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Opinion:
Dipak Gyawali

President: Doctor's Dilemma

New Spotlight's Investigation: Dadeldhura Municipality

Viewpoint:
Dr. Tilak Rawal

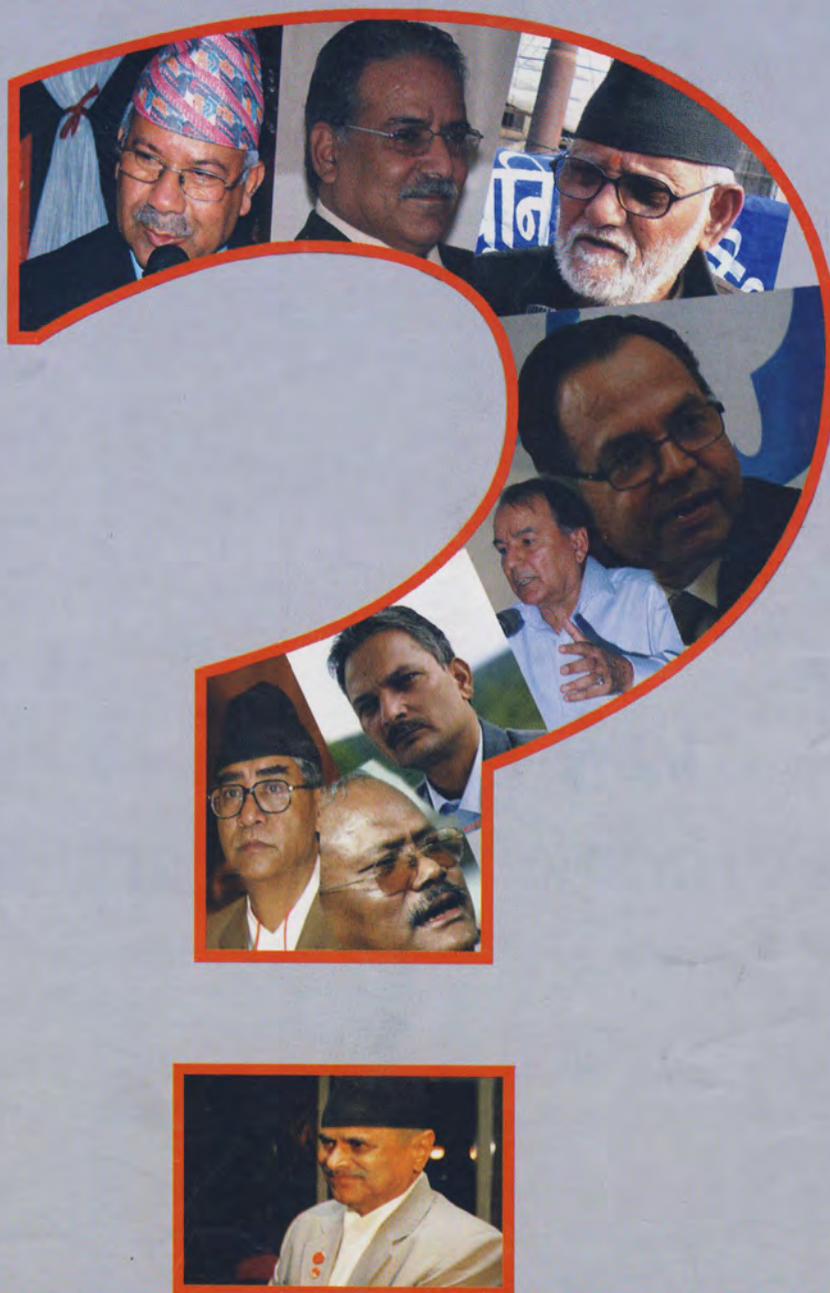


NEW SPOTLIGHT

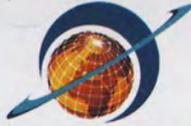
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From The Editor

With less than four months left for the extended deadline for a new constitution, more than seven months have gone into waste in search of a new prime minister. A fresh round of what still looks an uncertain search is due this week. The parliament's election regulations have been amended in an attempt to avoid the futile voting that marred the last round of elections for the top executive office. The promise of the three major parties – the Maoists, the Congress and the UML – to forge a consensus has already come a cropper. The drama has now shifted to forming a 'consensus-based' majority government. But who should head it first has divided the parties so deeply that hopes of a breakthrough is still suspect. The underlying cause of the stalemate is the long-running deep mistrust which we have time and again referred to in our previous issues. We have taken a fresh look at it in our cover story this time. Over the past few days, there had been signs of hopes only to be dashed soon after. But we discovered to our utter dismay the political parties, for reasons best known to them, are not serious in avoiding the bitter past and ensuring a sweet future. They, instead, appear gearing up for a showdown in which no national forces can hope to emerge a winner. Who will end up the winner is anybody's guess.

Keshab

Keshab Poudel
Editor



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Indian Aid For Dadeldhura Blood Bank

India has agreed to provide grant assistance of Rs 1.48 crores for construction of double storied building for Blood Bank-cum- Blood Transfusion Centre and provision of furniture and equipment in Dadeldhura under Nepal-India Economic Cooperation Programme. This is the third development project in the Dadeldhura District being undertaken with the assistance of India under its Small Development Projects. "Dadeldhura, does not have sufficient medical facilities. The people of the district have to go to Dhangadhi, Nepalgunj or Mahendra Nagar to meet their health and blood requirements. The new infrastructure being constructed with Govt. of India grant assistance will enable the District Chapter of Nepal Red Cross Society to establish a blood bank with blood transfusion services in Dadeldhura for collection and supply of about 500 units of blood per annum," states a press release by Indian embassy. As per the statistics provided by district health authorities, the district has maternal death rate of 5.7% due to infection and excessive bleeding



caused by unsafe deliveries and non-availability of Blood Bank and Blood Transfusion Services. The new facility would enable the people to have easy access to health facilities and meet their requirements for blood transfusion. "India-Nepal Economic Cooperation Programme has an outlay over Rs 5700 crores with more than 390 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."

DoR Recommends Shortening Mid-Hill Highway

The Department of Roads has recommended that the government shorten the Mid-Hill Highway's length by around 150-200 km, adopting alternative alignments in some sections. Currently, the length of the proposed highway is around 1,776 km. Tech Studio of Engineering (TSE), which prepared the detailed project report (DPR) of the highway, has also suggested exploring possibilities for adopting shorter alternative alignments. TSE submitted the DPR to the Ministry of Finance (MoF) last Sunday. The department said shorter alignments can be adopted to reduce cost and maintain the speed limit of 50 km per hour. According to the department's recommendation, the highway's length can be shortened in sections including Jorsal-Tamor-Sankrati, Sankrati-Myaglung, Myaglung-Basantapur-Hile, Hile-Leguaghat-Bhojpur, Chaurjahari-

Dailkeh-Dullu-Lainchaur and Mangalsen-Silgadhi. "The DPR has shown that there are possibilities of reducing the highway's length by 150-200 km," said a high level official at the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works. "However, as the Cabinet has already approved the 1,776-km alignment, it will be difficult to get the new proposal approved by the political parties."

US Welcomes Transfer Of PLA

The United States of America (USA) has welcomed the handover of the Maoist People's Liberation Army to the Special Committee on Supervision, Integration, and Rehabilitation of Maoist combatants, describing it a positive step forward in the peace process. The US government has also congratulated Nepal's leaders for completing the important process of transferring the command and control of the Maoist combatants to the Committee and commended, in particular, the UCPN-

Maoist party for demonstrating its commitment to democracy by separating itself politically from the combatants. "The United States reaffirms its support to the peace process and hopes that the ceremony today will encourage all parties to complete the remaining elements in the peace process, the drafting of the new constitution, and the creation of a Government", says a statement released by the US Embassy.

SAARC Telemedicine Center Opened

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal inaugurated the SAARC tele-medicine Center at Patan Hospital, Lalitpur on January 21. The centre has been established with an assistance of around Rs. 4.88 crores from the Indian government under the SAARC tele-medicine network project. The MoU for the implementation of the project between Indian and Nepal was signed in June 2009. The Centre will enable the host institution to receive Tele-Medicine consultation and Continuing Medical Education (CME) services to select hospitals in SAARC countries. The Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWRH) in Bhutan and Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH) in Kabul, Afghanistan are



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already availing such services as part of the SAARC tele-medicine network and with the inauguration of this Centre at Patan Hospital in Lalitpur, Nepal becomes the third SAARC country to get this facility. "In addition to the SAARC tele-medicine centre, Government of India has provided assistance to several other development projects under the rubric of SAARC programmes. Under the ongoing Project for Shuttle Breeding of Pulses, the Indian Institute of Pulse Research, Kanpur is providing assistance

to the Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC), to undertake field research and project work for improving the seeds quality of pulses which would lead to better yielding variety of pulses being cultivated in Nepal." A pilot project has provided solar home-lighting systems to over 300 families in Madi Kalyanpur village of Chitwan district as part of the India-funded SAARC rural solar electrification project. Computers and networking hardware has been provided to Nepal Police Headquarters under the project for Networking of National Police Authorities of SAARC Countries.

Full Scholarship To Girls

The Department of Education is set to provide with full scholarship to all the girl students from class 1 to 8 pursuing education in public schools across the country this year. Though the year 2010 against gender-based violence is over, the



Department is set to distribute scholarship to all girl students studying in public schools giving continuity to the year against gender-based violence up to mid-June, 2011.

EU Aid On MIP

The Delegation of the European Union to Nepal and the Government of Nepal have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for the period 2011-2013. Under this MoU, the EU will contribute an assistance of Euro 60 million (nearly NPR 6 billion) covering primarily three sectors - education, support to stability and peace building, trade and economic capacity building, according to a press release issued by the Delegation of the EU to Nepal. The EU has been working in these areas of cooperation on the basis of a

Country Strategy Paper covering the period 2007-2013 and the MIP 2011-2013, both of which have been designed in close consultations with the Government of Nepal and the donor community. The indicative financial envelope of Euro 60 million is about 33 per cent higher than the 2007-2010 programme. This increase, together with the concentration on a limited number of sectors, is an expression of the European Commission's commitment to maximise impact. Dhananjay Jha, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, and Dr. Alexander Spachis, Ambassador, Head of European

Union Delegation to Nepal, signed the MoU on behalf of the respective sides at a function organized at the Foreign Ministry this morning. "The EU has been keenly monitoring recent developments in the peace and constitution drafting process. The signing of the MoU is a further reaffirmation of its commitment to give continuity to its development cooperation initiatives with the Government of Nepal," Dr. Spachis said. He hoped that the EU assistance will be utilized to the full so as to assist Nepal move ahead in the key areas of education, peace building, trade and economic capacity building. ■



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PM's Time Used In Unproductive Nature

The lion's share of the time of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal is taken up by meeting with the cadres of his party and the members of Constituent Assembly (CA). According to his press advisor Bishnu Rijal, PM becomes busy from 8 am till 8 pm. In an analysis of his schedule carried out



Singhdurbar

by Abhiyan daily, of the total 39 meetings he attended, 25 were with the CA members and his party cadres. They were followed by the foreign diplomats. In fact, none of such meetings with cadres, CA members or foreign diplomats necessitate the presence of PM himself. The CA members who want development plans and budget for their constituencies can do so through the officials at the Ministry of Finance and National Planning Commission. 'It is better to meet party cadres at party office. As far as foreign diplomats are concerned, except the most essential, other meetings should be handled through the relevant sections of the Foreign Ministry,' said a political analyst.

