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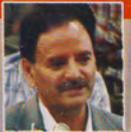


Politics: Lust Battle

Disaster: Quake Concerns

Face to Face:

Krishna Sitaula



New Spotlight's Investigation: Ilam Municipality

SPOTLIGHT

Jan. 21, Feb 03, 2011

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From The Editor

The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) is gone. After full 4 years. The peace process it was supposed to assist is not complete yet. The initial target of 6 months now sounds like a joke. After repeated extension of the UNMIN, the peace process is, instead, in danger. This, in itself, puts a questions mark on the UN mission's performance, notwithstanding the arguments in favour or against its extension. The UN may blame the 'insincere' Nepali actors. Critics may point fingers at the 'pro-Maoist bias' of the UN peace mission. The undisputed reality is: the UNMIN is gone without its mission accomplished. How will the peace process move now is the question that has been haunting many. Some are optimistic, some others are not. The only thing that is certain is uncertainty. The reason? The Nepali actors are fast losing control over what should happen in Nepal and how. That was what happened to the fate of the UNMIN. As Nepali actors remained divided, the world and the regional powers had the final say. This is what we have attempted to delve into in our cover story. Would Nepal have been worse off without the UNMIN? Or would be it better now that it is gone? That again, unfortunately, will in all probability, be decided not in the corridors of power in Kathmandu but in the powerful capitals abroad.

Keshab

Keshab Poudel
Editor

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South Asian Campaign for Gender Equality

The four existing distinct women's U.N. entities in the world body: the U.N. development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues; the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women; and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) have merged to create the new UN Agency for Women. UN Women will focus exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment and be as politically powerful and financially stable as other full-fledged UN Agencies. It is headed by the Under Secretary General Michelle Bachelet (former president of Chile). "The establishment of this new UN entity will mean more effective and expanded programming for gender equality, more resources, sustained long term programming, increased prioritization for Gender Equality and stronger accountability and leadership and extensive field presence. This is indeed a great victory for women's rights as well as for the coalition of women's and other civil society organizations that have worked hard for over four years to bring this entity into being." South Asian



Campaign for Gender Equality (SACGE) is a South Asian campaign with over 200 organizations across South Asia that advocated for stronger and resourceful gender equality architecture in the UN. The campaign was first initiated as a national campaign from Nepal as "Friends of UNIFEM" in March 2006 with thirty five organizations working for women's rights as members. SACGE is now part of the global campaign for UN WOMEN - GEAR (Gender Equality Architecture Reform). The demands of the Campaign were the need for a United Nations that really works for all women. A stronger women's entity at the UN which is fully funded to meet expectations and deliver results, led by an Under-Secretary General and supported by extensive field presence, has more authority, accountable at both the global and national levels through meaningful involvement of civil society and NGOs and active in promoting gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system.

weight for age (underweight), low weight for height (wasting), and/or deficient in vitamins or minerals (micronutrient deficiencies), has been neglected due to lack of attention and funding. As a result rates of under-nutrition have remained persistently high. In Nepal the EU grant will be used to support improved infant and young child feeding practices such as breast feeding and complementary feeding, prevention and management of severe malnutrition by boosting the ability of government staff at central, regional and district levels to address nutrition issues in the community.

Nordic Parliamentarians Meet PM

A visiting delegation of five parliamentarians from Denmark and Norway called on Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal. A statement issued by the UN Information Centre on January 17 said, the Nordic delegation held discussion on various issues related to peace and development of Nepal and the challenges it has been facing. The delegation also met Finance Minister Surendra Pandey and Chairman of the Constituent Assembly Subas Nemwang. "During the coming days of the visit, the delegation will travel to the field, visit Morang, Sunsari and Kapilvastu districts to see, first hand, the development and humanitarian programmes implemented by the UN country team in Nepal," the statement said. The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal, Robert Piper, welcomed the visit by the Nordic Parliamentarians as an opportunity for the UN country team to showcase results as well as highlight some of the challenges that Nepal faces in this important post-conflict transition period.

Indian Aid For Schools

Indian ambassador Rakesh Sood laid the foundation stone for the upgradation of infrastructure of six school buildings of Shree Rastrīya Primary School to be built with India's assistance of Rs. 4.45 crores under Nepal -India Economic Cooperation Programme. The schools are

EU Help For Children

The European Union is contributing a grant of €20 million to UNICEF to tackle under nutrition in five Asian countries where poor nutrition remains a major obstacle to development. Nepal is amongst the five countries which will benefit from the EU-funded Maternal and Child Nutrition Security project. Together with Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines, Nepal was targeted as a beneficiary country because of its huge nutrition problems but also due to its significant potential for change. Nepal is due to receive €3.2 million from the EU. "This EU grant is very encouraging for Nepal at this time as it focuses very clearly on the first 1000 days of a child's life - from conception

to two years of age - which is an absolutely critical period," said Ms. Gillian Mellsop, UNICEF Representative to Nepal. "For far too long the nutrition of pregnant women and of the under-twos has been neglected in Nepal and in South Asia as a whole. If we do not seize this opportunity it will simply be too late to make a lasting difference." During the four-year project, UNICEF will work with governments and partners targeting 30 million children and 5 million pregnant and lactating women in the five Asian countries and will promote good nutrition among policy makers, medical professionals and families. For years, under-nutrition, manifested by a child with low height for age (stunting), low

located at i) Nagarain-Jatahi; ii) Nagarain-Raghopur; iii) Ghorghas-Ganguli Pachhawari; iv) Ghorghas-Ganguli Daxinwari; v) Fulgama-Khadga; and vi) Lagama-Pachhawari VDCs in Dhanusha District. "The improvements in the infrastructure with Govt. of India's grant assistance will help in the creation of a significantly conducive environment for the students' community in the pursuit of their study programmes in keeping with their educational needs and towards raising the student enrolment in this area," says a press release from Indian embassy. According to the release, India-Nepal Economic



Cooperation Programme has an outlay over Rs 5700 crores with more than 385 large and small projects completed or currently being implemented in all

districts of Nepal in the sectors of education, health and infrastructure development. "These development projects have been undertaken in response to local needs and in partnership with the Government of Nepal. These projects reflect the commitment of the Government and the people of India to work together with the people of Nepal in their stride towards peace and development. Government of India looks forward to implementing many more such initiatives in association with the Government and people of Nepal."



Hearty Welcome to UN Women!!!

We, Women's Rights Organizations, Networks and Civil Society are extremely delighted at the historic birth of the New UN Agency for Women - **UN Women** and extend our best wishes for its success as it takes operation from **1 January 2011**.

We would like to thank all those organizations and individuals from Nepal and across South Asia who joined us since 2006 in our advocacy for a powerful and resourceful UN Agency with extensive national presence. We have all gone together through this historic journey — and transition of UNIFEM into—UN Women. On this occasion we also thank UNIFEM for its dedicated and relentless effort all these years in promoting women's rights and gender equality in Nepal

As it embarks in its journey of advancing women's' human rights and achieving gender equality we hope that the **UN Women** will forge effective partnership with civil society from global to local/grassroots organizations to deliver results on the ground and ensure that all women can enjoy their full human rights.

South Asian Campaign for Gender Equality (SACGE)

सचिवालय



CPRA



Didi Bahini



Equal Access



Homenet Nepal



Insec



LACC



Nagarik Aawaz



NIDS



NNSM



NSW



Pourakhi



Pro Public



RUWDUC



Samanata



Sancharika Samuha



Shanti Malika



Tewa



WAPPDCA



WHR



WSPG



WGS - TU



Governor Dr. Khatiwada

NRN Investment In Capital Market Sought

Governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Dr. Yubaraj Khatiwada hinted at steps to attract investment from the Non Resident Nepalis (NRNs) in the capital market. He said that the NRB was looking at ways to uplift the share market that has been on continuous slide. Addressing an NRN conference in Dubai, UAE, the governor said that the government will create environment conducive for NRNs to invest their savings in Nepalis share market. "The share market is very down at the moment. We don't want it to go any lower," said the governor.

WB Brings Down Growth Forecasts

Even as the government has predicted there would be 4.5 percent growth rate in the country in the current fiscal year, the World Bank has forecast that the GDP growth rate will hover around 3.7 percent. The WB prediction for 2012, too, is not exciting for the government. It predicts that the growth will marginally rise to reach 4 percent in the next year. The WB outlook blames the continuous political instability as a reason for grim forecast. The WB report also states that the contribution of export to GDP will continue to slide in these two years. From 2010 to 2011, the contribution of export to GDP will come down by 1.9 percent and its contribution from 2011 to 2012 will come down by 1.1 percent, it states. In 2010, the contribution of exports to GDP stood at 12.9 percent, which will come down to 11 percent this year. That will further slide to 9.9 percent in 2012.

'PPA Rate Increase Vital To Reduce Load Shedding'

Independent Power Producers (IPPs) have claimed that they can help bring down the load shedding to zero within five years if the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) revises its Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) rate to Rs 5.99 per unit. The pressure group formed by the IPPs has claimed that they are in a position to generate 1580 MW of power through 113 projects in five years if the NEA increases the rate of power purchase. According to Bijayaman Sherchan, coordinator of

the group, the IPPs are unable to invest in power at present PPA rate of Rs 4.44 per unit due to increasing bank interest rates, and rise in prices of construction materials.

Huge Royalty Outstanding From UTL And Ncell

Some of the private telecom operators have run into tens of millions of liabilities with the government after failing to pay royalty as promised. According to Nepal Telecom Authority (NTA), the biggest defaulter is the United Telecom Limited (UTL). "The total outstanding royalty of UTL is to the tune of Rs 89 crore," said NTA executive chairman Bhesh Raj Kandel. Presenting his report to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the parliament, Kandel said that Ncell also has dues amounting to Rs 20 crore. Both Ncell and UTL had bid to pay more than the minimum 4 percent of revenue as royalty when they obtained the license. After the UTL failed to pay its dues, the Ncell, too, began to complain. It has now filed a case at the Supreme Court (SC).

