasad Koirala for failure to hold the elections for CA. How do you look at it?

There is a consensus among all the members that the first meeting of Constituent Assembly should decide the fate of monarchy.

Girijababu has shown greatness by accepting responsibility of not holding the elections for CA on schedule but other leaders of eight political parties are more responsible than Girijababu and our party. Girijababu has expressed his strong commitment to hold the elections for CA. I think Nepali Congress is the only party determined to hold the elections for CA. How can you blame Nepali Congress leader when Maoists did not abide by their written commitments signed with the seven parties? We all know that it is the CPN-Maoist cadres who are still terrorizing people. The Maoists have not returned our confiscated properties and have not allowed internally displaced persons to return.

Even they have not yet returned my property.

What would be the agenda of Nepali Congress in CA?

As long as B.P. Koirala's ideology is there, we don't need to worry. Our party will contest the elections on the basis of moderate ideology propounded by B.P. Koirala. Our party always follows the moderate path. This is our identity. This going to be our agenda.

At a time when your party is completely discarding traditional force siding with extremist communists demanding abolishing monarchy, what elements are left to distinguish your party from the communists?

NC, which is the only liberal democratic party in Nepal, has a long history of struggling against autocracy of any form. Our opposition is against the autocratic monarchy. We have our own ideology propounded by B.P. Koirala. As B.P. Koirala had said, Nepali Congress is not in favor of any forms of extremism whether it is rightist extremism or communist extremism.

In case your party contests elections with a similar slogan of republic, do you believe that your party will retain its broader appeal?

As you know our party still maintains silence on monarchy and republic. In this regard, our slogans for elections will be different than communists. B.P. Koirala's new book Raja, Rastriyata and Rajniti (King, Nationalism and Politics) clearly will guide us on what Nepali Congress needs to do at the time of crisis.

Don't you see there are deviations?

I told you that there is deviation in the ideological front of Nepali Congress but our party cannot survive if we continue to deviate further. Even our leader Girijababu has been frank enough to accept that.

At a time when most of your party workers including prime minister Koirala are justifying the new role of Nepali Congress, what prompted you to take opposite stand?

We are not taking any opposite stands but we are harping similar ethos of national reconciliation as all our leaders including Girijababu has been doing. We were grown up under the leadership of B.P. Koirala, who taught us that whenever there is a

crisis in the country prime duty of a party worker is to speak truth keeping the country's interest in mind.

We are fulfilling our own national responsibility by speaking truth. As B.P. said, a political leader must speak truth even if it brings hostile reactions. I am not afraid of hostile reactions.

If B.P. Koirala had been alive, what do you think would be his reactions to the new situation?

He would stand for his own belief and conviction. Although B.P. Koirala is not there, his commitments and ideology inspires us to speak party's ideology. In his recently released book, B.P. Koirala firmly expressed his views on nation, democracy and monarchy. Every party worker knows what our leader said about our future.

Some of your leaders have been saying that the context of B.P.'s national reconciliation has changed now. How do you look at it?

Nothing has changed now and B.P.'s national reconciliation is still valid as it was in the past and it will be valid forever. The photo of young B.P. printed as a cover page of the book Raja, Rastriyata and Rajniti indicates this. It shows B.P.'s ideology has utility at all times and is forever young. I don't know what reasons prompted Ganesh Raj Sharma to choose B.P. Koirala's photograph of younger age in the cover page of the book. My observation is that the picture, which only a few of us had seen before, demonstrated that B.P.'s idea is always valuable and relevant.

What are the main agenda raised by the chairmen of District Committees and other leaders at the recent meet?

The meeting helped to bring clarity in the mind of many of us. Many party leaders expressed dissatisfaction on the deviation of Nepali Congress on many issues. Few members even demanded to amend the party constitution to make it republican. One of the positive sides of this meeting is that there is a consensus among all the members that the first meeting of Constituent Assembly should decide the fate of monarchy.

What were the major concerns raised by your party leaders in the meeting?

All of them were concerned about the deteriorating law and order situation in the country. District presidents also raised the question on continued Maoist atrocities in the villages. They called to announce the date of elections for CA with credible assurance of law and order. They criticized the Home minister failing to restore law and order.