NA's Rs 490 M Under Risk

About Rs 490 million of the welfare fund deposited by the Nepali Army (NA) in various banks are said to be under risk. According to Brigadier General Purna Chandra Thapa, director of the Welfare Directorate, the amount are under risk because of the bad financial condition of the banks and financial institutions where they have been deposited. The fund collects money by cutting certain portion of resources from regular salary of the NA personnel posted in UN missions overseas. In the wake of reports that huge amount of NA's welfare fund was in risk, the army has made the latest figure public through a press meet. Brig Gen Thapa said that Rs 170 million deposited in Nepal Development Bank, Rs 150 million in Nepal Sri Lanka Merchant Bank, Rs 70 million in United Development Bank, Rs 70 million in Amarawati Credit Cooperative and Rs 10 million in Samjhana Finance Company are under risk. He said that the Army was working to retrieve the amount safely.

Taskforce To Study West Seti

The Ministry of Energy has formed a taskforce to decide on whether to renew the license of West Seti Project. 'Since the

project could not take off despite repeated renewal of their license, we have now formed a taskforce to decide whether it should be renewed any longer,' said Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Minister for Energy. He said that the issue will also be discussed at higher political level including with the prime minister. The project had obtained the license 17 years ago. Its license was renewed last year when it showed commitment about Chinese investment. But it failed to carry out financial closure for the 750 MW strong mega project. It is estimated that the cost of building this project stands at around Rs 120 billion.

GEFONT To Agitate Demanding Minimum Wage

The labor union GEFONT has warned of agitation if the government does not increase the minimum wage for the workers. 'The government had committed to increase the minimum wage every two years. But two and a half years has already passed without any increase,' said deputy general secretary of GEFONT, Bishnu Lamsal. He said that they will launch agitation if the increase is not announced within a month. The Ministry of Labor and Transport Management officials, however, say that they cannot increase the minimum wage due to the interim order issued by the Supreme Court (SC), which has stayed any change in the wage. At present, the minimum wage for workers is set at RS 4600 per month.

IDs Mandatory In Domestic Flights

The authorities have made it mandatory for passengers in domestic flights to carry proper identification cards. For Nepali citizens, the citizenship certificate, driving



Domestic Airlines

license, passport or other IDs can be accepted. Students can show their student IDs while the minors can fly based on IDs of their parents. The new rule has been introduced after it was revealed that passengers of ill-fated Tara Air had lied about their nationality. The aircraft had crashed nearly two months ago. ■



Ex-king Gyanendra To Attend The Hermit's Meet?

A group of Hindu organizations have planned to invite ex-king Gyanendra to a meet of the Nepalese and the Indian hermits' in Kathmandu during the Shivaratri festival early next month. The meet is aimed at reviving the recognition of Nepal as a Hindu state, according to the organizers. This is a preparation to burn the constitution and sent warning that moves to change the country's name would not be acceptable, a member of the organizing committee said. 'Nepal must be made a Hindu state, this name cannot be changed' (Jana Aastha, Jan 26)



'Loyalty' To The Foreigners

News media of Nepal gave prominent coverage to the caretaker prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's 'briefings' on Nepal's progress in peace process by to the visiting Indian foreign secretary Nirupama Rao. It appeared that the prime minister who spares no opportunity in public forums in finding faults with the secretaries and civil servants of the country treated the Indian secretary with respect and goodwill. It was in fact a continuation of the tradition of 'loyalty' to the Indian secretary from the Nepali rulers who show reluctance to even respond to the greetings of the Nepalese secretaries. Similarly, the Nepalese news media which do not give importance to even the big events of Nepal did not lag behind in showing such loyalty by giving undue importance to the Rao visit. (Dr. Prabin Surya in Sanghu, Jan 24)

Ex-Army Chief Pleads For Monarch

The retired chief of the Nepali Army, Rookmangad Katwal has emphasized that the monarchy is still indispensable for Nepal. He made the remarks at a function of the Nepalese residing in London. He said that the monarchy is necessary in accordance with the country, time and



the circumstances. Each country's necessities may be different. As for Nepal, the monarchy was needed yesterday; it is needed even now to keep the country united. (Ghatna ra Bichar, Jan 26)

The PM Offer

Had the Maoists agreed to bring the combatants under the special committee a Maoist-led government would have been put in place eight months ago and a new constitution would have been drafted by this time, revealed senior leader Baburam Bhattarai. Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Sitaula had conveyed to the Maoists last May that the Nepali Congress would be ready to join such a government. The top Maoist leadership discussed this at great length. Bhattarai backed the Congress offer and insisted that it be agreed right away. But chairman Prachanda said that the offer can be accepted only if he was made the prime minister. He said that the oppositions have been trying to make the prime minister of their choice. So, the offer is objectionable. (Tarun, Jan 24)

Dirty Game?

Politics is described a dirty game. Some people and the parties who used to question why did the people's army remain under the Maoist command are now wondering why did the Maoists hand over the people's army to the special committee. They have been engaged in spreading rumours that the Maoists have surrendered or bargained for power. This is a strange politics that they keep on opposing even such moves which fulfilled their demands. The handing over of the peoples' liberation army (PLA) to the special committee is aimed at foiling the conspiracy of the elements that seek to derail the constitution-making and renew the conflict. (Janardan Sharma 'Pravakar' in Naya Patrika, Jan 27) ■



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What "Dramatic Political Gains", Ms Landgren?!

- By **DIPAK GYAWALI**

As a passionate believer in the cosmopolitan ecumenism of the United Nations, it grieves me greatly to pen this essay sitting in an UNESCO café in Paris. The UN is a clumsy giant, but then I am also a great believer in the virtues of clumsy institutions: they survive and evolve. It is, instead, the neat but rigid ones that collapse and die due to their brittleness, much as the former Soviet Union did. In these globalized times of great change, the UN is also the only legitimate global institutional commons that humankind has to debate and democratically decide collective courses of corrective action.

The sadness comes from the UN's latest failure in Nepal, a tragedy that need not have been. The UN system had been misused in the past by international hegemonies to force their self-centered policies onto the rest of us, especially in the developing, decolonized or 'Second World' countries. But super power unilateralism had been too discredited, we thought, to be seriously worried about in the twenty-first century. How wrong we were! It survives as a regrouped syndicate that self-styles itself 'the international community' and its warped views of what the global order should be harkens back to the hegemonic 1950s, perhaps even earlier to the colonial missionary zeal of the 19th Century. In its latest incarnation, it has come piggy-backing on the hegemonic ambitions of regional powers; and the UN has found itself as another unwitting piggy-wiggy.

It must be admitted that the UN's political peacekeeping mission in Nepal, the much-maligned UNMIN, essentially failed in its mission: while the ceasefire is holding, mainly because the Nepal Army has maintained the discipline of remaining quarantined in barracks, neither the peace process nor the political framework needed to keep it sustained in the future is seen anywhere on the horizon. Furthermore, there have been as effective ceasefires in the past but neither those nor the current one are due to UN efforts. The UNMIN was brought in to buttress a flawed appeasement of insurgents through a fairly fraudulent 12-point Delhi-midwifed political wheeling-dealing that none of the actors had any intention of honouring.

For all the protagonists, the ostensibly warm welcome was only a 'strategy' for other aims: exchanging 'bullets only' for 'bullets and ballots' for the Maoists, becoming unaccountable new rajas for the parliamentary parties, and erasing Nepali history and identity to facilitate control over Nepal's resources and polity for the 'international community'. Only the Monarchists seemed to appreciate the value of UNMIN. The indefatigable Nepali blogger Maila Baje wrote in Jan 15 2007: 'By seizing direct control, King Gyanendra knew he was risking his throne. The monarchy may have lost the gamble, but the

country hasn't. The United Nations' arrival as part of the peace process has ended New Delhi's monopoly in its tiny northern neighbor.' By departing without completing the peace process, the UN too has fallen victim to hegemonic ambitions of upstart powers.

UNMIN's original mandate was to provide a fig leaf of arms sequestration during the Constituent Assembly elections. And we know what a sham that was after the Shaktikhor videotape exposé! Despite valiant rationalization efforts to the contrary by starry-eyed, primarily romantic EuroAmerican boutique Left in reports of the International Crisis Group as well as in the latest (Winter 2010) European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, it is too well-known even by ordinary villagers that real fighters and their effective arms such as those that downed Nepal army helicopters never came into the cantonments, and even those that did were seen moving about freely all over the country. Since more fig leaves were needed to cover a shameless process, UNMIN's mandate was repeatedly extended; but all the haberdashery of New York could not cover a naked emperor.

As the 12-point Delhi architecture began unraveling, UNMIN found itself the target of all the protagonists venting their frustrations, arguing that they had been hoodwinked by the others. Today Nepal has gone back politically to 2002, with bickering political parties unable and unwilling to do what they promised and were mandated to do. Even that mandate ran out in May 2010 and an inherently intractable Loktantrick impasse stares the country in the eye even as it lurches from one political accident to another. The Mughlani wheeling-dealing envisaged taming their erstwhile Chakrata wards much as a wild elephant is tamed by two domesticated ones. Unfortunately, the wild one became the dominant one after the CA elections and ad hocism began to replace the collapsing political architecture. In the unraveling, the first pillar to go was the keystone 'government by consensus' enshrined in the interim constitution. Competitive politics that followed ensured not only mal-governance but no consensus on the new constitution's architecture as well. Currently, the two domesticated elephants, the Kangress and the UML as well as their siblings, are using their combined brute force to marginalized the Maoists, quite successfully so far, but in the process debasing the idea of civilized parliamentary politics and the very *raison d'être* of the CA.

And the UNMIN personnel themselves contributed enough to that mess. Ian Martin was unable to count the actual number of insurgents, and the Israelis held that against him in Gaza. Leaving aside the intractable but vital question of who is a guerilla, how many were there and just where they are now, only



Landgren

one example of UNMIN-created imbroglio is enough to give an 'F' to this mission. In January 2010, some 4000 fighters were discharged from the UNMIN cantonments as unqualified after spending over two years in paid ideological and military training. Of these, 3000 were minors in May 2006, but only 500 were under 18 when bid farewell. As the security expert Rajendra Thapa put it then, these unmarried and with no social responsibility disgruntled youth have now become incendiary matches spread all over Nepal, open to recruitment by any of the 106 armed groups active in this post-monarchy country. What kind of peace process have you left behind, UNMIN?

It does not require an astute political analyst to understand that one party with arms (believing in violence as a legitimate political means to full political control) cannot be faced by others without it, unless there was a neutral army to back them. But they were, unlike BP Koirala, short-sighted enough to join the Mughlani-manipulated bandwagon demonizing the monarchy and the army. They became party to improperly removing the monarchy but soon found out that they need the army more than ever. In the process, as belatedly admitted by Ian Martin in the above-mentioned Himalayan Bulletin, "the end of palace control of the army has left it more autonomous and unaccountable than ever." Welcome to the Autonomous Peoples Republic of Nepal Army in New Nepal!