PAC To Study Frequency Irregularities

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the parliament has formed five-member sub committee to look into possible irregularities in the distribution of frequency spectrum and unlawful usage of VoIP. Dr. Prakash Chandra



Nepal Telecom

Lohani heads the team, which has been asked to submit the report in a month. The PAC ordered the formation of the team after it was dissatisfied with the responses from the authorities on why beauty contest, instead of auction, was used to provide 2 G frequency spectrum and why the auction is not being held to provide 3 G spectrum. NTA chief Bhesh Raj Kandel had said that there were not clear provisions in the law to go for auctioning. He said that the NTA has submitted a proposal at the Ministry of Information and Communication to go for auctioning for the future distribution of 3 G spectrum. The PAC investigation into frequency distribution comes in the wake of reports of huge irregularities in 2 G spectrum distribution in India. ■



UNMIN Failed In Its Duty'

Established in 2007, UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was to supervise the disarming of the Maoist rebels and ensure a smooth transition from monarchy to democracy. India is opposed to granting an extension to UNMIN, convinced that it has failed to disarm the rebels and isn't expected to achieve this goal anytime soon. New Delhi also feels UNMIN has encouraged some western countries to interfere and complicate the internal process there. (Pranay Sharma in OUTLOOK magazine, India, Jan 17)

'UNMIN Did A Good Job'

The UNMIN has been sent back on the basis of a unilateral decision (of the Nepalese government) although it was here at the invitation of the both sides of the conflict - the government and the Maoists - under the comprehensive peace agreement to monitor the peace process. This decision has grossly violated the peace agreement. This also exposed the negative approach of the parliamentary parties of Nepal to the outside world. The world body had come here to ensure permanent peace in Nepal. But because of the non-performance of the Nepalese political parties who dance to the tunes of the foreign forces the UNMIN is being made to leave leaving the peace process incomplete. During its stay in Nepal the UNMIN efficiently fulfilled its mandate. (Pro-Maoist Janadisha daily, Jan 15)

In Defence Of

Unity Day

One must realize the country sandwiched between the two giant neighbours will find it very difficult to survive by being smaller than the present size. So, let's be aware of those seeking to undermine the importance of the national unity day observed on Poush 27. Those who initiated the series of loktantra diwas, prajatantra diwas, ganatantra diwas should not have dared to get rid of



the unity day. The Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah had laid the foundation of the modern Nepal. That was in 1768. The United States was born in 1776. Shah's unification campaign was older than that of Europe and the United States. Events show that Nepal is eight years older than the United States. As (former prime minister) Krishna Prasad Bhattarai mentioned in his recent book, Prithvi Narayan Shah, along with B.P.

Koirala and Laxmi Prasad Devkota, was the three Nepalese heroes born in our small country over the past 300 years. (Dhrubahari Adhikary in Tarun, Jan 10)

From India With Power?

Having attempted to improve the strained the party's ties with India and bring the Nepali politics back to the consensus road Baburam Bhattarai (following the recent visit to India) has brought the keys



for the Maoist leadership to knock the doors of power. Whether to use the key to open the doors for leading the government or to sing the unseasonal song of people's revolt and the principal enemy is up to the Maoist leaders to decide. (Purushottam Dahal in Himal, Jan 15)

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The Word Lab

PRIME MINISTER

A Lust Battle

The renewed race for the coveted office is unlikely to produce a long distance winner

By SUSHIL SHARMA

A re-energised Baburam Bhattarai has joined the race but the old horse Prachanda has jumped in the rings but Ram Chandra Poudel has not thrown in the towels. As the two fight it out Kul



Maoist Top-guns : Prachanda (Left), Bhattarai and Badal

has not hung up the boots. Prachanda would rather back Ram Bahadur Thapa | Bahadur Gurung is being projected as a compromise.



NC Trio : Poudel (Left), Deuba and Gurung

'Badal' than clear the way for Bhattarai | A resurgent Jhalnath Khanal believes he has reached the penalty box
The veteran Sher Bahadur Deuba



UML Bigshots : Khanal (Left), Nepal and Oli

but the Madhav Kumar Nepal-K.P.Oli combine has not left the guard.

After sixteen failed rounds over the past six months the fight for the prime minister's chair is on – yet again.

President Ram Baran Yadav has given a January 21 deadline to the parliament to find a consensus prime minister.

The consensus remains a mirage. So the deadline is almost certain to expire without a breakthrough.

The proposed amendments in the election regulations will however in all likelihood prevent the repeat of the inconclusive elections.

A majority government will sooner than later be put in place to succeed the caretaker government. Who will head it is not clear yet given the unmanageable squabbles within all parties – big and the small alike.

Deep divisions in the parties are too deep to allow a smooth sail for any new government.

The result: a clear winner is sure to be elusive as ever. A winner who can steer the peace process and the constitution-making to its "logical conclusion"

This will set the stage for a renewed debate for a non-party figure as a remedy to the crisis besetting the country in a critical political transition.

Prominent "civil society" leaders are already in the race. Behind the curtains, of course.

Like the political leaders, they have been knocking the doors of the influential power centres abroad to seek the all-important blessings.

The curtains could well be up. Sooner rather than later.

Whether that will bring the curtains down on the political drama on Nepal's transitional stage is a million rupee question.

Probably not. With geo-political atmosphere not conducive enough, the spectre of a prolonged instability is not over yet. ■

UNMIN'S EXIT

Common Agenda Uncommon Unity

Despite conflicting interests and, even, rivalry in the new Himalayan republic the influential world powers and the regional powers alike saw a common interest in the departure of the UN Mission in Nepal. The 190-member world body itself was no exception as proved by secretary general Ban Ki Moon's frustrations and anger.

By NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
in London

Until the Security Council's brief meeting on Nepal on January 5, some of the western countries had not completely ruled out the possibility of discussing the extension of the United Nations' mission in the country.

"It all depends on how things will unfold, but as of now we have not closed that option yet," a senior western diplomat in New York had said as ambassadors of the United States of America and the

United Kingdom in Kathmandu held meetings with both the government and the Maoists.

The western powers, that had in the past faced resistance from China and Russia on the issue of expanding UNMIN's mandate, knew that they had one more reason to be cautious this time: India.

Nepal's immediate southern neighbour was going to be present in the Security Council as one of the five newly

elected non-permanent members.

"We will have to brief these new members the situation about Nepal's peace process and what the Maoists and the government are saying about UNMIN," a highly placed source at the UN headquarters had told the BBC.

"More importantly, we will have to see what India has to say on whether UNMIN's mandate needs to be extended or not."

The caution apparently had to do

**UNMIN Headquarters**

with what has been widely viewed as India's resentment on the presence of a UN political mission in its backyard although New Delhi has made no such comment public.

Nor has it reacted to the recent widely covered media reports on its "role" to get UNMIN out.

Surprisingly to some, the Security Council meeting on January 5, was quite brief as no member country objected to the winding up of the UN mission.

**Landgren briefing the SC**

The closed door meet of the council thanked UNMIN chief Karen Landgren who had then just presented in the open meeting what later became a

controversial report on Nepal's peace process.

"Since the council got no request from the government on the extension of UNMIN's mandate, there was no way even the willing countries could raise their voice," a source present at the meet said.

"Even if they did, those who did not want UNMIN to continue would have argued that the request made by the Maoists alone would not justify any reconsideration."

After all, how could the "nay-saying" countries forget that some western countries were earlier quite quick to point at the "one-sided" letter by the government hinting at getting the army off the UNMIN hook?

And now joining the countries on such high alert in the Security Council was India whose interest and influence in Nepal is something the western powers have well recognised.

"But India did not have to say much about UNMIN in the security council meet as there was no objection when the president mentioned that the UN

mission was closing down," said the source.

"The Indian representative, however, did mention that New Delhi had been watching Nepal's peace process quite closely and that it was worried about what would now happen to the Maoist fighters and their arms."

Outside the Security Council and

**Nepali envoy GC Acharya at the SC**

inside the UN headquarters in New York, however, top bureaucrats in the world body were saying enough is enough.

"There is only so much you can take," said one senior official not wanting to be named. "You cannot allow yourself to become a scapegoat all the time while the fight is between other players.



SC meeting on Nepal

"We are glad that we have been given the marching orders, and so we are already preparing for it."

Having lost the battle for a broader mandate to "help Nepal's peace process", the UN had found itself in a hostile terrain.

The government and the ruling parties were mincing no words to say it was not wanted.

As the higher management at the UN thought exiting before the bad blood got worse would be wise, the western powers appeared to have factored in what



Indian Ambassador to UN, Hardeep Puri

their valued strategic and economic allies in the region — India and China — wanted.

The "meeting point" between the western and regional powers must have facilitated the Security Council president, Bosnian ambassador Ivan Barbalic, to draft his statement announcing the closure of the UNMIN.

By the time the draft was circulated among Security Council member countries for their comments, it was almost confirmed that there would be no opposition.

"The mood we saw during the January 5 meet of the security council continues to be the same among member countries," the source in the council had said last week. "Therefore, we know the January 14 meeting of the Security Council would only be a formality to adopt the president's statement."

That message was quickly picked up by the major powers in Kathmandu.

The ruling parties were toasting cheers while the main opposition was left licking its paw.

"The Security Council president's draft statement has been circulated among the member countries and that means the decision to close down UNMIN will not be reversed now," said the prime minister's foreign affairs advisor Rajan Bhattarai.

"So there is no question of any agreement between the government and the Maoists to request another extension of the UN mission."

By then, the Maoists had visibly toned down their position that UNMIN had to stay.

This was few days after their chairman Prachanda had pointed out in his political document that India was

behind the demand for UNMIN's ouster and that their party enjoyed international support.

While Prachanda had tried to imply that other international powers were for the continuity of the UN mission, the Security Council painted a different picture altogether.

The former rebels could not afford to ignore how the western powers — some of which they thought backed them on UNMIN — had shaken hands with the regional powers.

They must have in the past also noticed how these western countries had caved in on the issue of expanding the UN mission's mandate.

Worse yet, the region's fastest growing power the Maoists have at times been accused of being loyal to, China has always wanted the UN mission to go.

Now, with both the regional giants China and India present in the Security Council, how effectively will the powerful UN body follow and discuss Nepal's peace puzzle remains unclear.

Diplomats in New York say a couple of officials from the UN's political affairs department will be deployed in Nepal to report back to the council.

When the world body's full-fledged political mission was hounded throughout until it lowered its flag last



Chinese Ambassador to UN, Li Baodong

week, what will the few officials to be stationed in the UN's non-political office in Kathmandu be able to do is anyone's guess.

(Khadka is a BBC journalist)

THE UNMIN AFTERMATH

'The Maoists Will Feel The Pressure Now'

KRISHNA PRASAD SITAULA

Former home minister and one-time favourite of the Maoists, KRISHNA PRASAD SITAULA, was one of the vociferous figures in speaking against the extension of the UNMIN. In an interview with NEW SPOTLIGHT he explains why he is upbeat about the future of the process without the UNMIN. Excerpts:

UNMIN was supposed to go only after the integration of the Maoist combatants. But it has been sent back without accomplishing the job. Why?

The cantonments housing the combatants were to be dismantled in six months. But the Maoists did never show commitment to this part of the peace agreement. Instead, they tried to play with the Nepal army. So there was no point in continuing the UNMIN's stay here.

Why did the NC and the UML object to the UNMIN's stay whereas the Maoists wanted it to continue?

