

Opinion : Dr. A.B. Thapa

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Face to Face: Prachanda
The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

May 16-22, 2008

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Monarchy On Trial

INSIDE

Politics: NC Conditions
Pakistan Economy: Resilient
and Ready
Film: Devananda In Town

अब... १* रु. १ मै बचत खाता



नेपाल इन्भेस्टमेन्ट बैंक बढी ठगदा बढी
नागरिकहरुमा बैंकिङ्ग सेवाको पहिलो अनुभव
एवं बानी बस्न सकोस भन्नाका लागि सजोरब
प्रस्तुत गर्दछ... **मात्र रु.१ मा**
“ आफ्नै बचत खाता ”

सम्पूर्ण अन्तराष्ट्रिय स्तरको सेवा सुविधा सहित ।



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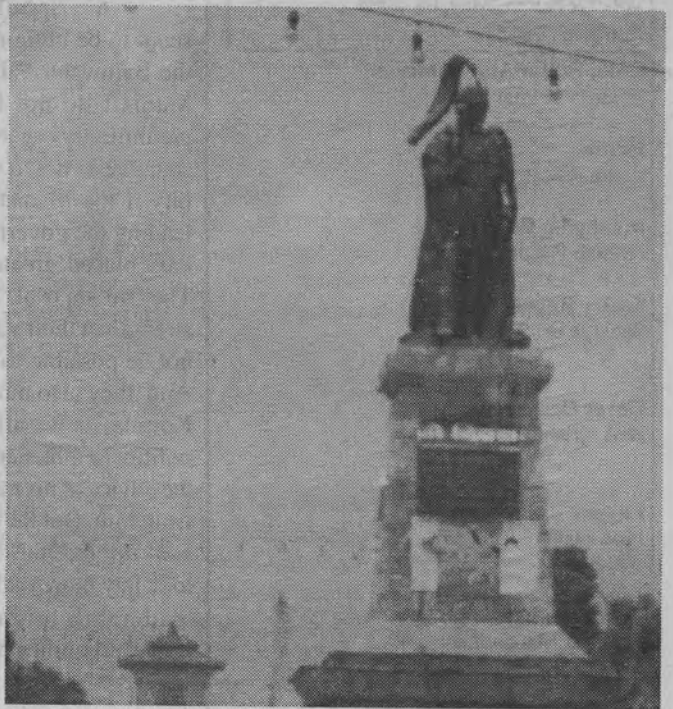
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COVER STORY: Monarchy On Trial Although many individual Kings have faced trials in Nepal, this is for the first time the institution of monarchy is facing the vote for its existence
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PAKISTAN ECONOMY: Resilient And Ready Despite political turmoil, Pakistan is experiencing around seven percent growth and is readying for further growth in the changed political context
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FACE TO FACE: Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda Maoist chairman talks about the new role for his party

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SPOTLIGHT

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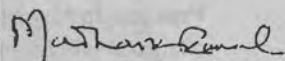
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The constituent assembly has been summoned. But the political uncertainties and the mistrusts between major political parties seem to be on the increase. Despite the rejection by the people, the Nepali Congress supremo, Girija Prasad Koirala does not seem to be obliging the Maoists who are getting impatient to occupy the Baluwatar Palace. Feigning to follow the democratic process, the Maoists do not find it necessary to disband their undemocratic paramilitary organizations. It is difficult to believe that the Maoists are so naïve as not to see which way the wind is blowing. It will be a great pity if the Maoists deprive themselves of the unique opportunity of leading the government by their sheer obduracy. The people of Nepal have placed greater faith in them without giving them a clear mandate. They are on trial. Their main task is to draft the constitution and not to strengthen their various organizations. They have to know that it might not be possible to achieve their objective if they are not at the helms. And they also must know they cannot dislodge Girija Prasad Koirala. Koirala, as we all know, has always being a satellite all through his political eminence in the last eighteen years, taking decisions only at the advice of his mentors. The Maoists have screwed a lot of concessions from him. But they may no more. It is being rumored Koirala has been well tutored not to give in this time. And Koirala definitely does not look any more malleable. All the high sounding rhetoric of the Maoists leadership might not be able to make any dent on Koirala's imperturbability because it might be fortified by invisible forces.

The one and only purpose or the mandate of this constituent assembly is to draft the people's constitution. Any political party trying to violate or transgress this mandate would be betraying the people and might have to pay dearly. Let the constitution decide our destiny and the nation's fate. The twenty six million people will not accept anything other than that and this demands that the draft of the constitution be put before the people for their approval. Since the people have lost faith in the older political parties they have decided to give a chance to the Maoists not caring how they secured the largest number of seats. The Nepali people sincerely want the Maoists to set an example of honesty and patriotism by not following the pliant and servile behavior of their predecessors. They must not be carried away by their doctrines or dogmas and subject themselves only to secure nation's cooperation in the pious task of enacting the constitution. They must restore the nation's pride by becoming their own masters. The Singhs, the Yechuris or the Soods must not be permitted to decide our country's destiny. As such, instead of giving vacant threats to king Gyanendra, they should concentrate on the more important task. They must not try to encroach upon the people's rights which could be counter-productive. They must not forget that they have to redeem our mortgaged sovereignty. And they must give due respect to our nation's army and not disparage them. History is witness our brave Nepali army adorned by men like the great patriot Bhakti Thapa, will never fail to rise when the occasion demands. A few selfish and unpatriotic men won't make any difference. And this is the time when the Nepali army and all the Nepali people have to join hands to preserve the sanctity and sovereignty of the nation.


Madhav K. Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



Rising Problem

After a long gap, it was interesting to read a cover story on economic issue in Spotlight. Rising Costs; Falling Exports and Twin Trouble (Spotlight May 09-15) was interesting as it discussed all important issues regarding the rising cost of food. Thanks to the rising costs of various products, the inflation rate has surged beyond seven percent while the trade deficit has neared Rs.100 billion. This is a very bad sign for Nepalese economy. As all political leaders are more interested on the issue of their own survival, it seem that the rising cost seems to be nobody's concern. Don't our politicians consider economy as an important agenda?

Laxmi Shrestha

Nepal Commerce Campus

Demonstration by Tibetans In Kathmandu

The Tibetans that have been living in Nepal as refugees in the past also. But the Nepali government has never been able to take proper actions against them. They should have deported them to their adopted homes in India. Since India loves to use them as pawns, she would have gladly accepted them. The recent demonstrations by the Tibetans refugees in Kathmandu against the China are also being judged by the Indians. This time they have both willing collaborators for in the form of Nepalis government. It is almost an open secret that some sections of the Nepali government are not only encourage them but even helping them indirectly. The Chinese government and the Chinese people do understand this well. And, they know the Nepal government always plays a double game on the issue. The Nepali people always stand by their Chinese friends. They want their friend to believe that no good Nepali would like to embarrass China in any way.

*Khanchen Lamal and friend
Boudha*

Listen Us

After reading your article on Chinese Concern, I have to clarify our stand regarding the demonstrations. Tibetan

refuges living in Nepal are taking part in the demonstrations. We are not anti-Chinese but what we want is our freedom in our motherland Tibet. Our aim is not disintegration of China but we want autonomy with freedom in Tibet. There might have some people with vested interest but not all demonstrators are anti-Chinese. Please try to listen us and support us.

Tshring Topden

Via email

Too Much Politics

We talk too much politics and now the time has come to discuss the economic agenda. At a time when the country is facing the sorry state of rising cost and falling exports, concerned authorities must show sincere concern to solve it. The implementation of republic or federalism is secondary matter now than the implementation of sound economic policy to rescue the country from bad shape. After reading the cover story of Spotlight, I came to realize that the country's economy may collapse in case of failing to manage the rising oil price.

Bibek Lama

Jawalakhel

Sorry Situation

I agree with you that the inflation rate has surged beyond seven percent while

the trade deficit has neared Rs.100 billion. You are absolutely correct that this sorry situation has emerged at a time when Nepal, along with the entire world, is facing the heat generated by the food shortage and shooting costs of essential food stuffs. Although Maoist leaders have been talking about the need to form their own government, they seem to be unaware about the challenges they are going to face. As the prices of petroleum products continue to rise and US dollar is also going stronger than our own currency, even if CPN-Maoists are given chance to form the government, it is uncertain that they will solve all those problems. The time is now to build the consensus for the economic development.

Sandip Rai

London Via email

Exploitation Of Sentiments

The recent activities of the CPN-Maoists show that they will exploit anti-Indian sentiments to remain in power once they are given opportunity to form the government. This may be the reason why CPN-Maoist leaders have been raising issues like scrapping Nepal-India Treaty of 1950 to regulate Nepal-India open border. Similarly, they have been also raising the issues of border encroachment by India. This way they are trying to prove themselves as a nationalist party. If Maoists want to be in a government, they must give up these kinds of anti-Indian activities. Otherwise, the relations between the two countries will be further complicated. Whether one likes it or not, India is Nepal's neighbor and we cannot change our neighbor.

Shanti Gadtaula

Via email

Right To Govern

As Maoists emerged as the single largest party, they should be given right to form the minority government. Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have lost the mandate to rule the government and people will not accept them again in power. As Maoist leaders have already declared that they will abide by democratic process, they must be given opportunity to rule. If India, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, which are architects of 12 points agreement, are really honest, they must pave the way to form the Maoist government.

