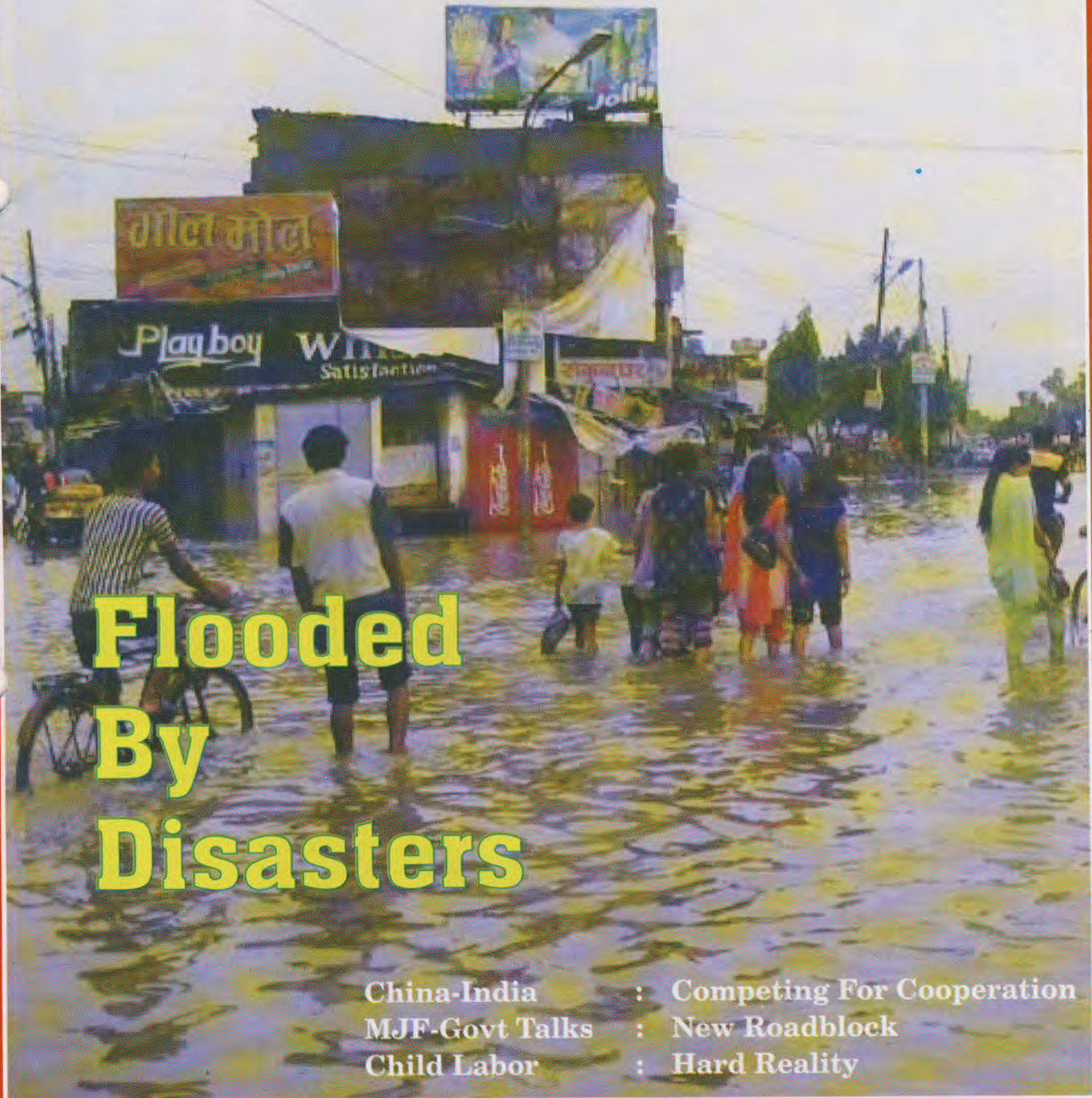


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The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

Aug 03-09, 2007



Flooded By Disasters

China-India : Competing For Cooperation
 MJF-Govt Talks : New Roadblock
 Child Labor : Hard Reality

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 India..... IRs.
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प्रस्तुत छ...

रु. १,०००/- मा लोटस बचत खाता*



बचत खाता



नेपाल इन्भेष्टमेन्ट बैंकले तपाईंहरूको विश्वास र चाहनालाई ध्यानमा राखि फेरि ल्यायो जीवनमरको लागि मात्र रु. १,०००/- मा लोटस बचत खाता । यो योजना नेपाल इन्भेष्टमेन्ट बैंकका सर्वे शाखाहरूमा लागू हुनेछ ।

विरसूत जानकारीको लागि नेपाल इन्भेष्टमेन्ट बैंकको शाखाहरूमा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोला ।



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COVER STORY: Wreaking Havoc

Unless Nepal and India realize flooding as mutual problem and start resolving it together on long-term basis, disasters may continue to strike

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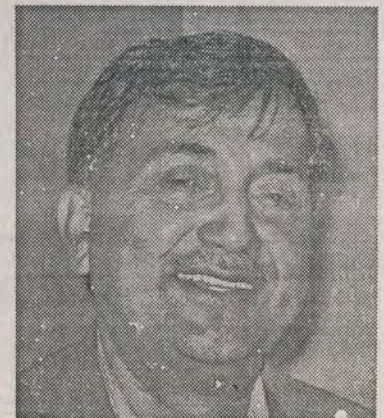
Cover Photo by Netra KC, Nepaljunj



CHINA-INDIA: Competing For Cooperation

Nepal can attain peace and stability only if its two neighbors decide to chart a course of cooperation rather than collision

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INTERVIEW:

Isiwor Pokharel The senior leader of UML, Pokharel, talks about his party's current strategy in the run up to the elections

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SPOTLIGHT

THE WEEKLY NATIONAL NEWSMAGAZINE

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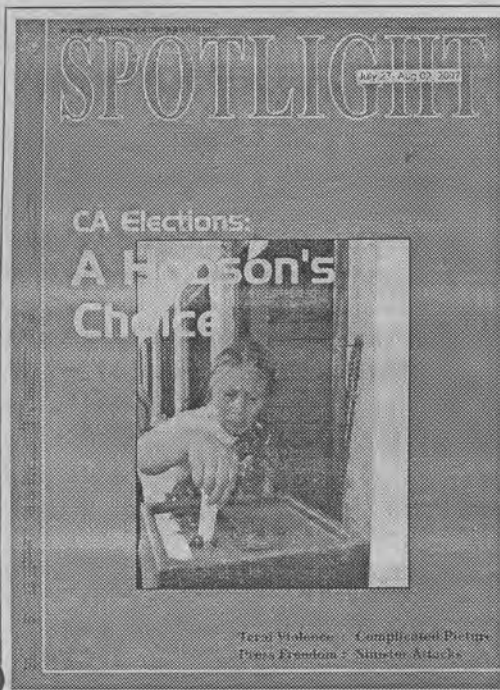
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It has been reported from authoritative source that the week long visit of General Rukmangad Katuwal, Chief of the Army Staff of the Nepal Army, to the traditionally friendly country of the United Kingdom, has been very fruitful. The warm and hearty welcome accorded to the Nepali General is, indeed, the manifestation of the high regard the British people feel for not only the valiant Gurkha soldiers but also for the friendly poor people of Nepal. It is quite evident that a change of government in the United Kingdom has brought a visible change in their attitude and overall policy towards Nepal which had recently gone out of track. The critical situation prevailing in the poor Himalayan Kingdom brought about by the violent insurgency and the fissiparous tendencies generated by the machinations of a powerful neighbor, must have caused deep concern to Nepal's friends like the U.K. who must have felt the need of expressing their solidarity with Nepal, especially with the armed forces. In the absence of a strong government, capable to suppress the chaos and lawlessness plaguing the country for a long time, the responsibility of not only restoring law and order but also crushing the disintegrating elements has fallen upon the shoulders of the famed Nepali army. As the world has known for decades, Nepali Gurkhas are always loyal to their government and even to their foreign employers and brave to face any eventuality. The uncalled for sinister attempts on the part of some pliant Nepali politicians to demoralize them could never succeed. The Nepali army officers and men are fully aware that the overwhelming millions of Nepali people have total faith and confidence that their armed forces will always be able to defend the sovereignty of their country. They also know how to deal with the politicians whose loyalty to the country is not above board and who collaborate with the enemies of the nation. The unprecedented convulsions for over a score of years have devastated not only the economy of the country but various social, political and religious edifices. The glaring absence of a charismatic leader who could inspire his countrymen with his patriotism, integrity and the spirit of sacrifice and the smallness of the politicians in authority who are fighting for even ordinary and regular postings of bureaucrats like dogs over a piece of bone shall spell disaster if not stopped immediately. Even the stipulated elections to the constituent assembly are sure to be disturbed by these very politicians who are shouting for it at the top of their voice, as they know, under the present circumstances, they don't dare visit their own constituencies and will lose even their present position. As a matter of fact, this eight party government must resign, without delay and a neutral government formed to conduct the election if they are to be free and fair. And all this is possible only if the Nepal Army takes up its responsibility in real earnest. If we Nepalis want to save our country, our heritages and our culture, we all must rally behind our national army because only the Nepali Army can rescue our hard won democracy. And, indeed, our good friends, China, the USA and all other European and Asian nations will not fail to bolster the morale and the strength of the Nepali Army so that their small poor friendly country might be saved from being disintegrated and brought back to the track of a patriotic democratic government.

Madhav Rimal
Madhav K. Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



No Option

It was interesting to read your cover story on "A Hobson's Choice" (SPOTLIGHT July 27). I agree with you that nobody wants to hold the elections now as all political powers are enjoying benefits from the present parliament. The silent majority, who wants to hold the elections, are not in a position to influence the country's course. It is unfortunate to say that people of Nepal have no option other than to live under present government which is neither accountable to the people nor representative.

*Sharad Subba
Dharan*

government's stance on press freedom will always remain questionable.

*Ganesh Maharjan
Chyasal*

Strict Laws

The interim parliament always seemed to pass controversial acts. However, it was amazing when it passed a law that can certainly address women trafficking (Harsh Hand SPOTLIGHT, July 27). The trafficking control act of 1986 was very ineffectual. Therefore, new law was indispensable for effectively controlling human trafficking. New law has come at a time when it was most needed. Many people have acclaimed parliament for formulating this law. This law is more flexible for the victim and stricter for the defendants. Although the law is stricter than the previous one, it will not be effective if not properly enforced. Law enforcement is a problem in our country. Law only is not enough to prevent human trafficking. This time the government should also enforce the law strictly. Therefore, if executed sternly this law will certainly discourage all the criminals involved in human trafficking.

*Tshiring Lama
Bouddha*

Informative Piece

The article written by Ganesh Raj Sharma was very interesting and very informative (SPOTLIGHT, July 20). Spotlight magazine should encourage such articles. At a time when our so called intellectuals have been focusing on Nepal's local issues, Sharma explained how helpless Nepal's internal players are trapped in the broad design of big neighbors. I agree with him that India which has manipulated everything to place Nepal into present chaotic position is ultimately going to be a loser. I don't understand what India has gained by weakening moderate and liberal democratic forces in Nepal and by backing the extremist communists.

*Sushanta Lama
Montreal Canada, via-email*

Mock Polls

The mock election held recently in Pharping showed a good turn out "A Hobson's Choice, SPOTLIGHT July 27). This shows people are much enthusiastic about election. Nevertheless, people's gusto is not enough to conduct the CA poll. Nor is the obstinacy of Prachanda and Girija Prasad Koirala adequate for accomplishing the CA poll. The main factor is security. The fact is Nepal is very insecure. The recent spate of murder of VDC workers by agitating groups in Terai exposed the fragile security situation in our nation. VDC workers have already said that they will not return to work until the government assures security. If these suspend there works for a few weeks more, then it will be difficult to conduct the CA polls on time. It doesn't seem that the Terai issue will be resolved in the near future. Therefore, whether the CA poll can be conducted or not on time still is questionable.