NC had no objection as such. But

Prachanda would not have moved the peace process forward if the UNMIN continued to stay. I can say this based on the last two years' experience.

Why did the other parties suspect the UNMIN?

It was supposed to monitor the combatants and the weapons. But it was felt wanting in cases where the combatants came out of the camps with weapons. UNMIN may not have been at fault but the people associated with it were. None including the government can squarely criticize the UNMIN.

Many blame the UNMIN's exit on India. Why did India want it to go?

That's not the case. I do not know if India has spoken for the UNMIN's exit. The fact is the peace process did not move an inch when the UNMIN was here. And because the peace process did not move, the constitution-making also could not much headway.

So the UNMIN was shown the door to corner the Maoists into



moving the peace process forward?

I don't know if the UNMIN's exit will make the Maoists easier or difficult to deal with. But one thing I know for sure is that they will feel the pressure now. Now that the UNMIN is gone the political parties cannot afford to linger the peace process. They will have to hurry to put the things on track.

By SAROJ DAHAL

MAOISTS' FAREWELL TO UNMIN

Sweet Bye Bye

It was the former rebels' farewell that must have been the sweetest to the departing UNMIN

By A CORRESPONDENT

As reports came that the government was not too keen on hosting a fitting farewell to the UNMIN, it was left to the former rebels to do the bidding.

And they did it well.

Not only did the Maoist chairman Prachanda – along with the entire top brigade of PLA – hosted a luncheon for Samuel Tamrat and Karen Landgren, he also 'apologized' for what he called as the unbecoming manner in which the UNMIN was treated by the ruling



Prachanda's farewell to UNMIN

parties during its stay in past couple of months.

He repeated that his party had

wanted the UNMIN to stay till the conclusion of peace process in Nepal.

Prachanda praised UNMIN for its 'unbiased' role and regretted the charge of 'biasness' hurled at it from the ruling parties.

In fact, Maoists had even proposed for technical rollover for a short period instead of shutting it down altogether.

Meanwhile, the gift of miniature Buddha statue that Prachanda gave will, indeed, be treasured by departing UNMIN chief Karen Landgren.

The gift is both symbolic and significant.

At the very least, it would serve as a warm parting gift to the UNMIN officials who must have felt humiliated in their last days.



For Post-UNMIN Consensus

By GOVINDA RAJJOSHI

After monitoring Nepal's peace process for four and a half years, the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) is leaving the country. UNMIN was initially brought here for six months to monitor the Constituent Assembly elections, and Nepal Army and Maoist combatants; and to logically end the peace process.

UNMIN failed to do any of these important works. Interestingly, when UNMIN is leaving the country, UCPN-Maoist, which does not believe in UN's neutrality, is demanding its extension while a party like Nepali Congress, which has a great respect for the UN's charter and its core values, is supporting its eviction. This shows the failure of UNMIN to maintain impartiality in the country during its four and a half year's presence in Nepal.

The recent controversy over the political statement presented by UN Secretary General's representative also reflects UNMIN's

controversial role during its working in Nepal. So far as the reactions given by president, prime minister and top

leaders of other parties on the controversial political statement are concerned, I think it is not appropriate to react from such top positions. Nepal's foreign ministry's reactions to UN would have been sufficient.

I don't believe that the sky will fall after the exit of UNMIN. Nobody can shake the present peace process as it is a compulsion for all political forces to abide by the present status quo. If someone believes that the present success is due to the presence of UNMIN, the belief will be proved wrong. In the last four and a half years, UNMIN made no contribution to end the political stalemate. If the political parties of Nepal cannot sustain Nepal, even the organization like UNMIN can do nothing. Had UNMIN's presence brought any impact, Nepal's peace process would have completed four years ago. It is unfortunate that UNMIN's role in Nepal landed in much controversy. Political parties which were die-hard supporters of UN presence in the peace process are today condemning it. The recent political statement prepared by UNMIN seems based on hearsay and media reporting rather than analyzing in depth on the ground reality of the country. UN must evaluate its reports to see if there are some shortcomings. I don't see any irrefutable evidences in UNMIN's report.

As an international body, UNMIN should have maintained its neutrality. From very early days of arrival of UNMIN, I have often tried to caution UNMIN about its role. Even during the elections of the Constituent Assembly, UNMIN did not take notice of our complaints. I cannot say that UNMIN has intentionally taken the side of United Communist Party of

Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M), but its actions of the past showed UNMIN's tilt towards Maoists. This is the reason Nepali Congress and CPN-UML opposed it. Out of 27 parties in the Constituent Assembly, almost 20 parties are opposing UNMIN. Nepal has long been an active member of UN and Nepal always believes in UN spirit. But due to biasness of UNMIN, it has lost credibility.

Many people are expressing worries about the situation after eviction of UNMIN from the country by January 15. Some people even are crying that there will be a major political disaster. But, I don't think any major upheaval will be occurring after that. Nepalese political parties, including Maoists, have to follow the present state as they cannot go beyond this. The present status quo is the reality for Nepal and Nepalese politicians have to live with this reality. As the political differences are yet to be settled, I don't see the possibility of

formation of new government anytime soon. Although political parties, including the Maoists, have been saying that they will

form the government, I don't think it is possible right now. What I can say is that the time has come for Nepali Congress to reconsider its candidate. Only after withdrawal of the present candidate, we can start fresh negotiations with other parties. I don't think CPN-UML will support our candidate Ram Chandra Poudel. In this situation, Nepali Congress has to take the crucial decision.

Otherwise, Nepalese politics will be like this for many years to come. Our candidate Ram Chandra Poudel has already lost 16 rounds of elections. It is unfortunate that our party has not even evaluated the gravity of this.

If leaders of three major political parties, Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and UCPN-Maoist, agree on certain agenda, nothing will be impossible. We can find political solution only by accepting strengths and weaknesses of one another. Nepali Congress leader Sushi Koirala, UCPN-Maoist's Pushpa Kamal Dahal and CPN-UML leader Jhala Nath Khanal can make a difference in case they agree on certain political goals. Prolonging the life of caretaker government is not in the interest of the country. The time has come to have certain agreements among political parties to form the government.

After eviction of UNMIN, what we need to do is to develop political consensus. By doing this, we can give a good message to the world community. We have wasted the last six months without agreeing on political agenda. Maoists too must realize that they cannot go on the path of rebellion and the international scenario is not favorable. What we need is political consensus, nothing less.

(Joshi is a former Home Minister)

I don't believe that the sky will fall after the exit of UNMIN. Nobody can shake the present peace process as it is a compulsion for all political forces to abide by the present status quo.



Prachanda (Left) and Baburam Bhattarai

MAOIST LEADERS

Looking South

Despite Prachanda's suspicion, Bhattarai's Delhi visit doesn't cut much ice

By ABIJIT SHARMA in Delhi

Critics in own party including chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' see him as a pro-Indian face. But that did not deter Baburam Bhattarai to embark on a tour of the southern neighbor — twice in less than two weeks.

In Delhi to attend a seminar on Nepal the senior Maoist leader took the opportunity to meet top Indian officials hours after landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport — and before another seminar invitee and senior pro-Prachanda leader Barsha Man Pun 'Ananta' reached there.

In what has now been confirmed as a political tour he held talks with Indian Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Foreign Secretary Nirupam Rao, national security advisor Shiv Shankar Menon and the opposition leaders.

Shortly after returning to Kathmandu the parliamentary party leader-aspirant of the largest party in the legislative parliament flew to Mumbai to attend another seminar. This time alone. Without Barsha Man Puns.

Not much is learnt about his latest visit except that he gave a speech at the seminar to extol the Maoist ties with India with which, according to him, "there

Not unexpectedly, his visits added fuel to the fire that he is being tipped as Delhi's favourite boy to win the race.

On return Bhattarai was upbeat. "The visit has helped bring the strained India-Maoist relations back on track," he boasted.

His boss was in no good mood, though. "One individual's meetings and talks would not make much difference," said Prachanda.

This has only lent credence to the speculations doing round in the some circle the South Block would rather see the division in the Maoist leadership deepen than reconcile with the former

ON THE BRINK?

As New Spotlight went to the press, the tussle between the prime minister-aspirant Prachanda and the challenger Baburam Bhattarai came to a head. The anti-revolt Bhattarai and his supporters took Prachanda head on at a training for 'the people's revolt' after the latter refused them to present the voice of dissent. The Prachanda camp described the event as "a very serious" (breach of discipline). Bhattarai spoke through the rift-ridden party mouthpiece Janadesh weekly to blast the "bureaucratic dictatorship" of Prachanda. As many saw the development as a harbinger of an inevitable split, the party called emergency meetings of politburo and central committee.

Coincidentally the Prachanda-Bhattarai spat reached the boiling point less than 24 hours after a senior diplomat from the South — the external affairs secretary Nirupama Rao — landed in Kathmandu for a three-day visit to reiterate that her country has no objection to anybody becoming a consensus prime minister. "The decision is Nepal's."

had been some misunderstandings."

At a time when the Maoist-India relations are not at their best Bhattarai's meetings with Indian leaders have been described as highly strategic and significant moves for both sides.

Incidentally, the Bhattarai visits coincided with the preparation for the fresh race for new prime minister.

rebel outfit.

According to knowledgeable sources in Delhi, the Bhattarai visits have not cut much ice. They say, the South Block is in mood yet to offer an olive branch to the former rebels of Nepal unless they changed course and moved away from what Delhi sees as the militant posture and the China-tilt. ■



GORKHALAND ROW

Fresh Clashes

Darjeeling witnesses fresh clashes between pro and anti Gorkhaland factions

By UMA KANTA KHANAL
in Siliguri, West Bengal

The hill district of Darjeeling in West Bengal and peripheral areas have seen fresh clashes erupting between the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, a party agitating for Gorkhaland as a separate state for the Indian Gorkhas, and non-Gorkha parties opposed to it.

Cadres of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha are blocking roads in what they call a final agitation for their separate state. The winter chill of Darjeeling has been relegated to the backburner as tires are burnt on the roads sending up plumes of smoke with GJM cadres raising their demands.

But then, as soon as GJM finished its 96 hours strike in Darjeeling and its peripheral areas recently, the

opposing Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Bachao Committee commenced a 48



CPI (M) Leaders

hour strike in Siliguri and other parts of Terai against the GJM. Supporters of the two camps attacked each other causing a dozen injuries. The injured from both sides were admitted at

hospitals for treatment. Many vehicles were torched.

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha started its fresh agitation because the Gorkha inhabitants of Darjeeling blamed it was going to agree with the central government not for a separate state but for an interim authority, which would be a part of autonomy within the state. The central government and Morcha were nearing an agreement for the interim authority in Darjeeling. But the other political parties demanding Gorkhaland pressurized GJM not to agree with the central government for the interim authority but to lead the agitation for a separate state.