Ajaya Thapa

Via email



NC Lays Down Seven Conditions For Cooperation

The central working committee meeting of the Nepali Congress (NC) concluded, Monday (May 12), by laying down seven conditions including dissolution of Young Communist League (YCL), dissolution of Maoists' parallel organizations and surrendering of weapons of their combatants, among others. The NC conditions also include amendment of constitution to insert provision whereby governments can be formed and dissolved based on simple majority. It has called for creation of political machinery for integration of combatants and their rehabilitation. The party has also called for keeping judiciary, constitutional bodies, government media, police-administration and army away from the shadow of party-wise politics. The meeting also concluded that the insecurity and fear psychosis propagated by YCL were the major reasons for the party's unexpected defeat at the recent election. *Leading dailies report*

Chinese Envoy Dissatisfied With Govt Action

Chinese ambassador to Nepal Zheng Xianglin, on Monday (May 12), urged the Nepal government to take strict action against the separatist Tibetans demonstrating in Kathmandu. "The activities of these monks and nuns should be clearly defined and they should not be allowed to participate in political

activities," the ambassador said at an interaction. He said Tibetan monks and nuns residing in Nepal are engaged in politics rather than in cultural activities. "There is no meaning of arresting demonstrators in the afternoon and releasing them in the evening," he said, adding that the Nepali government is under huge pressure from outside. "UN staffers are present at demonstrations. This is a serious violation of UN charter," he maintained. *Leading dailies report*

Accident If Monarchy Removed: Thapa

President of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP-Nepal) Kamal Thapa has said that there would be an accident in the country if monarchy is removed by the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA). "The exercise of the right to implement republic, in a haste, could lead to big accident," he said at an interaction in Reporters' Club. "Let us keep monarchy in status quo till the processes of writing constitution are completed," he said. Thapa who has been



acting as go-between Maoist leadership and the King, said, "The King is in no mood to leave Nepal. I have found a surprising degree of self-confidence in him." He said he has also told Maoist chairman Prachanda not to declare republic in haste. He also revealed that in private most leaders favor keeping monarchy but they speak in revolutionary tones in public. *Leading dailies report*

Maoists Torch Prachanda's Effigy

A few disgruntled cadres of the CPN-Maoist today burnt the effigies of party chairman Prachanda, party's CA poll candidate from Rautahat-3 Prabhu Shaha and Bhojpura sub-state chief Hari Bhakta Kandel. They accused the party

of sidelining Dalits and Madhesis while nominating CA members under the PR system.

The rally called by the Maoist District Working Committee Rautahat was taken out from Gaur. Shouting slogans, the rallyists passed through the thoroughfares of the city and torched the effigies at the BP Chowk. In Shivanagar of Rautahat, cadres of the Rastriya Mukti Morcha torched the effigies of Prachanda, Kandel and Shaha, said district president of the Morcha Lila Shaha. *The Himalayan Times reports*

No Change Yet In Nepali Maoists' Status: US Official

A senior government official the United States has said there is "no change" in the status of Nepal's Maoists, who are listed in the US terror watch list. "I don't think there's any change. There's no change in their status." PTI news agency quoted State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack as saying. He was commenting on the issue in the backdrop of a meeting last week between US ambassador to Nepal Nancy J Powell and Maoist chairman Prachanda. McCormack added, "There's a particular listing. And I don't have in front of me what exactly what it is, but at this point there's no change." The State Department spokesperson's clarification comes amid expectations that the Maoists might soon be removed from the terror list with the latter emerging as the largest party after the recent constituent assembly polls. Besides, the Prachanda-Powell meeting on May 01 marked the starting of formal contacts between the Maoist party and the US government. The US had listed the CPN (Maoist) as a terrorist organization in 2004. *Nepalnews.com reports*

Prachanda Consults With PLA Commanders

CPN-Maoist chairman Prachanda has said that the party is engaged in "last minute preparations" for the formation of a new government under its leadership and that the process of army integration would begin immediately after that. Prachanda gave this assurance during discussion with the divisional commanders of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the party's military wing,

in his residence Tuesday morning. This remark by Prachanda who is also the supreme commander of the military outfit that was in a decade long war with the state has come when the seven-party meeting scheduled to be held on Friday is believed to determine the composition of a "government of consensus" that would be formed soon. The role of the Maoist PLA combatants in the changed context, their thoughts (suggestions) on army integration including other pertinent matters were also said to have been discussed during the meeting. Senior Maoist leader Dr Baburam Bhattara and four deputy commanders and heads of seven divisions of the PLA were present at the meeting. CPN-Maoist party which is likely to lead the new government following its surprising victory in the recently concluded polls, has put army integration after 'democratizing' Nepal Army and making PLA 'professional' on top of its priority list. Prachanda had issued another directive to Young Communist League (YCL) cadres yesterday, asking them to avoid intimidations and attacks against the activists of rival political parties as it could tarnish the image of the entire party. *Nepalnews.com reports*

YCL Announces Month-Long 'Development Campaign'

The Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) has announced a month-long campaign to mobilize and motivate youths for development and corruption control.

The decision to launch the nationwide campaign was taken by the two-day meeting of the YCL central committee which concluded on Monday (May 5), YCL chairman Ganesh Man Pun informed. Speaking at a press conference in the capital Tuesday, Pun said tens of thousands of cadres would be mobilized for traffic management, development activities and 'corruption control' during the campaign. The announcement comes at a time when the Maoist leadership is facing pressure from other parties to control YCL 'highhandedness' with some parties even demanding that the Maoist party dissolve

its youth wing. *Nepalnews.com reports* Republic Tops Maoist Agenda: Dr Bhattarai

The Maoists are intent on driving the country along a democratic and a high-growth path once the agenda of the republic is implemented, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, the leader of the CPN (Maoist)



said. Dr Baburam Bhattarai said the agenda of the party is to declare a republic, form a constitution and drive a transitional economic development program focusing on infrastructure and employment. "We want to create a positive investment climate," he said, adding that the Maoists are serious about making the relationship between entrepreneurs and the laborers smooth. "The main problem is that you have not been able to increase productivity," he said. "If you produce more, then the capitalists' profit margin and the laborers' wage margin will also increase." He said the Maoists could drive the country on a high-growth path because they are different from the previous rent-seeking class and have direct connections with the poor and marginalized people. "There was never a class interested in massive industrial development, job creation and growth," he said. "It depends on who is leading the state." He also said the Maoists' top priority development projects include a fast track road link from Kathmandu to Nijgarh in Bara to ease Kathmandu's congestion. "We will use local resources to develop small and medium projects to end load shedding," he said. "For big projects, we will have to invite foreign countries." *The Himalayan Times reports*

Norway To Extend Assistance

Visiting Norwegian Deputy Minister for International Development Hakon A. Gulbrandsen has said Norway is ready

to continue its assistance in Nepal for peace, development and democratization process. Informing the press about his meetings with political leaders, at the Norwegian Embassy on Wednesday, Gulbrandsen said, "I have said that Norway is ready to assist the peace and democratization process in way that the Nepal themselves find most appropriate." He said Norway "prefers to listen first than act." The Norwegian minister further mentioned that he told the Nepali political leaders that maintaining the "spirit of the interim constitution of consensus and cooperation" in the ongoing political negotiations is very important. While in Nepal, Gulbrandsen's program included meetings with key political leaders including Prime Minister GP Koirala, Maoist chairman Prachanda and CPN-UML leader Jhal Nath Khanal. He also inspected some development projects funded by the Norwegian government. Informing that the possibility of Norwegian support in utilizing the hydropower potentiality was one of the issues discussed with political leaders, Gulbrandsen assured that he would try to encourage Norwegian investors to invest in the hydropower in Nepal.

Compiled from reports UN Wraps Up Electoral Office

The United Nations Electoral Assistance Office in Nepal is wrapping up after its role ended here following the technical aid and advice it provided to the country's Election Commission (EC) for recently concluded Constituent Assembly (CA) polls. "The role of the Electoral Assistance Office has ended," Fida Nasrallah, Chief Electoral Advisor with the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), said on Wednesday, adding that she will deliver a final report in June based on the written reports of electoral advisors. "I would describe the experience overall as having been extremely successful," she said. UN electoral advisors visited polling centers to monitor the process on the election day, and since then have also helped analyze the election results. They have also trained political parties in selecting candidates to meet quota requirements, as well as setting up media monitoring for non-electoral periods.

Compiled from reports ■



Chinese take Olympic torch to the Everest peak Kantipur

PRIME MINISTER GIRIJA PRASAD KOIRALA who is also the officiating head of the state has summoned the Constituent Assembly (CA) to meet on May 28. He has called the meeting of CA as per the interim constitution which says that the first meeting of CA should be called within 21 days of publication of final election results. The PM has called the first meeting on 11 am of May 28. The first meeting is expected to implement the declaration of republic. Meanwhile, taskforce of seven party alliance is doing its homework on pro-tem procedures and regulations in the run up to the meeting, which will be held at Birendra International Convention Center (BICC).