Nepali Congress is not in favor of any forms of extremism whether it is rightist extremism or communist extremism.

HERBS

Planting Against Poverty

ICIMOD is implementing a project to tap the potential of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants and use them to tackle poverty

By A CORRESPONDENT

About 20,000 tons of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) worth US\$18-20 million are traded every year in Nepal alone, and about 90% are harvested in uncontrolled fashion. The situation is similar in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and other countries of South Asia, and 90% of the plants from Nepal are exported to India in raw form.

For landless, resource-poor mountain farmers, often, the harvest and trade in medicinal plants constitutes their only form of cash income.

With the objective of tapping their potential and use them to overcome poverty, the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is implementing a project in three South Asian countries including Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

"Considering the increasing value of medicinal and aromatic plants, both in terms of primary health care and as a critical source of livelihoods and income for the rural poor in the region, ICIMOD with support from the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), The Netherlands is implementing a four-year, US\$1.68 million 'Medicinal Plants and Herbs: Developing Sustainable Supply Chain and Enhancing Rural Livelihoods in the Eastern Himalayas' Project in three countries," states a press release from the ICIMOD.

ICIMOD's Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Program in Asia (MAPPA) is the

project's implementing agency, with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Intergovernmental Sub-Group on Tropical Fruits providing a supervisory role.

In Nepal, the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Government of Nepal, is the nodal agency in Nepal, with the Herbs and Non-Timber Forest Products Coordination Committee, Nepal working with partners to implement the project in Western Nepal.

"The project's overall objective is to conserve natural resources, reduce poverty, and improve livelihoods for mountain communities of the Himalayan region through the sustainable development and utilization of high-value, low-volume medicinal and aromatic plants. A recently concluded three-day inception workshop in April launched the project with implementing partners in the three countries," the release adds.

At the inception workshop, ICIMOD and experts from India shared latest trends and organic practices in MAPs cultivation and processing as well as emerging value supply chains practices here and in other countries. "Through the workshop, each country's nodes and partners sat down and consulted with MAP experts on their individual country plans. The country plans are now being refined after the consultations."

According to ICIMOD, the greater Himalayan region, in fact, holds the

comparative advantage of being home to many medicinal and aromatic plants found only in the region. The region also has various well-developed practices in traditional medicines (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, among others) based on indigenous knowledge of these plants' medicinal and healing properties. "Considering the global trade in medicinal and aromatic plants – now a US\$60 billion industry and still growing, especially with the increasing demand worldwide for herbal medicines – the potential of MAPs to provide relief from poverty in South Asia, where 40% of the world's poor reside, is tremendous. It can be tapped."

ICIMOD is an international independent Mountain Learning and Knowledge Centre serving eight regional countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and brings together a partnership of regional member countries, over 300 institutions within and outside the region, and donors with a commitment for development action to secure the future of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

The ICIMOD Overall Strategic Plan (2003-2007) has identified following six integrated programs - Natural Resource Management (NRM); Agriculture and Rural Income Diversification (ARID); Water, Hazards, and Environmental Management (WHEM); Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance (CEGG); Policy and Partnership (PP); and Information and Knowledge Management (IKM).

ICIMOD member countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

JOURNOS RESOLVE DISPUTES WITH MANAGEMENT

In what is seen as the first such incident in the country, working journalists of a media house launched a successful agitation and forced the management to concede to their professional demands.

Representatives of Nepal One Television management and the agitating journalists of the same channel came to an agreement on 7 May at Kathmandu. The agreement between the representative of the management, Pradeep Roy and representative of the agitating journalists Rebat Sapkota was signed under the supervision of Mahendra Bista, FNJ secretary general, advocate

Ramesh Badal, FNJ's legal advisor, Bishnu Lamsal, general secretary of Labor and Transportation Ministry and Narayan Prasad Regmi, joint-secretary of Information and Communication Ministry.

The demands that have been addressed are, the immediate issuance of contract to its staffers since the date they have joined the organization, implementation of accident and medical insurance and provident fund among others.