Martin's successor Karin Landgren was unfairly criticized for saying in her last Security Council briefing what all the political leaders have been saying in private and in public about the impending final collapse of the November 2005 architecture. But parsing her speech shows that the UN came into a flawed process and left a bigger mess behind. She and the UN should actually be criticized for reifying it as "dramatic political gains" when the reality Nepal now faces is the aftermath of "dramatic political adventurism" by the parties and the international community. ■



New Government In Offing

By DR. TILAK RAWAL

Despite numerous efforts of the main opposition party, from the street as well as from within the parliament, to dislodge the current government led by M.K.Nepal, it has completed about eighteen months, seven of them as caretaker. In the current situation of political instability and turmoil, Mr. Nepal seems to have created a record in stretching the longevity of his dispensation, which is likely to remain

It does definitely look unusual for a caretaker government to continue in office for seven odd months but as far as the question of blame sharing is concerned, a major chunk of it should go to those who contributed in making the first phase of prime ministerial elections inconclusive for a prolonged period of time by abstaining, maintaining a position of neutrality and not withdrawing the candidature of a loner in the race even after several rounds of electoral defeats.



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unbroken for quite some time.

Circumstances remained so favorable in support of the government that it is continuing in office without much observable efforts for continuity from its head or deputy head. Despite wishes of most parliamentarians and people at large to have a new government in place soon, this somewhat nonperforming government dragged on due basically to inter and intra-party wrangling as to which party and who from the party should lead the new government - created favorable situation for it.

These actions of our parties and their leaders were so difficult to be digested by our society that, in addition to the press and civil society, the Supreme Court of the nation, expressed its unhappiness advising chair of the legislative body to make elections conclusive.

Thanks to the unilateral action, following disturbance during unsuccessful attempt to present the annual budget, of Madhav Nepal in proroguing the session of the parliament that facilitated bringing out the budget by ordinance the next day and closure of

the tiring election process. Thanks should also be given to the apex court that issued stricture stating that parties cannot remain neutral in prime ministerial election and to Nepali Congress party that decided, after pressure from every corner, to withdraw the candidature of Mr. Poudyal right at the start of the winter session.

Analysts often are tempted to draw an analogy between decision by NC to withdraw their candidate from the race and that of UCPN Maoist not to proceed with their agenda at the special session of the parliament, summoned at their behest, which closed the session without getting into any business. Both the parties, number one and two, were told in clear terms by political parties, on two different occasions, that their

(Prachanda), which seems to have paved way for UNMIN's exit, decision to hand over control of the combatants to the special committee and its formalization at a special function organized in Shaktikhor of Chitawan.

Some other positive developments include approval by the parliament of amendments to regulations to conduct prime ministerial election only for three rounds, formation of a task force, consisting of members of big three parties, to formulate integration modalities for Maoist combatants, fixation of the date, starting February 3, for PM election and the big three deciding to engage themselves in talks for consensus government even after the expiry of the extended time given by the President.

bring the economy and the nation to a grinding halt.

It is high time that top leaders showed the prudence and guts of controlling the extremists prevalent in each party. With considerable headway made in regard to vital issues facing the nation, commoners would not like to see one issue such as government formation mixed with the paramount task of constitution drafting and reaching the peace process to a rational conclusion.

Nepalese want a new government to be formed soon to kick start the sluggish economy and they also want constitution drafting work to proceed unhindered independent of the composition of the government to be formed and its leader.

Even in case of one among the big three deciding to remain as the major opposition party, people would like to see it providing positive inputs, unlike what has happened so far, towards completion of peace process and preparation of new constitution.

Leaders of political parties may kindly keep at the back of their head that any attempt to make the forthcoming election inconclusive, inventing new techniques, would not be tolerated by people. It may be noted that the slapping of J.N. Khanal, UML chairperson, in Sunsari by a commoner is definitely an unpleasant incident but the fact to be noted is that it is highly symbolic and offers lots of lessons for us to learn.

People cannot have two opinions on the fact that the current dispensation has utterly failed in doing anything about rampant corruption, providing relief to the poorer Nepalese furious at stinging food prices and stirring the stagnant economy.

In addition to persistent high level of inflation, nothing much has been done to correct imbalances in broad economic parameters.

However much people may be critical of the present government, if the current dialogues, emanating from the three-point deal, do not derail, there is an opportunity for Mr. Nepal and his team to walk the exit path with a reasonable level of happiness and pride.

(Dr. Rawal is a CA member and a former governor of the central bank)

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proposal would be overwhelmingly defeated should they remain adamant.

Political alignment, however, did not remain the same in that UML and NC joined hands in stopping the Maoists from going ahead with the special session and NC was told by the other two big parties that their candidate would be overwhelmingly defeated should they field the candidate for the seventeenth round.

Most notable development in recent weeks is the signing of the three-point deal between Nepal government (Madhav Nepal) and the Maoist party

Although these talks for unity government ended negatively as expected, talks of political leaders at various levels seem to be heading towards right direction and it could lead to setting of strong, unshakable foundation for preparation of the constitution and reaching the peace process to a positive conclusion.

At the same time, it may not be advisable to ignore other political forces in the country such as Madesh-based parties, although not much numerically, that have demonstrated on several occasions in the past their strength to



Nepal Rastra Bank

FISCAL WARNING

Fiat From FATF

The unending political uncertainty could finally tie a noose around the country's financial neck

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

Last week in Canberra, Australia, the visiting delegation of Nepali officials were red-faced.

Their trip to the regional review of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) down under was marked by the not-so-subtle thrashing they were subjected to for Nepal's failure in updating laws to deal with money laundering and checking financing of terror.

The FATF - an inter-governmental policy making body comprised of 36 member countries including all the important bilateral donors - could put Nepal in 'negative list' if it does not formulate half a dozen laws in few months.

The FATF has written a number of letters to Finance Minister in the last one year reminding Nepal to update its laws.

Nepal now has only five to six months

What Nepal needs to do to avoid FATF action?

Formulate:

1. Mutual Legal Assistance Act
2. Extradition Act (revised)
3. Organized Crime Control Act

Ratify:

1. Anti Terrorism Convention 1999
2. Anti Organized Crime Convention 2000
3. Anti Corruption Convention 2003

Amend:

1. Anti Money Laundering Act

to approve those laws.

"The parliament has to pass few acts and ratify a couple of international conventions within few months.

Otherwise, the FATF can take serious action against us," said Dharma Sapkota, chief of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) at the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB).

The central bank is the lead authority responsible for checking money laundering.

As per the FATF's recommendations, Nepal will need to amend one act, ratify three international conventions and formulate three acts (see box) within July.

The NRB officials say they have initiated the process to carry out the recommendations. The amendment act and two bills along with three conventions have been submitted to the parliament for consideration. One bill is being formulated.

But the main obstacle is the political instability, which has almost crippled the parliament for the last seven months.

If the House is unable to act on FATF recommendations, the country could be black-listed globally.

And its consequence could be serious - very serious.

"The foreign banks may dishonor the Letter of Credit issued by Nepali banks. The donor countries may stop budgetary support or lay down stringent preconditions," warns Sapkota.

Even more serious will be the effect on Nepal's image abroad. It may earn the ill-repute of being a country without laws to deal with money laundering.

"Nepali nationals visiting abroad may be subjected to strict vigilance from custom and immigration authorities," he added.

But NRB officials believe that such an unfortunate situation will not arise.

"We can address all the concerns once the parliament functions smoothly," said NRB spokesperson Bhaskar Mani Gyawali.

And that is what is most uncertain. The parliamentarians will be busy in choosing prime minister and writing constitution in the coming several months. They can easily overlook the dark clouds hovering over the country's financial system. One can only shudder at the likely consequences of such an overlook. ■

PRESIDENT IN INDIA

Doctor's Dilemma

The private-turned official India visit of the first commoner head of state of Nepal has taken place at a critical political transition of the new republic

By SUSHIL SHARMA

It was supposed to be a purely private visit. A visit to medical colleges in Calcutta and Chandigarh where he studied. At their invitation.

A nostalgic Ram Baran Yadav had no hesitation in accepting the invite.

Decades after he graduated as a medical doctor, he had become the first president of the Republic of Nepal.

And being a one-time active political leader he would, however, not mind if the opportunity of political interactions came along - in a country which retains a dominant influence in Nepal's internal affairs.

Quick to gauge his mind, the South Block decided to give the visit an 'official' status. 'Friendly and goodwill' visit, to quote the Nepalese diplomats in a bid to be technically correct.

As of writing this, the President, accompanied by the host country's ambassador Rakesh Sood, paid homage to Kali Mata in Calcutta and offered prayers for peace and stability back home.

After a one-way communication with the Goddess Kali in the West Bengal capital he was due to have a two-way dialogue with the powers that be in the Union capital. On the same issues: peace and stability.

The official announcement has it that President Yadav will be meeting almost all 'who's who' in Delhi's power circuit.

From his counterpart, Pratibha Patil, to the prime minister Man Mohan Singh and the powerful chairperson of the governing UPA, Sonia Gandhi and from Delhi's point man for Nepal, finance minister Pranab Mukherjee, to home, defense and foreign ministers and the opposition leaders.



President Yadav

His meetings are taking place at a critical political transition of Nepal which faces the challenge of running against time to meet the deadline of a new constitution. A failure fraught with dangers of plunging the fragile peace process into a dangerous crisis that, some fear, could threaten the very survival of the 240-year-old modern Nepal.

The fear may have been exaggerated, but few doubt that Nepal is facing one of the severest crises in its history.

As the fallout of the crisis is certain to transcend the national boundaries, there are concerns in many capitals - Delhi being the most important one.

It is this concern that is believed to have prompted the South Block to explore all possibilities including the role of President Yadav to ensure that the events did not go beyond its control.

With the political parties too

engaged in seemingly never-ending search for a new prime minister, it is obvious that the search for the alternatives have quietly begun behind the curtains.

After the failure of sixteen rounds in six months, the fresh process to elect a successor to the caretaker prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal has, at long last, raised hopes of a breakthrough.

But given the deep mistrust of the national political actors many doubt that any breakthrough at this point of time will last long.

That will leave the country back to the square one. Just ahead of the new constitution-deadline.

Here again, there have been intense speculations of a possible presidential intervention as 'the protector of the constitution'.

Will President Yadav oblige to the call and urge for such an intervention? Is he ready to become a willing partner? Or will he be just a reluctant traveler in the new journey?

Does he have the nerves to stand up and 'rise to the occasion' should the situation demand so?

These are probably the questions the Delhi mandarins would want to get answers to, during president Yadav's private-turned-official India visit.

For the first commoner head of state of Nepal, the answers would not be easy by any means.

He will probably return with two minds. A physician, will he be able to live up to the task of a surgeon? It's a doctor's dilemma. ■

NEW SPOTLIGHT

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POLITICS

Uncertainty Is The Only Certainty

Despite some signs of progress in peace process following the handing over of the 19000 Maoist combatants to the prime-minister-headed special committee, the long-running political stalemate shows no signs yet of an early ending. The fresh vote for electing the successor to the seven-month old caretaker prime minister may have raised hopes of a breakthrough. But the hopes could soon be dashed as the wrangling among the major parties along with dubious role of influential external powers threatens to play the spoilsport.

By SAROJ DAHAL

After more than a year of flak at the hands of the main opposition, the one-time 'puppet' Prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal received a standing ovation from the Maoist combatants at Shaktikhor camp last month.

The combatants were handed over to the special committee headed by him, despite a last-minute postponement of the flag handover.

Four days after the grand function at Shaktikhor Prime minister proposed Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' as the new consensus prime minister. This alone will give the country a solution, he said.

To many others, the sudden bonhomie between the one-time sworn enemies came as a big mystery.

Some Nepali Congress leaders termed this a result of the secret pact that served the interests of the two leaders.