THE NEPAL ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY (NEA) has reduced load shedding hours after water level in rivers have increased resulting in greater generation of power. The weekly 21 hours of load shedding will now decrease to 10 hours. However, the NEA has not formally announced this reduction because the 60 MW strong Khimti project will shut down its operations for three weeks beginning Sunday for maintenance. This could increase the load shedding hours.

OVER A HUNDRED DOMESTIC ORGANIZATIONS could disqualify for future election observation missions in Nepal for failing to submit their preliminary reports, Election Commission sources said on Sunday. The EC directive for the observers states that those organizations which have received EC accreditation as observers should submit their preliminary reports within 15 days of polls and detailed reports within three months. But according to the EC record, only 13 domestic bodies and five international bodies have submitted their preliminary reports to the EC till the date. In total, there were 178 organizations accredited to observe the election. Over 60,000 domestic observers from 148 organizations and 856 international observers from 30 organizations were assigned duty to observe the historic election. Commissioner Dr Ayodhi Prasad Yadav said those organizations, which have failed to

submit their reports, would be black-listed and their applications to observe any future elections would be rejected. "We are making a list of the organizations that failed to meet the EC directive," he said, adding that the EC was not going to request them to submit their reports. Yadav also said the organizations violated the EC directives by ignoring their responsibility to send reports. "It is their duty to submit reports. We had told this to them while awarding them accreditation," he said. An officer at EC said the 18 reports submitted by the observers hardly had anything new that has not already been reported by the media. "The EC would soon study the reports and classify them," the officer said. "It is difficult to understand why those organizations are not submitting their reports," he said.

THE NUMBER OF NEPALIS GOING ABROAD FOR JOBS has significantly risen in the past nine months as compared to the same period last fiscal year. According to the Department of Labour and Employment Promotion, 223,000 youths left the country for work in different countries especially the Gulf, by mid April. Last year, 142,600 Nepalis had gone to foreign countries. However, the month of Chaitra (mid March to mid April) saw downward trend with just 12,000 people going abroad in search of work while the number in the same period last year was 21,000. Qatar, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and UAE were the chosen destinations for Nepali job-seekers this year, too. Department officials say that cases of fraud have also grown as the foreign employment 'enterprise' continues to thrive. The department has registered 314 complaints, almost all of them related to fraud by agents, in the past nine months. Officials admit that many cases of fraud do not come into the sight of concerned government authorities due to the largely unregulated manpower business and lack of knowledge on the part of foreign employment seekers.

THE SUPREME COURT on Tuesday (May 6) rejected a plea by French lawyer Isabelle Coutant Peyre to defend Charles Gurumukh Sobhraj during the court proceedings. A division bench of Justices Min Bahadur Rayamajhi and Kalyan Shrestha rejected the French lawyer's request, which was made during on Tuesday's hearing. "The bench rejected her request saying that there is no such precedence here," Raja Ram Dhakal, Sobhraj's Nepali lawyer said. The bench, however, said a foreign lawyer could assist Nepali lawyers in any case. Former Attorney General Badri Bahdur Karki, senior advocate Basanta Ram Bhandari and advocate Dhakal defended Sobhraj during Tuesday's hearing on fake passport case. Sobhraj's counsel argued that the chargesheet against Sobhraj was silent on any offence under the Act Relating to Foreigners-1958 and the related regulation, so the charge of fake passport against Sobhraj was improper. They also argued that the apex court order to reopen the fake passport case against Sobhraj was baseless. The lawyers claimed that there was no evidence to prove his presence in the country in 1975. n

EARLY HISTORY OF SUEZ CANAL

NEPAL MUST NOT REPEAT EGYPT'S MISTAKE

§Dr. AB Thapa



Implementation of overambitious water resources development project without fully studying the financial, technical, environmental and all other relevant implications can be catastrophic for a country like Nepal. The history of the construction of the Suez Canal in the 19th century provides a glaring example how the Egypt's economy was totally devastated. Government was declared bankrupt. Foreign intervention finally compelled Egypt to relinquish sovereignty. On the contrary the financing country the Great Britain enormously profited from the Suez Canal project.

Ancient Canal

The Isthmus of Suez so obviously provided a short sea route from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and

beyond as against the sea voyage around Africa that a canal was dug in antiquity. The first canal between the Nile River delta and the Red Sea was excavated about the 13th century BC, possibly at the time of Egyptian ruler, either Seti I or Ramses II. For long periods of time during the next 1000 years the canal was neglected, but several rulers at various times had it re-excavated or modified. All efforts to maintain it in good condition were finally abandoned in the 8th century AD. From time to time thereafter various proposals to dig a canal across the Isthmus of Suez were advanced, but no action was taken.

Present Suez Canal

In 1854 the French diplomat and engineer Vicomte Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps succeeded in arousing the

interest of the Egyptian ruler Said Pasha in the Suez Canal project. Egyptian ruler authorized to construct the Suez Canal. The construction of the canal started in 1859 and ended in 1869.

Layout of Canal

Suez Canal is an artificial waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in northeastern Egypt. It connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea. The canal provides a

Suez Canal is an artificial waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in northeastern Egypt. It connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea. The canal provides a shortcut for ships operating between both European and American ports and ports located in southern Asia, eastern Africa, and Oceania.

shortcut for ships operating between both European and American ports and ports located in southern Asia, eastern Africa, and Oceania. It

is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes. The Suez Canal is 195 km long. The minimum bottom width of the channel is 60 m and ships of 16 m draft can make the transit. After it was opened to navigation in 1869, initially the Suez Canal measured only 8 m deep, 22 m wide at the bottom, and 70 m wide at the surface.

Suez Canal can accommodate ships as large as 150,000 dead weight tons fully loaded. It has no locks, because the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Suez have roughly the same water level. The canal utilizes three bodies of water—Lake Manzilah, Lake Timsâh, and the Bitter Lakes (the latter is actually one continuous body of water)—and is not the shortest distance across the isthmus. Most of the canal is limited to a single lane of traffic, but at several places passing bays exist,

and two-lane bypasses are located in the Bitter Lakes and between Al Qanparah and Ismailia. The Suez Canal is an open cut, without locks,

French Authorized to Build the Canal

In 1858 La Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez (Universal Company of the Maritime Suez Canal) was formed with authority to cut a canal and to operate it for 99 years, after which ownership would return to the Egyptian government. The company was originally a private Egyptian concern, its stock

owned

chiefly by French and Egyptian interests.

In 1875 the British government purchased Egypt's shares.

Construction

began in

1859 and took 10 years instead of the 6 that had been envisaged. Climatic difficulties, a cholera epidemic in 1865, and early labour troubles all slowed down operations. An initial project was the cutting of a small canal. At first, digging was done by hand with picks and baskets, peasants being drafted as forced labour. Later, dredgers and steam shovels operated by European labourers took over, and, as dredging proved cheaper than dry excavation, the terrain was artificially flooded and dredged wherever possible. Other than in the few areas where rock strata were met, the entire canal was driven through sand or alluvium. In August 1869 the waterway was completed, and it was officially opened with an elaborate ceremony in November.

Egypt was Declared Bankrupt

Construction of Suez Canal became too heavy financial burden on Egypt. Economic conditions

quickly deteriorated forcing Egypt to borrow from foreign creditors to finance the project. To stave off economic crisis, the government adopted drastic measures such as collecting taxes in advance, selling its shares in the company that operated the Suez Canal, and finally declaring bankruptcy. Egypt's inability to pay back its loans led to the appointment of foreign debt commissioners to monitor Egypt's finances in 1876, the inclusion of British and French ministers in Egypt's

cabinet in 1878,

and finally the forced abdication of ruler in 1879.

Under European pressure, a new

ruler was installed who cooperated with Egypt's foreign creditors.

Great Jubilation

Completion of

the construction of

the Suez Canal in 1869 had been marked with a great jubilation among the western power countries while the Egypt was slowly sinking into deep financial crisis. Verdi, Giuseppe (1813-1901), Italian operatic composer, whose works stand among the greatest in the history of Italian opera Aida (1871), perhaps Verdi's most popular opera based on Egyptian story of ancient pharaoh period, was specially commissioned to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal. It was first performed in Cairo.

British a Lucky Winner

In 1875, financial troubles compelled the Egyptian ruler to sell his holding, which was at once bought by the British government. Until that year the shares had remained below their issue price of 500 francs each. With the British purchase (at 568 francs each) quick appreciation took place. The share value shot up to more than 3,600 francs. ■



PM Koirala (Left) and Maoist Leader Prachanda : Collision Course

COALITION

Collision Course

Major partners in toppling the royal regime are drifting apart ahead of the planned abolition of monarchy

By SUSHIL SHARMA

The seven-party coalition is on the verge of collapse. Over an issue they were united till the other day — the monarchy.

The first meeting of the constituent assembly is fast approaching. Less than two weeks remain now.

The Maoists have been exceptionally vocal about the declaration of a republic on the first day.

They have set deadline for the king to leave Narayanhity. They have warned to storm the palace, if the monarch defied.

The “enthusiasm” of the single largest party has however not been matched by the rest in the assembly.