*Nirmala Sharma
via-email*

Press Under Attack

The continual hindering of distribution of various daily newspapers SPOTLIGHT/August 03, 2007

by Maoist affiliated workers is a brazen attack on press freedom. Maoist associated workers have already obstructed distribution of Kantipur, The Himalayan Times, Samacharpatra and Annapurna Post. It is disappointing that the government did not take any punitive actions against those Maoist cadres. Maoists are in charge of the Ministry of Information and Communication. Therefore, there role should be to preserve press freedom. Ironically, they are responsible for attack on press. Some people had already expressed disapproval when Maoists were given the Ministry of Information and Communication speculating that they would be against free press. However, Krishna Bahadur Mahara asserted that he is fully committed for press freedom. Now, again his commitment is dubious. It is hypocritical that the communication and information minister claims to be committed to press freedom while remaining a mere spectator when the media houses are attacked. Until punitive actions are taken against those responsible for obstructions,

YCL Cadres Thrash Dolakha CDO; Curfew Clamped In Charikot

Enraged over the detention of their comrade by the district administration on charges of beating another political leader of the district, the cadres of Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) ran amok in the Dolakha district headquarters Charikot on Sunday (July 29). They physically assaulted the Chief District Officer Uddhav Bahadur Thapa demanding that all cases be withdrawn against their comrade Bishal Khadka. They barged into CDO's office, beat him up and vandalized the office. Subsequently, there were clashes between the police and the YCL cadres triggering unrest across Charikot. Two dozen YCL activists and at least 10 policemen were injured in the clash. Later, the local administration clamped curfew from 5:30 pm Sunday till 5 am Monday in Charikot. The YCL activists were demonstrating for the release of Khadka, who is facing a case under the Public Offense Act for publicly assaulting Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) leader Sundar Prasad Khadka a few days back. A few months ago, the YCL cadres had similarly assaulted CDO of Kanchanpur district. *Leading dailies report*

Maoists Want Their Envoy In US, UK, India Or China

Stating that they want their envoy installed in one of the four countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, India or China, Maoists have said that lack of understanding on this demand has resulted in delay in making ambassadorial appointments. CP Gajurel, chief of the party's international relations cell, said that since other seven parties who have already selected their nominees in these countries are finding it difficult to withdraw those names, the appointment has been delayed. He said that if Maoist are allocated altogether four countries including one of the aforementioned four countries, then the issue could be settled. *Nepal Samacharpatra daily reports*

NC MP Sharma Passes Away

Nepali Congress MP Dilli Raj Sharma passed away at the age of 61 in Lamjung on Sunday (July 29) morning. He died of heart attack at Lamjung community hospital. Sharma had gone to Lamjung in order to inspect local jails along with a team of MPs and other activists. Later, Sharma's body was kept at NC party headquarters in Sanepa for paying last tributes. The interim parliament Subas Nemwang expressed sorrow at the death of Sharma. The cabinet meeting, too, expressed the grief. Sharma used to represent Parbat number two constituency. *Leading dailies report*

PM, Prachanda Discuss CA Polls

In the wake of suspension of cabinet meeting on Friday (July 27), Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist chairman Prachanda held one and a half hour long talks on Saturday evening focusing on ways to create election atmosphere. Prachanda went to Baluwatar on Saturday evening after returning to the capital from a trip to Jhapa district. He is said to have talked about strengthening eight party unity and creating election atmosphere across the country. According to Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel, the two discussed about the resumption of verification of Maoist combatants, the need to return seized lands and properties, among others. Senior Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai informed that the discussion also took up issues such as Madhes problem, appointment of ambassadors etc. Earlier, talking to reporters in Bhadrapur, Jhapa on Saturday morning, Prachanda stressed on strengthening eight party unity to ensure Constituent Assembly (CA) elections dismissing some Maoist leaders' assertion that they might walk out of the government. After the controversy that erupted with the sudden change of guards by Nepali Army (NA) for Maoist ministers, the latter had addressed a press conference stating they could review their decision to remain in the government. Prachanda said that eight parties need to take out joint political programs in Terai districts.

Meanwhile, Maoists are holding their central committee meeting beginning Sunday in Kathmandu. The meeting is being held ahead of their expanded meeting (plenum), which is set to begin from August 1. The central committee meeting is expected to fine tune the party's agenda at the crucial plenary session where Maoist leaders from district level chiefs would be taking part. *nepalnews.com reports*

Chure Withdraws Agitation

Following the talks between the government and Chure Bhawar Ekata Samaj on Thursday (July 26), the latter has withdrawn its planned agitation beginning July 28. The meeting took place in Godavari. At the meeting, the government team led by Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel agreed to provide relief to the family of Mangal Bahadur Gurmachan, who was killed in Dhunge Khola of Sarlahi district during Madhes agitation. Poudel said that as far as the Samaj's demand of releasing nine persons of hill origin who have been arrested on charges of killing a Madhesi man in Dhanusha's Yagyabhumi VDC, the government would look into the case 'sympathetically,' as the case is already under judicial consideration. Samaj leader Keshab Mainali, however, claimed that the Madhesi man was killed by a mob after a crowd set on fire nine tractors belonging to people of hill origin. The government team assured the Samaj leaders that the jurisdiction of an investigation committee, formed under the chairmanship of Supreme Court judge Khilraj Regmi, would be expanded to cover the incidents that occurred in Chure Bhawar region. The Regmi committee was earlier formed to probe incidents during Madhes agitation. A member of government talks team, Minister of State Gyanendra Karki said that the two sides ended the dialogue amicably by agreeing to again sit within mid-August. The Chure Bhawar Ekata Samaj has been demanding security and protection of rights of people of hilly origin living in Madhes region. They have also demanded autonomous status for Chure Bhawar region. In previous talks, they forwarded 23-point demands. *Leading dailies report*

Goit Ready To Talk Under UN Aegis

Jai Krishna Goit-led faction of Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) has said it is ready to hold dialogue with the government provided the United Nations or any other credible international agency agrees to broker it. Goit hinted at the possibility of talks in his letter to Chief of United Nations Mission in Nepal, Ian Martin, on July 13. However, he also cautioned that it would be impossible to hold talks with the government until it "builds an amicable environment". Saying that his group would continue to fight for the rights of Madheshi people, Goit said they were, however, not against talks. Meanwhile, senior official at the UNMIN confirmed that Martin had received Goit's letter, but added that the UNMIN was yet to take up the issue. Martin is currently in New York to apprise the UN top brass about Nepal's peace process. *Nepalnews.com reports*

Mahara Claims NA Changed Guards Without PM's Knowledge

After meeting with Prime Minister Grijja Prasad Koirala on Wednesday (July 25) morning, the Maoist leader and Information Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara has claimed that the Nepali Army (NA) had changed guards for Maoist ministers without Prime Minister's knowledge. Mahara told reporters that he "understood that the NA had changed the guards without the PM's knowledge." Prime Minister Koirala also holds Defense portfolio. Meanwhile, after the meeting of delegation of Maoist ministers with the PM, the Maoists have downplayed their earlier position that they were reconsidering whether to remain in the government. Likewise, Maoist ministers also discussed about the need to quickly make appointments in key constitutional positions and ambassadors before the Election Commission (EC) enforces code of conduct – which will bar the government from making new appointments or transfers till the election. "We talked mainly on two things. First was the need to make appointments in key posts before the EC enforces code of conduct for which we have less than a week remaining. The second was the issue of NA change of guards," Mahara said. *Compiled from reports*

Parliament Directs Govt To Publicize Rayamajhi Report

Speaker Subas Nemwang, on Tuesday (July 24), made a ruling directing the government to make the Rayamajhi Commission report public at the soonest. After the lawmakers raised strong objections at the government's indifference to their earlier calls, the Speaker made the ruling. "Drawing the attention (of the government) to this serious matter, I direct the government to make the report public without delay," Speaker said. At the parliament meeting, MP of People's Front Lilamani Pokharel had said that the government had violated the Special Prerogatives of the parliament by not abiding with its earlier directive. Rayamajhi Commission was formed last year to probe the allegations of repression against People's Movement. *Leading dailies report*

Limbu Retorts, Says He Can Talk With Anyone He Likes

In response to media reports about suspicious phone calls made by acting chief of Commissioner for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Lalit Bahadur Limbu to pro-palace officials and operator of a bank, against which the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) had taken action coinciding with the filing of case against NRB governor by CIAA, Limbu has said that it is his right to make calls to anyone he likes. "It is not illegal to talk with people. It will be worth considering only if such talks have affected decision-making," Limbu said at a press meet on Tuesday (July 24). According to report by Kantipur daily, the day CIAA filed case of corruption against NRB governor Bijaynath Bhattarai, Limbu had made six phone calls to Laxmi Bahadur Shrestha, promoter of Nepal Bangladesh Bank (NBB) and chairman of Nepal Credit and Commerce Bank. Just a few months ago, the NRB had dismissed the NBB management after the latter's financial condition was found to be very bad. The daily has added that in last three and a half months, Limbu has talked with Shrestha 73 times. Likewise, he also made 19 calls to a number registered under Royal Palace. Limbu said that he talked with his brother Gajendra Limbu, who used to be military secretary at the palace. Limbu who became a member of CIAA during royal regime claimed he is

a democrat. He also urged all to be alert about moves to malign his image as he has reached high office despite coming from Janjati background. Even though another CIAA commissioner was against his decision, Limbu had filed case of corruption against Bhattarai and NRB director Surendra Man Pradhan a month ago. At the press meet, Limbu also warned that there could be investigation on Nepal Telecom for providing information regarding the calls he had made. *Leading dailies report*

Gyawali Worried By Maoist-NA Spat

Former minister and UML leader Pradeep Gyawali has expressed concerns over the public spat between the Maoist ministers and Nepali Army (NA). A former government negotiator, Gyawali, said the bitterness between Maoists and a government organ could endanger the peace process. "The non-transparent style of government has invited this problem," he said, speaking at the parliament. He also added that without forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as per the peace agreement and constitution, it is 'meaningless to cast aspersions against soldiers of a particular battalion.' "The Maoists side, too, have committed as much rights abuses as the case of disappearance of 49 inmates. Until proven guilty by investigation, all should be treated as innocent. Resolution of this problem should be sought through Truth and Reconciliation Commission," Gyawali said. *Kantipur daily reports*

India Ready To Help In Controlling Terai Violence: Yechury

Indian communist leader Sitaram Yechury said India was against those who wish to disintegrate Nepal. At an interaction in the capital, Yechury said India was willing to give necessary help to control violence in Terai. He said security forces of both sides were preparing to strengthen the security situation. He also hoped that CA election will take place on time and added that a dangerous situation could emerge if it does not. During his Nepal visit, Yechury met with Prime Minister Koirala, UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, NC-Democratic leader Sher Bahadur Deuba and Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. *Nepal Samacharpatra daily reports* ■



SPOTLIGHT Family wishes for good health and long life to **Nava Yuvaraj Hridayendra** on his 6th auspicious birthday.