Nepal One journalists and employees have been protesting against the management of the television channel with 20 point demand since the

last 18 days. They were on a fast-unto-death strike since Saturday (5 May). Those on the indefinite fast-unto-death strike were journalists Raj Kumar Regmi, Rishi Dhamala and Bishnu Kalpit. However, Kalpit broke the strike on the evening of the same day, after his health deteriorated.

After the settlement of dispute, agitating journos broke off their hunger strike in the presence of Speaker Subas Nemwang, UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, other senior political leaders and FNJ president Bishnu Nishthuri.

Earlier, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had enquired Nishthuri about the ongoing protest. Meanwhile, political leaders as well as Jacqueline Park from International Federation of Journalists showed solidarity with the agitation. ■

MAOISTS STILL TERRORISTS: US

The US is the only country to maintain its designation of the Maoists as a terrorist organization at the end of 2006, a new report by the US state department says. The report made public recently states, from January to November 2006, Maoists were responsible for the deaths of 165 security personnel and 46 civilians.

During the same time period, the government killed 182 suspected Maoist militants, the report states. The report quoted Nepal's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that murders by Maoists lessened after the ceasefire in April, but still totaled 28 from May until November. Security force killings of Maoist insurgents were also significantly lower after the ceasefire, totaling nine during the same period.

The report further says, "Despite the ceasefire, Maoist rebels continued to conduct abductions, extortion, and

violence. In the Kathmandu Valley, Maoists took advantage of their dramatically increased presence and the government's reluctance to upset the peace process to expand their use of extortion and efforts to undermine trade unions and student groups affiliated with the political parties. They also continued forced recruitment of schoolchildren, with thousands targeted after the signing of the initial November 8 peace accord."

The report cites two major strikes called by the Maoists as instances of the breach of the peace agreement. On September 20, and again on December 19, the Maoists declared nationwide transportation strikes. Both events were accompanied by the stoning of vehicles, and each lasted only for the declared period, demonstrating Maoist command and control.

The US has also placed the terrorist tag on the Janatantrik Terai Mukti

Morcha (JTMM). "This year also saw the beginning of a disturbing new trend with the activation of the separatist Maoist-splinter terrorist group called the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM), which aimed to bring about the secession of the southern Terai plains from the rest of Nepal," it says.

The report states that 'imperialist' US and 'expansionist' India were the targets of considerable Maoists, especially in the period leading up to the April uprising but a trip by Maoist Chairman Prachanda to New Delhi on November 18 seemed to mark the culmination of a shift in the Maoist view of Nepal's large neighbor to the south. The United States provided substantial antiterrorism assistance and training to Nepal's security forces, including courses on crisis management and critical incident management, the report said. nepalnews.com reports

“Tourism Can Be Tool To Fight Poverty”

-Bharat Bahadur Dhungana

As the chief coordinator for local development, Local Development Officer of Solukhumbu District BHARAT BAHADUR DHUNGANA has been facing similar kinds of problems like other LDOs. One of the challenges for them is to implement development activities at a time when there is a vacuum of elected representatives at the grass root level. Dhungana spoke to KESHAB POUDEL in Salleri, the district capital of Solukhumbu, recently. Excerpts:

How easy is it to carry out development activities in the present context when local bodies lack elected representatives?

It is very difficult to implement development activities in the grass root level. However, you don't have other option than to carry them out. Whether there is elected representatives or not, people need a lot of development programs including small irrigation, school buildings, drinking water, health posts and roads.

What are the bases for the selections of the project now?

As a government employee, we have our own limitations. We cannot impose the project from the top. It is the political leadership who knows the demands and needs of the local people. This is the reason I discuss with the leaders of eight political parties about the projects. This is quite an effective way to build political consensus to select the projects as well as implement them.

How cooperative district leaders of eight political parties are? Do they come to support you?

They may have their own political ideology. So far as the project implementation is concerned, all of them have certain consensus. Every political leader is positive on development activities.

What are the priorities of the people?

This is one of the districts in eastern part of Nepal that is not connected with the road. Because of lack of transport, the cost of almost every essential product is three times higher here. Every one wants to see the road connections. People hold the view that the connection

of road will reduce the cost of essential products.

When will the road reach Solu then?