The others, notably the Nepali Congress and the UML, are too preoccupied with deliberations on how to tame, if not stop, a Maoist-led government.

Their fears have shifted now from the vestiges of “autocratic monarchy” to the ghost of “communist authoritarianism” of the Maoists.

The conditions set for a future coalition with the red brigade emanate from that fear.

On their part, the Maoists are in a hurry to move beyond the seven-party alliance. Having left the two major partners far behind in the CA polls — in terms of seats if not the votes.

The Maoists have accused prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala of dilly-dallying in handing over power to them. And in moving a republic motion in the first meeting of the CA.

Thundered Baburam Bhattarai, “Koirala has shown greed for power by refusing to step down immediately after the Nepali Congress fared badly in the polls.”

“We will throw the king out of the palace if he did vacate it before the first meeting of the CA.”

But some key non-Maoist leaders have doubts.

“The Maoist strategy appears to shift the blame on other parties mainly the Nepali Congress on a possible change in plans to declare a republic,” according to a prominent Nepali Congress leader,

“That is why they held dialogue with the king’s representatives keeping the other parties in the dark.” said the Nepali Congress luminary with close ties with the Maoists since the peace process began two years ago,

The Maoists reject such suggestion outright. But, one thing they can not deny is that the seven-party coalition is cracking under the weight of their recent poll showing. Notwithstanding the oft-repeated stress on continuing the alliance.

Said an analyst, “having made most of the alliance with the Nepali Congress and the UML, the Maoists want to go it alone, now.” Looking for new partners from unlikely quarters. ■



Karachi skyline: Bustling city

PAKISTAN ECONOMY

Resilient And Ready

Despite political turmoil and occasional problems like food prices and weakening rupee, Pakistan's economy is growing by seven percent. It looks set to take off further following introduction of democratic government

By SANJAYA DHAKAL in Karachi, Pakistan

At a time when Nepal is constantly hearing about the astounding growths in two of its neighboring countries India and China, there is another neighbor, which is also attaining a handsome growth in all these years - Pakistan.

Like Nepal, Pakistan also went through political instability and conflict in the last couple of years but unlike Nepal, Pakistan was able to maintain a robust economic growth as well.

The bustling city of Karachi, the busy streets of Lahore and posh business centers of Islamabad – all point to the resilience of Pakistan's economy.

Nepal and Pakistan have been through similar political problems in the last many years, which were marked by perpetual political uncertainties and turmoil.

However, Pakistan has provided an important lesson to be learned on how the economy can be kept growing amid such difficult circumstances.

The decade-long conflict has dragged Nepal's growth below 2 percent

while Pakistan has steadied itself on around seven percent growth for the last five years.

A country of over 160 million people, Pakistan has been successful in steering its economy on a right course despite political instability as well as energy crisis. It also suffers from load shedding problems like Nepal.

Located in a geo-strategic vantage point between energy-rich Middle East and Central Asian countries and market-rich China and India, Pakistan attracted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) totaling \$ 5.12 billion in 2007, according to Shafqat Saeed Piracha, vice president of Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The FDI level was way down at \$ 485 million five years ago.

The size of Pakistan's economy has nearly trebled from \$ 58 billion to \$ 148 billion in the last five years.

Although the level of poverty is still dissatisfactory, the per capita income has gradually increased reaching \$ 925.

Its exports have increased by 86 percent in the period from \$ 9.13 billion

to \$ 17.01 billion. The foreign exchange reserves have surged to \$ 16.10 billion from \$ 10.72 billion five years ago.

Textiles, food products, pharmaceutical products, construction materials, leather products are major export items of Pakistan. "We have plenty of cement, which we can export to Nepal if we can get access to transport them," said Piracha, adding that his country has also been exporting cement to India.

In recent months, the price of cement in Nepal has increased by many folds due to lack of its availability since India has restricted its export in order to control inflation.

Exploring such avenues could be beneficial since the current level of Nepal-Pakistan trade is quite low. "Trade between us is not very high and is at around \$ 4.7 million, mainly due to logistical difficulties. Pakistan has also provided duty free access to 10,000 metric tons of tea from Nepal," said Masood Khalid, Additional Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

Inflation, particularly in food prices, have hurt Pakistan like all other countries in the world. "We are also concerned by weakening rupee value against dollar," Piracha said pointing to new challenges of Pakistani economy.

A huge market on its own, Pakistan was able to survive the turbulent times due to its robust indigenous economy. "We are large country of 160 million people. All of us will need certain products like we all will drink tea or buy something, travel somewhere – causing the economy to roll on," said Khalid Maqbool, governor of Punjab province.

Over 50 million mobile phones have been sold in Pakistan, where 800,000 motorcycles are manufactured every year.

"But we are facing problem of energy. We have 3000 MW deficit in the energy at present," said Dr. Ishrat-ul-abab, governor of Sindh province.

However, experts and businessmen believe that following the February election and transition to democracy, the economy of Pakistan could grow further in the coming years. ■



Sindh Minister Shazia Marri: Rising role of women

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN ELECTION

Strong Showing

Almost forty percent of parliamentarians in Pakistan are women including ministers and the first lady Speaker

By **SANJAYA DHAKAL**
in Islamabad, Pakistan

The recent elections in both Nepal and Pakistan have been fruitful for increasing the role of women in politics.

Just as the April 10 elections of Nepal has brought in encouraging numbers of women in the political leadership position, the February 18 elections in Pakistan, too, has opened up fresh avenues in that regard.

Pakistan, which is often portrayed as being a place where women are victimized due to religious extremism, has come up with encouraging number of women politicians.

For the first time not only in its history but also in the history of Islamic world, a lady Speaker has been elected in Pakistan. Dr. Fahmida Mirza, a close aide of late former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has been elected as the Speaker of the National Assembly.

In the federal cabinet, Sherry Rahman is regarded as one of the most active ministers. She is the Minister for Information.

"Of the 642 seats in the National Assembly, almost 40 percent are occupied by women," said Masood Khalid, Additional Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

Even in provincial governments, women leadership are emerging. There are four provinces in Pakistan – Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and North West Frontier Province.

In Sindh Province, Shazia Marri is the Minister for Information. A journalist-turned-politician, Marri, who belongs to the party led by Bhutto – the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), says that women are making big strides in the country.

According to Khalid Maqbool, governor of Punjab province, particularly the western media have portrayed a stereotyped image of Pakistan regarding the situation of gender discrimination. He said there are now more women than men in universities.

"There is no doubt they have not attained what they deserve. Especially in economy, they are given secondary role," he said, adding. "And things like honor killings of women in some parts are still there."

Often there are reports of militants torching girls' schools, particularly in restive tribal regions.

"But our people have made very comfortable arrangements to bestow the respect and dignity on women. There are many positive aspects, which do not find space in media," he said.

At a time when even the most developed countries like the United States have not yet had women presidents, South Asian countries including Pakistan have already given women prime ministers.

Analysts in Pakistan hope that the re-emergence of democracy and the encouraging show by women in election would help resolve long-standing social problems in the coming days.

Monarchy

On

Trial

As the session of the Constituent Assembly has been summoned for May 28, the issue of the fate of monarchy appears as the crucial agenda for its first meeting. Although many individual Kings have faced trials in Nepal, this is for the first time the institution of monarchy is facing the vote for its existence. The prominent question now is how the newly elected members of CA- supreme body of public trust- will abolish monarchy. For many followers of seven party alliance, it is now just a simple ritual to declare Nepal as a republic. Will CA abolish monarchy through a proclamation in its first meeting as prescribed by previous nominated interim parliament or wait till the promulgation of new constitution? The first decision taken by the newly elected members of CA will have a far reaching consequence to the country

By KESHAB POUDEL

“King Gyanendra should help us and himself by abdicating and leaving the Royal Palace. We want his graceful and respectful exit. This is also the mandate of the people,” said CPN-Maoist chairman Prachanda. “If he does not do so, the first meeting of CA will decide his fate.”

“Monarchy will be abolished within

the month of Jestha (May 14-June 14),” said speaker of Legislature Parliament Subas Nembang. “Within that period, the CA will declare the country as a federal republic. I am confident that without any hindrance, the monarchy will be abolished and the country will be declared republic.”

“The best option for King

Gyanendra is to abdicate. If he leaves Royal Palace before the proclamation of Constituent Assembly, it will be better for his future. This is the mandate of the people,” said another Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai.

Not only Nepali politicians, political leaders from India- which has the highest security stake in Nepal – too, seem to be



Statue of King Mahendra with palace in the background: Transformation in making

determined to abolish monarchy to pave the way for new experiment under the CPN-Maoist party. "Now, we believe that Nepali people will be able to establish a democratic republic. Indian people and the government will respect the decision taken by the Nepali people about their political future," said politburo member of the CPI (M) Sitaram Yechury in his recent visit to Nepal.

All these comments and expressions delivered by political leaders show that abolition of monarchy is their ultimate aim. The interim constitution has been amended in such a way that many people with extreme outlooks think that it is only a ritual now. According to them, the decision has already been taken and what

remains to be done is merely to implement it through the parliamentary approval.

Before the monarchy is actually being put into vote, seven party government including the Maoists did everything over the last two years to root out monarchy from the perception of the common man.