AS THE BUDGET FOR THE EDUCATION sector this year has been fixed at Rs 28.29 billion, the Ministry of Education has unveiled its plans, and programs for the current fiscal year 2007/08. At a press meet on Saturday (July 30), Minister for Education and Sports Pradeep Nepal introduced 32-point policy. The policy aims to make 104,000 more people literate and provide post-literacy education to 50,000 people. The Ministry policy also aims to expand the campaign to hand over schools to community during this period. The policy also promises subsidies to the community-managed schools or those that are in the process of being handed over in the recruitment of 8000 teachers at primary level, 2500 teachers at lower secondary level and 1500 teachers at secondary level. "Such teachers will be appointed through open competition. The school management committees will give priority to women, Dalit and disabled when making such appointments," said Nepal. He informed that the government will provide grant up to Rs 645,000 to community-run schools if they are interested in constructing school buildings in cost partnership basis. "In order to bring in uniformity in the operation and control of the universities, we are preparing to introduce an Umbrella Act," he said, adding that the government would set up one university each in far west and mid west region as well as initiate efforts to convert Rampur Agriculture Campus in Chitwan into Agriculture and Forestry University within this fiscal year.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAHANA PRADHAN, on Friday (July 29), said that the Bhutan government's unwillingness to sit for talks had almost brought to an end the bilateral process for a solution to the Bhutanese refugee crisis. Speaking to journalists after launching a report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Kathmandu, Pradhan said the Bhutanese ministers had informed about their inability to hold the talks citing their resignation from ministerial posts. Seven Bhutanese ministers including Prime Minister Khandu Wangchuk resigned en masse on Thursday morning, intending to join party politics for the upcoming election scheduled for March next year. Pradhan said there was no option now before Nepal government than to try other alternatives for finding solution to the protracted refugee crisis. "The possibility of bilateral dialogue with Bhutan has almost ended," she said. She also hinted that government could decide to start the procedure for resettlement of the refugees in third countries including the United States. The US government has pledged to resettle at least 60,000 of the refugees in the US. Canada and Australia each offered to resettle 5,000 refugees. The establishment of Out Processing Entity (OPE) by the US government has already begun in Damak, Jhapa district, where

formal procedures of resettlement of the refugees will be carried out. The US government is planning to start the process by early September. Nepal had asked the Bhutanese government to sit for final round of bilateral talks on the refugee crisis. Earlier in November, the Bhutanese ministers had postponed the scheduled talks saying they were busy with the birthday celebration of their King.

SPEAKING AT THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE on the Monitoring of the Implementation of Peace Agreement, Thursday (July 27), Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel said that the government does not have detailed information regarding the whereabouts of the disappeared persons. He also informed that though a separate commission on disappeared had been formed, the government had sought the help from the Office of Attorney General regarding its authority. After the MPs took the government to task for failing to act on disappeared peoples' issues, Poudel said the formation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be helpful in this regard.

AT A TIME WHEN AIR SEAT VOLUME had become a problem for travelers coming to and from Nepal, Silk Air, a subsidiary airlines of Singapore Airlines is flying to Nepal from Singapore from October, 2007 on a regular basis. For Chai Woo, general manager, India - Singapore Airlines announced, Thursday, that the airlines intends to begin a three-times a week flights on Singapore-Kathmandu sector by the end of October this year. Although operational matters and schedules are subject to government approval, Woo said that the Silk Air plans to fly every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday directly between Singapore and Kathmandu. Flights will be operated on Silk Air's Airbus A320 family aircraft. "We are happy to announce our operations," he said, adding that the airlines has already begun necessary procedures to get the government and aviation regulator's approval. Yagya Prasad Gautam, director general of Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), assured that Nepal's aviation regulatory would extend all kinds of support to facilitate the flights. Since Silk Air has good connection with Australia, Japan, USA, New Zealand and many European cities through its alliance partner airlines (Singapore Airlines), it is believed that it would bring up-market clients to Nepal these destinations, the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) said. Everest Express Tours and Travels is the GSA for Singapore Airlines and Silk Air in the country.

BRITISH AMBASSADOR DR. ANDREW HALL has expressed worries about the stalled verification of Maoist combatants. He said that the UN was here in Nepal to help its peace process and if it cannot carry out its duties within the specified timeframe, then it could send bad signal to the international community. Speaking at an interaction organized by Ganesh Man Academy, he stressed on providing maximum security for the people in order to hold election in free and credible manner.

FOLLOWING AGREEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT to rehabilitate freed Kamaiyas in specific time, the latter have decided to end their agitation. According to the agreement reached between the government and the freed Kamaiyas, they will be rehabilitated within mid-January next year in Dang; by mid-April in Banke and Kanchanpur; and by mid-July in Bardiya and Kailali districts. The agreement adds that as far as possible, freed Kamaiyas will be provided the land they are currently using. The nine-point agreement also promises 35 cubic feet of wood, Rs 10,000 cash and 5 kattha of land for every family. The agreement was signed after weeklong agitation by freed Kamaiyas in Kathmandu. ■

“All the top leaders of eight parties should be elected on the basis of consensus among us parties in the election.”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), in Gorkhapatra.

“Eight parties must take out joint political programs in Terai districts to ensure successful elections.”

Prachanda, Maoist chairman, at a press meet in Jhapa.

“The government does not have detailed information regarding the whereabouts of the disappeared persons.”

Ram Chandra Poudel, Minister for Peace and Reconstruction, replying to the queries put forth by lawmakers at the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Monitoring of Implementation of Peace Agreement.

“The possibility of bilateral dialogue with Bhutan has almost ended.”

Sahana Pradhan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, saying that Bhutanese government has not responded positively to Nepal’s proposals for bilateral meeting on refugee issue.

“Since the other seven parties who have already selected their nominees in these countries are finding it difficult to withdraw those names, the appointment has been delayed.”



Chandra Prakash Gajurel, chief of international relations cell of the Maoists, saying that lack of agreement over Maoist demand to get one of the four overseas diplomatic posting in the United States, United Kingdom, India or China, has resulted in the delay in ambassadorial appointments, in Nepal Samacharpatra.

“We understood that the NA had changed the guards without the PM’s knowledge.”

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, government spokesperson and Maoist leader who also holds the portfolio of Information and Communication, after meeting with

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to discuss the controversy surrounding change of NA guards for Maoist ministers.

“The Maoists side, too, have committed as much rights abuses as the case of disappearance of 49 inmates. Until proven guilty by investigation, all should be treated as innocent. Resolution of this problem should be sought through Truth and Reconciliation Commission.”

Pradeep Gyawali, senior UML leader and former minister, criticizing the Maoists for their ‘irresponsible’ behavior in the aftermath of NA guards row, in Kantipur.

TRANSITION

APPOINTED: The three member management team headed by Nepal Rastra Bank director Dr. Binod Atreya and including Laxmi Prapanna Niraula and Numnath Poudel, to oversee the management of Nepal Bank Limited (NBL), by the central bank.

ARRIVED: The five member team of the United Nations Electoral Expert Monitoring Team (EEMT) comprising of Dr. Rafael Lopez-Pintor, the team leader (Spain), Ayman Ayoub (Syria), Stefanie Luthy (Switzerland), Antonio Reis (Brazil), and Bong-Scuk Sohn (Republic of Korea), on its second visit

to Nepal. The EEMT - established under the mandate of the Security Council Resolution 1740 – members are directly appointed by the UN Secretary General to review and report on the conduct of the election.

RETURNED: Chief of Army Staff, Nepali Army, General Rookmangud Katawal, after a weeklong visit to the United Kingdom.

LEFT: Wang Chao, Chinese Assistant Commerce Minister, after completing a brief visit to Nepal.

Yashwant Sinha, former Minister for External Affairs of India, after a brief visit to Nepal where he met with the Prime Minister and other political

leaders.

Sitaram Yechury, politburo member of Communist Party of India (Marxist), after a brief visit to Nepal where he met with Prime Minister and other political leaders including Maoist leaders.

PASSED AWAY: Nepali Congress (NC) Member of interim Parliament (MP) Dilli Raj Sharma, at the age of 61 in Lamjung community hospital. He died of heart attack.

CONFERRED: Professor Dr. Surya Subedi, expert on international law, with the title of “Barrister” by British organization Middle Temple In. Prof. Dr. Subedi teacher international law at the University of Leeds. ■

UNITED STATES AND INLAND WATERWAYS

- By Dr. AB Thapa

Few years back in 1997 Nepal and India had signed an agreement to conduct a detailed feasibility study to develop KOSI CANAL WATERWAY linking Nepal with the seaport. Soon after that another agreement had also been signed to carry out joint studies to develop Karnali and Gandak navigation. A special joint committee composed of nine members of each country had been constituted to conduct the Gandak and Karnali navigation development studies.

In the United States, the development of inland navigation started as early as 1782 and it is still continuing. The experience of the USA in dealing with the problems of the inland water transport could be very useful for the development of inland waterways leading to seaport outlet for Nepal.

Now the inland water transport is very much developed in the United States. This form of transport is extensively used and it is the cheapest mode particularly for transportation of bulk cargoes. Dr. K.L. Rao, former minister of the Government of India has written in his book *INDIA' WATER WEALTH* to highlight the comparative advantage of the inland water transport "In USA, in 1965, traffic handled on the inland waterways was as much as 147 billion ton miles. The cost per ton mile is 3 mills, 15 mills and 65 mills for boats, rail and trucks respectively."

Waterways Network

United States had 25,380 miles of usable navigable inland channels, exclusive of the Great Lakes in second half of the 20th Century. A nine foot operating depth is standard for these inland channels. Of the 25,380 miles, a total of 15,348 miles have a depth of nine foot or more. The remaining 10,032 miles is under nine-foot depth. Except for the 522 mile New York State Barge Canal all these waterways are Federal Projects.

With the exception of the Upper Mississippi Waterway, the Missouri River and New York State Barge Canal, all the inland channels are open to navigation the year round. Icing conditions close the above three waterways for about four months of the year- December through March. At times, ice forms on the Illinois Waterway, the Mississippi above St. Louis, and on the Ohio River, but seldom impedes navigation for any length of time.

With two notable exceptions the channels are slack water routes which have been improved for navigation by the construction of systems of locks and dams. The Mississippi

is open river for 1,000 miles south of St. Louis. The Missouri is open river. Yet the two present a striking difference. The Mississippi is a wide, deep, commodious river. The Missouri has a restricted seven-foot depth. Both the Atlantic and Gulf Intracoastal Waterways are largely open channels, although both have some locks and both have reaches that are exposed to tidal currents and winds.

Steamboats Era

In the United States of America, development of river transportation began as early as 1782. The introduction of steam propulsion in the beginning of the 19th Century gave further encouragement to inland navigation. In 1811, just four years after the invention of the steamboats, the river steamer *NEW ORLEANS* was launched at Pittsburgh and went into service between there and New Orleans. By 1836, river steamboats were making calls at New Orleans at the rate of 1,000 per year. By 1852, the public landing at Cincinnati was reporting river steamboat calls at an annual rate of 8,000, about one per hour.

Traffic on the inland waterways expanded so rapidly with development of the steamboat that Congress acted in 1824 to improve the rivers and harbors on a planned basis. The President was authorized to utilize the services of the Army Corps of Engineers for this work. Ever since that time, the Corps has had responsibility for the planning, improving, and maintaining of the nation's navigable waters, including harbors.

Water transport through the Great Lakes also developed when grains and iron ore markets of this regions were opened up. The Canals constituted another means of transportation. With the success of Erie Canal in 1825, canal construction developed into a speculative boom.

River Transportation in Decline

During the War Between the States, there was a constant struggle for control of the rivers and coastal waters serving the areas of conflict. Traffic in these waters was brought to a virtual standstill. Hundreds of steamboats were burned.

