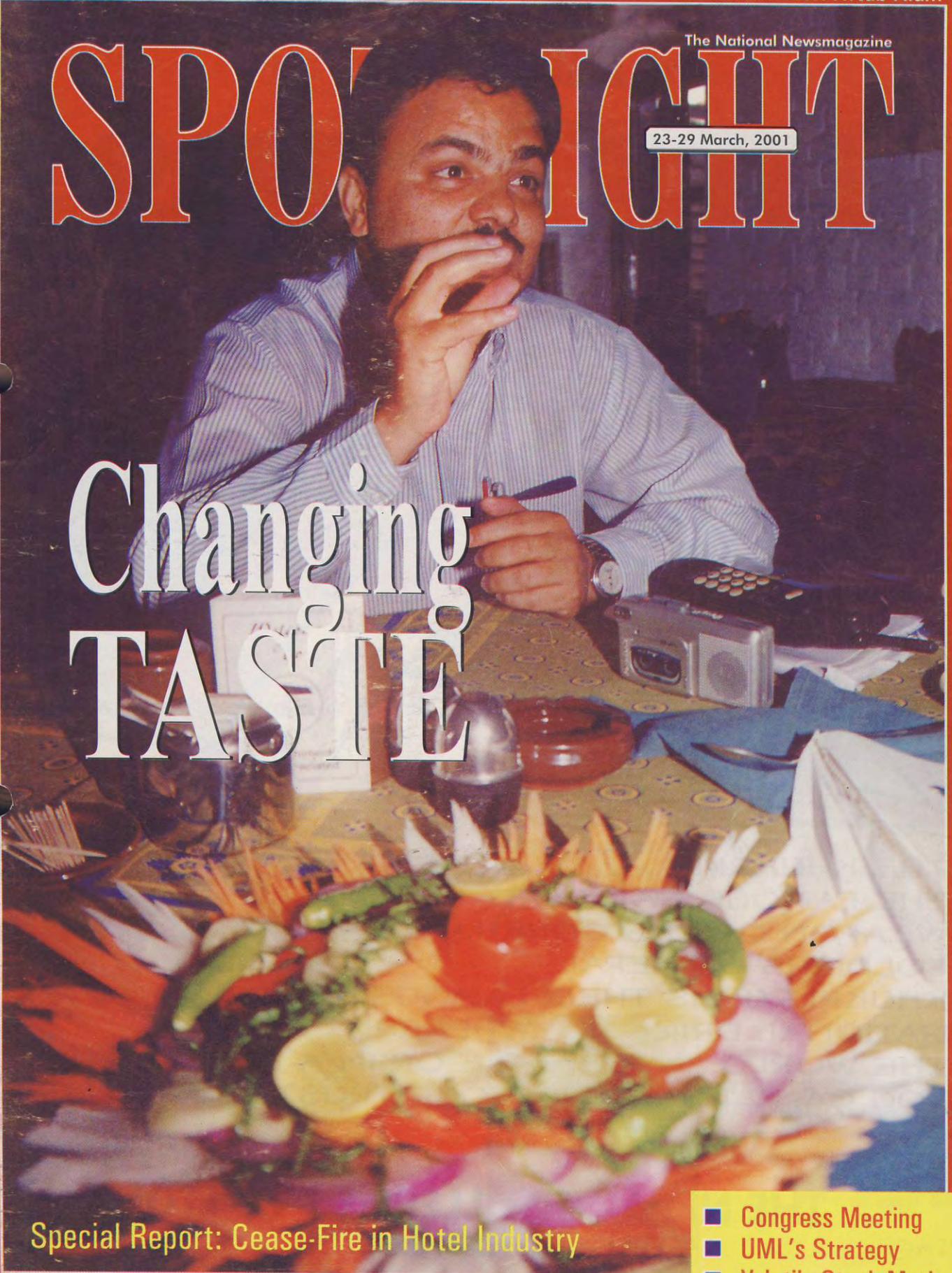


SPOTLIGHT

The National Newsmagazine

23-29 March, 2001

Changing TASTE



Special Report: Cease-Fire in Hotel Industry

- Congress Meeting
- UML's Strategy
- Volatile Stock Market
- Citizenship Debate

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COVER STORY : CHANGING TASTE

As the food habits of urban Nepalese are changing, traditional delicacies are fast giving way to modern menu.