According to a lawyer, the intention of putting the monarchy to vote in such a crisis situation is itself an example of how the monarchy is being pushed aside without proper judgment.

"The era of monarchy will come to an end on May 28 when the first meeting of CA will declare Nepal as a republic," said Krishna Pahadi, a human right

activist and member of civil society. "Some may have a ray of hope but I don't have any doubt about abolition of monarchy and declaration of Nepal as republic."

In a typical way, like during the period of Cromwell in England when Cromwell and his followers beheaded King Charles- who was put in a stage-managed trial with an aim to remove the monarchy. Like Cromwell and his supporters whose set order was that the King had to die. Their only question was how; by assassination? A discreet poisoning? In the end, they decided to put him to death as per the stage-managed trial.

In a similar way, from Nepali Congress leader Girija Prasad Koirala to Maoist leader Prachanda and CPN-UML leaders Nembang and other leaders of seven party alliances, they have drawn the conclusion that the monarchy must be abolished. Nobody has concern about legitimacy or rule of law.

"Throughout history monarchies have been abolished either through legislative reforms, coups d'etat, or wars. The monarchy is a costly institution to preserve and it has been the subject of considerable controversy since King Birendra and many of the royalties were assassinated in 2001 in a very surprising way," said Bipin Adhikari, a constitutional commentator.

"In fact, there has been a varying tide of media criticism which has ebbed and flowed prompted by King Gyanendra's 2005 decision to exercise executive power to deal with Maoist menace, some inappropriate comments and conduct of certain other members of the royal family, and royal pomp and ceremonies. But they are not the reasons behind the abolition of monarchy in Nepal. The reason here is geopolitical. It is happening because the Nepalese monarchs proved for sure that they are not blindly negotiable for money, power and red carpets," said Bipin Adhikari, a constitutional commentator. "There are many people in Nepal, who think their right to take part in a referendum to decide about the king should have been recognized."

"Certain things were not possible as



PM Koirala: What next?

long as the monarch stood there as the protector of Nepal's political independence. This is not to defend the King or his unconstitutional trespasses, but to explain a phenomenon that comes as a challenge of nation building in this country. It is not just the King who is going with a heavy heart. Even the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who led the process of the current betrayal to the King, has no choice. The country has no use for him any more," said Adhikari.

According to the constitutional experts, the interim constitution is unclear regarding the procedure to formally declare Nepal as a republic. Of course, Gyanendra has right to abdicate and personally he can abdicate his kingship but what about the monarchy as an institution?

"Is monarchy a personal property of King Gyanendra? If that is the constitutional logic, personal resignation

of CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal from general secretary of CPN-UML or Prachanda's resignation from his party or G.P. Koirala from his party presidentship could or should abolish their respective parties. Two different standards are being set by our newly incarnated democrats: one for themselves and another for monarchy," said a former attorney general and constitutional lawyer on condition of anonymity.

Procedural Issues

If political leaders want to remove monarchy, the parties need to amend the article 159 by two third majorities and replace the article 159 and its proviso regarding the monarchy.

Article 159(2) says the implementation of (transition to) the republic shall be made at the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly. Provided that the Legislature Parliament

may implement the republic prior to the elections to the constituent Assembly if the king creates a serious obstacle to the Constituent Assembly Elections, by a motion in the regard passed by at least a two-thirds majority of the existing members of the Legislature-Parliament. Such a motion shall be presented before the Legislature-Parliament in accordance with a decision of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Nepal.

"The proviso cannot override the main provision of the main article 159. To implement the proviso, you need two third majority of CA. However, to implant the main clause, you are saying that no voting is required and simple declaration will do it. What a constitutional logic?," argued former attorney general. "It is unclear what procedure the first meeting of CA will follow in case of declaring Nepal as a republic."

As a non-elected body, monarchy is



Parliament: Assertive role

based upon its age old tradition, rules and customs. It is a hereditary institution in which successor is not appointed by his merits but by virtue of a birth in the family. That way a king can decide over his own fate but he cannot deprive his successor from inheriting the throne. As long as monarchy is there in Nepal, this is a valid practice to be observed.

"A democratic society is just society and a democratic government is just government and justice is needed for all. As long as monarchy is there, it also needs justice particularly in the situation like present," said a political analyst.

Nepal has a long history of monarchy of over two thousand years. Institution of monarchy has been in continuity. Of course, forms and dynasties have changed time to time but it continued. Shah Kings have been ruling since 237 years but before there were Mallas, Lichhivis, Thakuris and Kirats.

Monarchy for Stability

Although politicians and human

rights activists have been advocating the removal of monarchy to create new Nepal, they ignore the fact that the monarchy has played its role in stabilizing the society. There are many instances in Asia and other parts of the region where the removal of monarchy brought perennial political instability and devastation.

"It is just a myth that the monarchy will protect Nepal's integrity and sovereignty," said senior Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Badal. "The monarchy will be buried in the first meeting of CA."

The politicians who reached gentlemen's agreement regarding the role of monarchy betrayed one after another. Whether political leaders betrayed the king, people don't know. When Girija Prasad Koirala and King Gyanendra reach an agreement on April 22, 2006, there was no agenda in priority to make Nepal as republic. Even highly publicized 12-points agreement didn't mention abolishing the monarchy.

The prime minister was appointed by the King and he took oath of allegiance in the Royal Palace. "People were, by implication, assured to have continuity with change – continuity of the institution of monarchy and change according to the wishes of the people expressed through CA. Following the dictation from unseen center, Nepal has been pushed into whirlwind of political instability. One does not know where it will lead all the seen and unseen players," said the political analyst.

Changing Regional Dynamics

Removal of monarchy will not only change the internal dynamics of Nepal but it will also change the dynamics in Nepal's neighborhood. "After removal of monarchy, India and China will have to see face to face. There will be no safeguard for them," observed a foreign diplomat based in Kathmandu.

Journalist Sudhir Sharma in his recent news analysis in Nepal weekly predicts emergence of a new situation in which Maoists may be in a position to play Nepal's two neighbors once they are in power, "After growing Tibetan activities in Nepal, China is desperately searching a new political force which can defend its interest. With the abolition of monarchy, there are no other strong forces other than Maoists to protect Chinese interests," writes Sharma.

The case of Afghanistan is there where a mistake committed by former Soviet Union in removing the monarchical system finally ruined it. The prolonged political instability and political disorder forced Soviet Union to send its troops to stabilize Afghanistan prompting the entry of American power through Pakistan. Till Jahir Shaha ruled Afghanistan, it had played the role of a perfect buffer state with rise of moderation.

"The mistake which Soviet Union committed by involving itself in Afghanistan brought devastating results for it. India is inclined to commit a same mistake in Nepal which may unfortunately bring similar consequences," said a political analyst. "If one undermines the stabilizing factor of Nepal, it must be prepared to face the consequences. Nepal's peace and stability is not only for Nepal but it



King Gyanendra in Dakshinkali: Religious rites *Kantipur*

ensures the peace in the region too.”

Nepal's position vis-à-vis China and India is like an unalterable logic of geography as described by Sri Lankan president Jayewardene regarding the relations between India and Sri Lanka.

“One is free to do anything but one has to face the consequences also. This applies to the states also howsoever powerful they are,” said the analyst.

King's Move

As the day is coming closer, King Gyanendra is busy attending marriage ceremonies, receptions and worshipping the gods and goddesses. King Gyanendra worshipped Dakshinkali on Monday.

The monarch is very clear in his commitments to abide by the verdict of the people. Verdict is yet to come by proper means and ways through the CA. “The king is relaxed and not in a hurry of any kind,” said leader of RPP-Nepal Kamal Thapa. “The king abides by the verdict of the people.”

In the beginning, all political leaders were committed to abide by the CA about the fate of monarchy. Later on they deviated from their original stand and declared that the CA will abide what they will say. That way they turned CA as just a formality to fulfill their political command. “By getting a strong political backing from an unseen center, politicians have taken for granted the popular verdict,” said the analyst.

“Many countries have followed their own way to decide on the fate of

monarchy. For example, Australia recognized the right of Australians to take part in a referendum as to the status of the British Queen in Australia. The first question in the 1999 Australian referendum was whether Australia should become a republic with a President appointed by Parliament, a bipartisan appointment model which had previously been decided at a Constitutional Convention in February 1998. The second question, generally deemed to be far less important politically, asked whether Australia should alter the constitution to insert a preamble. Neither of the proposed amendments passed. It is not the time of Oliver Cromwell of 1649 who overthrew the English monarchy through the Parliament of England. Neither it is 1792 when the French monarchy was abolished (and later restored several times until 1871). We are in the 21st century. If there is democracy and the rule of law for the common people; they decide the turn of events for sure. If not, then it is the outsiders who take the decision. The political institutions of a subservient state, heavily influenced and mesmerized under a planned process, only rubber-stamp what they have been told to do,” said Adhikari.

As such, if leaders of political parties prevail, Nepal's republic will be under command at any moment since the ground has already prepared for such move. ■

Bhattarai's Statement Voice of Conscience

At his last leg of political career, former prime minister and octogenarian leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai speaks his conscience defending the need for an institution of monarchy

As the first session of Constituent Assembly is coming closer and Maoists and other parties are making efforts to



abolish monarchy through a declaration, seasoned politician Bhattarai is speaking the voice of his conscience.