For all practical purposes, river transportation was not rebuilt. One of the reasons was the emergence of the railroads as the dominant form of transportation. In 1850 there were only 9,000 miles of rail lines in the United States; by 1890 the railway track length had increased to almost 164,000 miles. Of devastating significance was the railroads' entry into water transportation. They bought up river lines and lake lines. They even bought some privately owned canal. Their

purpose was not to promote water transportation, but to destroy it. The railroads used some water shipping lines as fighting ships to bleed competing water lines to death economically. Others were bought to let the vessels rot at their docks. And the docks and terminals rotted with them. Railroad-purchased canal were relegated to disuse.

After 1880 water transport except on the Great Lakes rapidly declined. By the end of the century steam vessels had practically disappeared from the rivers following the development of Railways.

Panama Canal Act

The railroads' tactics to destroy river transportation finally attracted the attention of Congress. . President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Inland Waterways Commission in 1907 to study the status of waterways and water carriers. This Commission recommended in 1908 that Congress make more suitable provision for improving the inland waterways of the United States.

The Panama Canal Act was passed in 1912 to divorce railroads from ownership of water carriers. This Act is considered by historians as the legislative keystone of the revival of inland waterways transportation. It prohibits railroads from owning, controlling or operating a water carrier that operates through the Panama Canal or elsewhere, provided, however, that in the case of a water carrier not

Since 1920 the United States of America has implemented plans to create and develop about 28,000 miles of waterways, 10,000 miles of which take over 9 feet draft. The resulting benefit to the country of this extensive development of waterways can be gauged from the fact that the annual traffic carried on these waterways exclusive of the Great Lakes increased from 9,233,362,320 ton miles in 1931 to 97,662,567,000 ton miles in 1955.

operating through the Panama Canal, authority is conferred upon the Interstate Commerce Commission to make a determination as to whether such ownership or operation will be in the public interest and will not exclude, prevent or reduce competition on the route.

In 1959-1962 a major test of the Act was made. The Illinois Central and Southern Pacific Railroads in 1959 filed an application with the Interstate Commerce Commission seeking approval to acquire the John I. Hay Company barge line, a major common carrier operating on the Mississippi River system and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. This was the first major effort by railroads to invade domestic water carrier operations since the passage of the Panama Canal Act. The American Waterways Operators, Inc., opposed the application, as did other interests. In 1962, ICC denied the

application in a decision reaffirming the established public policy of separation of ownership and operation of the various transport modes.

Revival of River Transportation

A bold policy of active participation of the Government after the first World War had resulted not only in rehabilitating water transport but developing it as an essential mode for the economic development of the country. The opening of the St. Lawrence seaway may be quoted as an example of the policy adopted by the United States and Canadian Governments. Harnessing the Mississippi system and stabilizing the Channels is another example of the systematic planning and hard work done by the United States Engineers backed by the technical and financial resources of a prosperous country.

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Modern Technology

Water transport in the United States has undergone phenomenal changes in recent years as both the Federal and State Governments now fully appreciate the part that inland water transport can and does play in the development of an integrated transport system geared to the overall requirements of the country. Power units have been made more efficient and economical through improvements in craft design and improved methods of propulsion and towage. Considerable progress has been made in the development of articulated push-tows. Transportation needs of steel mills, cement factories, oil refineries, chemical plants, coal mines and numerous other industries are being met by these huge integrated river tows, some of which are longer than the largest ocean freighters and tankers.

Even in the early days, inland water transport was considered cheap, but, with the extensive progress that has been made in recent years in respect of craft design, etc, it has now come to be recognized as the cheapest form of transport. It is interesting to note that currently 15 percent of the total transport requirements of the United States is handled by this mode of transport.

In Conclusion

Nepal and India can be greatly benefited if the vast experience of the USA in development and operation of inland water transport is applied in future development of inland water transport in the Ganges basin.

(Dr. Thapa writes on water resources)

MJF-GOVT TALKS

Another Roadblock?

By throwing a surprising demand for House dissolution, MJF seems to be carefully calibrating its political muscle and demanding share in power

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

Having spearheaded the Madhes movement in January/February this year, the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) – a hitherto club of assorted Madhesi leaders representing different parties – suddenly transformed into a political party with mass organization and cadres.

As it was able to compel the state into amending the constitution to meet demands of Madhesi people, the MJF suddenly realized its increasing political capital and quickly registered itself as a political party at the Election Commission (EC).

And now, the MJF appears to be exploring further avenues to consolidate its presence as a big regional political party.

On Saturday (July 28), the MJF gave another indication of its increasing political assertiveness. On that day, the third round of talks between the government and the MJF ended in a limbo after the latter sprung up a surprise demand of the dissolution of interim parliament.

On the face of it, the MJF leaders have said that they merely want to ensure that the election for the Constituent Assembly in November will be held in free and fair manner by dissolving the parliament since the MPs belonging to particular parties won't be able to exploit state resources at their command. "We think that it is wrong for parties to pocket salaries and benefits and exploit state resources and then take part in election. We think this interim parliament should be dissolved once the Election Programs are released. Their (legislative) authority can be given to the government," said Upendra Yadav, chief of MJF.

However, deeper analysis could lead one to conclude that the MJF leaders, in fact, are employing another smart move to enter into the power club. "They

probably have decided that they, too, want fair share in current power set up. They might be asking for seats in the parliament, and even in the cabinet as they claim to be the representative of Madhesi people," said a political observer.

Apart from this surprise demand, the MJF has been demanding constitutional



Yadav and Poudel (right): What next?
Kantipur

guarantee of federal governing system with local autonomy along with right to self determination, and fully proportional electoral system for constituent assembly elections during its talks with the government. The government, on the other hand, does not seem willing to entertain those demands.

Government talks team coordinator and Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel has already stated publicly that fully proportional representation based election system is not appropriate. However, the government is in a tight spot as it needs to quickly settle its negotiation with the MJF to ensure smooth elections in Terai.

Till now, the government has already held three rounds of talks with the MJF – one June 1 in Janakpur, on July 25 in Dhulikhel and July 28 in Godavari. ■

UN SG CAUTIONS AGAINST FAILURE

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has warned that failure to ensure a credible election within a realistic and well-planned period could have a much more serious impact on the unity of the eight parties and their ability to act and function in unison within the existing coalition.

In his report presented to the Security Council at UN headquarters on Tuesday (July 24), Moon said the overall human rights situation continues to be worrying, with the main concerns linked to inadequate public security and law enforcement and to unresolved issues of discrimination with regard to representation and inclusion in the political process.

"The enforcement of repeated bandhs, especially in the Terai, by a range of groups seriously affected freedom of movement, as some protests turned violent. Police responses ranged from passivity to excessive use of force," the report said. Moon said that the ongoing peace process in Nepal appears on track to deliver peace and stability, but the national political scene has become more complex and challenging in recent months. "Renewed and expanded efforts will have to be made to sustain the successful trajectory of the peace process," Moon adds.

He expressed hope that peace process in Nepal will achieve its goal and give the people of Nepal a well-deserved future of peace, stability and prosperity. The report further states, "The significance of the far-reaching process of democratization that Nepal is going through cannot be overstated. The successful holding of the Constituent Assembly election in a manner that meets the aspirations of the majority of the Nepali people is the central element of this process." ■

FOOD INSECURITY

Worsening Situation

A joint report by WFP and FAO shows that the situation of food insecurity in Nepal has worsened

By A CORRESPONDENT

Thanks to a series of natural disasters in 2006 and 2007, crop production in Nepal have been severely impacted, placing a significant number of people at risk of food insecurity, according to the joint report released this week by the UN World Food Program (WFP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

According to the report, a combination of prolonged drought, hailstorms, and flooding in areas traditionally most agriculturally productive have resulted in an estimated 225,000-metric-ton food grain shortage for 2006/2007, compared to a food deficit of only 23,000 tons last year. An estimated 42 out of 75 districts are reported to be food deficient. The report is based upon the findings of a joint FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment mission conducted in March and April of 2007.

"The results of the report largely confirm WFP's earlier estimates that

many people, particularly those living in remote, chronically food insecure areas of Mid- and Far-Western Nepal are suffering the impact of consecutive years of drought and the lingering impacts of the 11-year insurgency," said Richard Ragan, WFP Representative in Nepal, in a statement released by WFP-Nepal office.

"This is particularly troubling during this highly sensitive post-conflict period and WFP will immediately address these concerns by targeting 1.2 million people through a new US\$49 million Peace and Recovery Programme and urge donors to support our effort," Ragan added.

Nepal is a chronically food insecure, food deficit country, prone to natural disasters that can have serious consequences to agricultural production at both the national and local level. The report expresses serious concern over the estimated national undernourishment rate of 42 percent, with undernourishment rates in hill and mountain areas as high as 50 percent. Stunting rates in children

are estimated to be as high as 60 percent in the Mid- and Far-Western Regions, and acute malnutrition rates of children at nearly 18 percent in the Terai.

"This is a really critical time," said Henri Josserand, Chief of the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System. "The process of national reconciliation can only make headway if the whole country shares in improved access to food and markets, lower rates of malnutrition, and a determined risk management strategy for food security."

The report concludes that "the confluence of high population growth, extremely limited scope of expansion of cultivated areas, under-developed irrigation infrastructures, continued high level of dependence on agriculture for livelihood and almost stagnant productivity of crops has resulted in acute risk of nation-wide food insecurity."

The UN report warns that continued high levels of food insecurity could destabilize the peace process, and recommends that immediate efforts be put in place to improve household food security and livelihoods.

The report also makes a number of recommendations to address Nepal's food insecurity. They include a series of short and longer-term projects aimed at improving the availability of irrigation, construction of critical infrastructure, support and strengthening of government agricultural monitoring systems, and immediate food aid for drought and conflict-affected communities. ■

AIR CARGO TRANSIT POTENTIALS

At a time when there have been discussions about the prospects of Nepal turning into transit bridge between India and China, Indian Ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee has said that Nepal could be developed as a transit point for air cargo between India and the rest of the world.

The Himalayan Times on July 30 reported that Mukherjee referring Nepal's geographical location between the world's two fastest growing economies; India and China, said that Nepal has an opportunity to serve as a transit point for air cargo that could bring considerable benefits to the country.

"We are prepared to examine

necessary bilateral arrangements that would make it possible for Nepal to exploit such opportunity, especially after forthcoming revision of air services agreement between the two countries," he said addressing a program to mark to the 13th Cargo Day organized by Nepal Freight Forwarders' Association (NEFFA), on Sunday.

Mukherjee further added — that India would substantially liberalize the bilateral air services arrangements — hinting for modifying the bilateral trade treaty to add international airports to the designated routes for bilateral trade. External trade is a key to Nepal's economy, he said adding that expansion

of transport network and elimination of non-tariff barriers are required to boost the trade. Contemplating that about two-thirds of Nepal's foreign trade is with India and over 90 percent of Nepal's third country trade transits through India, Mukherjee stressed on the need of improving infrastructure as well as expanding transport network. As the largest trade partner, he reiterated that India has a vital stake and interest in Nepal's prosperity.

His remarks have come in the wake of complaints by NEFFA over problems related to land transportation due to rise in political disturbances in the terai region. Currently it takes more than 45 days to reach Nepali exports to Europe from Kathmandu, compared to the earlier 30 days, states NEFFA. ■

FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES

Wreaking Havoc

The solution of perennial inundation of Nepal's plain land in south lies on how well natural drainage systems are made functional like in the past. With the construction of infrastructures like roads, and irrigation canals inside Nepal and construction of embankments, barrage and irrigation canals across border in Indian territory, Nepal's southern plain Terai has turned into a pond accumulating monsoon rain waters - damaging properties worth billions of rupees and making the people homeless. The floods and landslides have already killed more than 75 people this year apart from displacing nearly 100,000 people. As long as Nepal and India, close neighbors with geographical proximity, do not share each others' tragedy, water inundation across terai is going to be a way of life. Allocating budget to distribute temporary relief to the victims and compensation for the families suffering from the flood cannot end this tragic disaster

By KESHAB POUDEL

As soon as the rainy season begins, people living in southern parts of Banke district have sleepless night. Whenever there is heavy rain, people have to come out from their homes carrying necessary foodstuffs and searching for safer place.