If things go smoothly, Solukhumbu will be linked by road within a year. District Development Committee has been spending its resources to link the road between Okhaldhunga and Salleri. We are also proposing to link Solukhumbu district with Ramechhap.

As Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) is phasing out soon, does your district has institutions to continue it?

Yes, it is phasing out from coming June. Thanks to the support from TRPAP, we have already built up sustainable Tourism Development Section to carry out the activities. We have manpower and institutional capabilities to continue it.

What about financial resources?

Annually, Solukhumbu district contributes millions of rupees as royalty to Tourism Fund. We are considering demanding the resources from the fund to run the program.

How do you see the TRPAP?

TRPAP is one of the programs directed at poverty. It is unfortunate to say that the program is wrapping up when the normalcy has returned in the country. The program was implemented during very difficult time.

What lessons did you learn from TRPAP?

After more than five years of implementation, TRPAP has shown how tourism can be used as an effective tool to alleviate poverty. Northern parts of Solukhumbu district had already made progress and enjoyed much benefit. TRPAP explored southern part of Solukhumbu as a new product for tourism. Dudhkunda-Pikey Cultural Trail is a new product for this district. This trail will cover 9 to 16 days of trekking.

What is the distinct character of this trekking trail?

One can see diverse culture and nature along the trail. From the culture of Khaling Rai of southern Solukhumbu to Sherpa of Junbesi and higher land, this trail has unique combination of culture and nature. There are a number of monasteries along the trail. One of the

famous Monasteries is Thuptenchholing Monastery. One can see sunrise from Pikey mountain (4065 m) and the Himalayan range from Kanchanjunga of east to Dhaulagiri of west.



How local political leaders and local people see TRPAP?

TRPAP is one of the popular programs in the district as it has contributed to transform the livelihood of people. All the programs implemented by TRPAP are bringing direct benefits to them. When this program is so popular among people, no one can dare challenge it. Even during the time of intensification of conflicts, this program had hardly seen any disruption. Political leaders are pressing us to continue TRPAP for another few years.

As you said TRPAP has brought tangible change in the rural life, what is the visible change here?

One of the visible changes is the number of tourists coming to visit the southern part of the district. As you know, Solukhumbu's northern part including Everest trekking trail used to receive more than 20,000 tourists a year. Despite all ingredients, the visiting number of tourists is lower in southern areas. What TRPAP has done is, it explored the product. Compared to north, the poverty is rampant in southern Solukhumbu and tourism can be a powerful tool to fight the poverty.

How hopeful are you about the increasing number of tourists in the region?

As the country is returning to normalcy, I am very optimistic that the number of tourist will increase in the area. Even in the last four months, we have seen a lot of tourists in the region. Nepal Tourism Board has also assured us that they will sell this product in international tourism mart. To provide basic information to growing number of tourists, Tourist Information Center has already been opened in Junbesi. ■

BOOK

Crisis of Identity in Nepal

In his new book, Prakash A. Raj, a well known scholar of Nepal, discusses Nepal's identity in changing context

By A CORRESPONDENT

Following People's Movement II or popular uprising, Nepal has seen many changes in its basic structures in politics, religion, society, values and ideals. After the success of Janandolan II, the leaders of agitating Seven Parties Alliance (SPA), with the tacit backing of Maoists, hit on many basic and traditional characters of Nepal.

Although SPA and Maoists launched the agitation with limited objective to end the autocratic rule of monarchy and to hold the elections for the constituent assembly by the restoration of House of Representatives, the members of restored HoR took several steps crossing the mandate of Janandolan II virtually changing the basic character of the state. Under the proclamation of House of Representatives, Nepal was turned into a secular state from a Hindu Kingdom curtailing traditional and constitutional role of the King.

At a time when all changes including in constitutional practices, cultural aspects, political structures and social sides have been taking place, the identity of Nepal is in crisis and nobody knows what identity it will retain in future.

Nobody knows what will be the structure of Nepal. Is it going to be federal

structure on the basis of ethnicity? Or is it going to be federal state on geographical basis? Is it going to be the country ruled by eight parties or is it going to be the country with multi-party competitive politics? Whether the state will retain its traditional identity as a Hindu nation or become completely secular? These are the fundamental questions every Nepali has in his/her mind. From future of monarchy to future of country's political system, everything remains uncertain.