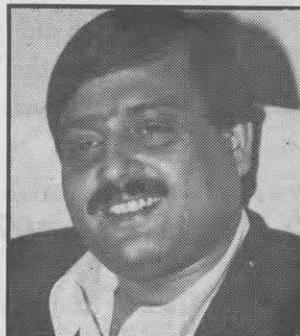
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HOTEL INDUSTRY : What Next?

The govt gives a temporary respite by bringing hotel industry under the Essential Services Act.

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INTERVIEW :

MOHAMMED AFTAB ALAM
Minister of State for Land Reform and Management, Alam promises to resolve the problems of freed Kamaiyas before monsoon this year.

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SPOTLIGHT

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This short sojourn this time in the United States has further disillusioned this scribe with politicians who are callously gambling with the fate of their unfortunate twenty three million poor countrymen. It was very difficult for this writer to find even one NRN (Non-Resident Nepali) who showed even a jot of respect for the politicians who have been ruling the poor country for the last eleven years. Whether it be New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles or Salt Lake City, all the Nepalis living there, without even one exception, expressed total frustration with the political leadership of Nepal. Some were very critical of the Palace also. They were very emphatic, in no uncertain terms, about their disenchantment with the institution of Monarchy for not taking any action to save the country when the politicians have miserably failed. It was, indeed, very difficult to convince them that the King would act at the opportune time. Future will only prove whether the optimism of this scribe was well founded.

* * *

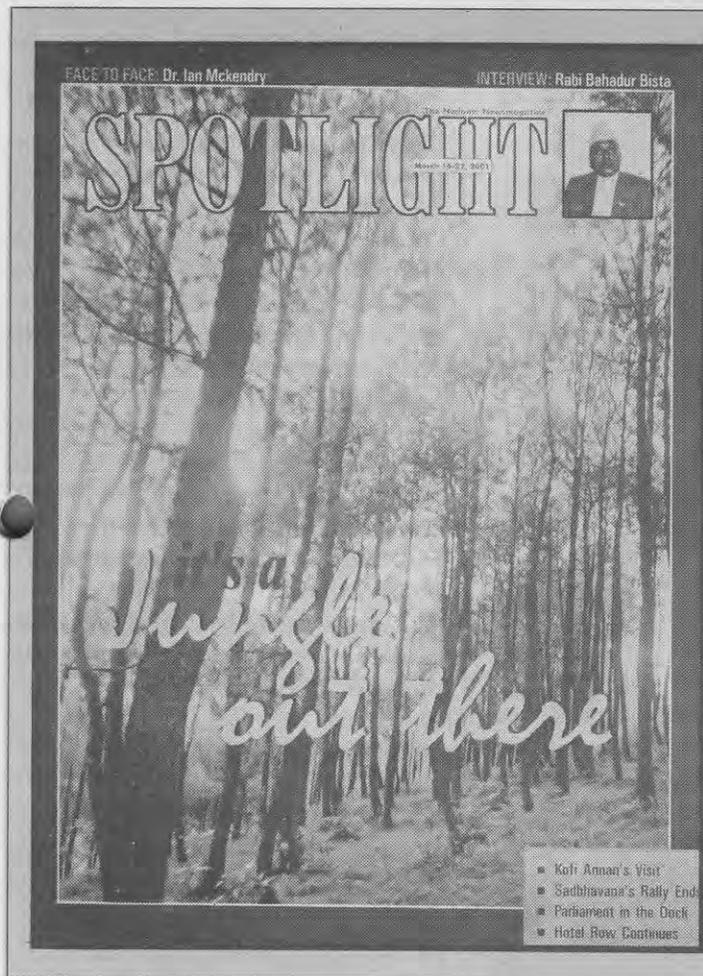
The Nepalis living in the United States are much better off financially than their kith and kin living in their poor motherland. A few have indeed become rich. But their wealth does, in no way, reflect the noble values and ideals that characterise a person imbued with humane qualities. They have been very quick to cast away their traditional virtues and imbibe the basic excellence of their adopted land. These NRNs are so caught up with the fast pace of American way of life that they have no time to think about their poor country and countrymen.

* * *

Indeed, there are some Americans who are good friends of the poor Nepalis. They are quite outspoken and even blame their own government for not helping the poor people of Nepal. They are very frank in stating that the policy of their government is directly helping the corrupt politicians and the political parties. A very senior Nepal expert, on condition of anonymity, confided to this writer that the US government's policy towards all the poor and developing countries needs drastic change. US aid is often meant to prop up governments that toe their line. Let us hope the Bush administration will bring marked changes in its policies towards the Third World.



Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



Wise Use Of Forest

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Nepal's green forests were considered the wealth of the nation ("Its A Jungle Out There", SPOTLIGHT, March 16-22). However, the rapid deforestation that followed turned that reality into a myth. Again, after the introduction of community forestry concept, the hills are slowly regaining their green cover. The authorities should make timely decisions to make prudent use of our forest resources. Sustainable means of using forest products must be explored. Otherwise, we will once again lose our precious green resources.

Jeevan Sharma
Satdobato

and Kala-azar" ("Joint Venture" SPOTLIGHT, March 16-22). All in all, it was a good report, and I understand that it was not possible to address equally all the diseases covered in that meeting. Tuberculosis is, indeed, an enormous burden for the families affected, for the health sector and, of course, also for the economy. I also appreciate your efforts to highlight the positive developments in the collaboration between public and private sectors of the health care delivery system. I was, however, surprised when I read the very last paragraph of the article. That is something your author must have picked up in a different meeting. Food habits have nothing to do with any of these four diseases. Sanitation has certain relevance for malaria in that bad sanitation (stagnant water) creates good breeding places for mosquitoes. But, otherwise, it is a wrong statement that could mislead people. If there is a need or wish for more detailed clarification, we will be happy to offer our assistance.

Dr. Klaus Wagner

WHO Representative in Nepal

Due Process Wanted

The bickering between two football associations has left Nepalese football in tatters ("Battle Over Due Process", SPOTLIGHT, March 9-15). Worst hit are the football players who do not know what the future holds. Already frustrated by the pathetic conditions they are forced to work in, the players are now further depressed by the division in the national football association. Until and unless swift actions are taken to end the present turmoil, Nepalese football will be relegated to history.

Akash Mahat
Thapathali

Expand Community Concept

It seems that the government is not keen to introduce the community forestry concept in the terai region ("Its A Jungle Out There", SPOTLIGHT, March 16-22). It may be true that the communities in the terai are huge compared to the hills, but this alone cannot be justification for not introducing the community forestry in the terai. In fact, Nepalese forest officials, who have been lauded for their pioneering concept of community forestry in the hills, should make a thorough study of the situation in the terai and come up with adjustments that will allow the concept to flourish equally successfully there.

Kamal Karki
Balkhu

Stop Irregularities

Your cover story "Its A Jungle Out There" (SPOTLIGHT, March 16-22) provided a rare insight into the workings of the Nepalese forest sector. However, it failed to reveal the rampant corruption and irregularities that occur in forest offices. Right from the central level to the districts, many forest officials work hand in glove with timber smugglers, leading to loss in revenue collection and deforestation. This issue must be publicized in order to deter the unscrupulous elements from looting the country's resources.

Sandesh Rai
Jhamsikhel

Moratorium Is Logical

As pointed out by Forest

Secretary Rabi Bahadur Bista in his interview (SPOTLIGHT, March 16-22), we cannot afford to use our forest resources just yet. It is better to declare a moratorium on using forest resources until we reach the aim of covering 40 percent of our country with forests. That would be logical. In fact, posterity would praise us for handing down to them so much of natural resources. Introduction of community-type forestry in the terai would help us achieve that aim sooner.

Bishnu Thapa
Gokarna

Misleading Report

I read with great interest the report on the SAARC-WHO Intercountry Meeting on "Cross Border Initiatives in HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria

Fires Destroy Property Worth Rs 20 Million

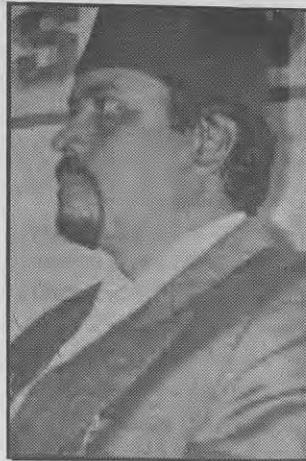
The cause of the fires that destroyed property worth millions of rupees in two different business enterprises at Suraj Arcade and Thamel in Kathmandu and a shop at Lalitpur almost simultaneously Friday night still remains unknown. All of these incidents are suspected to have been sparked by electric short circuits. However, most of these businesses were closed at the time of the fire and the lights and appliances had been turned off. Some reports suspected the fire to have been caused by Maoists, but local police officials rejected the link. Police said the fires caused a loss of more than Rs 20 million in goods and property. *Compiled from reports March 18.*