“I urge all political leaders not to abolish the institution of monarchy as it could deepen the problems facing the country,” Bhattarai said in a written statement issued on Monday. The veteran leader Bhattarai - who was in prison for more than a decade in different jails during the direct rule of kings - sees the institution monarchy as an essential part of national unity.

“The institution of monarchy can still play a role to unify nation's culture and civilization and protect the national integrity and ethnic and geographical diversity of the nation,” said Bhattarai. “Since no party has an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly only politics of consensus can bail the country out of the current crisis and that failure to work on consensus would endanger the existence of the nation,” said Bhattarai.

When his colleague and prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala, whose brother B.P. Koirala died stressing the need for reconciliation with the king, is preparing to be a first president, Bhattarai has spoken his conscience in words, which only few people can speak in these turbulent times. ■



NC Leaders : Conditional support

POLITICS

Conditional Support

Nepali Congress and CPN-UML set conditions to pave the way for Maoist government prolonging political instability

By A CORRESPONDENT

As the prime minister has summoned the first meeting of constituent assembly on May 28, the political temperature has gone up to match the May heat.

The preconditions put by Nepali Congress and CPN-UML before the Maoists, which emerged as the single largest party in the last election, has pushed the country's political situation onto uncertain course.

When Maoists have been threatening to use all kinds of methods to form the government under their leadership, there are certain consensus among anti-Maoist parties as seen in the conditions put forward by the Nepali Congress.

"It is very surprising to see the new conditions laid down by Nepali Congress. I have not read all the conditions of Nepali Congress but there is no way we can follow their diktat," said CPN-Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. "Nepali Congress and CPN-UML must respect the verdict given by Nepali people."

Although Madhesi leaders agree on the issue regarding the resignation of Congress-led government and on giving the chance to the Maoists to form the government, they back NC's stand on amendment of constitution.

"We are with the other parties regarding the conditions of amendment of constitution," said Upendra Yadav, chief of Madhesi Janadhikar Forum. "The provision should be made to replace the government on the basis of majority not on the basis of two third."

Nepali Congress leaders, who compromised and sacrificed everything in the last few years to please the Maoists, have now started even questioning the intention of Maoists and their alliance with other forces.

"The Maoist charted extremely utilitarian course by using blatant words against prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala who they had once praised as the most towering personality in the Nepali

political field," said senior Congress leader Ram Chandra Poudel. "Once they had all the good words for Koirala but now they are humiliating him and knocking the doors of Kamal Thapa. We cannot keep mum against this tendency," said Poudel, who was one of the persons who had, at different times, labeled Maoists as a pawn of palace to a messiah of democracy.

After forwarding conditions for support to form the new government, NC and CPN-UML have shown that they will not let the Maoists form government without fulfilling certain pre-requisites.

The demands of Nepali Congress include: the amendment of interim constitution adding clauses to form and dissolve the government on the basis of simple majority, dissolution of Maoist army, People's court and People's government, dissolution of YCL's paramilitary structure, prevention of anarchical activities, immediate handover of arms and ammunition stored in Maoist cantonment, formation of political unit to reintegrate and rehabilitate the Maoist cadres, return of property seized by Maoists and rehabilitation of internally displaced population and guarantee of independence of judiciary, police administration, constitutional bodies and government media.

"This is the view of Nepali Congress. If Maoists want our support to form the government, they must fulfill these conditions forwarded by our party," said Bimendra Nidhi, general secretary of NC. "Maoists must agree on these conditions to forge an alliance for future."

At a time when Maoists have been talking about one point agenda of abolition of monarchy from the first meeting of CA and formation of new government under their leadership, the new conditions laid down by two major parties have pushed the country into another direction.

Maoist leaders have already declared that they will march tens of thousands of people in the streets of Kathmandu in case of denial of power to them. "If Girija Prasad Koirala declines to resign, he will be thrown out of the chair by the people," said Dr. Bhattarai.

NC, too, has similar stand. "We will not allow Maoists to form the government without amendment of the interim constitution," said Congress leader Govinda Raj Joshi.

As the disputes among major political parties begin, the formula of consensus will be replaced by course of confrontation. ■

“We Want Abdication Of The King With Due Respect And Dignity”

- Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda

CPN-Maoist chairman PUSHPA KAMAL DAHAL aka Prachanda has been proposed as a new prime minister by his party. As the constituent assembly meeting draws closer, he talks about various issues regarding his party's new role. Excerpts of his interview by RABINDRA MISHRA for BBC Nepali Service:

Are you sure that Nepal will turn into democratic republic now?

There is no doubt about it. This is the mandate of the people expressed through the election for Constituent Assembly. I don't have any doubt in my mind regarding this.

What about the possibility of forming new government on your own leadership?

Since Maoists have emerged as the single largest party, we have the mandate to do it. I don't have any doubt about forming the government under my leadership.

Other political parties are demanding the need to dismantle the Young Communist League and pointing out that you need to give up the position of the chief of rebel army and return properties seized by your party, what do you say?

There is no question of dismantling YCL. It is a purely non-political demand. Would other parties dismantle their sister organizations? So far as resigning from People's Army is concerned, I continue in the position as a part of comprehensive peace process.

Are you considering mobilizing YCL in development activities?

They can also be mobilized for that purposes as they are very dedicated and disciplined youths.

Will you pay them when you head the government?

We are also considering that.

What type of government will you lead?

It is still pre-mature. First of all there is a need for consensus among seven parties and then we need to discuss the matter with newly emerged parties. Then only we can say about the nature of government. After forging political consensus, we will form the government.

What would be the first proposal for coming CA?

The proposal would be to declare Nepal as a republic and remove the monarchy.

There is also a rumor that Nepali Congress is demanding that their leader Girija Prasad Koirala be made president. Is it acceptable to you?

We have already made it clear that creating two powerful positions of prime minister and president will create more trouble. Such system will create parallel form of power centers and divide the loyalty of state. If loyalty is divided, we will face problems even in writing of the constitution. And there is no such provision in the interim constitution as well. After declaration of republic, we can follow the similar pattern as now where a prime minister and head of the state will be the same person. We are discussing the issue among ourselves.

What is the level of your dialogue with palace now?

We want abdication of the King with due respect and dignity. This process is directly and indirectly going on. What I am saying is, if it is necessary, I am ready to meet the King before the first meeting of constituent assembly. The King has already indicated his understanding about the verdict of the people. There were such indications in his statement given after the election of CA. If we build consensus on the issue regarding abdication of King Gyanendra that will be good for all of us.

Have you received any message from palace in response to your statement that you are ready to meet with the King?

I have not received any formal response from the King. But, indications are that there is possibility for dialogue to find out solution through consensus. I have been receiving such kinds of indications from the King.

Persons close to palace have been saying that the King is completely relaxed and assured of his position and he is not going to give up his position so easily. Even some of them are saying that the King wants to settle the issue of monarchy through the referendum. What do you say?

After declaration of republic, we can follow the similar pattern as now where a prime minister and head of the state will be the same person.

Some people might have said so. The mandate expressed in the election and the current political situation, however, do not give space to that kind of logic. If the King declines to accept the mandate of the people and starts thinking something else, it is neither in his interest nor his family and the country. I don't think the King can take such foolish action.

What kind of alternative has the palace proposed to you?

The palace has not proposed any alternative and there is no alternative at all before the palace. There is no alternative before the King other than to give up.

You have publicly said these things many times but why has the King not left the Royal Palace?

This is still in the negotiation and discussion stage. This may be the reason why the King has not vacated the palace. I think insiders of palace may be monitoring all these new development and situation since the first meeting of Constituent Assembly will implement the decision to make Nepal a federal republic. Palace might have thought that they will find certain solution till the first day of CA. It is not necessary that the King should vacate the palace (right now). If the King announces voluntary retirement on the day of convening of the first meeting of constituent assembly, people will see the role of Gyanendra Shah in making of a new Nepal. That will be a good thing for Nepal.

Are you really interested to meet the King before the first meeting of CA?

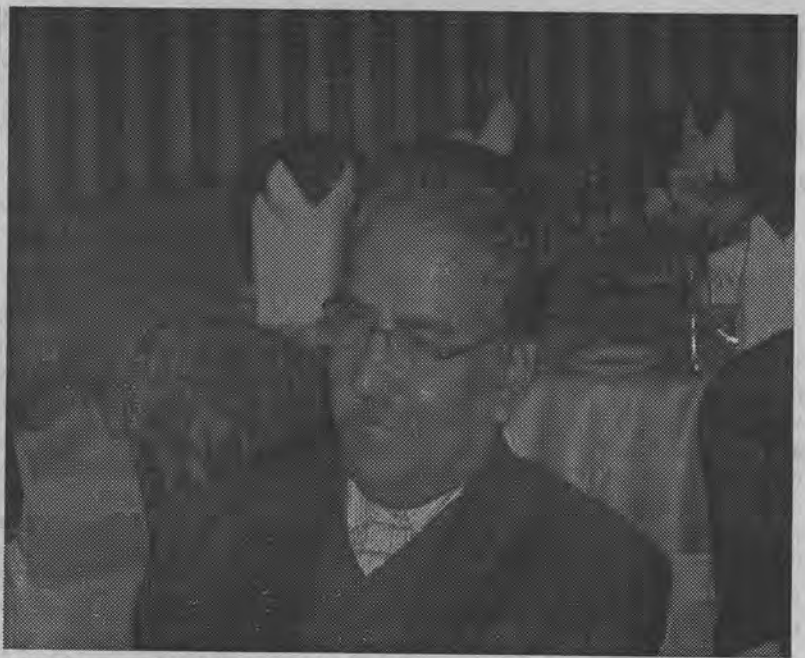
If it is necessary, that is definitely true. One thing is that our dialogue is going on indirectly. If King Gyanendra thinks meeting directly with me can make things easier, I am interested to meet the King.