On the surface, it looked like a major breakthrough in ending the long-running political stalemate and removing the hurdle in the peace process and the constitution making.

This many believe would also bring



PM Nepal (Left) and Prachanda: No end in sight

about political stability in the country four months ahead of the constitution-deadline.

But soon there had been signs that all was not well.

The atmosphere began to take a different turn after the Gokarna resort meeting.

This was explained in no uncertain terms by none other than Prachanda himself. At a function in the eastern district, Sunsari.

"External forces (read India) are bent on stopping me from becoming the prime minister again."

He said that even the planned Feb 6 elections are less likely to break the PM election stalemate despite the recent amendments to the election regulations.

"A conspiracy is on," he said.

The same day, Prachanda's rival in the party and a PM- aspirant Baburam Bhattarai expressed the same doubt.

"Other political parties are hatching

a conspiracy to stop the Maoists from leading the new government." He said.

At the root of the crisis is the same old problem. The problem of mutual mistrust.

All the three major parties see each other with deep suspicions.

Said a senior Nepali Congress leader, "No matter what agreement is forcibly reached on completing the peace process, we will chart own strategy on power-sharing."

This means the Nepali Congress will not be willing to back the Maoists regain the seat of power even if the Maoists show sincerity in peace process.

"Peace process and the power-sharing are two different things."

Even if the three parties show sincerity, they are one on a possible Maoist leadership.

The UML is ready to accept the Maoist leadership once the number of the combatants and the modality and the

time-frame of their integration and management are agreed.

The Nepali Congress believes the real process can be considered to have begun only after the Maoist weapons are handed over to the state, while keeping the combatants in the cantonment under the special committee.

The Maoists say, all these can be done only after a new government led by them is put in place.

To make the matters worse, the major parties' mutual suspicion is accompanied by the Prime minister Nepal's proposition to accept Prachanda as his successor, which has brought about an unlikely commonality in the voice of the former candidates - the Nepali Congress' Ram Chandra Poudel and the UML's Jhlnath Khanal.

UML general secretary Iswor Pokharel who is eyeing deputy prime minister ship with the coveted home portfolio under a non-UML-headed



PLA Handover: Confusion Persists

government says, "Madhav Nepal's proposal to make Prachanda the new prime minister is a good move which has been appreciated by all at the Gokarna resort meeting."

Pro-Prachanda Maoist leader Barsha Man Pun 'Ananta' also believes that his party chairman can become the prime minister on the basis of what he called a 'positive proposal' of prime minister Nepal.

Senior Maoist leader, Top Bahadur Rayamjhi, who belongs to Baburam Bhattarai faction, however, points out that the party has not officially named its candidate. A clear challenge to Prachanda's aspirations and tacit support to Bhattarai's bid.

Throwing cold waters to the Maoist dreams is a one-time Maoist sympathiser and Nepali Congress leader Krishna Sitaula, "Now is the time for the Maoists to immediately complete the peace process," which, he says, can be

expedited under a Congress-led government. "Once the process is completed, the Maoists can take over the reins."

Nepali Congress leaders suspect that prime minister Nepal

and Prachanda have reached agreement to make the latter the new executive chief of the country.

But the 'suspected' agreement appears unlikely to be put in practice with the other factions of the two parties and the Nepali Congress holding serious reservations.

The integration and management of the 19000 combatants and the handing over of their weapons ahead of the prime minister's election is impossible.

That will take at least a month from the start.

If the other parties do not trust the Maoists to lead the new government without ending the combatants' issue once and for all, the Maoists suspect that doing so beforehand could give the other parties (and the external forces) an opportunity to come down heavily on the former rebels.

In the circumstances, the parties may agree on deferring the

election for the prime minister to make way for prolonging the tenure of caretaker prime minister Nepal.

In the event of a vote, the parties have the option to boycott it, which will mean that the elections will be inconclusive yet again.

This is what Prachanda said is going to happen.

He may be right. The wait for the new government and a new prime minister may not end soon.

What is likely to begin is a fresh round of games to get the better of each other.

Each party wants to emerge a winner in the power games. The constitution-making and the peace process as envisaged by the 12 point accord and the



Maoists Combatants



Nepali Army

interim constitution are clearly not the priority for any of the big parties. Nor for the power that facilitated the Delhi accord and the subsequent developments in what is widely hailed as 'the uniquely home-grown' peace process.

As none of the key actors are sure about the future course of Nepali politics, each trying to turn it in its favour, the only thing that is certain in the coming days is uncertainty.

What now, will probably be the most commonly asked question in the next few weeks. The answer will have to wait for four months when the extended tenure of the constituent assembly comes to an end clearing way for a new beginning in the Nepali politics which has remained unstable over the past sixty years. ■

'The Parties Need To Find A Middle Way'

-GOPAL SINGH BOHARA

After 19000 Maoist combatants came under the special committee led by the prime minister amidst a grand function at Shaktikhor cantonment in Chitwan, debates and deliberations on the integration and the management of the former rebels have heated up. What are the challenges ahead and how soon they can be tackled is what Special Correspondent SAROJ DAHAL tried to find out in an interview with member of the army integration special committee secretariat and UML lawmaker, retired Brig General GOPAL SINGH BOHARA. Excerpts:

Well, we do not know what was agreed before. The leaders have their own versions. Conflicting versions, at times.

Has the army integration moved forward as is being believed by many?

This is certainly a positive step forward. But this alone is not enough. The modality and the criteria of the integration and the management of the Maoist combatants are more important. This is still being discussed at the highest political level. Without a consensus, it will be difficult to move forward.

As a member what is your take?

This cannot be resolved technically. Important thing is to resolve it politically.

You have visited the cantonments. Given the situation there how do you think can this be resolved?

The approach of the Maoists and the other parties are different. They will have to find a meeting point notwithstanding the ground situation in the cantonments.

As a retired general of the national army who is also associated with the special committee as well as a political party -- the UML -- what modality do you suggest?

As a member of the committee who is supposed to be neutral I am not supposed to make my opinion public. It does not serve the purpose as well. Still I think it will neither be totally in line with what the Maoists think nor what the army believes it should be like.

The parties have claimed to have inched closer to an agreement on the issue. Do you think so?

Nothing is impossible provided there are serious and sincere talks between the parties concerned. I think the modality can be worked out in accordance with the national requirements rather than the international criteria.

The chief of the secretariat Balananda



Sharma is reported to have suggested a certain number beyond which no integration can be possible nor the integration above Major rank is possible. What is your opinion?

The main thing is the tradition prevalent in the Nepal army and the Nepal police. For instance, the soldiers have to spend some 20 years to reach the rank of a Major. Can a combatant who has fought for ten years and spent four years in the cantonment be given the same rank? Then there is the issue of whether the combatants have received the training to merit high positions. So there are many vexing issues which cannot be resolved in a few days.

How optimistic are you about an agreement following the on-going discussion at the political level?

I cannot read the minds of the political leaders. But think all of them mean business.

What is the problem in moving ahead on the basis of what was agreed before?

Well, we do not know what was agreed before. The leaders have their own versions. Conflicting versions, at times. Mahara ji is very much here, so is Sitaula ji. But they have different stories to tell about what was agreed.

Do you mean there had been secret or tacit agreements on the integration and the management of the Maoist combatants? About the modality and the number etc?

I don't mean it. What I mean to say is that they must be aware of the issues raised during the agreements and the interpretations of the understandings between the leaders. ■



Fragile Climate

Climate Finance

Pulling The Purse String

Nepal's aid-handling climate needs to change for an effective fight against climate change

By NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
in London

Just as in climatic changes, strange things are happening in climate financing in Nepal. Despite a worldwide concern that financially-hit developed nations may not soon be able to give the climate funds they promised to poor and vulnerable ones, the country is not bothered. Reason: It has no dearth of donors.

Bilateral and Multilateral assistances continue to pour in as if they would climate-proof the entire country. But can they?

Climate science dismisses that. It calls it a mission impossible as long as the main source of human-induced climate change, carbon emissions continue to grow.

And the growth will remain with the United States now in back gear on climate agenda and dirty power plants still mushrooming across China.

The top two emitters have been

enough excuses for other polluters, both the established and emerging ones, to carry on with business as usual.

So, as the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere continues to thicken, all that the poor and vulnerable countries like Nepal can try to do is adapt to the inevitable impacts of climate change.

The good news is the country is receiving money to do that.

Even better is that it now has the National Adaptation Programme of Action that has identified areas of intervention to help people cope with impacts like floods, droughts, landslides, among others.

For a country so much rattled by a prolonged political instability, these are significant achievements indeed.

And, they would not have been possible without an active role of donors and, of course, the bureaucracy.

But it is only half the battle won.

What remains to be dealt with now is how the assistance received from so many donors is coordinated.

The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation have been behind the 110 million US Dollars Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience and UN agencies are involved in a number of climate projects.

Increasing number of bilateral climate aid is making inroads as well.

The Norwegian government is giving 5.5 million US Dollars for the study of global warming's impact in the Nepalese Himalayas and their water resources.

The British government's Department of International Development is already involved in several climate related projects and recently the German government announced its assistance for Nepal in the same field.

The number of bilateral donors channelling climate funds through non-government organisations is also on the rise.

In September 2009, 14 bilateral and multilateral donor agencies had signed an agreement 'donor compact' with the government committing themselves to help Nepal in its fight against climate change.

An indication then that flood gates for climate assistance were set to be opened.

Money since then has gushed in and continues to fill in the myriad pots.

But what about duplication of projects and donors' lopsided priorities - as in other foreign-funded areas?

How does a caretaker government so embroiled in a political fight make sure that these things don't happen and that it puts the money where its mouth is?

"To address that, we have brought the climate change policy," says Environment Ministry joint secretary Batu Uprety. "The policy will help us coordinate all the foreign assistances we get in the fight against climate change."

It won't be long whether the policy approved by the cabinet few days ago does as he says.

It then will be clear if the right hand in climate financing knows what the left hand is doing.

Khadka is a BBC journalist



Defending Nepal's Track Record: Deputy PM Koirala (2nd from right) and Jyoti Sanghera of OHCHR-N with Nepali officials in Geneva

Photo courtesy: Oliver Spencher/Article IIX

HUMAN RIGHTS

On Wrong Side

International community expresses worries over what it calls rampant impunity in Nepal, with only the communist Cuba coming in defence of 'loktantrik' Nepal.

By BHAGIRATH YOGI in London

On 10 March 2010, two women and a 12-year-old girl were killed by army personnel attached to a patrol of the Jwala Dal Battalion deployed in Bardiya National Park in mid-western Nepal. The army claimed that the victims were armed poachers who had attacked the patrol and that the soldiers had acted in self-defence.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) investigated the case and found that all three victims had been shot from behind. The NHRC concluded that the victims were not armed and were very poor members of the Dalit community who had been

collecting bark to sell.

On 27 April 2008, members of the United Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) abducted Ram Hari Shrestha, a businessman, from his residence at Koteswore in Kathmandu. He was accused of having stolen Rs 1.7 million and a weapon that Maoists had allegedly given him to keep safe. Shrestha was then brought to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment in Chitwan where he was severely beaten. On 8 May, he succumbed to his injuries and on 25 May, his dead body was recovered from Jugedi, Chitwan on the bank of Trishuli River.