As the water level increases up to four to five feet, there are hardly such places in remote parts of terai. Even water entered into school buildings.

With the construction of Laxmanpur Barrage and canal across the border in Indian Territory, residents of Southern Banke don't have other options other than to helplessly see their villages turn into a lake with the onset of monsoon. For the last six years, water inundation continued to make their lives miserable.

"Our villages are not safe during

monsoon as the embankment and dam constituted to protect canal and people of other sides in Indian Territory is transforming our villages into a lake," said Reshma Kurmi, 45, of Bethana Village Development Committee of Banke district, 500 miles west of capital Kathmandu. "We have lost everything including our huts and food stuffs stored in the houses."

Although the officials from both the sides meet on a number of occasions to resolve the crises of inundation of Nepalese land, nothing has changed much. "We cannot do anything to prevent submerging of land as long as India does not agree to open the gates of barrage and embankments constructed on their territory," said a senior official at the

Ministry of Water Resources. "We have held several rounds of meeting with India's central authorities and authorities of states but nothing has come out."

For nearly one half of Nepal's population living in southern plains flood has become a regular feature of their life. Flood in terai used to be occasional phenomenon in the past. But for last six years frequency of water inundation has substantially increased.

"The embankment constructed by India on its side of border is responsible for submerging large areas of land in Terai. It is a failure of the government to raise this fundamental issue with India. If Nepal's land continues to be submerged every year, there is a need to destroy barrages like Laxmanpur,

otherwise tens of thousands of Nepalese will have to suffer," said Narayan Man Bijukchhe, leader of Nepal Peasant and Worker Party in parliament. "When people living in southern parts of terai are living under a threat of death, why this government is not taking these major issues with India is a mystery," he said.

Along with Bijukchhe, CPN-Maoist MPs also raised the question of inundation in the parliament. "Nepalese government must raise the issue of water inundation and construction of embankment and dams in Indian territory close to our border," said CPN-Maoist MP Shanta Shrestha, at the legislative parliament.

Along with embankments constructed on the Indian Territory, the rampant construction of houses and other infrastructures like roads, and canals in Nepalese side is also blocking the natural flow of water. Obstruction created by man made infrastructures is curbing the natural drainage leading to inundation.

Water Inundation

Everywhere

Not only in Banke, water inundation has been causing major problems in 18 districts in Terai. According to Kantipur Daily, the Danda dam and embankment constructed in the Indian Territory close to Nepal border inundated more than a dozen of villages in Nepalese side. The embankment constructed in Indian Territory close to border has already created obstruction on drainage of water causing inundation.

Nepalgunj has been one of the worst affected regions. The city was waterlogged and flood waters had rushed inside homes. Educational institutions, factories, government offices, schools and markets were closed down.

According to Natural Disaster Management Section of Home Ministry, among the municipalities, Nepalgunj

was worst affected with four to five feet of water. Siraha district, too, was affected with 6000 houses collapsed and 10,000 families displaced. Similarly, Mahottari also faced severe damage with 36 VDCs flooded, 5000 houses collapsed and



Nepalgunj city: Waterlogged

Photo: Netra KC

13000 families displaced. Twenty two villages in Banke flooded with 500 houses collapsed and 600 families displaced. In Bardiya, 18 VDCs flooded with 818 houses collapsed and 2300 families displaced. Dhanusha's 60 VDCs were flooded with 3500 houses collapsed and 5200 families displaced.

The flood also affected 21 VDCs of Sunsari, 36 VDCs of Saptari and 40 of Sarlahi district. Likewise, 40 VDCs of Rautahat, 40 of Bara, 17 of Parsa, 12 of Nawalparasi, 12 of Kapilvastu, 12 of Kailalli and 30 of Rupandehi districts were also affected.

In Rupandehi district, most affected area is Marchwar where more than four dozen village development committees are submerged. According to Ministry of Home Affairs, thousand of houses remain water logged in most districts of Terai.

Submerging the Land

Most of the badly affected areas are in eastern, central and mid western region. In his article in Spotlight (September 15-21.2006), water resource expert Dr. A.B. Thapa wrote, "At present

the natural drainage of the western terai is blocked by a network of canal system which have been built just across the border in Indian Territory." According to Thapa, the canal system running almost parallel to our border starts from the Lower Sarda Barrage in the west and ends up in the Bangnaga (Rohini) River. The total length of this canal system is 258 KM. There are five barrages along this canal system in Indian Territory. They are lower Sarda, Karnali at Girjapur, Saryu (Babai) barrage, West Rapti Barrage (Laxmanpur) and Rohini (Banganga) Barrage.

"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 a sizeable area of lands in Nepalese territory could remain

perpetually submerged. When the rivers are in flood, the water would be spreading out into the lands that were never before regarded prone to flooding," he wrote.

"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," he stated.

According to a study conducted by the Department of Water Induced Disaster Prevention (DWIDP), the climate and rainfall pattern of Nepal combined with the steep topography accounts for the great variability in water availability in time and space. There are more than 6000 rivers in Nepal with a total length exceeding 45,000 kilometers. About 80 percent of the total precipitation falls during the summer monsoon period (June to September) and about 15 percent during the post monsoon (October) and pre-monsoon.

DWIDP's studies also showed that along with embankments and barrage in the Indian Territory, water logging and over-irrigation in Terai without proper maintenance and drainage facilities have affected agricultural lands in Terai as have the construction of inadequate capacity cross-drainage structures in roads, canals and embankments. Cross-border inundation due to the unilateral heightening of existing weirs and construction of embankments across the border has caused adversities to the people residing near the border areas in the south of the country.

In Nepal, increasing population pressure, encroachment upon marginal lands for subsistence, farming on high slopes, deforestation, over-grazing and unsustainable extraction of bio-mass for

energy in the rural areas are blamed as the human induced factors leading to land degradation and natural resource depletion as well as increased risk of

wreak such havoc in the lives of common people, the flash floods in country's major rivers are definite to bring a lot of devastation in the country.



Banke district admin office: Scenes of inundation

Photo: Netra KC

disasters. Other malpractices include indiscriminate quarrying of stones, river bed mining for sand and poor engineering design and alignment of roads, canals etc.

Paltry Relief

The government has decided to release Rs 50 million as immediate relief to the victims of natural disaster in the country. The Home Ministry has also decided to increase the immediate compensation amount to relatives of those who have died in disasters to Rs 25,000 from Rs 15,000.

As flood triggered by torrential monsoon rainfall has continued to strike the southern plains from east to west across the country, according to reports around 200,000 people of 16,000 families have been displaced in different parts of the country.

If the flood of small streams can

The solution for the floods in terai is not traditional approach of rescue and rehabilitation. By geography and nature, Nepal and India have many things inseparable including the nature. The rain in Nepal originates from Bay of Bengal and comes from the sky. Once it outbursts, it needs drainage to go back again in a cycle through the land. What Nepal requires now is to start meaningful dialogue with Indian officialdom to strike long-term resolution of this problem.

As long as Nepal and India do not see flood as their common problem, people living in Nepalese side of border will have to go through sleepless nights but the people living in Indian Territory, too, are not permanently safe by depending on such constructions. What Nepal and India require is understanding about their geographical proximity and the formation of land. ■

FSR AT RISK FOLLOWING NBL MANAGEMENT ROW

The World Bank (WB) has threatened to suspend all assistance related to the financial sector reform project, as well as the proposed budgetary support, if the government doesn't restore the ICCMT management team at Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) by the end of August.

In a strongly worded letter sent Thursday (July 26) to the finance secretary, the major financier of the reform project said that it intends to suspend the right of the borrower (Nepal government) to make further withdrawals of assistance unless the management contract with ICCMT, an Irish/Scottish consulting firm, is extended for a six-month period, reports The Kathmandu Post.

The consulting firm that had been handling the management of troubled Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) for the last five years unilaterally terminated the management contract on July 22, citing inadequate cooperation from the central bank. Thursday's letter signed by the country director at the WB Nepal office has also alleged that Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) failed to create a conducive environment for the operation of the NBL and has asked for decisive action satisfactory to the WB to restore the

operational autonomy of the NBL management team.

In the face of increased interference by NBL's board and unions in the day-to-day operation of the bank, NRB has not taken necessary measures to ensure effective control over NBL as required by the agreement signed in June 2004, said the letter.

The WB has recommended convening a meeting of all parties, including the finance ministry, NRB, the consulting firm and the WB before the departure of the one remaining consultant. According to sources, Peter Ward, chief credit manager, is scheduled to leave Nepal on July 28. WB has also made it clear that following a six month extension for ICCMT, the government is free to hire a professional management team for NBL, foreign or local, but with at least one expatriate as either CEO or chief credit manager. However, the team needs to have qualifications and terms of reference acceptable to the WB and should be hired as per the procurement procedures agreed between Nepal and the WB, said the letter.

If the WB decides to suspend the assistance, it will immediately affect US\$ 100 million reform projects at NBL and

Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB) and reengineering at NRB. In addition, a proposed grant assistance worth US\$ 30 million aimed at enhancing Access to Finance will be an immediate victim. Likewise, the much-needed budget support for the current fiscal year will also become uncertain. The budget for the current fiscal year has anticipated receiving up to Rs 100 million in budget support. WB and DFID have extended Rs 7 billion for Financial Sector Projects and the government has utilized Rs 5.52 billion as of mid-March, 2007. Out of the total utilized, Rs. 3.89 billion (70 percent) was spent on Voluntary Retirement Schemes (VRS) at the two banks - NBL and RBB.

Meanwhile, on Friday (July 27), the NRB appointed a new management team at the NBL. The three member team is led by NRB director Dr. Binod Atreya and includes Laxmi Prapanna Niraula and Numnath Poudel.

In another development, the Finance Ministry has written a letter to the Office of Attorney General requesting for quick settlement of the case against Bijaynath Bhattarai. Following the filing of case of corruption against him by the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Bhattarai remains suspended from his position as Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) governor. ■

CHINA TO GIVE RS 13 BILLION LOAN

China has offered concessional loan of Rs 13 billion to Nepal. It has also agreed to provide Rs 1 billion grant assistance. At the 10th meeting of Nepal-China Inter Governmental Economic and Trade Committee in Kathmandu, on Tuesday (July 24), the two sides discussed conditions of the loan.

"We have accepted the loan but we have still not finalized about the conditions," said a senior Finance Ministry official.

Meanwhile, reports add that China has agreed to provide about Rs 432.5 million grant to Nepal for the construction of Syafrubesi-Rasuwadhi road, which will open the second trading route with the northern neighbor. China has also agreed to provide logistic support for the constituent assembly elections scheduled for November 22.

Finance Secretary Vidhyadhar Mallik and Chinese assistant commerce minister

Wang Chao signed the accord on behalf of their respective governments. Under the economic and technical cooperation, China has also agreed to provide mobile container and X-ray installation at the customs points.

The visiting Chinese assistant minister said that China would continue its support to Nepal in its socio-economic development endeavors. "New foundation has been laid for strengthening economic and technical cooperation between the two countries. For this, the meeting has been highly successful in identifying new areas of cooperation," he added.