Dawa Sherpa, executive president of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League said, "It is not time to settle with the interim authority because the central and the state governments have been cheating the Gorkhas of India for more than hundred years by not providing their constitutional security."

The ruling party of West Bengal, Communist Party of India (Marxist), has demanded that the administration should discourage the agitation of GJM. It submitted a memorandum to the IGP of North Bengal a few days ago. Saman Pathak, a leader of CPI (M) said, "The agitation of the Morcha is against the public. The public of Darjeeling are deprived of getting food and other necessary materials because of the strike called by GJM. So, we have requested the administration to be strong to dominate its agitation."

Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Bachao Committee has also warned the traders not to provide any materials to the hill. This is a hint that there will be more clashes in the terai and the hill. But GJM has already made it public in Darjeeling asking its inhabitants to be ready for the final agitation for Gorkhaland state. ■

NRN MEET

Wake-Up Call

A regional conference of the non-resident Nepalis takes up the issues of Nepali workers in the Gulf. But will the government listen?

By SAROJ DAHAL in Dubai

It was a festive mood at the Crowne Plaza Dubai as nearly two hundred Non-resident Nepalis (NRN) delegates and Nepali officials gathered to discuss the problems being faced by Nepali migrant workers in the Middle East, among others.

“Collective Investment and Safe Migration” was the main theme of the three-day conference (Jan 14-16).

President of the Non-Resident Nepalese Association (NRNA), Devman Hirachan, said that existing laws posed obstacles to channelize collective investment from the Nepali diaspora. He also urged the government of Nepal to take steps to better manage the remittance entering into Nepal from the Gulf countries.

Coordinator of the conference and Treasurer of the NRNA International Coordination Council (ICC), Rameshwar Shah, said if the government could create a conducive environment to utilise the skills and resources of the Nepali migrant workers, it could prove immensely useful in socio-economic transformation of Nepal.

Officials, too, sounded optimistic during the conference. “The (Nepal) government stands ready to collaborate with you. We know that not only money, NRNs possess knowledge and skills which Nepal needs. The onus is on you, NRNs, to contribute towards your motherland,” said Dr Yubaraj Khatiwada, governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank. He also assured that the government would remove legal hassles so as to facilitate investment by NRNs in Nepal.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala, too, urged the



NRN conference in Dubai

NRNs to invest in productive sectors in Nepal.

Remittance

It is estimated that some three million Nepalese work abroad—over 700 Nepalese leaving the country every day. According to the Migration and Remittances Fact Book 2011 published by the World Bank, Nepal received 3.5 billion dollars in remittance in the year 2010. Remittance constitutes nearly 23 percent of Nepal's GDP (nearly double to that of Bangladesh). More than half of total remittance that enters Nepal is generated by the Nepalese working in the Gulf countries. Nepal was ranked fifth among the remittance receiving countries last year.

“It is the duty of we NRNs to contribute towards making Nepal prosperous,” said Dr. Upendra Mahato, founder president and patron of the NRNA. Brushing aside concerns regarding protracted political instability in the country, Mahato insisted that

there were risks to investment everywhere. “So, NRNs should be ready to invest in Nepal,” he added.

Minister for Labour, Mohammed Atab Alam, assured that he will look into the problems being faced by Nepalese working abroad.

One such problem was that of safety and security of Nepali women working in the Gulf. Several incidences of Nepali women sexually mistreated in the Gulf countries by their employers have come to the fore. Hundreds of Nepali workers

die in Gulf countries every year due to poor safety standards and lack of awareness. But the government so far has done almost nothing to address these problems

The 12-point “Dubai Declaration” adopted by the conference

called upon the Nepal government to bring out a comprehensive “Foreign Employment Policy” with a view to make foreign employment sector safe, dignified and managed. The conference also called upon Nepali missions abroad to work in close collaborations with local NRN Associations to protect and promote the interests of Nepali migrant workers.

The conference also called upon Nepali banking sector to develop a competitive and hassle-free banking services to migrant workers.

While welcoming the government's recent decision to provide citizenship to NRNs devoid of political rights, the conference called upon the government of Nepal to make provision of “Once a Nepali Always a Nepali.”

Interestingly, the term “dual citizenship” was missing in the declaration. ■

OVERSEAS STUDENTS

Tough Times Ahead

The proposed changes in the immigration rules are likely to turn UK into 'unattractive destination' for the overseas students

By BHAGIRATH YOGI in London

Rishi Shrestha, a Nepali student, is awaiting response to his visa application at a private London college. Originally from Biratnagar, he has plans to come to UK to study Accounting and bring along his wife as a dependant.

"My idea is that my wife could work full time while I studied at the college. I

According to a consultation document published by the British government on 9 December 2010, the new proposals include:

- restricting study of courses below degree level to institutions with Highly Trusted Sponsor status,
- raising the minimum level of English language to study any subject, including English, to B2 (that is IELTS score between 5 to 6.5),
- not allowing students to make an immigration application in the UK to extend their stay,
- abolishing Tier 1 (Post-Study Work) visa,
- restricting weekday term-time work to work on campus only
- allowing family members to enter or stay in the UK only if a student is studying for more than 12 months and removing all work entitlements from their family members,
- and, imposing more restrictions on private colleges.

also hope to work part-time to meet my expenses," said Shrestha.

Recent changes proposed by the UK Border Agency (UKBA)—that manages immigration into the country, however, are likely to make life difficult for



A UK University

prospective students like Shrestha.

The UKBA consultations end on 31st January 2011 and are expected to come into force from April this year.

"These changes are likely to have far-reaching consequences on foreign students," said London-based Solicitor Raju Thapa, who specialises on immigration matters. "The government's proposal mainly seems to be aiming at reducing the number of overseas students and their dependants especially below degree level," he added.

Impact on Private Colleges

The new proposals are also likely to affect thousands of private colleges mainly centred in and around London. "If the new proposal comes in the current proposed form, it will seriously disadvantage students and institutions. It will make UK a less attractive destination for overseas students," said

Rajen Kandel, managing director of the South London College (SLC) – that has recently been recognised as a 'Highly Trusted Sponsor' by the UK Border Agency.

Kandel said private colleges are trying to get their message through to parliament via their Association of Private Colleges and also through local MPs. "At the same time we are now

diversifying our courses and also focusing on the courses that will attract local as well as students from the European Union."

Many overseas students, however, are not in a position to influence the British government's policy. Unlike British students who took to streets last year protesting against the government's plan to raise University fees, foreign students who are already studying in the UK seemed reluctant to voice their concerns.

"First of all, we don't exactly know how the proposed changes are going to affect us," said Rachana Sharma, a Nepali student now studying at a college in North London. "Moreover, we don't want to draw unnecessary attention from the UK Border Agency which could have adverse impact on our visa status," she added. ■

"Long Term Prospects Of Growth For India Are Better Than China"

KISHORE MAHBUBANI

KISHORE MAHBUBANI, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore and a China expert, spoke about India's engagement with China and South-East Asia. Excerpts:

In the past two years, we have seen a very aggressive China—not only towards India but also towards neighbours in South-East Asia. What are the reasons for this?

I don't think there has been any fundamental change in Chinese foreign policy. They have clearly made more mistakes in the last 12 months. They seem to be more assertive in their claims over the South China Sea. They are perceived to be more assertive vis-a-vis India. But I think their overall foreign policy hasn't changed. I think they are still abiding by their principle that they are going to focus on internal economic development; they don't want to get distracted by foreign policy disputes. And their main challenges are internal, not external.

But why did the Chinese make these mistakes?

I don't think we know enough of how the Chinese decision-making process takes place. It could be due to the succession issue (a new generation of Chinese communist leadership will take office in 2012); it could be due to the PLA (People's Liberation Army) becoming more assertive. But I think that while there have been incidents, while the Chinese have mishandled, they haven't changed their fundamental foreign policy.

How do you see India-China relations turning out this decade?

I think this is a very crucial decade in India-China relations. As you know, time is on India's side because the Indian economy is growing; if you grow at 8 or 9%, your economy will double in eight or nine years. Time is also on China's side. But time is not on the side of the United States of America. American power has peaked globally and, while it may grow absolutely as a relative share of the global GNP (gross national product), American power will shrink. So there is some pressure on the part of United States and the West to try and come to terms with China before it becomes too powerful. But there is no such pressure on India.

In fact, in many ways, the long term prospects of growth for India in some ways are better than China because you have a demographic dividend. China will become old before it will become rich. So, right now, don't get distracted by geopolitical issues. Why get sucked away by geopolitical issues when you can move them aside and say "I will deal with them later on?"

How do you see India-China ties evolving when the new Chinese leadership steps in?

Nobody knows what the real views of the next generation Chinese leaders are. But it is a fact that with each passing decade, China is developing a leadership that is more and more exposed to the world...the current rules governing the



international order, the 1945 rules-based order that America and Europe created, the two greatest beneficiaries of this order are China and India because you are the fastest growing economies now. China does not want to upset that 1945 order. And I suspect the new leadership is savvy enough to realize that this is not the time for China to do that. No one knows, of course, what they will be like, but I suspect they will carry on the current policies.

The thorniest of issues between India and China are the disputed border and Chinese support to Pakistan. How do you see these two issues affecting ties this decade?

The good news is there has been no violence at the border since 1962...I think that should be the No.1 priority. Even if you don't get the border dispute resolved, we can live with the status quo...20 years ago, when China had much stronger leaders, they could make territorial concessions. Right now it is harder for Chinese leaders to make territorial concessions because with the opening up of the Chinese society, with Chinese Internet community playing an active role in shaping public opinion...the Pakistan issue is a much more difficult issue to handle, and I can understand why the Indian government feels very upset. The Chinese have had a long-standing policy of standing by their allies even when the allies, sometimes, do things to aggravate them—for example, North Korea. But, just to get the scales right, India's No.1 obsession is Pakistan.

By contrast, China's No.1 obsession is the West and how the West could undermine the growth of China. Just imagine if India had to deal with a Pakistan that was far more powerful than India. The reason I mentioned this is that you have to understand that the Chinese have much bigger fish to fry in many areas and they have their own strategic obsessions, and relatively speaking, South Asia comes quite low in their strategic priorities.

When you meet Chinese decision makers, what do you tell them? Do you tell them that as a major power, they

should behave like one—be sensitive to the concerns of smaller neighbours?