When the country is facing a major crisis for the first time in its history, Prakash A. Raj, a well known Nepalese scholar who has written a number of book on Nepal, looks at all different aspects of ongoing political trend and crisis. The

Crisis of Identity In Nepal

Author: Prakash A. Raj

Published by: Pilgrims
Publishing, Varanasi,

India in 2007

Price: Rs. 208.00

book deals with crisis of identity and examines if Nepal should be known by a new identity.

"Nepal is at the crossroads of an epoch

making change after Janandolan II organized by an alliance of Seven Political Parties and Maoist insurgents. The future of monarchy and democracy in the country is uncertain. Nepalese Diaspora in many countries and effects of modernization and westernization are also contributing factors for such a crisis. It is uncertain when elections for a constituent assembly will take place and if the Maoist will give up their violence before that. Maoist demands for creating six autonomous regions in Nepal based on ethnicity have raised questions about their utility and viability," said Prakash A. Raj. "The purpose this book is to probe such a crisis in detail to be helpful in the understanding of Nepal."

Analyzing various political, social and constitutional factors, author Prakash A. Raj argues what Nepal's new identity will be like. In his research, the renowned writer discusses issues related with the present crisis in Nepal.

"What kind of identity should Nepal have in the future, whether it continues to be a state having a ceremonial monarchy, or a republic? How did a peaceful land, which was Buddha's birthplace with friendly people, become a country containing the largest number of disappeared people and where a Maoist insurgency has claimed 15000 lives? A study of the crisis of identity in Nepal could also be made with respect to the political, economic and sociological dimensions of the crisis," said Prakash A. Raj.

At this point, Raj's book helps to understand the crisis faced by Nepal and its implications to overall identity of Nepal.

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Instability in Abundance

- Dr. Tilak Rawal

At a time when our two neighbors to our north and south are struggling to check runaway growth of the economy (China) and attain a growth of above 9 percent in a sustainable manner without running into hyper inflation (India), we in Nepal have not been able to pay attention to the sluggish state of our economy. Despite prediction of a 5 percent growth by the interim government, it is likely to remain below 3 percent in the current fiscal year. Inflation is on a rise (8 percent on a point to point basis) and export and import have both decelerated. Budget surplus of Rs.18 billion (a result of increase in revenue, grants and decline in capital expenditure) has become a headache for the government and there is a strong urging by people that this amount be spent in the creation of physical infrastructures, wherever possible. Finance minister Mahat's discomfort could be eased a bit if he decides to spend this money on creation and/ or improvement of infrastructure in so far ignored far western Nepal. To be specific, about 200 million could be spent in the improvement and blacktopping of about 28 km road that starts at Lamki in Kailali and passes through Tikapur, an important educational and commercial point in Seti zone, and ends at the border point in Khakrolaghat. Several other projects with relatively short completion period could be cited in so far ignored far western Nepal itself if the government is serious about not using the stockpiled money in debt servicing.

Those at the helm of affairs have admitted that economic issues have not yet received the much deserved attention because efforts are mostly directed toward resolution of mushrooming protests and conflicts

even after the end of the major decade-long conflict. Signing of 12 point peace accord between the 7 parties and the Maoists, formation of an interim legislature and the government with adequate representation in both of all involved in conflict resolution, could not ensure peace and stability in Nepal basically because new fear have surfaced in the country. In fact, there are about half a dozen bodies that seem to be taking turns in calling bandhs and other protest programs in Nepal, mainly in the fertile plain area which is also a center of major economic activities. Recent formation of Young Communist League (YCL) by Maoists has also not so far contributed toward creating a peaceful environment. With the exception of some social work carried out in the city of late, YCL cadres' reported involvement in looting, vandalism and torching of property has contributed toward tarnishing the image of CPN Maoist and its leader Parchanda. How bad this leader must have felt when he came to know that the vehicle he was using was a forcibly snatched one, anyone can guess. Looking at the activities of political parties and vacillating views of their leaders on vital issues, it seems ailing G.P. Koirala has a tough task ahead of resolving the major political issues keeping the current composition of government intact. In addition to bringing the new groups in conflict around the negotiating table, government seems to be seriously trying to satisfy the insatiable Maoist's thirst for resources. It was interesting to see the two parties, Maoist and the government, indulged in trading accusations on the subject of adequacy or otherwise of resources made available. Despite hundreds of millions of rupees made available to them, it is disgusting to see Maoist combatants living in such deplorable conditions:

saw one camp in Kailali recently. Therefore, it doesn't really make much sense to talk about economic matters at a time

when the nation is almost neck-deep in the flood of unrest and instability.

Sporadic unpleasant incidents happen even years after cessation of hostilities as is shown by experience of other war-devastated countries. In light of this reality, Nepalis were quietly trying to cope with inconvenience caused by strikes, bandhs and other unpleasant incidents emanating from activities of various disgruntled groups formed along regional, ethnic and racial lines. The nation, however, was shocked by the incident in Gaur of Rautahat a couple of weeks ago in which scores of people were killed as a result of clash between cadres of Madhesi People's Right Forum (MPRF) and pro-Maoist Madhesi Mukti Morcha. Killings of this scale were heard in the past when the Maoists and government troops alternated in inflicting collateral damage on the other side. It is not clear that Nepal is still far from achieving normalcy and that possession and use of fire power is no more a monopoly of Maoists; cross-firing that occurred between the rival groups in Gaur and use of weapons by other groups elsewhere in the country amply demonstrate this. To avoid recurrence of this kind of incident and other violent happenings, major political leaders mainly Maoist supremo Parchanda, who is as popular as octogenarian G.P. Koirala as is shown by different surveys, will have to really work hard to tame some of his unruly cadres who take to



extortion, beating and abduction of people begging to differ with them. Maoists will have to learn to respect the fundamental rights of people and instill in their cadres some norms of political values and ethic to save their party from ruination. It is disgusting to see them still confiscating property of people, instead of returning as promised by party leaders. In fact, the eight party cadres will have to learn to respect the fundamental rights of people such as fundamental rights of expression. When we have not yet enacted a law barring certain people from making political expressions, we must respect this fundamental right of people, be it the sidelined monarch or Mr. Rabindra Nath Sharma who was manhandled by eight party workers while delivering an ostensibly pro-monarch speech in eastern Terai..

Protests and counter protest rallies held in the past and currently are a clear indication that violators of fundamental rights can not always escape scot-free. Therefore, instead of trading accusations and organizing counter protest rallies, the concerned need to get into a soul searching exercise. Let no one's property be taken away forcibly, be it of the royalties or a common villager: Maoist lawmakers by now must have given some thought to the repeated plea in the parliament by some co-parliamentarians for returning their confiscated property.

Everything has to be done legally. If available laws are not adequate or effective enough, get new laws enacted by the interim parliament which lacks sizeable number of lawmakers to challenge or obstruct what the parliamentarians of eight ruling parties intend to do. Let individuals be involved in economic pursuit of their choice in a fearless environment, depending on their ability. The created wealth can be taken away through progressive taxes giving due recognition to the tax payers. High-tax European countries such as Germany encourage individuals to create wealth in a competitive environment then take away a major chunk of it without seeming to have forcibly taken it away. Similar is the situation in prosperous Norway which has created a competitive environment to ensure most productive use and application of factor inputs and have different measures in place to take care of the basic needs of people there.

Property forcibly taken away in the past should be immediately returned and extortion, abduction and confiscation of property should now be a matter of the past if CPN Maoist has to retain its current status of a major political force because ultimately in the changed scenario it is the ballot and not bullet that is going to matter. Dramatic results can not be expected overnight but the disciplining work or educational exercise has to start immediately in each party, more so in CPN Maoist. Cementing fragile unity of ruling parties and exercising maximum restraint by the concerned can help bring an end to this unrest engulfing our nation. Pending resolution of political issues, economic issues in Nepal are bound to be on hold, however much restless we become looking at the progress of India and China.