Talking to the media persons, finance secretary Mallik informed that various matters related to trade, investment, economic and technical cooperation as well as other subjects of mutual interests were discussed during the meeting. "The Chinese delegation has assured us to look

into all issues and requests of Nepal," he said. China has agreed to form a joint committee led by chief of customs of Nepal and Tibet to finalize on a proposal tabled by Nepal to grant duty free access to 498 export commodities to the Chinese market. According to him, China has taken positively Nepal's request to double the annual technical and economic cooperation being provided to Nepal.

China provides about Rs 800 million grant to Nepal every year. Likewise, Nepal also asked for China's support in major infrastructure development projects including the construction of outer Ring Road, regional airport in Pokhara, Upper Trishuli 'B' and extension of railway up to Nepal border, said Mallik.

"In the investment front, the Chinese delegation enquired about visa processing, land acquisition and investment climate here in Nepal. They have floated an idea of setting up a joint venture bank for the investment in mega projects," he said. ■

“If Leaders Of Eight Political Parties Agree, Nothing Is Impossible”

- Ishwor Pokharel

ISHWOR POKHAREL is one of the influential politicians of CPN-UML. Pokharel, who has been in party's leadership since 1978, was also a minister in the Sher Bahadur Deuba led government, which was ousted by King Gyanendra on February 1, 2005. Known as a key person in party handling, Pokharel is a Member of Parliament as well as standing committee member of CPN-UML. Pokharel spoke to SPOTLIGHT on various issues regarding the current politics. Excerpts:

What we need now is courage, strength and commitment to solve the complex problems. It is the duty of leaders of eight political parties, government and the parliament to do just that.

At a time when the country has been passing through the critical situation with the deteriorating law and order situation, unrest in terai and growing violent activities, how do you see the possibility of holding the elections?

Of course, there are problems in the country but it is heading towards the positive direction. The situation is very complex. What we need now is courage, strength and commitment to solve the complex problems. It is the duty of leaders of eight political parties, government and the parliament to do just that.

Do you mean it is lacking now?

You are correct. Even the meeting of the leaders of eight political parties has not been convened for a long period. The leaders of eight political parties failed to endorse the policies and programs of the government. Even the budget was presented without any consent of leaders of eight political parties. The performance of the government is not as expected by the people. Despite overwhelming support behind it, the government looks very lackluster now.

Just a few days back even chief election commissioner stressed the need to improve the present situation to hold the elections for Constitution Assembly in November; do you think the present situation will change?

If leaders of eight political parties agree, nothing is impossible. They must develop programs and priorities giving role to different political parties. In the beginning, they must organize mass meetings with the participation of all eight political parties. This will be the first step.

How do you see the issues raised by armed groups in terai? How can they be solved?

Of course, various groups in terai and Janjatis are raising genuine issues. All of them need to be

addressed. We must start fruitful negotiations with them. As there is still more than three months to go for the elections, we have time to address their problems.

Is the government doing anything to address the problems?

I have told you that our party is stressing the need to address the problems of Madhesis, Janjatis and Dalits. However, CPN-UML cannot do it alone. So far as the government is concerned, it has set up a committee to hold the negotiations with them but it is yet to achieve the success. The government must address their demands politically. Some ministers presented themselves very irresponsibly threatening to use force against the armed groups in case they do not come to negotiation table within 15 days. We think Home Minister's statement was very irresponsible.

What is the role of CPN-UML?

So far as our party is concerned, our recently concluded central committee meeting has decided to launch nation wide campaign for the CA elections. Our party has already set up a high level CA elections campaign committee under the leadership of general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. Our party has also set up a committee to write party's manifesto for the forthcoming CA. Our party has already started to conduct the meetings at the workers' level. From the beginning of September, our party will launch nation wide campaign to mobilize the people for CA.

What about other parties?

I don't know much about others. Our party has already proposed to hold joint nation wide campaign with other eight parties. Such campaign will make the atmosphere more favorable. For this, leaders of eight political parties should first address a mass meeting in Kathmandu to generate the election fever.

Do you think other parties too are really sincere about the election?

I have told you that CPN-UML wants to see eight party joint campaigns for the CA. We have yet to receive any response from other parties. It is the responsibility of all the political parties to hold the elections for CA. If we cannot hold the elections, our legitimacy will be questioned.

As some of the armed groups are even demanding secession and right to self determination, what do you say?

There is no question to compromise on the

issue of integrity and sovereignty of Nepal with any group. All their demands should be dealt within the integrity of the country. If the government negotiation team is really sincere and effective, the issues raised by all these groups can be addressed politically. We have not seen any determination on the part of government team. Except the demands of secessionists, the government should fulfill all other demands like power sharing and political rights. This country does not belong to particular groups but to all the people living within it. All the citizens have equal rights.

How do you see the demands of right to self determination? Should the government team fulfill demands to divide the country on the basis of language and ethnicity?

We think issues raised by Madheshis, Janjatis, Dalits and women need to be resolved politically. For this, we have to agree to go for proportional representative model in the constituent assembly. The government must recognize the right of different linguistic and ethnic groups. All the groups must be given equal rights in sharing of the power. As the country has already agreed to go for federal structure, we can address the issues raised by these groups within this mandate.

A minister representing your party in the government disclosed many lacunae of the government including the inefficiency of ill prime minister and his arrogance to lead the government as an NC government. How do you look at it?

It is the moral duty of our ministers to inform people about the performance of the government. As a party of coalition government, we have to share all the successes and failures of this government. It is the duty of our ministers to inform people on which conditions they are working and how the cabinet is running. One must analyze the executive role performed by our ministers. When Nepali Congress is taking all important portfolios like Home, Defense and Finance, much of the decision making lies on its shoulder. Our ministers have little to do. In this situation, we have to inform people about the decision making process of the cabinet.

How do you see the comments coming from your minister?

It is clear that prime minister is ill and old and he is unable to provide dynamic leadership needed by the country. Home minister, who is responsible to maintain the law and order, has been working independently. He finds hardly anytime to share the problems with other members of this coalition government. Prime minister Koirala is behaving as if he does not have to consult with anybody regarding national issues.



So, your minister doesn't have any responsibility?

I am not saying that we are not responsible for this, but our minister cannot exercise executive authority. It is for the prime minister to decide all the issues. For instance, our minister has already forwarded the name of the ambassadors, and appointees for the vacant positions in the universities but prime minister Koirala is yet to announce the appointments.

What happened with the CPN-UML's stand to hold the referendum to decide the fate of monarchy?

We still believe that referendum is the best democratic way of deciding the fate of monarchy. Although we presented the proposal during eight party meetings, Nepali Congress and CPN-Maoists opposed our move. Had they accepted our proposal, the fate of monarchy would have been decided a long time back and the country would have gone for CA elections. NC and Maoists opposed our move saying that it will divide the nation and monarchy would play politics on the basis of vote it receives. Such arguments are rubbish.

But, CPN-Maoist is now pressing to decide the fate of monarchy through two third of the present legislative parliament? How do you look at it?

Of course, we have added this clause in the last amendment of the constitution but this will create more problems in the country. As we have already agreed to decide the fate of monarchy through the simple majority of Constituent Assembly, we have to wait for it.

How confident are you about holding the elections of CA in November?

We don't have any other option other than to hold the CA. The legitimacy of eight parties will come under question if we fail to hold the elections for CA. I don't have any doubt about holding the elections. ■

When Nepali Congress is taking all important portfolios like Home, Defense and Finance, much of the decision making lies on its shoulder. Our ministers have little to do. In this situation, we have to inform people about the decision making process of the cabinet.

REGIONAL CONFLICT

Development

Or

Destruction

Nepal is at the crossroads where it stares at an immense possibility for the all round development on the one hand, and a complete destruction in case of growing tension between its two neighbors, on the other hand

By KESHAB POUDEL

During his recent visit, Chinese vice minister Wang Chao opened a box of economic and development packages reiterating China's firm commitment to offer all kinds of assistance to Nepal. Along with additional packages of financial assistance of about Rs. 460 million (RMB 50 million) to Nepal for the construction of Syaphrubesi-Rasuwadhi Road, China also agreed to provide logistic support for the upcoming Constituent Assembly Elections.

Fiancé minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat requested Chinese vice minister Wang to provide US\$ 200 million in soft loans to Nepal for hydropower projects and infrastructure development. "The talks for acquiring the loans are at their final stages," said finance secretary Bidhyadhar Mallik who signed a separate agreement under which China committed to extend technical support to mobile container and x-ray inspection system at the Nepali Custom offices. Chinese side also agreed to consider Nepal's demand to build dry port in Nuwakot and Panchkhal.

According to the Finance Ministry, Chao reiterated Chinese government's continued support for the implementation of various ongoing projects including scaled up technical cooperation.

After completion of Tenth Inter-governmental Economic and Trade Committee, Chinese side also agreed to provide zero duty facility to 278 items. With the restoration of democracy in 2006, China is coming with offers for economic packages for Nepal's economic development. Similarly, China has also shown its growing security concerns and stakes in Nepal.

Nepal's other southern neighbor, too, has come up with similar packages of economic and development. Although Nepal's present trouble-makers and turmoil-instigators are said to be operating by basing themselves in Indian territory, officials and politicians from that country are stressing the need for Nepal's prosperity and stability.

Less than twenty-four hours after the visit of Chinese delegation two Indian political leaders – communist leader Sitaram Yechuri of the ruling UPA alliance and opposition leader Yashwant Sinha - came to Nepal conveying the message that India will provide all necessary support to solve the rising tension in southern Nepal.

Moreover, Indian Ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shanker Mukherjee revealed that India can extend railway up to Kathmandu. "Referring Nepal's geographical location, he said Nepal has an opportunity to serve as a transit point for air cargo. External trade is a key to Nepal's economy he said adding that

elimination of non-tariff barriers and extension of transportation networks are key to trade" addressing 13th Cargo Day Organized by Nepal Freight Forwarders Association. (The Himalayan Times July 30)

As Nepal's two neighbors are coming up with economic and development packages,

this is an area where Nepal can reap a lot of advantages. With the all weather road network of more than 40,000 kilometer inside Tibetan Autonomous Region and the railway to Lhasa and its extension up to Xigatse will further give ample opportunity to Nepal for the diversification of its trade. For long, Nepal's trade and business had completely relied on Southern road network but now new opportunities are coming in the north. The opening of Rasuwagadhi-Syaphrubesi road will add another milestone.

"China has come out with a new phase of its development as well as international role in Nepal. Security, however, has been its higher priority but has always been assuring its neighbors as well as powers which count more that its priority is to promote and enter into a new interdependent economic development. For that Chinese have reasonably demarcated their point of agreement and point of disagreement with the previous adversaries. In Nepal, Chinese have priority for regional interdependence and economic relationship through trade and transport networks," said the analyst.

On the other hand, India seems to be in more confusion regarding its Nepal's policy. Even India's former foreign minister and leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha, Jaswant Singh, is a critic to India's current policy towards Nepal. "The present non-Government in New Delhi has a non-policy on Nepal," writes Jaswant Singh in Pioneer. "Now, under Mr. Manmohan Singh, India has abdicated its role and totally withdrawn from Nepal. Naturally, external forces have moved in. Henceforth, we will probably see more activism by not only the US, but also China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. What the present Prime Minister of India does not realize is that



Yechury: Counsel from south

there cannot be a vacuum in international affairs. If India does not act, then others will move in."

As Nepal's two neighbors are yet to settle their border disputes, they continue to watch carefully each other's move which will generate prolonged political conflict in Nepal. Similarly, the high economic growth and growing economic interactions between India and China also give a great advantage to Nepal but their competition in security may have negative consequences.