When they (China) made mistakes, I have written on that. In the past, you could not criticize China at all. The Chinese were very prickly. I wrote this article which was critical of China a few months ago and subsequently, I went to China, I met everybody; they didn't mind the criticism. So they are now willing to listen to criticism in a way they were not ready to do before. And that is why I think you need to have greater and deeper engagement between China and India. When

I come to India, I can certainly feel a very strong obsession with China. I was in China a few weeks ago and there was almost no mention of India. When I gave an interview to CCTV4, which is watched by 100 million people, I said the 21st century belongs to China and India and nobody objected.

India has just joined the East Asia Summit. What kind of a role do you see for India there?

As you know, Singapore lobbied very hard to get India into the East Asia Summit. We believe that it is good to have more great powers involved in the region. The main challenge will be the US-China relationship. That's the largest, most difficult geopolitical relationship in the world. And India can play a role as a balancer in the US-China relationship.

What about India and Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean)?

I think Asean should be seen as a geopolitical gift to India, because Asean is providing the geopolitical platform which enables India to get integrated into East Asia. And the paradox here is that the reason Asean can provide the diplomatic leadership to create regional organizations that bring everyone together is because Asean is weak. Precisely because it is weak, it is able to bring all the powers together and that is why this geopolitical platform that Asean provides is something India should be taking greater advantage of.

(Courtesy:livemint.com)

DISASTER

Quake Alarm

The Earthquake Safety Day is a chill reminder of the imminent danger the country faces

By NITISH DEV BHATTARAI

Magh 2 reminds us of the day in 1934 when a devastating earthquake had hit Nepal killing thousands of people. That was when the total population was far below what it is today, with fewer concrete buildings and virtually no high-rises.

The 1934 earthquake – known as *nabbesalko bhuichalo* or the 90's earthquake— destroyed 20 per cent buildings in Kathmandu valley. It damaged 40 per cent of them. As such, Kathmandu saw a quarter of homes, along with several historic sites, destroyed.

In the 20th century, over 11,000 people have lost their lives to earthquakes in Nepal. Geologists believe Nepal is at risk from an

earthquake with a magnitude of around eight in the Richter scale, that is, 10 times as powerful as the Haiti shock that killed more than 212,000 people.

Nepal is in a highly volatile seismic zone on the border between two huge plates that have moved together over millions of years to form the Himalayas. The country lies in moving and colliding Indian and Eurasian plates making it prone to frequent earthquakes.

Nepal ranks 11th in terms of quake hazards and seismic faults in the world which means it is not surprising for Nepal to fall victim to natural disasters such as landslides and earthquakes.

In fact, Nepal was originally formed following a huge earthquake over 60 million years ago involving the Eurasian and the Indo-Australian plates. This

earthquake was of such immense power that it resulted in the high peaks which we now know as the Himalayas.

At the climax of the collision between tectonic plates that thrust up the Himalayas, Nepal was crisscrossed by geologic fault lines - some of which have been building up pressure for centuries. Even if a quake happens 300 km away, measuring 6 or 7 in magnitude on the Richter scale at its epicenter, it could generate level VIII, IX or even X of shaking on the Mercalli scale in Kathmandu.

It is not usually the earthquake itself which results in the high number of casualties but, instead, the poor reinforcement of buildings.

But it is said Kathmandu would suffer the worst losses. Very

low building standards, weak infrastructure and the fact that Kathmandu is built on the soft sediment of a former lake bed all contribute to the high risk level.

In spite of such risks, high-rise buildings are mushrooming in Nepal. High-rise buildings are constructed largely because they can create a lot of real estate value out of a fairly small piece of land.

These reasons, however, do not support why high rises are built on low standards. Worse still, Kathmandu has only two main roads routed towards medical facilities and only one runway. Consequently, any disruption, damage or blockage of these roads could easily have devastating consequences. ■



Kathmandu Valley: Haphazard construction

Metro Strains

By **ABIJIT SHARMA**



The commuters in the Indian capital are in a new world these days. A housewife from Saket, in south Delhi, doesn't have to think twice before going to shop at Chandani Chowk, an old market in the north Delhi. Students from the north campus of Delhi University are seen hanging around freely in south Delhi malls till late night. Given the fact that the distance between these two parts of Delhi is of more than two hours, it was something people could not even imagine before.

The Metro has transformed the life of the Delhi commuters. The Delhiites have witnessed a complete transformation in their way of commuting. Eight years after it began, the Metro is ever growing. Travelling inside the city, which used to be an excruciating experience, is now not only painless but also a lot faster. Neither do the people have to worry about riding an overcharging auto-rickshaw nor any worry about hours-long jams. The Metro is everywhere. It connects the posh southern part of Delhi to old markets of North Delhi and also the western part to the more

residential eastern section. People have got access to the service in almost all the major shopping and residential points including the airport.

Not surprisingly, the Metro carries more than one and a half million passengers a day. So influential the Delhi Metro has been that, even IT city Bangalore has decided to follow in its footsteps.

Not that the picture is rosy in all fronts. There have been complaints of a number of thorns. So much so that it has lost some of its initial credibility. Something which was being hailed as a boon is at times seen as a bane!

The 'technical glitches' in recent times have frequently disrupted the functioning of the trains. The trains come to a complete halt mid-way through the track for a long time with passengers stuck inside. Passengers are eventually evacuated

through emergency means. The metro stations, during such times become overly crowded and movement of every train thereafter is affected. Five serious disruptions had been reported in the last one month alone.

The Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) has also found it at the receiving end for its failure to provide proper management at metro stations. Despite huge crowds at the stations, there is hardly any mechanism for controlling them. The result: entering into and exiting from a train becomes a herculean task. Although people have complained of stampede-like situations, the



Despite huge crowds at the stations, there is hardly any mechanism for controlling them. The result: entering into and exiting from a train becomes a herculean task. Although people have complained of stampede-like situations, the DMRC has not bothered to fix the problem.

DMRC has not bothered to fix the problem.

With the construction of few more lines, the DMRC certainly has high hopes. But there have been too many 'technical hitches' in too short a time period. This does not augur well for the pride of the Indian capital. ■

Profile



Himalayan Bank AGM

HIMALAYAN BANK LIMITED

Reaching Top

Himalayan Bank Limited has made a major breakthrough in its transactions

By A CORRESPONDENT

Despite a nation-wide crisis of cash and economic slowdown, Himalayan Bank Limited has achieved a major success in the fiscal year 2066/67. Under a capable and dynamic leadership, the bank was able to maintain its efficiency and performance.

In the fiscal year 2066/67, the bank's total deposit reached Rs. 37.611 billion for the period under review, recording an increase of 8.44 percent over the deposit of previous year. The loans and advances reached Rs. 29.124 billion during the period under review, recording an increase of 14.12 percent. Presenting its report to Annual General Meeting (AGM), the bank also proposed several new schemes for coming years.

According to the bank's press release, it was able to make an operating profit of Rs. 579.231 million during the review period. The net profit of the bank reached Rs. 508.798 million.

In the current Activities and Achievements as of Mangsir End 2067 or first 5 months of the current fiscal year, the deposit base of the bank was Rs. 39.466 billion and the loan portfolio of the bank was Rs. 32.535 billion with the operating profit Rs. 574.857 million.

In the process of increasing accessibility, HBL installed 3 additional ATMs (Automated Teller Machines), one each at Gorkha, Kalanki and Satdobato. At present, there are a total of 53 ATMs deployed by HBL in different parts of the country (33 units inside Kathmandu valley & 21 units outside Kathmandu valley).

As HBL has been expanding its services, it established Gorkha, Kalanki & Satdobato branches to add up to a total of 33 (14 branches inside the valley and 19 outside it).

To attract depositors, HBL launched a new deposit product named 'Special Payroll Account'. HBL launched EMV

(chip based) card acquiring business in its POS terminals. HBL is the first financial institution in the country to start EMV card acquiring business.

Along with making profit, the bank also got involved in the humanitarian assistance as HBL provided financial assistance of Rs. 0.5 million as donation to the Embassy of Pakistan, Kathmandu as a humanitarian aid for conducting rescue and relief operations in the flood affected areas of Pakistan.

A large number of Nepalese are working outside the country, and HBL has been certified as the 19th participant in 'Worker's Remittance' service going live by SWIFT. 'Worker's Remittance' is a global remittance platform developed by SWIFT. HBL is the first financial institution in South Asia to achieve this certificate.

The AGM also approved planned activities for the next 7 months of the current fiscal year.

HBL has envisioned extension of additional 13 ATMs and 6 branches in the valley and beyond. HBL will be issuing chip based EMV debit and credit cards very soon and HBL is firmly committed to roll out some technology driven new products and services.

HBL has targeted to make available '365 Day's Banking Service' and morning & evening counter service from all the 33 branches. HBL has targeted to expand remittance business to Asian, European and American markets with a focus on further sophisticated services. ■

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'JICA's Role Incredible'

-CHANDIP. SHRESTHA

CHANDI P. SHRESTHA, chairman of JICA Alumni Associations Forum of SAARC Countries (JAAFSC) and immediate past president of JICA Alumni Association of Nepal (JAAN), is a not a new name in Nepali Civil Service. Former home secretary Shrestha retired five years ago after serving for 28 years in civil service and making a major contribution to establish Nepal-Japan relations at the people to people level through JAAN. Shrestha went to Japan in 1984 to get a training. As Japanese Overseas Volunteers and JICA recently celebrated forty years in Nepal, Shrestha spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues regarding the role of JICA in Nepal's development. Excerpts:

As Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan Overseas Volunteers (JOCV) have recently celebrated their forty years in Nepal, how do you assess their role in the process of Nepal's transformation?

Undoubtedly, JICA has played a incredible role in Nepal's development process. Be it in introducing apples in Mustang or oranges (junar) in Ramechhap or coffee in Syangja, trout fish in Rasuwa and Nuwakot or strawberry in Nagarkot, JICA and Japanese Volunteers have contributed a lot. Koteshwor-Bhaktapur Road and Banepa-Sindhuli- Bardibas Road have visible impacts as projects bringing major change in Nepal's overall development. TU Teaching Hospital, Kulekhani Hydropower and Drinking water Improvement projects in Nepal are others. Along with this, Japanese volunteers have also been working in various sectors including health posts, District Development Committees, environment, and agriculture sectors.

How do Japanese Volunteers contribute here?

Their contribution is also immense in Nepal's development process. Hundreds of volunteers have already worked in Nepal and many are working in the country to uplift the life of rural people. A former Japanese volunteer



Toru Kondo, chairperson of Society of Agriculture (MDSAC), who helped to introduce apples in Mustang district, spent almost all his life working to improve the poor people of the region. There are other Japanese volunteers, who also worked for Nepal and remained loyal to Nepal's cause.

Do you mean Japanese aid has visible impacts in rural parts of Nepal?