You used to be quite angry with the chief of Nepal Army. What is your relation now with Nepal Army?

We will strengthen the army as per the spirit of Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Interim Constitution. Since we all have agreed to change the army as per the Loktaantra, there is no difference at individual level.

Will you change the army chief if you lead the government?

The indication I have received from army and statements appearing publicly that army has no objection and difficulty to work under the legitimate government - these are very much welcoming statements and respect democratic spirit and culture. In that context, even if the government is formed under my leadership, we will



not take any drastic step to change the structure of the army. Nepal will run under existing laws and regulations.

You have been raising the question of restructuring of army with integration of Maoist rebels into the army. Will you integrate Maoist rebels into Nepal Army or will they be included in forces like industrial security force?

When we have been talking about the integration of our army, it does not mean that all of our cadres need to be integrated into the army or that all of them need to be included in the industrial force. This issue needs discussion in broader terms. After discussions, we may find out how to integrate our army into the national security forces. Whether it is going to be the integration of individuals or units, we will discuss all these matters in detail. We have not decided this issue in concrete terms yet.

What will you do if you do not receive consensus to form the government on your leadership?

We don't have any alternative to consensus. If that happens, it will not bring a good result. Such moves will also not serve the interest of the country. This will not solve the problems of the country.

If Girija Prasad Koirala does not present the proposal for republic, there may also appear problems and you also need to manage two third majority in case you fail to develop consensus for your leadership?

I cannot even imagine that Nepali Congress and Girija Prasad Koirala will attempt to take such nasty decision. That means it will be against the democratic value, which we want to institutionalize through the CA. ■

One thing is that our dialogue is going on indirectly. If King Gyanendra thinks meeting directly with me can make things easier, I am interested to meet the King.

KING AND COMRADES

The Maoist victory in Nepal is not as conclusive as is made out

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Champions of Hindutva might go into sackcloth and ashes and ageing parlour pinks croak with delight, but the Maoist victory in Nepal is almost as exaggerated as Mark Twain's death. The outcome of the two-phase election, which commentators, whose wishful thinking runs away with reason, hailed as "stunning" and "stupendous", "epoch-making" and "extraordinary", is by no means as conclusive as is made out.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) secured only 29.3 per cent of the vote. Given Nepal's anguish during ten years of insurgency when 13,000 people perished, contrasts between poverty and wealth, royal autocracy, political chicanery and harsh social divisions, one would have expected a landslide in favour of the one party that flaunting its classless, casteless revolutionary zeal, vowed to sweep away the inequalities of centuries and usher in the idyllic millennium.

Clearly, voters were not convinced that Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka Comrade Prachanda, is indeed the Redeemer. That does not stop him from airing his presidential ambition and treating the prime ministership as a foregone conclusion.

The CPN(M) captured 120 out of 240 seats in the direct election. Its 29.3 per cent vote gave it another 102 from the 335 seats filled by proportional representation. Prachanda thus has a total of 222 (possibly one less) out of 575 parliamentary seats. That excludes the 26 nominated members who are expected to make up for representational lacunae and bridge gaps between different groups.

If the CPN(M) gets half these, it will have only 235 members in a house of 601. That is certainly an impressive showing for a first-time contestant and gives the Maoists a better claim to office than other contenders. But theirs will still be a minority government, which is why Prachanda is fishing for support from the Nepali Congress and Communist Party

of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) and even the three Madhesi parties. The need for this horse-trading explains why the "supreme commander" who used to swear by the inevitability of war with India now talks reasonably of "a new dimension" in relations, while his deputy, Baburam Bhattarai, compliments New Delhi on its "positive role", confirms that the CPN (M) "wants to maintain (its) relations with the Indian government" and even hints that offending Maoists may be punished.

Precisely because of these hotchpotch results with no clear winner, India faces an even more difficult and delicate challenge in the landlocked Himalayan kingdom. How difficult and delicate will not be fully revealed until a coalition emerges. Suspicion of India is probably the only factor that unites monarchists and Maoists, not because of India's sins of omission or commission — though there have been plenty of both — but because of the unalterable logic of geography of which J.R. Jayawardene warned when the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was launched in Dhaka. India's strongest card is that anyone with any sense knows that Nepal just cannot survive without its generosity. First evident when King Mahendra foolishly tried to turn his back on his southern neighbour and divert trade to the northern Kodari road, this was confirmed during the 1988 partial blockade. A fanciful scheme to import oil through Karachi and over the Karakoram Highway through Tibet would have meant using 50 litres of fuel for every litre of kerosene.

If Nepal cannot do without India, India cannot do without Nepal.

Mutual need should create a cooperative bond, not generate competitive one-upmanship in which the bigger partner is inevitably accused of bullying. If that is again allowed to happen, Prachanda will be tempted to go on the rampage against India's perceived hegemony. It's not just the 1950

peace and friendship treaty that is being questioned. Prachanda's statement that he wants "to review all other treaties signed between Nepal and India" must be read in the context of Bhattarai's criticism of the 1816 treaty of Segauli which forced Bhim Sen Thapa's expansionist regime to cede one-third of the territory that then comprised Nepal. Kumaon and Garhwal in the west and large tracts of the Terai in the south were incorporated in India while Darjeeling district in the east was restored to Sikkim.

Bhattarai argues that Nepal's economic fortune plunged after Segauli. Such issues that straddle domestic and foreign affairs and can be said to have a high emotional content assume additional importance in the face of daunting problems at home. A decade of civil war's toll of agriculture, exploding population, the rising price of food grains and the increasing global cost of oil would have challenged the resourcefulness of an experienced government with an unassailable mandate. Prachanda's insistence that his People's Liberation Army with a nucleus of 3,000 ideologically committed cadres must be "integrated with the state army" is bitterly resented by the nearly 290 MPs of the Nepali Congress, CPN(UML) and the three Madhesi groups. So, at another level, will abolition of the monarchy. For the throne is revered even if its occupant is detested.

A February opinion poll conducted by Britain's department for international development and the Asia Foundation found that 49.3 per cent of Nepalese want a king against 38 per cent who don't. It is revealing that 60 per cent of respondents were anti-monarchy in a similar poll last June. Clearly, the anti-incumbency factor works fast in Nepal, and some people are already beginning to lose patience with the shenanigans of politicians. That might explain the uncharacteristic courtesy of Prachanda's promise that "the king will not be removed forcefully or dishonorably", and the meeting he and Bhattarai had with Kamal Thapa, president of the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party. The same survey showed that while 59 per cent of Nepalese want their country's Hindu status to continue, only 31 per cent seek the secular label. Nepalese society is inherently conservative. It follows tradition. If the Maoists ban

recruitment by the Indian army, Gorkha lads will simply slip across the 1,700 kilometres of unguarded border to join up. Closure of the border would not only violate the 1950 treaty but — far more to the point would seriously affect Nepal's trade and employment.

A World Bank directors visit, which promised help with hydroelectric projects, indicates that the CPN(M) is no longer at war with the rich and powerful. The meeting with Nancy Powell, the American ambassador, who also promised continued assistance, is another straw in the wind of change. Though last year the state department did not regard the CPN(M) important enough to be branded a full-blooded terrorist organization, it did lump the Maoists with 42 rag-bag organizations — including our Communist Party of India (Maoist),

Japan's Red Army and sundry Irish and Islamic outfits — in the Group of Concern category. Even last Wednesday's American announcement says that "the Maoists continued to engage in violence, extortion, and abductions, and tensions remained high" throughout 2007 "as crime, abductions, and general lawlessness were evident throughout Nepal". No doubt Prachanda will play his cards more carefully for the 2008 report.

India must deal fairly with a Maoist-dominated government, but will have to remain wary of any gulf between its professions, intentions and actions on the ground. There is a danger, too, that the Maoist minority might, through sabotage or subversion, try to upstage coalition partners, seize total control and wreak its will on Nepal and the Nepalese. That is how communist members of East Europe's post-war united fronts established one-party control. But today's China is no hegemonic Soviet Union. India also enjoys some leverage although it can easily become counter-productive. But the real hope lies in the self-serving temperament of Kathmandu's top comrades who are not so unlike their counterparts in Calcutta and Delhi. Their god need not fail, for while the rank and file believe, the leaders only calculate as they yearn for the loaves and fishes of bourgeois respectability. Revolutions devour their children in France; here, they nibble away at credibility. Ultimately, only bombastic rhetoric remains. (Courtesy: TheTelegraph_sunandadr@yahoo.co.in)

WB GRANTS

Impetus For Projects

The World Bank grants US\$ 127 m to Nepal for various projects

By A CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank (WB) has announced US\$ 127 million grants for three separate projects in Nepal, one being the Emergency Peace Support Project which aims to consolidate the peace process.