Another Indian scholar S.D. Muni, however, sees India's policy is moving in right directions. "Being vulnerable to Nepal's turbulence, India cannot afford to let Nepal degenerate into anarchy. A stable and peaceful Nepal is vital to India's own interests. Therefore, India is deeply engaged with the peace process to ensure that the Maoists get mainstreamed into a peaceful and democratic order and Nepal is put on a firm road of political stability and orderly development," said Muni, professor of Jawaharlal Lal Nehru University.

Terai Unrest: Neighbor's Concern

Although India supported to bring Maoists into political mainstream, the growing violent activities in southern Nepal adjoining India are causing major troubles to Nepal pushing Nepal into further chaotic situation.

Indian communist leader Sitaram Yechuri last week said that India is ready

to support Nepal to bring all the rebels of terai in the national mainstream. "Indian government

would extend full support and cooperation in conducting the CA poll of November 22. All the forces in the Terai who have been unleashing violence, must join the political mainstream and seek active participation in the November elections," said Yechuri.

Former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Sharan pledged that India would sternly act against violent activities in Terai. According to July 16-22, Newsfront magazine, prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala has lodged a complaint about Indian territory being used by some of the Nepali 'terrorist' groups. These statements have not brought any changes in the level of

critical situation of Nepal unlike its past statements when Chinese deputy prime minister and foreign minister Marshal Chen Yi in October 5, 1962 had said "in case any foreign army makes a foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal. China will side with the Nepalese people."

After a long silence China has reiterated its earlier stand about Nepal in the words of present Chinese ambassador Zheng Xianglin, "when Nepali people face difficulties and pain, we will take that as ours; especially when Nepali people face some difficulties to uphold sovereignty and territory integrity. Any foreign, intervention in Nepal will not be tolerable for China."

Regional Conflict

Not only Nepal the whole region is at the crossroads. What is going on at



Chinese sign agreement on cooperation: Bounty from north

violence in Terai, though.

Chinese scholars and officials have shown similar concern on Nepal's growing violence. "As Nepal is heading to hold the elections for Constituent Assembly, there will be peace after that, sooner the stability and normalcy return, better for the region and Nepal. Nepal's instability will have long term implications in its border with Tibetan Autonomous Region of China," said Chinese scholar Professor Li Shaoxian.

So far as the current situation of Nepal is concerned, both of its neighbors have sensitivity towards each others' attitudes and actions. China is till now showing utmost restraint in its reactions over the

present as a political crisis in Nepal is a miniature of the crisis going on in the whole region.

"Nepal definitely has a critical position in the regional politics and its politicians have definitely a role to play to promote and preserve the vital interests of Nepal. However, capable and farsighted they might be, they have a limit to deal the surmounting situation," said the analyst.

"Yes, the quality of Nepalese politicians is much inferior than what Nepal had in the early 1960s when B.P. Koirala and his senior cabinet colleagues like Subarna Sumsher and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya- persons of high intellectual

caliber and responsibility were there inside Nepal as well as outside also. Things are yet to be scrutinized with adequate detachment regarding the interplay of regional forces which reflected not only in abrupt

dismantling of the parliamentary politics in 1961 but in an enlarged confrontation between the two big regional powers in 1962 across the frozen land of high altitudes of Himalayas. Its side effects are yet continuing to disrupt many of the most valuable opportunities this region could have reaped the benefits from to get rid of vicious circle of poverty and primitiveness," said the analyst.

Both countries at present have reached to a certain stage and can be partners in progress of this region.

"For the security of both the emerging powers of the region, strategic importance of Nepal has tremendously increased, in the present circumstances, compared to any time in the past. It is due to this strategic factor, a position of equidistance is not a matter of choice but has been forced upon Nepal which guarantees her survival. Instead of graceful deal, it has been a compulsion of geo-politics on both its side which has ensured Nepal's survival as a nation yet," writes eminent constitutional lawyer and political analyst Ganesh Raj Sharma in his recent article Nepal in a Zone of Conflict (See spotlight 20-26)

"The phenomenal growth of China's national power in the period after 1978, plus Indian apprehensions about that growth, suggests that genuine Sino-Indian rapprochement may come later rather than sooner. If the conflict between Indian and Chinese aspirations and interests is as deeply rooted as it seems, it may well increase further before eventually undergoing a qualitative transformation into a cooperative relationship. The growth of

Chinese capabilities may lead to the further expansion of ties between China and India's neighbors. India may feel increasingly vulnerable and seek ways of countering China's advances. China no doubt would take a negative view of these Indian counter measures. Unless India is willing to become a junior partner of China in the emerging world



A scene in Rasuwagadhi: Alternative contact point

order, Asia and the world may well see further Sino-Indian rivalry in the first part of twenty-first century," writes American scholar John W. Garver in his book Protracted Contest

Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century.

India's strategic analysts, too, see complications in future. "Nepal occupies an important place in India's political and strategic consideration. It provides an easy access to the Indo Gangetic plain. Ever since the elimination of Tibet as the outer buffer India has regarded Nepal and Bhutan as its inner strategic buffers. India's security would be gravely imperiled if it were to lose the two inner buffers. Chinese efforts to make strategic inroads into those buffers thus challenge Indian security," writes India's renowned strategic analyst Brahma Chellaney in his recent book Asian Juggernaut, the Rise of China, India and Japan. "All in all, by beefing up Chinese logistic support in Tibet, the rail road arms China with multiple strategic benefits vis-à-vis India - enhanced power-projection force capability; the option to step up direct military pressure; superior

transport links with states that are part of the Indian security system (Nepal and Bhutan); a greater potential to meddle in India's restive northeast."

Sandwiched between two big neighbors, Nepal has many

complications. "Nepal has a very limited choice because of its size and capabilities but its neighbors are too big and too much capable to make this region heaven or hell. Nepal has, on her own, unnecessary killings and disturbances under a fake political cover for more than a decade which has now become irrelevant," said the analyst. "Though it was merely a cover but in this changed situation it has become a beneficiary of the past as a legendary champion of its martyrdom of the past. Though its base of operation in the past was democratic country, it was neither useful to that country and now nor for a democratic process of this country. It is liability for that country and this country's democratic process," said the analyst.

As American scholar Leo E. Rose said, the current potentialities of external domination and subversion are not very different in kind- though they may be in degree - from those with which Nepali governments have had to contend for at least two centuries.

As Nepal's two neighbors came with economic packages indicating that something is in the process of change. However, prolonging instability and violence in southern Nepal bordering with India shows that there is a long way to go before the regional powers come to terms benefiting Nepal. ■

POULATION

Male As Partners

Parliament members have shown interest to learn the new emerging phenomenon of population management

By CORRESPONDENT

For many parliamentarians, it was for the first time when they were discussing about the state of population, and the role of men in the maternal health. Organized by Population Concern Society Nepal, the half day seminar on Men as Partner in Maternal Health was first of its kind where members of legislative parliament found time to discuss the maternal health and population issues along with experts.

From country's overall health situation to the demographic pattern and the issues of maternal mortality rate, the participants discussed all issues of national importance. With the support from UNFPA, the program was organized to commemorate the World Population Day.

As this year's slogan is 'Men as Partners in Maternal Health,' the half day seminar focused all its attention on the issues of women health and maternal mortality. Despite some progress in maternal mortality, the women health issues are still of critical concern to the country. A large number of women are yet to get pre-natal and post-natal care. Overwhelming majority of women still give birth at home and only a small number of women receive trained medical assistance during delivery.

"Population and women's health are main issues of the country and MPs need to raise these issues in parliament. I am happy to see that such a large number of members of legislative parliament actively took part in discussion," said Subas Chandra Nembang, Speaker of the Parliament. "I hope members of legislative parliament will raise these issues during the session of parliament."

Presenting the policy paper, member of legislative parliament and a member of Education, Health and Population Committee Dr. Banshidhar Mishra revealed that women's health is in pathetic situation. "Despite some improvements in the women health,

maternal mortality rate is still 281 per 10,000. Many women die without trained medical staffs at the time of delivery," said Dr. Mishra.

"I am very happy to know the overall health situation of the country from the Members of Parliament. If Nepal's parliament members understand the country's health and demographic problems, half of the problem will be solved," said Junko Sasaki, UNFPA's country representative to Nepal. "As women have been suffering from many health related complications, the problem of uterine prolapse also needs immediate intervention."

Participated by more than a dozen of members of parliament, the participants also raised the important issues of health and population. Presenting the paper on the state of Uterine Prolapse or Fallen Womb, Dr. Marasini from the Ministry of Health highlighted the painful state of women suffering from fallen womb. "The number related to uterine prolapse is so high that it will take years to perform surgery to all. One needs to spend about US\$200 to perform the surgery. If the ministry decides to perform the surgery for about 175,000 women who are identified for medical intervention, the country needs more than billions of rupees of budget."

Despite so many challenges in health sectors, the country has made some progress in the population management. "Although Nepal's population growth rate is still high, the recently released

Nepal Demographic Health Survey shows some encouraging trend. It is interesting to recall that the fertility and mortality has declined considerably over the years," said Dr. Ram Hari Aryal, Chief of Population Division of Ministry of Health and member secretary of Population Concern Society. "We can see the declining trend in the population growth in future."

In the population of more than 25 million, women consists of more than half but their role in population management is negligible. More than 700,000 women suffer from uterine prolapses and about 200,000 need immediate surgery.

"We never knew that there were such a large number of uterine prolapses. This is an eye opener for us," said MP Sabitri



Interaction: Serious deliberations on population management

Bogati. "As a member of parliament, I will definitely raise these issues in the parliament."

At a time when country's large numbers of hospitals in remote parts are without doctors, women have to face the consequences. "Since the announcement of new policies, there will be enough doctors in the remote parts of the country within a year," said Ramchandra Bahadur Singh, Secretary at the Ministry of Population and Health.

"In a short notice, we are able to gather more than dozens of Members of Legislative Parliament and experts together to debate on the issues related to demography and health. As a member of parliament, we are able to understand what are the health related problems in the country now," said Member of Legislative Parliament and president of Society Bhakta Bahadur Balayar. ■

CHILD LABOR

Hard Reality

Despite laws and regulations, child labor continues to be a major problem of the country

By NIRAKAR POUDEL

An orphan from an early age, Madan Karki (name changed), 14, used to work at his uncle's small farm in Jeevanpur of Dhading District, 50 kilometer west of capital. Madan's job was to take the cattle for grazing the whole day. One day, a family friend approached him with offer for work at his home in Kathmandu with a promise that he will be admitted in a school.

However, the man instead engaged him at a carpet factory in Kathmandu. Working like a bonded labor, Madan was forced to learn knotting wool rugs on heavy wooden looms. His workdays started at 4 am in the morning till 11 at night. The earthen floor of the factory was his bed. When the owner obtained a rush order, he and the other boys would have to work throughout the entire night. Despite his hard work, the owner always scolded and physically abused him.

After working in harsh conditions for about eight months in the factory, Madan—who was not paid—fled the factory to work as a helper in a gas tempo. Now, he earns about Rs 1000 (approximately \$15) a month. Madan's case is not a unique one as this is the reality of many child workers in Nepal.

One of the significant factors that have forced children like Madan to work is poverty. His uncle could not afford school for him. Instead, he wanted Madan to help in his household chores.

As long as Madan assisted his uncle, his uncle did not have to spend extra money by employing a shepherd. Therefore, Madan was also contributing to his family income. However, it is against the law to make children work all day long by denying them education, entertainment and rest. But this law is rampantly violated.

"The ministry has been doing its best to rehabilitate the children working in risk areas," said spokesman of the

Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare.

According to a recently published report of Nepal Living Standard Survey II, more than 30 percent of the population lives below poverty line where parents income is not sufficient to cater to the basic needs of the family. Therefore, children are obliged to work to generate income to supplement the family earning.