Yes. Along with the big infrastructure projects, Japanese support in agriculture, health and animal husbandry sectors have enormous contribution in transforming the life of poor people. From road construction to agriculture and from health to communication and primary education, JICA has spent huge money to improve the life of poor people of Nepal. Japanese have provided support to construct school buildings. Japanese help to Nepal is visible all over the country. One cannot deny the role of JOCV to provide skills. They give know how to Nepalese farmers.

Which sector do you think JICA has been involved in mostly?

Primarily, JICA's support is focused in areas like health, education, transport and construction of Bardibas-Dhulikhel

road, one of the largest projects of JICA in Nepal. After completion of this road, the livelihood of people in Kavre, Sindhuli, Ramechhap and Mahottara will drastically change. This road will also provide an alternative to the present roads linking Nepal's southern zone. This is going to be historic road which will shorten the distance between eastern parts of Nepal and capital Kathmandu by more than 100 kilometers. This is JICA's one of the largest projects in the world. The government of Japan, through JICA, has been providing development assistance to Nepal since the 1970s, mainly in the areas of social and economic infrastructure, democratization and peace-building and improvement of rural living standards.

It is said that Japan's aid to Nepal is declining now. How do you look at this?

Even Japanese have officially said that their aid to Nepal has declined. This is not only in Nepal but other parts of the world too. Of course, Japanese are now shifting their priority to the African countries. Due to Japan's own economic problems, the volume of aid has gone down.

How many Nepalese technical

experts are here who got one or other kinds of training in Japan?

There are 3700 Nepalese who got training in Japan under JICA. Out of this, we are capable to accommodate 1000.

In which sectors are these Nepalese working now?

Except Nepal Army, we have other professionals from all other sectors including bureaucrats, technicians and people from private sector. There is an Alumni Association of JICA around the world. Our aim is to promote people to people relations and use our knowledge and expertise gained in Japan in overall development of country and for the benefit of the poor people of Nepal. JICA Alumni Association is involved in the transformation of the society.

What role have you played during your two tenures as the chairman of JICA Alumni Association of Nepal (JAAN)?

During my two tenures, I took the association a little bit differently. Earlier, JAAN used to organize seminars and workshops in star hotels and organized get togethers. However, I shifted JAAN from workshop oriented organization to community based and development oriented. During my six years tenure, I shifted the paradigm of the organization. Now, we organize health camps in rural areas, support income generating activities and literacy. We choose three villages from two districts for our programs. We are launching programs in Lele and Nallu of Lalitpur and Chalnakhel of Kathmandu district. We have our own building in Balkhu. As a 37 year-old organization, JAAN has its own importance.

How are Japan's projects different from others?

Japan's support is different in the sense that their programs are directed to uplift the life of poor people of Nepal and to support the modernization process in development sectors. As an Asian country, Nepal shares a lot of things with Japan. This way Japan's support is very valuable. For the last forty years, Japan always supported Nepal's efforts to transform livelihood of poor people. They are supporting in the baseline. Their support is directed to villages, to a major change. ■

Dear women of Nepal,

You are making so much noise again on the streets to be political and legal part of New Nepal. But do not you know you are needed in the kitchen 24/7? You are needed to the mankind to make babies so that human race could continue. You are needed to men when they are feeling lonely. You are needed to the political leaders for showing their strengths on the streets and going to power on your vote planks. Once you take to the streets, political change (a revolution or an evolution) becomes possible, but it is the men who grab the power. Your role as a political animal is finished before you get back to the kitchen, taking care of children, utensils, needles and clothes. You are needed for political leaders and men to show, internally and internationally, that they are very gender sensitive and would do anything to make you empowered so that you could take part in development work and all that is so good in papers, radios and TV!!!. To translate the rhetoric into reality, however, political leaders have a second thought, "Why are these women making so much noise, don't they know that we are working for women and we know all the problems they face?"

Of course we have brought a revolution in our country but it does not mean that we should forget our cultural and religious values.

"Women are needed to continue to do their religious duty to look after the family. They are not able to think seriously on political and legal issues. We men are here to talk on behalf of them and promise that they would be given due respect. We are talking about 33% seats for them in every aspect of life but women should be able to hold their responsibilities, we men are born with the ability but women have to learn that. So how could they compare with us, the political leaders, the best brains of the society, with themselves? We have to make them understand that they are inferior to us and we are trying to improve them. It will take time and energy. Nepalese women don't have energy so we will give them power and will teach them how to use the brain. So women, please, stop making noise and let us the political leaders work seriously for the development of the country."

A Letter To Nepalese Women

By DR. ARUNA UPRETY

So my suggestion to women of our country is that there is no point talking about the women's issues as it will be taken care of by men. So please women do as our religious scripts say and our cultural values command. If you will make a lot of noise our societal structure will be destroyed. Once political leaders have promised that they would continue to help us, why you are demanding so much? It is their kindness that they have thought about us as we are weaker sex and we need their help to go ahead all the time. As the political leaders have more intellect, have better exposure and also can think in a broader prospective, as they have bigger shoulders, also bigger heads, hence they can analyze much better than women. So please, please, let us avoid all the shouting, noise, demonstration and rest assured that your representation will be done by our men political leaders. I am very much confident about it and that's why I suggest you be polite and make no more demonstrations, Dear Nepalese women! I'm sure that after reading this open letter you will have some ideas in your small brain that women will be well taken care of by our politicians and all the problems we are facing will vanish once they will elect themselves as our representatives. They will work day and night for the development of the country and they will think sometimes about women which will be a great contribution for our issues and we will be happy ever after.

Till then, you please go to the kitchen again and make good food for our men so that they could have better ideas and would bring thoughts to solve women's problems. But you also have to assume that there are other priorities in front of our political leaders than women's problems and issues. So Nepalese women, like good girls, be passive and silent and pay attention to our political leaders and do as they advise. They have advised us to be quiet. In order to make them happy and satisfied we have to go to the kitchen and work as there is a saying 'in order to win the heart of political leaders we have to go through their stomach' (it means through good food).

(Upriety is a Women's Right activist).

Critical Barriers In Creating A Functional State

By DEV RAJ DAHAL



Modern state is based on constitutional and cosmological foundation. Its effectiveness is based on legitimate monopoly on power, taxation, loyalty of citizens and international recognition. Democratic constitution unites the general will of all citizens into a sovereign power to abolish the state of nature and reduces the risk of eternal fear and anarchy in society fomented by irrational human nature, nature of state and the state of anarchy that characterizes the international system.

In Nepal, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed by Maoist rebel and the government has defined the normative, institutional and operational framework of peace to transcend the partial interests of the signing parties and include all those affected by the absence of peace. The democratic peace postulated by the CPA and the judgment built on it aim to cease conflict, eradicate structural injustice of society, bring social transformation and begin post-conflict peace building process to eliminate future source of conflict. One can, however, see a disparity between public expectation for post-conflict peace dividend, leaders promise for a democratic state and the weakness of Nepali authorities to create public order. The domination of entire governing structures from local self-governance to the cabinet by all-party committees and extension of patronage in all areas of public life, however, indicate that leaders are more comfortable to arbitrate laws by a patrimonial system of governance. This has subordinated the national integrity system of polity to control corruption, impunity and geopolitical cross-pressures.

Andreas Wimmer argues that modern nation-state is the "product of four closely interconnected processes of institutional closure, such as a *political one*

(democracy tied to national self-determination), a *legal one* (citizenship tied to nationality), a *military one* (universal conscription tied to national citizenship) and a *social one* (the institutions of the welfare state linked to the control of the immigration of foreigners)." The cosmopolitan requirements have increased the state's institutional opening to external environment, commitment to human security and the transformation of ethno-based nation into demo-based constitutional state with the ability to complement governance effectiveness including its role in the balance of regional and global geopolitical interests. In this context, constitutional state is expected to lower the transaction costs and enable the governance to realize its goals.

To be functional, Nepali state has to remove many institutional gaps between it and society. It has maintain *autonomy* from dominant interest groups of society, uphold sufficient *capacity* to mobilize tax and human resources, maximize the standards of human rights, democracy and rule of law, *embed* in ecology and the general interest of all citizens and muster the legitimacy of its statehood. Now, it is facing several institutional gaps: *vision gap* between the changing *yug dharma* and indigenous statecraft and social division of labor (even democracy and political pluralism have become contested sites); *power gap* between juridical international status and actual political capacity for internal social cohesion and system integration; *development gap* between unequal social classes of society causing structural injustice and conflict; and *legitimacy gap* between the ability of leaders to govern and their capacity to fulfill legitimate aspiration of citizens for liberty, property, justice, peace and pursuit of happiness. These gaps continue to undermine the

separation of the state and society and the possibility to address distributional struggle of left out sections of society.

Deviation of leadership from state-bearing institutions and assertion to exclusive power claim marked a distortion of the civic spirit taking over almost all independent institutions of the state and smudging many of national perspective: constitutional vision, vitality of its institutions and verve to cement state-society harmony. As a result, one can see continuous deadlock over power-sharing and constitutional issues and erosion of the outreach of state in society. It has delayed the possibility of transforming negative peace into positive peace as neither the Maoists nor non-Maoist is willing to give concession to inspire each other's confidence for the vision of common good and address the anarchy of free wills of armed groups and criminals who oppose state sovereignty. Regular dialogue among the leaders of major parties have so far failed to become a feasible option to open up common ground, provide room for each other's legitimate interest, ideology and identity and bridge the ends and means of peace for the shared outcome of a liberating condition for all Nepalese citizens.

There is a truth in what Nietzsche says: "The degree of suffering is determined by the position in hierarchy." The profound craving of Nepalese citizens for a release from this suffering remains alluring as their voice remains unheard and unheeded in the corridor of power. In a situation of careless contempt for powerless, state building requires reducing transaction cost imposed by hierarchy by activating multi-track dialogue, offering peace dividends, curtailing the fearful prospect of violence and moderating and democratizing the pyramids of undemocratic structures. This means

Nepalese leaders must be accountable to politics as a public responsibility and link the society to public sphere for its articulation and public action. This is possible to achieve by fostering 'active citizenship' aligned with public spirited actors, institutions, networks and movements.

Building productive relationship with the cultural industries such as media, civil society, public intellectuals and intermediary institutions and movements is precisely fashioned to awaken the leaders to their accountability of drafting a social contract, structural reforms and sustainable peace through rational consensus. It helps to weaken the confidence of the spoilers of peace. A rational consensus based on CPA shuns the concept of winner and loser and makes leaders accountable for the benefit they frantically enjoyed from democratic deficit. It is possible to overcome this situation if intermediary institutions nurture cross-cutting social capital across various empirical divides of the nation and socialize their leadership in the virtue of peace as a common good and make national economy agile and competitive to enable citizens and the state enjoy their constitutional and human rights and duties.