A press statement issued by the WB on Wednesday (May 7) said that the US\$ 50 grant under the Emergency Peace Support Project intends to help the government of Nepal fulfill commitments made under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the subsequent 23 Point Agreement.

As part of the peace process, the Nepal government has authorized payments of US\$ 1540 each to the families of the war deceased. It has also authorized monthly payment of US\$48 to approximately 19,600 verified Maoist combatants living in different cantonments, including arrears on these payments that have built up over the past 10 months, the WB said.

In addition, the project will also help the government pilot reintegration initiatives. "There is a high degree of commitment at the political level to ensure lasting peace in Nepal, and this project is designed to contribute to this agenda," said Susan Goldmark, WB's Country Director for Nepal.

Likewise, the WB also approved additional grant financing of US\$50 million for the Nepal's health sector and US\$27 million for the Second Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project.

The grant to the health sector program is designed to expand access to and the use of essential health care services, especially by underserved populations. In addition, the grant will support two recent initiatives: the removal of some user fees and the introduction of the Safe Delivery



Power Project : Lack of resources

Incentive Programme benefiting poor and disadvantaged women and children.

"The original project, which was approved on September 9, 2004, has helped a rapid expansion of access to essential services. For example, the community-based integrated management of childhood illnesses has been expanded from six to 55 districts and will cover all the country's 75 districts within a year."

The grant for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project will scale up the project to provide services to more remote rural areas. According to the bank, aims to improve institutional performance of the rural water supply and sanitation sector and will also support communities to form inclusive local water supply and sanitation user groups that can plan, implement, and operate drinking water and sanitation infrastructure that delivers sustainable health, hygiene, and productivity benefits to rural households.

These grants are from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's concessionary lending arm. ■

BOOK EXHIBITION

Knowledge Show

As in the past, the 12th Nepal Education Book fair 2008 offers varied choices of book

By A CORRESPONDEN

From young to old, and students to scholars, the exhibition Hall of Bhrikuti Mandap is jam-packed as various kinds of people who are busy picking books of their choices ranging from history to culture, religion to philosophy.

The 12th annual Nepal Education and Book Fair is an attraction for people of different walks of life. For students who want to go for educational institutions with quality education, the fair offers various choices.

Organized by Global Exposition and Management Service Pvt. Ltd in collaboration with National Booksellers, and Publishers Association of Nepal, the exhibition was inaugurated by legendary Indian actor Dev Anand.

Along with different colleges and educational institutions of Nepal, many renowned book publishing houses from Nepal and India took part in the exhibition. Mandala Book Point, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Educational Book Enterprises, Pairavi Book House, Ekta Book Bhrikuti Books are some of the prominent book stalls.

Similarly, Penguin, Sage Publication, Oxford and Cambridge and Indian National Publications, too, have brought many interesting books in their stalls. One of the main attractions of the exhibition this time



Anand inaugurates book exhibition: Rewarding expo

was the book written by Dev Anand "Romancing With Life."

Renowned for its publication of high quality books, India's National Book Trust has brought many books related to democratic, cultural and social values. Books related to Mahatma Gandhi, Indian democracy, cultural and other areas were other highlights.

With the huge collection of various national and international books, Mandala Book Stall was another attraction. "We have sold all kinds of book. My experience is that I have seen drastic change in the study behavior of local population," said Madhav Maharjan of Mandala Book Store. "This kind of exhibition will also help encourage people to develop reading habits."

Along with B.P. Koirala's Atma Brittanta, Karna Shakya's Soch and Narayan Wagle's Palpasa Café, there were also high demands of books written by other Nepali writers.

"Every year we experience more participation from different corners and professions. Earlier, people hardly had

any idea what a book fair was all about. Now, they wait for one to come. That is what we have achieved," said RC Timothy, managing director of Ekta Books.

The education exposition also attracted a large number of youths. From counseling for higher education to education institutions from various parts of the world, students kept themselves busy soaking up all the information they desired.

Educational institutions from India, Bangladesh, China, the United States of America, Australia, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada, Ireland, Russia and Germany took part in the exhibition. Nepalese education institutions also came with the various scholarship and education packages. ■

“There was never a class interested in massive industrial development, job creation and growth. It depends on who is leading the state.”

Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, senior Maoist leader, claiming his party will focus on high growth.

“Let us keep monarchy in status quo till the processes of writing constitution are completed.”

Kamal Thapa, president of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP-Nepal), saying that hasty implementation of republic could lead to a disaster in the country.

“There is no meaning of arresting demonstrators in the afternoon and releasing them in the evening.”

Zheng Xianglin, Chinese ambassador to Nepal, expressing dissatisfaction over the continued demonstrations by Tibetan exiles.

“Implementation of past commitments, favorable environment for co-ordination between the parties, reliable commitment on the future course of



Janabhawana

action (of Maoists) and assurance of exercising democratic behavior will be required from the Maoists for UML to be part of the next government.”

KP Oli, senior leader of Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), spelling out condition for cooperating with Maoist-led government.

“Press freedom must be guaranteed in the new constitution.”

Dharmendra Jha, newly elected president of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ).

“I would describe the experience overall as having been extremely successful.”

Fida Nasrallah, Chief Electoral Advisor with the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), announcing that the UN is wrapping up the role of UN Electoral Assistance Office.

TRANSITION

SUMMONED: The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly on May 28, by the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who is also the officiating head of the state.

WRAPPED UP: The Electoral Assistance Office in Nepal by the United Nations. The Office had provided technical aid and advice to

the Election Commission (EC) for recently concluded Constituent Assembly (CA) polls.

RETURNED: Hakon A. Gulbrandsen, Norwegian Deputy Minister for International Development, after a brief visit to Nepal.

ELECTED: Rajendra Kumar Khetan, as the Chairman of Laxmi

Bank Limited, by its board meeting, unanimously. Khetan is also the Chairman of the Khetan Group. He is an Honorary Consul of Portugal.





Dev Anand: Versatile Friendship

DEV ANAND

Friend in Need

Bollywood actor Dev Anand has shown that people-to-people relation between Nepal-India is much more important than the state-to-state relation

By A CORRESPONDENT

Whether under the direct rule of King's Gyanendra or the time of forming a new government led by Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist, it does not make any difference to renowned Bollywood actor Dev Anand. His message, all the time, is clear: nothing can alter the strong and warm relationship existing at people to people level.

Bollywood actor Dev Anand has made great contribution to strengthen the relations existing at the people to people level by making some very popular films in Nepal. His film Hare Ram Hare Krishna helped introduce Nepal's image in India.

For the last four decades, Dev Anand's passion to visit Nepal has continued. Even at this stage, he came to Nepal to unveil his autobiography

Romancing With Life. Indian envoy to Nepal Rakesh Sood released the book at the 12th Nepal Education and Book Exhibition.

Although he is 85, Dev Anand still has same the same charisma and his smile still has the same power to steal hearts. Three years ago when Indian media were making every efforts to tarnish the image of Nepal, Dev Anand had shown courage to speak about the long and warm brotherly relations existing between Nepal and India. This time, too, he exhibited same love and passion to Nepal.

Along with attending Book Exhibition, Dev Anand also interacted with Nepalese audience. Organized by B.P. Koirala India Nepal Foundation, Indian Cultural Center and India Embassy, the interaction program was

lively as Dev Anand discussed a wide range of relations existing between two neighbors.

"The way I have seen Nepal, most of you have not. It is a very beautiful country and we have many cultural and religious commonalities," said Dev Anand. "I've traveled the world. Mark my words, no place in this entire universe is as beautiful as your country. Even in Switzerland, many things are manmade. Nepal is god-gifted. I appeal to all to go to Nepal, go to the high mountains. They're tremendous. That's Nepal to me."

Being a close neighbor, Nepal and India naturally have seen many ups and downs in their political relation but that is not the case in the relations at people to people. Having many cultural and religious similarities and common religious values, the relation at people living in both countries remain harmonious.

"When I was about to start my shooting at this architectural place, many told me not to pick this venue. They said Nepal and India don't have good relations. I didn't care. I wanted to shoot in the place as a filmmaker and not as a politician. The moment I started shooting, the whole of Bhaktapur participated; and Mumtaz danced beautifully. No doubt, every one liked the film," said Dev Anand to The Kathmandu Post.

Whether one likes it or not, it is a reality that Nepal and India, though they have certain differences, cannot ignore the commonalities of interests in all spheres of life. Persons like Dev Anand can make a lot difference.

B.P. Koirala Nepal India Foundation has been playing very important role highlighting cultural commonalties existing between two countries. Although Nepal has seen transformation in political system as it became a secular state from Hindu Kingdom and is moving from monarchical to republic, unitary to federal, one cannot change religious and cultural commonalities existing between the two countries. ■

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