After a complaint was filed by Ramila

Shrestha (Ram Hari Shrestha's wife), the Chitwan District Court formally charged five Maoist cadres including Kali Bahadur Kham 'Vividh' and Govinda Bahadur Batala. Only one of the five, Batala, was arrested. The four other accused were declared 'absconding' by the police after they did not appear before the court.

Despite having launched an internal probe panel to investigate into Shrestha's killing, the UCPN (Maoist) refused to cooperate with the police. On 24 May 2008, the PLA announced that one of the main accused-- Kali Bahadur Kham-- who was the commander of the PLA Third Division at the time of Shrestha's abduction-- was suspended. Nevertheless, Kham was never handed over to the police and was later promoted in the party hierarchy in January 2009. He is now a Central Committee Member and the Commander of the PLA Fifth Division.

The National Human Rights Commission, in its report, said the police chief of Chitwan District did not provide them with the information and documents demanded in relation with the case. Kham has also been accused of masterminding the robbery of three Chinese traders in

Kathmandu. On 9 August 2010, the Kathmandu District Court issued an arrest warrant against Kham and ordered the police to produce him before the court within seven days. The Home Minister Bhim Rawal met up with the Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal on 15 July to urge the Maoist party to hand over the accused to the police. But they didn't oblige.

These are but two incidences of the pathetic situation of human rights in the country. Political leaders as well as human rights activists claimed that rights situation in the country would improve once the direct rule of King Gyanendra comes to an end. But even after the demise of monarchy, the situation remains precarious.

On January 25 this year, some 50

members of the United Nations raised questions regarding human rights situation in Nepal at the 10th session of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. They mainly pointed towards what they called the situation of impunity in the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom.

Delegations from Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea and Switzerland, among others, asked the government of Nepal to take concrete steps to end the environment of widespread impunity and bring the guilty to book.

The British delegation recommended that the government of Nepal tackle impunity by creating an independent police commission responsible for all transfers and promotions, in order to end political interference in police duties through the threat of demotion or quick transfer.

The delegations of the Czech Republic, Canada, France and US recommended the government of Nepal specifically safeguard the security of journalists and implement adequate measures for the protection and investigation of crimes against journalists and human rights defenders.

It was only the Cuban delegation that supported the Nepal government saying that that human rights abuse in Nepal was due to the "unfair independent economic order".

Nepali officials, on their part, maintained that the poor human rights record of the country was due to the difficult transitional phase that the country was passing through. "Nepal is committed towards upholding universal human rights principles and fundamental rights enshrined in the country's interim constitution," said deputy prime minister Sujata Koirala, who was leading the Nepali delegation. While defending Nepal Army's record so far, she assured that the government will take action against human rights violators.

Leading human rights groups,

however, say there is little ground to believe that Nepali government will actually take action against rights violators. "Human rights violations go unchecked in Nepal. Police fail to register and investigate cases, state forces ignore court orders, and

the Government continues to withdraw serious human rights cases from the courts. The Government has failed consistently to act on recommendations by Nepal's National Human Rights Commission," said Amnesty International, in its report in the run up to the Geneva UPR. It also called upon the government of Nepal to promulgate a human rights action plan with concrete objectives to be implemented before the next UPR, expected to take place in 2015.

Rights groups say as Nepal is emerging out of the shadow of the decade-old Maoist insurgency, human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by both the state and the rebels during the armed rebellion are yet to be accounted for.

The comprehensive peace accord signed by the then government and Maoist rebels in November 2006 calls for setting up a National Peace and Rehabilitation Commission as well as a high level Truth and Reconciliation Commission to conduct investigation about those who were involved in gross violation of human rights during the conflict.

After more than four years, none of these commissions has been formed. The whereabouts of over 900 people disappeared during the conflict remains unknown. Worse, dozens of armed groups have sprung up in southern districts of the country, which are carrying out extortion, kidnap and even murder, forcing the local population to live in a



Nepali Rights Activists

situation of constant fear and threat.

The ousted king Gyanendra succumbed to international pressure and allowed the Office of High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) to be established in Nepal in 2005. "But the major political parties and the government of Nepal today neither listen to the international concerns nor domestic criticism," said Subodh Raj Pyakurel, chairman of Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), who was in Geneva to lobby with the international community. "Unless parties improve their behaviour and agree to draft a new constitution during the stipulated time frame, the situation won't improve."

As things stand now, both the sustainable peace and new constitution look remote in Nepal, which will have direct bearings on the overall situation of human rights in the country. ■

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Maoist Attacks Mount In India

By SIDDHARTHA SRIVASTAVA

Maoist violence, India's biggest internal security challenge, shows no sign of abating, with 2010 the worst year on record in terms of human casualties, and even more worrying a steep rise in the number of civilians killed.

Official figures released by Home Minister P Chidambaram earlier last month show 1,169 people died last year, the most since the armed rebellion began nearly four-and-a-half decades ago, and far more than terror and insurgency related deaths across the country, and in the troubled northeastern state

"It will be apparent that the Naxalites [Maoists] have not only spurned the offer of [peace] talks but have also escalated the conflict," said Chidambaram, who has been spearheading a massive security operation against the rebels said, in the year end assessment of his ministry.

The spread of the Maoist insurgency is so vast across swathes of India's mineral-rich states that it is most improbable that it could be defeated by force alone. As is the case with the Taliban in Afghanistan, where the US military and its allies have been unable to defeat the insurgency after nine years, the Maoists have a strong grassroots powerbase.

India's stellar economic growth over the past decade has given rise to a consumer class of 300 million people, but more than 700 million people have been left behind, the majority of whom live on less than US\$2 a day. These impoverished people, especially farmers, landless laborers and tribal minorities in remote areas, are the prime recruits of the Maoists.

Matters have clearly not gone right with the government's approach to the rebels. The 2010 toll includes 713 civilians (compared to 591 in 2001), 285 policemen (against 317 in 2009) and 171 suspected left-wing guerrillas (against 219 in 2009). Mineral-rich Chhattisgarh was among the worst affected, with the deaths 142 civilians and 164 security forces personnel. The state, in the center of India, witnessed the country's deadliest leftist attack in April as Maoist rebels killed 75 police.

In that attack, a government paramilitary force - mostly from the

Central Reserve Protection Force - involved in flushing-out operations in the thick forests of Dantewada district was hit by about 500 armed rebels.

The attack happened a few months after the first ever combined action of state and federal security forces, codenamed Operation Green Hunt, against the Maoist rebels whose writ runs large across provinces that as well as containing mineral riches also comprise India's poorest tribal populations.

Reacting to the Dantewada attack, Chidambaram said: "Something has gone drastically wrong. They seemed to have walked into a trap set by the Naxalites [Maoists]. Every soldier on the patrol was either killed or wounded."

The Maoists believe in armed struggle to overthrow the state and bring about socio-economic change, especially in the northeastern and central eastern provinces of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. The Maoists' stated goal is to overthrow the state by 2050, an ideal that is widely dismissed as mere rhetoric.

Today, 40% of the top 50 mineral-rich districts in India are affected by

They have already established links with leftists in Nepal and LTTE fighters - now that their battle is over - are involved in training the Maoists. Maoist rebels in Nepal overthrew the world's last Hindu monarchy and negotiated their way into government within a decade.

Naxalite violence, with repeated attacks on any symbol of authority, both private and public, including mining sites. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are the worst-affected states.

More than 10,000 people, including police, rebels and civilians, have died in the conflict. In February last year, at least 25 policemen were killed in West Bengal when Maoists attacked a camp. In March 2007, the Maoists were blamed for an attack that killed 55 policemen in Chhattisgarh.

The latest figures will, however, call into question New Delhi's approach of

using sheer force against the Maoists, whom New Delhi calls 'the biggest threat to India's internal security' - even more so than disputed Kashmir, where for decades India and Pakistan have squared off, at times even briefly going to war.

Critics of the government's approach say that a more political and humane policy is needed in handling the rebels and that there should be more focus on economic and social development of the deprived population. Chidambaram has been castigated for his inflexible and hardline views.



Indian PM Dr. Manmohan Singh

The government has also been criticized for equating Maoists with terrorists. It is pointed out that the rebels attack mostly symbols of state power (property and personnel) and not soft targets or civilians, as is the case with jihadis in Indian-administered Kashmir.

In June 2009, New Delhi labeled the Naxalite group, the Communist Party of India (Maoist), or CPI (M), a terrorist organization, putting it in the same league as other banned outfits such as Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba - accused of carrying out the massive Mumbai attack in November 2008 - and the now-decimated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka.

The Naxalites are also known to be seeking alliances with secessionist groups, especially northeast insurgents in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram, in a bid to expand their influence and gain a pan-Indian presence.

They have already established links with leftists in Nepal and LTTE fighters - now that their battle is over - are involved in training the Maoists. Maoist rebels in Nepal overthrew the world's last Hindu monarchy and negotiated their way into government within a decade.

As the bodies mount, there might be some in the corridors of power who question whether the use of an iron fist addresses the socio-economic problems that fuel the insurgency.

(Courtesy: Asia Times)

Hu Confronts Ghost Of Stalin

By FRANCESCO SISCI

For a nervous and wavering Beijing, the stakes were high. In the case of failure, some had even envisaged the beginning of a Cold War with Washington. But even before President Hu Jintao met with the troublesome United States Congress last week, Beijing felt relieved.

The Chinese champions of dialogue, the volunteers of a future alliance with the US, and the willing dreamers of the "sweet and sour" AmeriChina were already claiming victory.

A significant sign of their success was a reference in a speech of US President Barack Obama. He had mentioned in positive tones the Chinese theory about its peaceful development, the brainchild of Zheng Bijian, Hu's top adviser, who accompanied him to the United States.

The idea of peaceful development, with Washington's endorsement, can become the compass of the bilateral relationship. It gives new power to the moderate wing in the debate within the Communist Party of China and it could already give a new, more 'pro-American' spin to Chinese foreign policy in the coming months.

It is not the Group of Two, but a test not only of words but also that there is real substance in the new ties - the approval of the establishment of a US-China joint research center on clean energy in Beijing. These signs embody the search for mutual trust as a basis of the bilateral relationship that for the past year has been the mantra of Chinese policy towards the United States.

Some fear that the US wants to incite the toppling of the Chinese government and then proceed to cut China into pieces, dividing Tibet or Xinjiang from the rest of the country. Obama's assurances on these issues were echoed by Hu's acknowledgement of the weaknesses of Chinese human rights, and he also admitted that Beijing could learn from Washington. However, he maintained that the countries had different histories and levels of socio-economic development, and thus their human rights record could not be compared in the same manner.

In exchange for this support, Hu granted assistance on the delicate North Korean and Iranian dossiers. It is therefore an important victory for the voices of dialogue in China, even if it is not a final and absolute victory. Taiwan still represents a slippery slope.

Here, things are fine for now, and if the elections at the end of next year give Ma Ying-jiu another term in the president's office we might even see the start of political talks on reunification, possibly led by Zheng Bijian.

But if the elections are won by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party, which is in favor of Taiwan's unilateral declaration of

independence, the situation could become much more tense. For Beijing, it will be important to strengthen ties with America in the months before Taiwan's voters go to the polls and hope for no surprises.

Chinese monsters over bilateral ties

Success did not come easily and monsters still lurk in the many dark corners of bilateral ties. In Washington, Hu went with a large shadow over his shoulder - that of the Chinese military, which had challenged US technological supremacy with the experimental flight of a stealth fighter jet, the J-20.