Child worker (right): Working as helper

Children supply their labor with nominal money. Since poor parents only care about their children's salary, which they receive, they are oblivious to the working situation of their children.

Although law exists to prevent child labor, statistics show that there are too many child labors in Nepal. According to ILO, there are 2.6 million children between the ages of 5 to 14 years currently working in Nepal. The National Census 2001 revealed that children aged below 14 years consist of 40 percent of total population.

Because Nepal's dependency on child labor is so deeply entrenched, only half of the children are allowed to complete the fifth grade of school. The ILO reports showed that. Children are employed in

eighteen different sectors like in brick kiln, coal mines, child prostitution, mug house, leather processing industry, coal mine, stone quarrying, match factory, house-hold helper, bonded labor, street children, mine and carpet factory, drug trafficking, transport sector etc. About 1.4 million children are not provided the salary for their work and 1.27 million children are working in worst forms of labor.

There are many reasons for child labor in Nepal like poverty, illiteracy, and lack of employment, family problems, internal conflict, and the lack of law enforcement, cheaply available child labors and scant economic opportunities.

"The government should create new employment opportunities in rural as well as urban areas. Along with launching different skill development programs for unskilled labor, the government needs to

enforce the child labor act strictly," said an NGO worker.

Experts argue that education up to secondary level should be made free so that children will not be forced to drop out because of poor economic situation. Apart from enforcing law and addressing poverty, government also requires the help of the civil society to tackle this problem.

With the support from ILO and other INGOs like Save the Children Norway, Save the Children USA and CWIN, the situation has been gradually improving but there is still a long way to go before bringing about positive changes in the lives of children like Madan Karki. ■

FNJ DEMANDS REINSTATEMENT OF SACKED JOURNOS

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) has condemned the sacking of 45 journalists from Gorkhapatra daily, a state-owned national daily and has demanded their immediate reinstatement. The government had sacked them on 26 July.

"FNJ is holding talks with the management of Gorkhapatra Corporation," said a statement by FNJ. The statement added that the management had said it can consider the Federation's demand, but has shown willingness to reinstate only some of them. Currently, there is a Maoist minister heading the Ministry of Information and Communication.

"The journalists were sacked by the management without any genuine reason or proper evaluation." When FNJ demanded the reason for ousting the scribes, the management said that they had to remove them so that they can recruit new journos to make the organizational structure inclusive, which sounds to be a baseless reason, according to FNJ president Bishnu Nisthuri.

These journalists have been working in the corporation on contract basis and some of them have worked for as long as 14 years. "The corporation cannot seize the bread and butter of its employees with baseless reasons and in the name of inclusiveness. The Federation demands the government to re-instate all the journalists immediately and to act more responsibly in the future."

Meanwhile the FNJ Gorkhapatra chapter in its press release has warned the management that if it fails to reinstate the journalists soon, they will launch a phase wise movement against the management.

On the other hand, Revolutionary Journalist Association, said to be close to Maoists, has issued a statement saying that they are in favor of inclusiveness and restructuring of government media. Defending the corporation management's decision, it said that only the journos whose contract had expired had been removed from Gorkhapatra corporation. The statement issued by Govinda Acharya, acting president of the association, also accuses that some persons 'who had aided and abetted royal regime in the past were involved in obstructing the progressive march of government media.' ■

Book List

- 1 Bonded Labour (Kamaiya) in Nepal/2005
Dr. Padma Raj Lamichhane Rs. 350/
- 2 Economic Survey Fiscal Year 2006/07
Govt. of Nepal/Ministry of Finance Rs.100/-
- 3 Electrification Coverage in Nepal/2007
Subarna Prasad Kapali Rs.100/-
- 4 Essays on the Sociology of Nepal /2007
Chaitanya Mishra Rs.450/-
5. Inside Out Political Parties of Nepal/2007
Dwarika N. Dhungel, HDS Publication, Kathmandu
Rs.350/-
6. Local Governance in Nepal Democracy at Grassroot/2007
Rabindra Kahanal, Rs. 295/-
7. Making Constitution Through Constituent Assembly/2006
Bhimarjun Acharya Rs.300/-
8. Mass Media in Post -1990 Nepal /2006
Pratyoush Onta Rs.200/-
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Ramesh C. Arya, PHD Rs. 220/-
11. Nepal's conflict and its impact on public policy/2006
Ananda P. Shrestha/ Hari Uprety Rs. 150/-
12. Nepalese Tourism The Challenges /2007
Raman Grandon Rs 300/-
13. Nepal's Conflict A Micro Impact Analysis on Economy/
2007 Pyakuryal/Sainju Rs. 350/-
14. Newar Society City, Village and Periphery/ 2007
Gerard Toffin Rs.790/-
15. Regional Strategies for Sustainable Development in Nepal/
2006 Jibgar joshi Rs 400/-
16. Simple Convictions My Struggle for Peace and Democracy/
2007 Girija Prasad Koirala Rs.250/-
17. Societal Analysis Politics of Poverty, Injustice and
Inequity/2005 Narbikram Thapa Rs 250
18. Stock Market in Nepal/2006
Rabindra Bhattarai Rs 110
19. The Fateful Interview/2007
Madhav K. Rimal Rs 400
20. The State and Society in Nepal/2006
Prayag Raj Sharma Rs 460
21. Tilled Earth/2007
Manjushree Thapa Rs 312
22. Wrong We Do, Right We Don't/2005
Aditya Man Shrestha Rs 350

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A LETTER FROM CANBERRA

- By Dhruva Adhikary

Nepal's entry into Canberra's diplomatic community in March this year appears to have been a quiet affair. A three-member team, headed by Charge d' Affaires Shanker Bairagi, landed in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to set up what would eventually be the Embassy of Nepal in the country occupying an entire continent. Budgetary and logistic considerations allowed the team to move ahead only slowly, yet steadily. Official courtesies and facilities, channelled through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, were obviously forthcoming. Contributions made by some enthusiastic Nepalis, remembers Bairagi, turned out to be equally encouraging. One effort led to another, and by the second week of May officials were successful in sending a note back home with detailed address of the place Embassy would operate from, at least until the time it is taken out to a more permanent location. The mission has become operational, and Nepalis who have begun seeking consular services include those from New Zealand and other countries in the neighbourhood. Opening of the Embassy here indeed represents a remarkable change from the days when Australia used to be looked after by the Nepali mission based in Tokyo! Anyhow, the present team of Nepali diplomats have formidable challenges ahead, and the first among them could be a need to persuade Canberra to change its existing arrangements that require Nepalis to send in visa applications to the Australian mission located in the Indian capital. After all, reciprocity is the name of a game in diplomacy.

Canberra's is one of the four Nepali missions to be set up as the Embassy of Nepal (other three are in South Korea, Denmark and Israel). Not as a "Royal Nepalese Embassy" as was routine in previous times. In fact, embassies in the past used to be opened and maintained, at taxpayers' expenses though, as an extension of palace secretariat. And ambassadorships and other plum jobs distributed as favours to the king's relatives, obedient civil servants and retired army generals. Barring exceptions, these royal appointees worked or expected to work mainly for the palace, often spending times and money to procure fancy, trendy dresses and other luxury goods. Qualifications, merit and experience were not to be the primary requirements for the jobs that essentially needed skills and competence to represent Nepal as a country. Palace linkages, warm references from influential persons and even pecuniary interests were said to be the basis for appointments, postings and transfers. All of these now need to be a part of history. Leaders committed to create new Nepal must not waste time in making party-based claims for ambassadorships, instead should pick up best and brightest Nepalis to take up responsibilities abroad. Should they continue

to fail to close their ranks indefinitely, Nepal's standing in international community would be subjected to further erosion.

Official records show that Nepal and Australia established diplomatic relations in February 1960. The decision, from the Nepali side, was obviously taken when the country was being governed by first democratically-elected government led by charismatic BP Koirala. But initiatives to follow it up were not taken in subsequent years, as priorities of all successive governments after Mahendra's coup of December 1960 were directed elsewhere. Better late than never. Nepal now finally has a formal base in Australia from where it can also develop contacts in the rest of Asia-Pacific region. The Australian side had not waited for too long. They opened their mission in Kathmandu in 1984 which was upgraded to ambassadorial level two years later. In the words of Kevin Andrews, federal minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Australia-Nepal relationship, actually "predates" formal diplomatic links in 1960. His remark was inserted in a message delivered to a Sydney gathering on 7 July. That probably was the reason why Australia took steps at a greater speed.

How many Nepalis are there who can take benefits from the newly-opened embassy in Canberra? One unverified estimate puts the figure at 25 thousand. But a more educated guess, says Dr Krishna Hamal, would be 10 thousand. According to economist Hamal, a long-time resident of Canberra, most of the Nepalis, around six thousand, are in Sydney, Australia's largest city. Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra are some of the other cities where rest of the Nepalis are scattered. And nearly a quarter of the total are said to be students; others are in professional jobs as engineers and doctors. As the number of Nepalis in Australia goes on increasing to create a larger Nepali diaspora, it is not altogether a bad idea to start thinking about giving a more stable look to the Nepali mission in Canberra. The first step could be to buy a plot of land available at the diplomatic enclave where missions are allowed (rather encouraged) to construct buildings, fitted with representative cultural trappings. Dr Hamal and several like-minded countrymen/women agree that a timely investment for a permanent Nepali structure would help save substantial sums of money that need to be spent in rent-payment over next four to five years. And if countries like Afghanistan, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina can afford to have their own buildings to house their embassies why can't Nepal? Sounds logical.

Australians put a lot of emphasis on a multicultural society. This is visible almost in every official initiative. SBS radio, for instance, has programmes in 68 languages including Nepali. Even if John Howard's

liberal Government does not return to power after the elections later this year, Australia's long-term policy on this count is unlikely to change. The Labour party's approach may not go for any marked shift on the issue.



While seriously thinking about the multicultural dimension of the society, Australians are equally anxious to see that all immigrants to Australia love to make themselves parts of it, physically as well as emotionally. It is, therefore, but natural for them to have identical expectations from those who have migrated from Nepal. "We ask people living in Australia to integrate into our society and embrace the core values which define us as a people," is the categorical message from minister Kevin Andrews for the Nepali community. The organizers of the 'NRN conference', however, might have found the statement out of tune. Senator Fierravanti-Wells, who was present at the July 7 conference, echoed the ministerial voice, by saying that there are benefits and opportunities of living in Australia "including the opportunity to apply for citizenship and participate fully in Australia's way of life." The Senator's suggestion for full participation might not enthuse NRN activists whose primary objective appears different: to create a basis for creating rights for certain categories of non-resident groups within Nepal. The Australian Senator, incidentally, is a son of an Italian couple who came to this country as immigrants in 1950s. As is substantiated by facts, the Senator's Italian origins have not prevented him from reaching where he has reached now. It is a pity that so-called NRN leaders prefer to remain indifferent to stark realities.

The Australian, one of the leading newspapers of this country, recently quoted a German journalist as saying that "on a global scale Australia is not still the most important country," but is an expanding one. While there can be a debate on the image issue, at least one South Asian diplomat apparently did not find any reason to dispute with the 'expanding' perception. To Humayun Kabir, the man who was Bangladesh's envoy to Nepal till July last year, it did not take even a year to realize that Canberra could be a stepping stone to make an upward move onto Washington DC. After a year as 'high commissioner' here, he now has reached DC to be an ambassador once again. Even the new movers and shakers in Dhaka ostensibly found Kabir's credentials and commitments to represent his country in the US intact and reliable. Could he be a role model for other South Asian aspirants?

(Adhikary, a Kathmandu-based journalist, is currently vacationing in Australia) ■



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