(Dr. Rawal is a former governor of Nepal Rastra Bank)

Peace Process Firmly On Track: UN

Despite the postponement of elections planned for mid-June in Nepal, the peace process in the mountainous country, which recently emerged from a 10-year civil war, is firmly on track, a United Nations envoy said after briefing the Security Council on May 4.

"Fundamentally I'm optimistic, because it was the people of Nepal who took their future in their hands in a very dramatic way in the people's movement of a year ago," Ian Martin, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) told reporters at UN Headquarters.

"Their determination and demand that Nepal must not slip into armed conflict is very strong," he said.

Martin said that no one could have imagined a year ago that the King of Nepal would have relinquished executive authority and that the resulting cease-fire could have blossomed into a full, comprehensive peace agreement that has already made strides under UN monitoring.

At the same time, he pointed out that the timetable for the election of the Constituent Assembly, which will adopt a constitution for the country, has been delayed because regulations governing the process are not yet ready.

A new date for those elections has not yet been agreed on, but they will have to await the end of the monsoon season and major national holidays, which means November at the earliest.

Meanwhile, Martin said, he hoped the Nepalese, with the assistance of UNMIN, will be able to improve security conditions for the elections and work for the full inclusion of marginalized ethnic groups.

A report on Nepal by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, released late last month, praised all parties in the country for their willingness to strive towards consensus on some of the most divisive issues, but also noted that some of the underlying causes of the conflict are yet to be tackled. He warned that challenges remained in monitoring stored arms and improving the cantonment conditions of armed personnel.

On May 4 briefing Martin reported that, with reports of snakes and tents blowing away, cantonment conditions are, indeed, "extremely unsatisfactory." There are now plans for the construction of more permanent living structures, he said.

SECOND ISRAELI FILM FESTIVAL

Show of Culture

Tired of watching Hollywood and Bollywood flicks Nepalese film lovers find some respite by watching world class Israeli films

By A CORRESPONDENT

Like all other societies, there are contradictions, emotions and conflict in the Israeli society. This is what one can see in the movies exhibited in three-days-long second Israeli Film festival. All the films screened at the Russian Culture Center had their own peculiarity.

From love to social trauma and tragedy, Israeli films cover all different aspects and new emerging trends of Israeli society. From tradition to modernity and cultural to human feelings, one found a variety of areas covered by Israeli films.

The stories and actors are excellent and direction and



technology employed are world class. Although Israeli films are not making big headlines, they are of good quality to compete with other western movies.

The six movies displayed at Kathmandu ranged from love story to thriller drama, fiction and comedy.



All the films displayed the human talent and unique environment of Israel. The actors are able to perform their role and directors are completely capable to handle the situation.

The movie *Something Sweet* was the most interesting movie. Based on love story, the 97-minutes-long drama, keeps the audience captivated all the time. This is a heart warming romantic tale of unrequited and inopportune love set against the backdrop of mysterious superstitions. With the full human story, this movie showed how unthinkable things turned the life of individual. The story turned in climax when a lady falls in love with the fiancé of her younger sister. This is full with Moroccan ethnic

music and sweet delicacies.

Directed by Tzahi Grad, this move is full of social and family upheaval. Love and hate as well as new pattern of relationship are main characters of this movie. Subtitled in English, this movie showed perfect combination of directions and actions.

Directed by Nir Bergman, *Broken Wings* is another interesting movie shown in Kathmandu. Subtitled in English, the story of *Broken Wings* is about a family tragedy. The unexpected death

of the family patriarch throws every member of the Ullmam Clan off-course. The story of family tragedy and supporting each other at the time of crisis is the lesson of this movie.

The *Big Dig* is a comedy movie. The movie begins when a main character Blaumilch, a mental patient, escapes from the insane asylum and decides to turn Tel Aviv into Venice. This is a story about the bureaucratic culture and disputes. This 87-minutes film is full of interesting things.

Another interesting film is *Three Mothers*, a new film, which is about the story of three mothers. Born in Egypt before 1948, these Jews sisters immigrate to Israel and grow into three very different young women – one sexy, selfish and wild, one pretty, delicate and devoted and one smart, plain and practical. This film explores the social realities and bond of the society.

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