It is unclear if Hu had fully supported the test, held to coincide with the visit to Beijing of US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. But Hu's most important office is that of chairman of the Central Military Commission. This was the last post held by Deng Xiaoping, in synch with the mindset of Mao Zedong's warning that 'power comes from the barrel of the gun'.

The party and the army are actually two structures one inside the other. The soldiers are still a major constituency of China's top leadership. At the latest party congress in 2007, nearly 30% of the delegates were from the army. Moreover, social security depends on the armed police, or wujin, who partly obey the Ministry of Public Security and partly the armed forces, but constitute one military body.

The central problem of the army, however, is: what is its mission and ambition now?

Under Mao it was very clear: to bring revolution against the invading Japanese or the incumbent Nationalists, but also, in the 1950s and 1960s, to support communist forces in other countries, like Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Burma (Myanmar) or Mozambique. Deng, who came to power at the end of the 1970s, changed the tune, cutting off all 'revolutionary' missions and in 1979 deploying troops against those of a former brother country, Vietnam, which had invaded another former brother country, Cambodia.

The war against Vietnam was a disaster and Deng cut half a million soldiers, but also created a new political pact with them. The military would not receive new funding (which was short in general) for weapons, but in return could get into business.

Starting in the 1980s, the military was one of the engines of economic growth as it opening thousands of businesses and gained more privileges at a time of major expansion in foreign trade. This phase had an initial end in the mid-1990s. At the time, China was in talks to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the predecessor to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and there was dispute about tariff levels requested by the West.

A study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences broke the deadlock by proving that in

reality, the level of tariffs on Chinese total imports, official and smuggled, was in fact lower than the rates required to join the GATT. If the government had cut the rates for the GATT while cutting off all smuggling, tax revenues would have increased along with protection of the domestic Chinese market. Smuggling was then largely under the tutelage of the army.

Therefore, between 1997 and 1999, the Chinese government took all enterprises away from the army, removed its import privileges, radically eliminated smuggling, and entered the WTO.

But what

this brought was a new political pact with the army. Soldiers were no longer allowed to make money with business and had to be in the military full time. Thus, they would receive funding from the state to buy new weapons and upgrade their technology.

At the same time, China was getting rich; it increased its tax revenues and had no spending on social welfare as schools and hospitals were, and are, privately run. Therefore, it had more money to throw at the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

In the past decade, according to the most conservative estimates, military spending increased by more than 10% per year, faster than the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate, and it was also distributed differently from in the past. The air force, missile force and navy had the lion's share in new technological acquisitions compared to the once-dominant ground forces.

Their mandate has become to avoid defeat in the case of limited or major confrontation over Taiwan.

Hu certainly does not want an armed confrontation with Taiwan. He has opened an intense relationship with the island's president, Ma Ying-jiu and his ruling Nationalist Party, the KMT. But even the mere possibility of a confrontation creates tension with the US, which pledges to defend the island from a possible mainland attack by selling advanced weapons.

Here, the limit is very thin not militarily, but politically. From China's view, it is not clear whether the promise of an American engagement against any attack on Taiwan by Beijing is just passive or if it represents an



Chinese President Hu Jintao

active US commitment to prevent reunification. For the Chinese generals, and also for Hu himself, who pushed so much for the cause of reunification, the US stance on Taiwan is crucial.

It could also be crucial in some military sectors to show that resolution of the Taiwan issue was obtained because of the military stance, not thanks to political maneuvering. Furthermore, thinking of the 2012 party congress, military forces or those who want their support can try to flex their muscles to gain the upper hand.

Here, there might be differences, but there is also a common denominator - a deep mistrust of the US, cordially reciprocated, according to the Chinese. Hu's task at the summit was then double: to try to reassure President Barack Obama about Chinese intentions but also bring home solid arguments in the next few days, when he will brief China's top echelons, to convince the other politburo members about the sustainability of a relationship of increasing trust with America.

This will in turn define the next political mission of the Chinese army, to be decided in years to come. We do not need to think of open hostilities, but it is enough to wonder whether the PLA mission should be aligned with or against the US. Will the patrol of naval routes in 10-20 years, when the Taiwan issue is solved and Chinese GDP is two to four times its current size (without considering yuan revaluations), be held together in coordination with American ships or not?

The first conditions in response to these questions have been raised in recent days. In the following weeks and months, one important testing ground for the new relationship will be North Korea. The issue between China and Korea, besides all geopolitical and security issues, is a problem of political identity of what the People's Republic of China used to be and what it is or may be, the truly new China.

The identities of the People's Republic of China and North Korea are intimately linked. Kim Il-sung, the first in the breed of North Korean communist dictators, began his revolutionary career in the ranks of the Red Army of China, after leaving a school he attended in China. This thread became a chain after Pyongyang attacked the South in 1950.

At that time, China had to decide what to do and the decision was extremely complicated.

China would have preferred to leave Korea to its fate and concentrate instead on the recovery of Taiwan, where nationalists had taken refuge. Here, at first, the Americans lacked a clear attitude. Indeed, the US did not intervene directly when in China the Nationalists were overwhelmed by the PLA, and it seemed that, as had happened before, the US would not oppose the communist attack against the nationalist bulwark in Taiwan.

To a then-emerging China under a new communist rule, it was a matter of national unity and eliminating the dangerous hotbed

of opposition, which would clearly become the anti-communist Nationalist government in Taiwan.

North Korea was a more controversial issue, one which counted in the complex international arena affecting beleaguered Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin. For him, confrontation with America and the West had become hard, while Mao had spent the 1940s getting some support from the Soviets and flirting with the Americans. The Soviets responded to these gestures with some support for Mao's Nationalist enemies. In short, between Americans and Chinese communists there had been no confrontation, as indeed there had been approaches to engagements.

US military advisers had arrived in the Yanan revolutionary base, and Mao had entrusted his memoirs to American journalist Edgar Snow, and four-star US General Joseph Stilwell had said he would have armed the communists rather than the Nationalists. When the civil war then broke out with the

The identities of the People's Republic of China and North Korea are intimately linked. Kim Il-sung, the first in the breed of North Korean communist dictators, began his revolutionary career in the ranks of the Red Army of China, after leaving a school he attended in China.

Nationalists, the US had armed Chiang Kai-shek, but had stayed away from intervening in the conflict; this is in contrast to what happened later in Korea and Vietnam. On the other hand, the Soviets had armed Mao (ungenerously), while grabbing as spoils of war much of what the Japanese had left in Manchuria.

This is important because in many ways the Cold War could have begun with the outbreak of hostilities between communists and Nationalists in China, but it never did. America still held a cautious attitude towards Mao. Even Stalin was prudent with Mao as the Soviet leader had his ambassador follow the Nationalist president Chiang Kai-shek to Canton. In fact, the Soviet ambassador was the last diplomat to follow the Nationalist government into Canton, just before its departure to Taiwan.

The newly established People's Republic of China was friendly to the Soviet Union in 1949 but was not an outright enemy of the US, partly because American neutrality was useful to the re-conquest of Taiwan. This balance was broken into two stages. The Americans intervened directly in defense of the South against the invading North Koreans.

It was a very important strategic shift in respect to substantive neutrality observed in China. They did it by using a new, international institution, a result of the war: the United Nations, which sanctioned the operation. The Soviet Union then - probably for fear of being isolated in an international context whereby they felt alone and surrounded by enemy countries (other

members of the Security Council were Britain, France and China - at the time Chiang's Nationalists) - did not veto a military intervention in support of the South.

The North, however, was likely to be swept away and Soviet boundaries threatened in the confrontation with the US, sending a strong signal against Stalin after he had just taken a big territorial leap by winning Eastern Europe. In other words, the Soviets had to try to assert their control over their part of the world as their control was far from certain.

On the other hand, Stalin, who had not vetoed the UN intervention, could not then come openly in support of Pyongyang. Even if he was just considering a limited war, intervention was risky because he could be beaten and there could be further escalations and an open war on all fronts that probably would have destroyed a Soviet Union yet to 1/26/2011 recover from the wounds of World War II.

The Chinese card offered Stalin numerous advantages. It advanced a line of defense against America and forced Mao to make a clear choice between the US and the Soviet Union, a choice which he had played with for years. If China had been defeated, the loss would not be lethal, as Mao was unreliable according to Stalin. Moreover, the Russian leader had maintained many ties with Chiang, whose son had also lived for years in the Soviet Union. Chiang would have had ties with the Soviet Union, just as America would protect Taiwan, while the Chinese intervention in Korea would mark a clear break between Mao and the US.

We do not know what pressure Stalin exerted to push Mao to intervene in Korea, it is clear only that Mao was at first very reluctant, fearing both defeat and also missing the opportunity to reunite Taiwan and break his flirtation with the Americans. Certainly, the Soviet Union promised aid and technology transfers to China, but this was only the carrot of the ties. There was certainly a stick we do not know about, but this had to have something to do with the alleged leverage Stalin still had within the Chinese Communist Party.

In this context, Mao went to war officially supporting the view that territorial contiguity with Korea made action there a priority compared with Taiwan, which was protected from the sea and thus less strategically fearsome.

The thesis was not entirely farfetched, because the Americans led by militantly anti-communist General MacArthur might have behaved differently this time than during the civil war and might have crossed the Chinese border after having swept up the North Koreans. But surely, if Mao had not feared Stalin and was serious about the issue of Taiwan, he could secure a trade with the US: neutrality on Korea in exchange for the return of the island.

The exchange could have been agreeable in Washington, for in one stroke, it would bring two successes: the US would recover all of Korea and it would have distanced China from the Soviet Union. With this, the Soviet Union

would have been expelled from Asia and its weakest border, Siberia, would be dangerously exposed. Moscow would have then been in a vise on two weak fronts. In Asia, as we have said, and in Europe, the French, the British, plus the Germans could rearm and wipe out the Red Army from new Soviet territories, the countries of Eastern Europe, where the Russians were not welcome.

Mao then ensured strategic depth to Stalin, and it was important that he should stop the American advance. Mao succeeded; this consolidated Soviet power in all areas under their control. This started the Cold War, but it cost China's reunification. After the Chinese intervention in Korea, Washington began to protect Taiwan's independence. For decades, the People's Republic has still not been "China" due to the lack of Taiwan and because of Mao's intervention in Korea.

Had it been 60 years later, the historical situation could have been reversed, but it would need different elements. One is certainly a closer relationship with Taiwan that voluntarily moves nearer to Beijing, and this actually is happening. But the other element to change, the offspring of the Korean War, is the US protection over Taiwan.

Here, the situation is similar to the great exchange between Mao and Stalin. Stalin gave technology to China in exchange for the intervention in Korea and the loss of Taiwan. Today, Beijing has a US request to give up Pyongyang. Beijing probably could do it, but in return it wants the end of US military protection of Taiwan (ergo the American arms sales to Taiwan) and US technological concessions. In return, Beijing could give up North Korea and also work together on a number of other international issues dear to the US, such as Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Can and does the US want to accept the offer? The problem is that America, unlike Stalin's Soviet Union, must construct its policies on the basis of democratic public opinion. It is not easy to build a compelling political reason to persuade the American public to leave Taiwan alone in order to resolve the North Korean problem. In some ways, then, America may think that if the exchange is to have North Korea and cede Taiwan, then the status quo would work better for its present interests. For the US, Pyongyang is a never-ending problem, but Taiwan brings many benefits.

In any case, for the first time after Mao's political defeat to Stalin over Taiwan 60 years ago, China's Hu Jintao is in the position to repair Mao's loss. This, for future Hu biographers, should be an underscored point, because it puts Hu as equal if not better than Mao on the issue of national reunification.