The new challenges for virtuous statehood are to build bridge across the gaps between the state and society, system and life-world, center and periphery, and groups and individuals through healing and reconciling with spiritual, social, economic and political resources of the nation. This, however, requires a self-reflective learning of leadership about the wisdom of ordinary folk, public opinion and cultural heritage of the nation's tolerance of equality and diversity nurtured by sages, statesmen and citizens for long. Now, national identity of Nepalese formulated on the common background condition, socialization and mutual expectation of a shared future has to be strengthened by shoring the national spirit and the spirit of international cooperation.

Dahal is Head, FES Nepal Office



Nepal Rastra Bank

BANKS

Interest Jitters

News reports of banks preparing to further increase the lending interest have sent jitters to the borrowers

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

In the last one year alone, the banks and financial institutions have doubled the rates of interest on loans from the average of 7 percent to 14 percent.

This, some bankers say, may soon increase further.

Particularly, the lending to the realty sector and home/auto loans could see the rise of further few percent in the interest rates.

This news has caused businessmen to shudder in anxiety.

The Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) Kush Kumar Joshi has said that the businessmen could find themselves in a situation where depositing money in bank will be more profitable than running businesses.

The investors in realty sector are much more apprehensive.

"Due to the doubling of lending rates in past one year, the realty sector is already suffering. Worse, this has come at a time when the central bank has

tightened guidelines on banks to limit their lending to real estate. As such, in the last one year, the number of transactions of real estate has declined by almost 90 percent," said Min Man Shrestha, general secretary of Housing Association of Nepal.

The bankers are criticized for only trying to increase the rates instead of accepting reduced profits in 'rainy days.'

But they are quick to point out the 'reality.'

"We have not made decision to increase the rates. But it is true that the cost of fund has increased and the problem of liquidity is worsening," said Radhes Pant, former president of Nepal Bankers Association (NBA).

At a time when the central bank's leadership has come forward in announcing measures to tackle the financial ills, the problems in lending rates that could directly impact common consumers should get appropriate attention. ■

ILAM MUNICIPALITY

Misused Road Funds

Local Self Governance Act 1999 encourages participation of consumers in development projects through maximum utilization of municipal investment. However, the experience of Ilam Municipality is different. Although the Municipality has spent huge amounts of resources in development projects in the last few years through the Consumers' Groups, rampant misuse of resources allocated to projects has come to the surface. The 4-kilometer Tilkeni-Namsaling-Naya Bazar-Fikkal road is an example

By UMA KANTA KHANAL In Ilam

Five years ago, Ilam Municipality set up a Consumers Group to construct a 4-kilometer road in line with the Local Self-Governance Act 1999. The accord with the users group was to complete the road work in two years. The deadline passed. Three years later, work is still in a preliminary stage.

Considerable amount of money has gone into building the Tilkeni-Namsaling-Naya Bazar-Fikkal road. The municipality has been allocating the budget for the project every year, but nobody knows how many more years it will take.

A number of other projects are facing a similar fate. As per the annual records of Ilam Municipality, it spends 60 percent of its total budget in development work, but only less than 25 percent work is successful. Most of the unsuccessful projects are run by users

groups, failing to deliver results by the deadline.

Talk of the Town

Let alone bigger central projects, the road is the latest talk of the town. Almost every resident of Ilam knows about the delay in the road work, who are behind it, and who benefit. It is an open secret.

Matrika Dahal, a permanent resident of Ilam Municipality ward number 6, is one of knowers. He is dissatisfied with the work on the road linking Tilkeni Turn of Ilam Municipality to Mai River. The municipality had allocated NRs. 400,000 (US\$ 5500) to initiate the road construction in 2006.

"Documents show that the municipality has already paid the money. But, where did all the money go? No one knows," said Dahal.

The road connects Namsaling, Naya Bazar and Fikkal of Ilam. In 2007, the municipality allocated Rs. 5.4 million for completion of the road. However, Rs.

2 million was deducted to construct a taxi stand.

"Despite so much money going into the project, the road is far from usable as yet," Dahal said.

Tractors are using the simple track with difficulty as they go to Mai River to collect sand and other construction materials.

After locals lodged complaints, the municipality has started constructing drains alongside the road.

Dahal said, "As the contractor hired by the Consumers Group didn't work properly, the locals had to evacuate mud and stones from the construction site. I am firmly confident that the road will start to decay after completion."

Local residents complain that there is corruption even in the purchase of construction materials. The contractors are ready to pay more than the running rate of any products or services provided to them. People say the extra money,

which is paid to them, will be returned to the members of the Consumers Group for their private use.

After this revelation, the municipality has now decided not to award any development work to the users groups. It will instead contract out works to competitive bidders in accordance with the Public Procurement Act 2007 and Public Procurement Regulations 2008.

Consumers' Group

Local residents talk about how the economic standards of people involved in the users group went up.

"These same people used to walk while going anywhere before they were in the committee. Now they ride their own bikes," said a resident on condition of anonymity.

"These members of the Consumers Group are affiliated to the sister organizations and other structures of political parties," said a local resident of ward number 6.

"All are cadres of the political parties. We have broadcast or published the news regarding this but nothing affects them," said Som Suseli, former president of Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Ilam Branch.

"Only 15 percent of the Rs. 3.4 million funds has been used properly. Rest of the money has gone into pockets of cadres of political parties who are in the Consumers Group."

Interestingly, political parties and the municipality set up the group involving most of the members from other VDCs.

"We cannot recognize the members of the Consumer Group. We hear that they are from Shri Antu and Samalbung," said Matrika Dahal. "Had locals been in the users committee, the Tilkeni-Fikkal road would have been blacktopped by now."

While forming the Consumers Group of Tilkeni-Fikkal road, political parties had a big row for at least a month, executive officer of the municipality Yubraj Dahal said. He claimed the procedure to form the Consumers Group was wrong. "We have still not returned their deposited money yet."

Clause 119 (1) of the Local



Ilam Municipality

Governance Act 1999 says the municipality may form consumers groups from direct beneficiaries in implementing the project.

Political Mechanism

There are ten members in the Ilam Municipality's Political Mechanism comprising people nominated by three major and other minor political parties.

However, the representatives of the political parties claim that they are unaware about the programs that the municipality launches.

"It is mysterious that we do not know about the programs launched by the municipality. There is no transparency," CPN (UML) representative Mahesh Basnet said.

Political representatives say that it is the hardest time to understand the demand of the public. The employees try to implement the development works under the influence of bribes, they say.

Basnet said, "The employees of the municipality only think about how to be economically better off personally."

Clause 117 (2) of Local Self-Governance Act 1999 says the secretary shall implement or help implement the projects as per the calendar referred to in sub-section (1) in coordination with the concerned ward committee. However, projects directly concerning the

municipal denizens shall be operated through the consumers committee.

In the absence of elected representatives, the political mechanism exercises all the authorities given by the act.

Locals say political representatives have no work. "If the municipality doesn't discuss implementation of plans with the political representatives, why should they be there?" asked Bijay Shekhar Bhattarai of the municipality. "It is the representatives of political parties who are responsible for the mess. The political representatives neither resign nor work to activate the employees of the municipality."

Dissatisfied Political Parties

Ilam Municipality was established as far back as 2015 B. S. But it has yet to develop a trend to consult with the representatives of the political parties regarding the expenses of the municipality.

Mahesh Basnet, who was a mayor before, expressed dissatisfaction about every municipal decision on expenses. "These decisions are not transparent," Basnet says. "The trend is one man prevails in the municipality."

The municipality, for example, has a mandate to donate only up to Rs. 100,000 or a certain percent of the total budget



Tilkeni-Mai road

per annum as per the Act. But the donation, the UML leader claims, exceeds that amount because the executive officer, who is the chief of the municipality, does all work related to every expense.

The absence of elected representatives is the main obstacle to reaching the fruits of the development projects to the citizens. The political party representatives say the employees are not accountable to fulfill the public demands. Instead they work for their own benefits.

"The employees of the municipality work under the influence of political parties, not according to the necessity of the people," Basnet says.

When elected representative are there, people go to them with complaints against any type of corruption, he said. "But where do they go now?"

The municipality holds meetings with political representatives hardly once in six months. "So, the political parties do not know about the agreement with the donor agencies," he says.

These meetings take place when the municipality is in problem.

The president of Nepali Congress of Ilam Keshav Thapa agrees that the development works are not going on in full swing. "If there had been the elected representatives there would be many

development works in the municipality. Tilkeni-Fikkal road would have been a success story," Thapa said.

Consumers to Contractors

The municipality set up the consumers' group according to clause 119 of Local Self Governance Act 1999 because the road project directly concerned the local people. The Act doesn't support contracting out development projects meant for the community use.

However, as the road project set a bad example, Ilam Municipality has decided to implement development works through open bidding and not through the Consumers' Group. The executive officer of the municipality Yubaraj Dahal said, "We have learnt a great lesson from Tilkeni-Fikkal road project. The municipality has decided not to involve the Consumers Group in the construction of such projects."

The 900-meter Bhakta Bahadur Dewan Marg has been blacktopped by a contractor for 3.5 million rupees in just a year under open bidding. Now contractors are bidding for several projects, including the construction of trekking trails and motor roads.

One of the major problems with the users group is that the members are appointed on political recommendations. "Despite prevailing

criteria which include that the members of Consumer Group must be the residents of the area, the political parties appointed non-local members, so the development works are badly affected," Dahal said. "There was no alternative other than to bar them from implementation of the development works. Even the representatives of the political parties got involved in the decision."

Open Bidding

The municipality official said that it is easier to work under the competitive bidding system. Clause 116 (2) of Local Self Governance Act, 2055 (1999), requires that after the selection of the projects, the municipality will have to prepare a calendar of operation and implementation or help get these ready for such projects.

Tenders for such projects are awarded as per the legal provisions specified by Local Self Governance Act 1999, Public Procurement Act 2007 and Public Procurement Regulations 2008.

The Public Procurement Act 2007 and Public Procurement Regulations 2008 clearly set the standards for the construction of projects, procurements including acquisition of any goods, consultancy services or others services or carrying out or causing to be carried out any construction works, by a public entity.

One of the objectives of Public Procurement Act is to make the procedures, processes and decisions relating to public procurement much more open, transparent, objective and reliable, obtain the maximum returns of public expenditures in an economical and rational manner by promoting competition, fairness, honesty, accountability and reliability in public procurement processes, and; ensure good governance by enhancing the managerial capacity of procurement of public entities in procuring, or causing to be procured, construction work and procuring goods, consultancy services and other services by such entities and by ensuring the equal opportunity for producers, sellers, suppliers, construction entrepreneurs or service

providers to participate in public procurement processes without any discrimination.