This success over Taiwan in turn could give Hu clout to push for the major institutional reforms he may deem necessary for the future. And certainly in the next 10-20 years, when China's economy will catch up and possibly overtake the US's GDP, these reforms could be necessary to make Beijing stand safely in the domestic and international arena.

(Courtesy: Asia Times)



Working On Migration

By RADHA POUDEL

Migration is a normal phenomenon across the world. The global dynamics of technology, politics and economics needs to be understood to grasp the causes of migration. In Nepal, migration has been in practice for around 200 years. Nepalese migrated to work in Indian and British armies. Later, tea estates in Assam, India, took in Nepalese workers.

Three factors have contributed to the phenomena: push, pull and inter-country networking. Pull factors include changing demographics, such as in developed countries, and push factors include unemployed population, existing poverty, deteriorating agricultural productivity and emerging culture for migration. Push came to the fore in Nepal during the decade of armed conflict because it displaced people, enhanced social insecurity, and downsized developmental and industrial activities. Inter-country networks have also promoted migration of Nepali people in several countries abroad.

The good side of it all is remittance, which has been contributing to national economy. It had crucial roles during the financial crisis. Neither the government nor migrants really give much attention to remittance. Remittance mostly goes in meeting household expenditure, health services, education, and paying back loan.

Mostly, Nepali take blind decisions, without information about policies (foreign employment act 2042, international convention on migrant workers etc, national labour act of origin and destination country,) and use illegal channels. They usually represent middle and lower economic families. Like people from other countries, Nepalese encounter with many problems such as market failure, trafficking, forced labour, recruitment malpractices, exorbitant placement fees, sexual and physical harassment, employment in hazardous jobs, under or non-payment of wages etc. Women migrant workers are also in demand due to their honesty, sincerity, low wage

agreements, lack of awareness of their rights, and low bargaining power. They usually get entangled in the 'three D's' work cycle-dangerous, difficult and dirty.

Currently, Non-Resident Nepalese (NRN), whose regional meeting in Jan 14-16, 2011 discussed safe migration, and other I/NGOs are also extensively engaged in rights of migrant workers. But the entire efforts are focused on migration of Nepalese not to the neighbouring countries, specially India, but elsewhere.

Poor people neither have access to information; policies, rights etc on migration nor adequate financing, such as property for collateral. The large number of people from far-west and mid-west are migrating temporarily. Due to prolonged food scarcity, poor infrastructure for adjusting to winter and other several reasons related to poverty, they have to go to India. They also engage in three D's jobs there. Usually, they come back after 3-10 months with small amounts of money, and pack of clothes but they are often looted in the border of India. Sometimes, they might have been affected by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases due to ignorance and other reasons. At home, women neither know about the dangers from migrant men nor are able to ask about the behaviours against their husbands. As a silent killer, one day, AIDS might affect the entire society.

Now, the time has come to consider the rights of migrant people as a cross-cutting issue because it has direct links with poverty and it is urgent to explore underlying causes of migration or options for livelihood in their surroundings. Likewise, the manpower agencies also need to be intensively monitored by the government, to make sure they are fully aware and compliant with national and international policies on migrants. Radio programs, specially local, may be more effective to disseminate information on migration, benefiting both migrant family and individuals. ■

RAJESHWOR DEVKOTA

To Whom Gloom Is Doom

Devkota charts interesting political career spanning decades

By YOGESH GYAWALI

Rajeshwor Devkota is one of the few individuals to have witnessed major political upheavals in Nepal over the last 60 years. Born in Gorkha, Devkota grew up to become an active participant of democratic movement of 2007 B.S. He went underground, traveling around Lumbini to raise awareness and funds for the agitation. The 107-year old Rana regime toppled and Nepal entered an age of political and social transformation, which is still continuing.

The circumstances that led Devkota to enter the political foray are noteworthy. Devkota came to Kathmandu at the age of 13 to appear in a Sanskrit exam. Around the same time, many Nepali Second World War veterans started returning and brought news from around the world, including that of liberation of countries from clutches tyranny. It was also an era when a closed Nepali society was slowly opening up to the international trend in politics and ethics developing in favour of equality. The opposition to the autocratic Rana rule gathered momentum.

In 1946 AD, Devkota went to Varanashi to appear in Madhyama (SLC) exam in Sanskrit. The Indian Independence Movement was at a full swing. There, he met many Nepalis living in exile. He attended protest campaigns and learnt to write slogans and organize rallies.

Devkota and his friends returned home after planning to start a protest under the guise of educational reform. They used religion to attract the general public. But their real goal was regime change.

Nepal today is very different from what it was 60 years ago. In those days, it

was possible to travel for a week with a budget of less than five rupees! There were many inequalities too. Different laws applied for different people -- Newars, Chhetris, and Gurungs. Brahmins were eligible for state sponsored Sanskrit education. There was one institution, Trichandra College, where one could

Who are your role models and sources of inspiration?

My father was a priest but he was very open to changes. He was a poet and probably the only individual subscriber of Gorkhapatra in Gorkha.

I also admire Raja Mahendra for his development work. The modern development that we see was initiated by him. He was also a staunch nationalist.

Indian Freedom Movement was an inspiration for me to agitate against the Ranas to bring freedom to Nepali society and honor to the country.

What are your hopes for the future?

study Geography or History. But only the wealthy and elites could afford to study there. Only 3% of the total population could read and write and less than 1% of women were literate. The rulers were doing nothing but building mansions for themselves.

The self-righteous government would not tolerate the slightest of dissent. Even its hint could result in banishment of people. Collecting public donation was a criminal offence. In one of the daily rituals that exemplified the smugness of the regime, the students before eating their meals at Tindhara Pakshala, had to recite a thank you grace in the name of the rulers.

Besides his political contribution,



Devkota

I am an optimist. We cannot afford to be negative. I think Nepal's recent troubles are the result of a society growing pessimistic. Social harmony decreases with people being increasingly gloomy.

What message do you have for the youth?

It is up to them to develop a national character because right now that is what we are lacking. Instead of the group or ethnicity that they belong in, the youth need to concentrate on the country. I would also like to remind them to read history because the future is always built on past.

Devkota has also penned down several books. As a student, he had a privilege to rub shoulders with giants of Nepali literature like Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Bal Krishna Sama. The literary horizon, back then, was teeming with new ideas and perspectives, which had an obvious influence on him. Although he loves all his work, he mentions the book, Dwanda ko Awasan, which is taught in colleges, as the most popular one.

Devkota has retreated from active politics. He is writing a book on Nepal's history.

Although Nepalese history reads more like a genealogy of Kings and Queens, it is fairly accurate when it comes to major historical episodes. ■



Celebrations Amidst Frustrations

By ABIJIT SHARMA

As soon as President Pratibha Patil unfurled the tri-color in the presence of her Indonesian counterpart and the chief guest of the event, four Mi-17 Helicopters showered flower petals from the air signalling the beginning of India's 62nd Republic Day celebrations.

For the culturally rich India, the Republic Day celebration is a mini-display of the country's wide cultural diversity. And this time too, it was no different. The celebrations were indeed a sight to behold as colorful tableaux depicting India's equally colorful diversity were showcased in a parade that also included display of military might from all the three wings: Army, Navy and Air-force as well as the technological achievements and ambitions of the country. Be it the huge Rabindranath Tagore statue displayed by the Culture Ministry or the Maharastrian 'Lawani' dancers or the army's showcase of its advanced Brahmos Launcher System, T-90 Bheeshma tanks and Multi Barrel Rocket System 'Pinaka'; the event enthralled all. Thousands were present to witness the celebrations in the chilly morning and thousands of others were glued to their television sets to catch a glimpse of the grand event in the capital of a world power in the making.

There is another side of the picture, though. Despite all the colorful celebrations and the achievements it does boast of, India is still struggling to confront some of the 'darkest' sides of the country. It has come a long way since its constitution was drafted 61 years back. But poverty, corruption, religious tensions, racial discriminations and security threats — both internal and external — continue to haunt the country of the 1 billion plus.

A 2008 World Bank estimates say, 42 percent of the population depend on a little more than a dollar a day. This makes the country a home to a third of the world's poor. This, obviously, in turn, deprives a large number of population from health and other essential services. Not surprisingly, India carries some of the worst statistics in terms of health as well. The life expectancy is still only 66.46 years old — much lower from many advanced countries. Infant mortality rate remains at 49.13 per cent. Not a rosy picture either.

The erosion of the rule of law is another headache. The second most populous country in the world also has a dubious distinction of being one of the most crime-infested countries. From petty offences to murders and white color crimes, the problem is rampant from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The capital,

New Delhi, has earned a notoriety for rape.

Fraillties of the legal system are thoroughly exposed in places like Mumbai where organized crime is an everyday occurrence. In fact, just two days before the Republic Day, a district collector, who was cracking down on oil mafias was burnt alive near Nashik.

As India talks about development and modernization, it is yet to leave the social practices and taboos prevailing in its societies since centuries behind it. Need proof? The overall sex ratio of India is 950 women to 1000 men. However, as of the census of 2001, the child sex ratio, the number of girls to every 1000 boys in the age group 0 to 6 is only 927. This has been blamed on abortion of baby girls. In a startling revelation, it has been found that at least 1,370 girls are aborted every year in India. This explains the low birth of females compared to men.

At a time when voice for gender equality is growing as ever, discrimination against girls does not augur well for the future of India. Religious tensions, too, is still abound. The Babri Masjid verdict and the response to it showed the prevailing cold vibes between the Hindu and the Muslim community.

The huge display of arms and armors by the its military during the Republic day celebration may be seen as a subtle signal to its neighbors as external security threats show no sign of thawing. Border disputes with traditional rivals, Pakistan, and the rising world power China, are as complicated as

they were before. Critics fear that the off and on protests in Kashmir could erupt into a dangerous explosion anytime. Arunachal Pradesh, which China refer to as 'Southern Tibet', remains a source of tension. Adding to the problem is the Maoist violence which, going by the accounts of the officials themselves, is gaining momentum. It was not for nothing that the prime minister Man Mohan Singh termed the leftist insurgency as the 'greatest internal security threat' — forty years after it hit the world's largest democracy. strong action was needed to solve it.

Just as the flying helicopters showered beautiful petals on the Republic Day in the capital, the expectations are that the country would march towards a rosy road to become another world power. But with rampant corruption and insecurity threatening to tear apart the system, frustrations are running deep. Will the political leaders be able to stand up and rise to the occasion to allay doubts about their capability and intent? It's anybody's guess. ■



Republic Day Celebrations

AMARGADHI MUNICIPALITY

Dirty Game

Solid waste disposal is a major problem of Amargadhi Municipality, a beautiful city lying some 700 km away from the capital in the far west. The municipality spent about 1.9 million rupees in the last three years to manage garbage. Paperwork gives it a clean chit for the job done. But the ground reality is that a worsening garbage problem has prompted the local people to ask this question: Where does all the money go?

By UMID BAGCHAND
in Dadeldhura

In the official parlance of Amargadhi Municipality, the next year is almost never. Locals are fed up. For ten long years, they have been hearing the official promise of 'next year' to clean the city, which generates some 5 to 10 tons of garbage daily.

Twelve sweepers and three tractors are assigned for collecting garbage and carrying it to the nearby landfill.

The budget for sanitation and solid waste disposal, according to municipal financial expenditure records, is increasing over the years.

But it is often used up before the completion of the year.

Local people see a dirty practice beneath the dirt strewn around their otherwise beautiful city, known as the gateway to the far-western region, above 2000 meters, some 700 km far west from the capital. Garbage covers drainage and sewerage systems and dirty water flows over the main road, making people forget the city's beauty.

Their conclusion: A largely invisible chain of corruption eats up funds under garbage and sanitation head.

Unlike construction works, daily

garbage collection and disposal are hard to measure. Going by the municipal paperwork and audit reports, the municipality has been getting a clean chit for the job done. The municipality claims it disposes 10 tons of daily garbage.

"We are disposing the solid waste as per our capacity. There is nothing to hide," executive secretary Gajendra Sharma said, calling attention to growing population and resulting wastes. "We don't play with the dirt."

But the ground reality is different, locals said. "You can see the stinking

garbage heaps everywhere,” municipal resident Navaraj Bhatta said. “A question naturally springs to our mind: Where does the municipality spend the money?”

Rotting garbage is a human health hazard. The municipality has the authority to spend any money, any time in emergency response to health hazards. In such a response, the municipality uses resources at its will even by avoiding certain legal provisions.

For example, the municipality hires ten laborers to collect the garbage, but pays wages for a hundred. There are three tractors for carrying garbage but the transport cost involves 5 tractors.

One of the urban problems arising out of consumerism is an increased generation of wastes. Unmanaged, wastes create a serious health and environmental hazard.

Poor urban settlements are more affected because of indiscriminate dumping and lack of open space there. Amargadhi seems to be doing better by providing house-to-house waste collection services and final disposal. But the progress is too small to alleviate the real woes of people.

The municipality has limited resources for full and efficient solid waste management services. Corruption has turned the situation from bad to worse.

Legal Provision

Clause 96 of the Local Self Governance Act 1999 stipulates the functions, duties and powers of a municipality. Sub-clause 96 (c) relates these to water resources, environment and sanitation allowing the municipality to carry out and/or manage acts of collection, transportation and disposal of garbage and solid wastes and initiate sanitation programs within it.

One of the primary objectives of the municipality is to keep the city clean. Amargadhi Municipality has been giving priority to garbage management by allocating necessary budgets to perform the job every year.

Under its powers of punishment, the municipality can penalize anyone dumping solid wastes in places other than designated with a fine of up to



Amargadhi Municipality

fifteen thousand rupees. But Amargadhi has failed to take necessary action against those who throw the garbage in the main streets and release sewerage anywhere because it has no designated places.

Municipal Budget

Under the title of sanitation and garbage, a total of Rs. 18, 95,407 (US\$25000) was sanctioned in the last three years. Municipal officials completed paperwork to regularize the expenditure without spending any money in real garbage collection.

The municipality sanctioned Rs. 500900.00 (US\$ 6000), Rs.600, 000.00 (US\$ 8000) and Rs. 713,570.00 (US\$ 10000.00) in the fiscal years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 respectively under that title. But the money actually went somewhere else.

“We have raised issue with the misuse of resources and rampant of corruption in the municipality by its executive secretary, members of political mechanism and other employees, but nobody is listening to us. A rampant corruption is going on in the municipality in the involvement of so-called all party mechanism and municipal officials,” said Lal Bahadur

Jagri, district president of United People’s Forum.

The people’s front has announced a campaign against municipal corruption.

“The corruption in garbage management by the leaders of the all-party mechanism and municipal officials is a heinous crime. They are playing against the public life,” said Jagri. “We want a probe on this matter by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority.”

Such disenchantment is growing. “We cover our nose before the piles of stinking garbage dumped in the main streets and other parts of the municipality. Our health is at risk,” said Bhatta.

Although the pressure against corruption in the municipality is building, leaders of political mechanism have already distributed one million rupees (US\$ 14,000) sanctioned for the construction of sewerage and garbage collection.

“It is unfortunate that the paper work has already been presented and the bill has already been cleared by the municipality,” said Jagri. “How they spent so much money in just three months is a matter of concern. I am



Uncollected Garbage in the City

confident that there is an irregularity in the expenditure.”

Jagri has already filed a complaint to chief district officer.

Other municipal residents nurse similar grudges. “This is one of the dirtiest municipalities in the country. There is stinking garbage in Kirtipur, Tufandanda, Bagbazar and other areas. Where does the budget go?” asked a local businessman.

Local people also blame municipal officials for misuse of money sanctioned for sanitation and garbage management. According to them, all the executive officers start spending the money allocated for sanitation and garbage as soon as they take charge of the executive secretary. “The budget allocated for sanitation and garbage has already been finished now,” said a municipal official.

“If municipality grossly neglects human health, what other things can one expect from it? We are witnessing health problems including chest infection, diarrhea and typhoid,” said Bhatta.

As a small municipality with moderate population, Amargadhi could

manage its garbage through allocated resources if the funds were not to fill the pockets of individuals.

Members of political mechanism and municipal officials have been awarding the tender for garbage collection by evading the process. Soon after the release of the budget, leaders of major parties divide it among themselves. In municipal records, paper documents are there to legalize the spending, but the situation at the ground level is different because nothing much gets done.

Public Private Partnership

“We are tired of listening to complaints one after another. We are now planning to hand over garbage management function to the private sector,” said Gajendra Sharma, executive secretary of Amargadhi Municipality.

Earlier, Industry and Commerce Association of Dadeldhura expressed its willingness to get involved in garbage management but the process was suspended because of political disputes.

“If political parties decide the issue on consensus, we are ready to take charge of garbage management,” said Prakash

Bahadur Saud, president of Dadeldhura District Industry and Commerce Association. “The garbage management is not an issue at all. We can handle the issue if we were given the responsibility.”

Although the municipality announced a tender bid asking private parties to submit proposals, it received no bid. “Since our association is not a contractor body, we did not submit the tender,” said Saud. “Those who hold the licenses do not carry brooms.”

Padma Joshi of Tufandanda said the negligence of the municipality was responsible for the garbage crisis. “Without political consensus, it is impossible to manage the garbage. It is also a weakness of local administration and political parties to helplessly watch the inaction of the municipality,” he said.

Municipal employees and members of political mechanism, however, reject charges as politically guided. “The budget allocated for sanitation and garbage management is properly used. Of course, some of the money went to pay the office rent and salary of the sweepers,” said Lal Bahadur Saud, head of administrative division of the municipality. “The municipality has been doing its best to make the city clean and healthy.”

Local business leader Binod Joshi demands probe on the municipal expenditure. He complains nobody knows about how even the one million rupees provided by Dadeldhura district was spent.

“You cannot accuse that there is corruption in the expenses of sanitation and garbage management without valid evidence,” said Ananda Keshri Pokharel, Local Development Official at Dadeldhura District Development Committee. But Pokharel expresses his helplessness about the fate of the million-rupee budget provided to the municipality. “It is the municipality’s job to spend the money in accordance with its plan. I cannot say more than this,” said Pokharel.

Despite pressure from media,

intellectuals and businessmen, the municipality's garbage remains unmanaged. As per the policy of the Ministry of Local Development, Amargadhi Municipality is also planning to hand over garbage collection to the private sector.

Growing Urbanization

In Nepal, urbanization is increasing at an alarming rate. Amargadhi is not an exception. In the process of urbanization, the issue of garbage management obviously comes to the fore. According to a study, conducted by Practical Action, Best Practices on Solid Waste Management on Nepalese Cities, solid waste management was a big challenge to all established and emerging towns in 2009.

When there is corruption, the situation will definitely go from bad to worse. Amargadhi Municipality's experiences have shown that municipal



Litter on the roadside

corruption reaches beyond capital expenditure to even the service sectors, unless something is done to stop the dirty game.

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

TOURISM

Time To Cash

The Nepal Tourism Year 2011 presents an opportunity to cash the untold potentials

By NITISH DEV BHATTARAI

Nepal is a country of highly diverse and rich geography, culture, and religions. The mountainous north contains eight of the world's ten highest mountains, including the highest, Mount Everest. The fertile and humid south is heavily urbanized.

The natural scenery, high mountains, incomparable cultural heritage and numerous specialties have made Nepal a well-known destination in the world tourism map with a distinct image of its own. However, the development of tourism is limited in number and within the certain areas of the country only.

The government has shown greater concerns about the real value of tourism and its role in contributing to economic growth, poverty alleviation, equity and overall tourism development in the country.

Therefore, the government is placing



Scenic Spots

high priority on the tourism sector in its new economic development policy. Government of Nepal in consultation with Nepalese Tourism Industry, concerned organizations and experts decided to launch a national tourism campaign "Nepal Tourism Year 2011".

This announcement reflects the government's anticipation to bring into

at least one million international tourists in Nepal by the year 2011 and spread the benefits of tourism to the people at large. The national campaign also indicates the tourism industry's need to organize a tourism promotion campaign that can have wide impact.

The concept of Nepal Tourism Year 2011 envisions harnessing these opportunities and strengths and

bringing together the commitment of the government, expertise and experiences of the organizations like Nepal Tourism Board, aptitude and dynamism of

the private sector and communities for further tourism development in the country.

The campaign will also focus on mobilizing the networks of the Non-Resident Nepalese (NRN) communities, Nepalese diplomatic missions abroad, INGOs/NGOs, airlines, and national and international media. ■

A Little Confidence

- By ALAIN LE, BS

It was the second day of medical school and already we were headed up to the wards to confront our first real patients. With a shaking hand and a similar shake in my voice, I introduced myself as a first-year student. Sitting down in the chair beside my patient, I asked, "So, what brings you to the hospital today?" My inquisition steadily grew as more questions came pouring forth.

"How long has this been bothering you?"

"Is there anything you do that makes the pain better?"

"How has this illness affected your quality of life?"

Five minutes flew by in no time at all. Getting a patient history was a piece of cake, I thought. No sweat!

Closing up the interview, I decided to ask my patient a simple question:

"Is there anything else I can do to help you with your stay?"

She replied, "Why, yes."

Wait! This was not going according to plan! In my role-playing activity just 10 minutes earlier, my classmate had responded "No" to this same question. Already I could feel little beads of sweat starting to form on my forehead.

What would she ask me? What kind of procedure could I possibly perform? What in the world could a student on his second day of medical school know that could possibly help any patient out? This was not fair; I was not yet trained to handle anything! I was 3 months away from studying the coagulation cascade, 12 months from learning the causes of hypoxemia, 25 months from understanding the management of gastrointestinal bleeding. In fact, I did not know medicine at all. Having graduating from college as a business



major, I was a clean slate, devoid of medical knowledge.

Not knowing enough in medical school is something that frightens me every time I turn another page in the thousands that make up Cecil's Textbook of Medicine. I find myself repeating the phrases "I do not know" and "I did not know that" countless times each day. There is so much to learn, and I have been told that there will always be someone older and wiser telling me.

So there I was, sitting next to my patient bracing for her inevitable question. I realized the only thing that I could do at this point was to reach for something previously untested.

Searching deep, I took hold of a little confidence.

I was new, but eager, and there would be plenty of time to

learn in the years to come. If I did not know the answer to her question, I would hold my head high and tell her that I could look it up or find someone who did know. Being confident in unexpected situations is something I would have to master if I wanted to become a good physician.

Thus, I braced myself for this very first question that would test the limits of my medical knowledge. And so the patient asked me, "Sir, could you turn the television back on when you leave?" ■

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