The act has clear guidelines for bidding process, awarding contract and process for completion and ensuring the quality of works. "This act helps us a lot to avoid the political pressure and use the public resources for the greater benefits of the people," said Dahal.

Extortion of Money

Wherever the Consumer Groups are formed, the local cadres of the political parties regularly extort money from them. Political workers make different program proposals and take donations. The executive officer of the municipality Dahal said, "The pressure comes from UCPN (Maoists) and Limbuwan groups. In the last fiscal year, more than three lakh rupees went through this."

The employees of the municipality say the sister organizations of different political parties come to the municipality demanding donations. "They come here claiming that they are going to organize conventions and other programs of the organizations," Dahal said. "This is a hazard for the municipality."

The locals do not believe the money is utilized properly in the works they have been paid for.

The Ilam president of Nepali Congress Thapa said that this happened because of vested interests of the political parties. The money, as a result, is misused.

Ilam Municipality's road projects show how politically motivated nominees in the Consumers Group are consuming the funds allocated for the benefit of the people. Local cadres of political parties posed obstacles, instead of extending help, to the municipality in the development works. This is an example of how political instability is badly affecting the entire development projects and real demands of the people.

This is the sixth of nine investigative stories on politics of local bodies supported by The Asian Foundation. The views expressed by the Author do not necessarily reflect those of The Foundation or founder. ■



Gender Strategy: Give Women Land Rights

By RADHA POUDEL

Nepalese women suffer exploitation and violence in their family and work settings regardless of their caste, religion, location, or education. It is sad for the lot of women, who cover half the sky of Nepal as primary food producers and household managers, to make do with limited political, social and land rights.

In fact, as per a practice associated with the Hindu religion, women have no right to claim their parental property. As a result of such customary and statutory laws, only 8.1 % (CBS 2001) Nepalese women own land. Even after the restoration of the multiparty system in 1990, women continued to be deprived of rights and opportunities at par with their male counterparts.

Landlessness also deprives women from the political empowerment process. Women without land hardly participate as members in formal and informal groups and committees in their communities. Consequently, they are excluded from the process of crafting public policies and sharing resources. This situation affects their leadership, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills.

Women's landlessness also contributes to the deterioration of the environment. Quick decisions or adaptation and mitigation measures are required to address effects of climate change and disasters. Because women do not have land ownership; they are left out in making such crucial decisions. As a result, while their productivity is affected, the situation aggravates environmental degradation.

Last but not the least, women's sub-human living conditions have been confirmed by CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) 1979, Beijing Women Conference 1995 and MDGs. Women are not getting due respect, security of shelter, and opportunity to exercise their liberty and dignity to work, all thanks to their landlessness.

Because of Nepal's patriarchal social

structure and culture, neither are women likely to exercise their rights, nor are men ready to provide them space. Rules and regulations are still not fully aligned with Nepal's Interim Constitution: male and elite dominated cultures exist everywhere, such as in bureaucracy.

Women's landlessness also hinders all efforts aimed at poverty reduction, peace and sustainable development at large.

Realizing the need and urgency for giving women their land rights, several organizations, networks and alliances have emerged at local, district and national levels in Nepal. Among them, Community Self-Reliance Center, a civil society organization, is championing their cause. Yet, civil society organizations have remained far from meeting certain targets and developing appropriate

strategies for women's land rights.

A gender strategy helps these organizations to promote equal opportunities or for reducing the gaps in opportunities between women and men. It assesses implications for women and men for any planned action, including organizational policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. A sound gender strategy should be integrated in to program planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and other aspects of institutional operations where both women and men equally benefit by following steps such as hiring gender expert/consultant during assessment in order to ensure the use of gender friendly approaches, tools including use of sex-disaggregated data. Gender strategy also demands establishment of baseline data, ensure mid-term and final reviews and evaluations of the programs,

Thus, gender strategy is the most crucial strategy to increase women's land ownership and empower them. It is imperative that organizations working for women's land rights issues have to incorporate gender strategy deliberately and urgently. ■



A woman ploughs a field

Kidney Stone: An Alternative Therapy?

- By BUDDHA BASNYAT, MD



Kidney pain (renal colic) is a very common problem in medical emergency settings in Nepal. Pain is so severe that it may awake patients from their sleep. There may also be accompanying nausea and vomiting. The pain may go away only to return a bit later in an excruciating manner radiating from the lower back and going down the abdomen. The pain is described as having "peaks and valleys". Stones less than 5 mm in diameter often pass spontaneously in the urine; that is without any medical intervention. Drinking plenty of fluids helps. But stones >10 mm in diameter do not usually pass without medical intervention. The usual treatment is surgery or where available, lithotripsy.

Lithotripsy is a non invasive method of using shock waves to crush the kidney stones. There is a laser lithotripsy too, but all of these measures can be expensive and unavailable.

So, some clinicians have suggested that a common blood pressure drug (nifedipine, sustained release) which is relatively inexpensive and widely available be used first for stones around 5 to 10 mm or larger in size. This

suggestion is based on recent studies which showed that with the usage of this drug, the increase rate of expulsion of the stone was higher and also the patient required less pain medicine (analgesia). As anyone who has suffered kidney stones will testify, the relief with effective pain medicines during an attack of renal colic is something to be very thankful for. So if less pain medicine needs to be used, that in itself is helpful. Nifedipine apparently works by decreasing the spasm (contraction) of the smooth muscle which are wrapped around the kidney's plumbing system of pipes. If the stone can be passed in this manner, obviously this is beneficial for the patient as this is clearly a much less invasive method than even lithotripsy. Furthermore nifedipine is generally a well tolerated drug.

In the context of Nepal and in terms of cost effectiveness, nifedipine seems like a useful drug that possibly could be tried first before more more invasive methods of treatment is carried out. Of course drinking adequate amount of water to flush the stone out is a very useful and a simple strategy, but this alone

may not do the trick unless if the stone is very tiny. For some people the drug nifedipine may cause dizziness and headache, but if patients can successfully deal with these side effects,



the drug may be worth the effort.

There are other drugs besides nifedipine which have been tried successfully. But in our context this is the drug that is inexpensive and widely available. However it is important to discuss this option of using drug treatment for expulsion of the stone with your doctor before you go out and buy the drug and use it. The treatment needs to be properly supervised. This treatment may not work for everyone. Other tests may need to be done.

MOHANA RIVER

Bio-Embankment Works

A green initiative has prevented Mohana river from cutting its banks

By UMID BAGCHUND, in Kailali

No sooner did the residents of a ward in Dhangadi Municipality successfully turn the banks of Mohana river into a green community forest than they realized that they were truly protecting their village from floods and river cutting.

The Adarsha Community Users Group of Ward No. 3 implemented the bio-embankment scheme with the financial support of Rs. 369,000 and a local contribution worth Rs. 1.43 million under the Western Terai Landscape Conservation Project (WTLCP). The success story has prompted the residents living down the river to

demand similar projects.

Local resident Brindadevi Avasti said the one kilometer bio-embankment has saved equally long river bank from erosion.

"We can have a sound sleep now during the monsoon," said Avasthi. "Most of Ward No. 3 used to be under a great threat of floods and erosion."

The local community started plantation of saplings on the banks of the Mohana river in 1995 and called the area Adarsha Community Forestry. But then no one believed that the work would be sustainable.

"We were able to show how to turn the barren river banks into a green forest. Thanks to the efforts of the local

community, this became possible," said Sita Khadka, vice president of the committee.

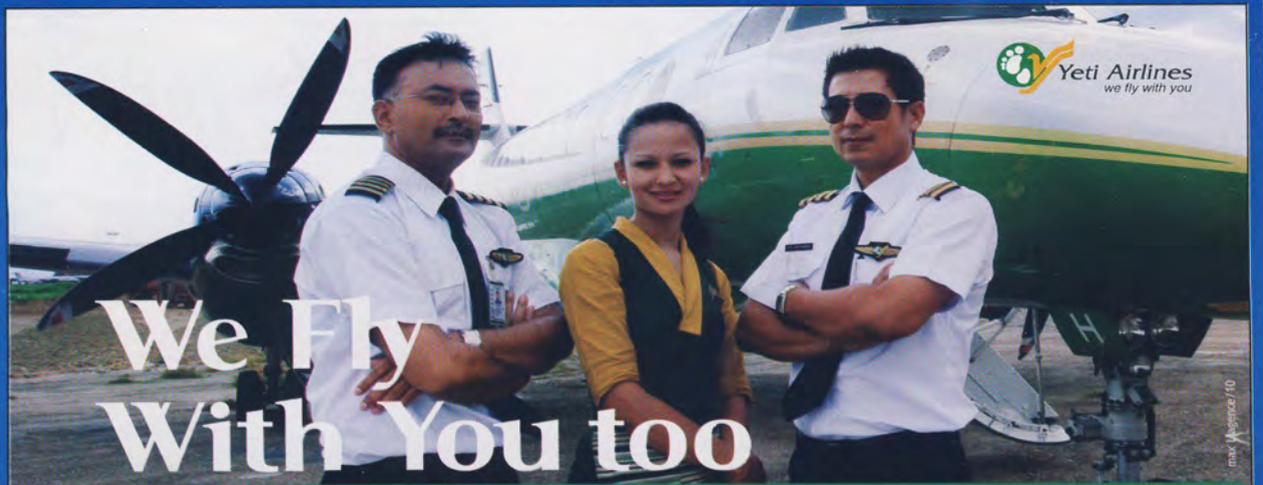
The users group has 173 households as members. Local residents share the forest products, including fodder, here.

Women from the users group planted various kinds of saplings, including fruits, gradually turning the river bank as a garden just a kilometer away from the Dhangadhi market. The forest group got a bonus as the area developed into a picnic spot.

"During the summer, there is a rush of students and families to organise various activities," said Taradevi Bhatta, member of the users group. "We see a reason why we should protect the plants as our children."

After flash floods destroyed the river banks, locals demanded from the administration to build the bio-embankment.

"We used bamboos and sand against the flood water," said the coordinator of the Mohana River Community Users Group. ■

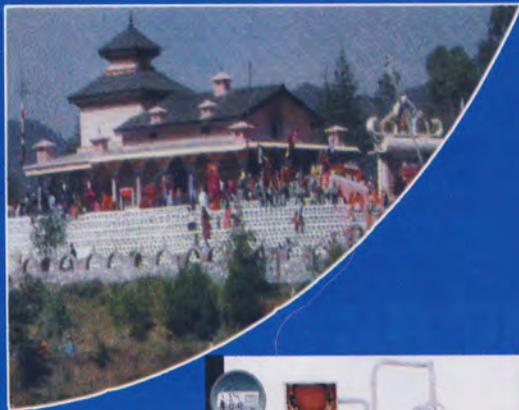


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