'Irregularities In China Airlines Deal'

A parliamentary sub-committee probing into the China South West Airlines (CSWA) deal has said there had been several irregularities in the deal, Kantipur daily reported Saturday. In its report submitted to Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of parliament Friday, the three-member sub-committee, led by Rastriya Prajatantra Party lawmaker Buddhiman Tamang, said the PAC should direct the government to act against the concerned officials. The Royal Nepal Airlines has leased aircraft from CSWA nine times. Meanwhile, in a statement then-civil aviation minister and UML leader Bhim Rawal has denied allegations linking him to the deal. *Compiled from reports March 18.*

Gupta Allegedly Involved In A Scandal

A newspaper said then-minister for information and communications Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta had made a decision on the eve of the 1999 general elections to provide license for the import of 62,000 pieces of mobile telephone sets worth Rs 3,000 million. All the business firms that were granted license belonged to controversial businessman Dipak



Gupta

Malhotra. As mobile telephone services had not started in the country at that time, most of the imported mobile phone sets are believed to have been smuggled across the porous border into India, the newspaper report said. The Nepalese government imposed a 33 percent duty on the imported mobile sets while the customs duty on the same sets in India was as high as 250 percent (of the procurement price) during that period. The newspaper also published secret documents showing the minister overruling the recommendations of senior government officials not to provide the license. *Space Time March 13.*

Cop Kills Two Colleagues

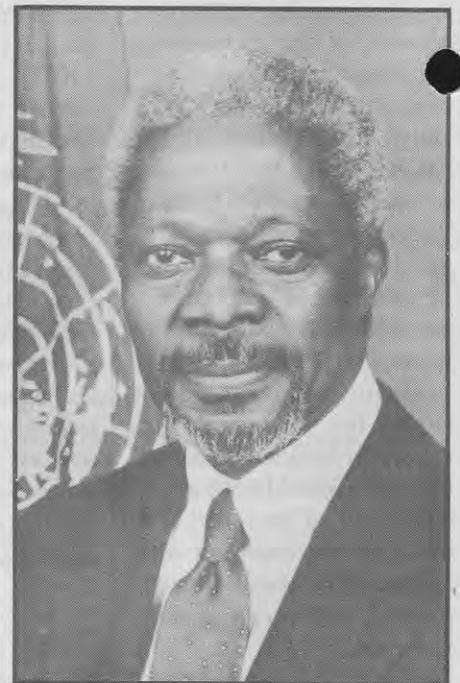
A policeman, Chandra Man Rana, has been absconding since late Tuesday in the mid-western town of Nepalgunj after allegedly killing two of his colleagues. According to police, Rana absconded after killing two police constables in a hotel lobby Tuesday night. The policemen were guarding the hotel where pilots of helicopters were staying for the last two months. Eyewitnesses said Rana had quarrelled with his seniors before the incident took place. Police refused to give further details. *Gorkhapatra March 15.*

Maoists Refute Home Ministry Report

A high-level source within the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has refuted a recent report published by the Home Ministry saying that the rebels had kidnapped 130 people over the last five years. A weekly newspaper said to be close to the Maoists said the underground party has so far taken 22 people into 'people's custody' and 'mobile prisons' for their alleged involvement in various crimes. These people have been allowed to see family members, journalists and human rights workers, the source said. The source further claimed that the Home Ministry report even includes Maoist activists among those reported to have been taken into custody by the rebels. *Janadesh March 13.*

Annan Supports Regional Peacekeeping Center Plan

Visiting Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan has delighted his hosts by supporting the Nepalese proposal to set up a UN regional peacekeeping center in the country. Talking to reporters at the Tribhuvan International



Annan

Airport before his departure to Bangladesh Tuesday, Annan advised Nepal to discuss the issue with other countries in the region.

Out of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the United States, United Kingdom and China have taken the Nepalese proposal positively. French officials are yet to make their views public on the issue. During their meetings with Annan, Nepalese officials had sought continuation of UNHCR support to maintain nearly 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal. Annan said he discussed a broad range of issues with Nepalese officials during his visit. *Compiled from reports March 14.*

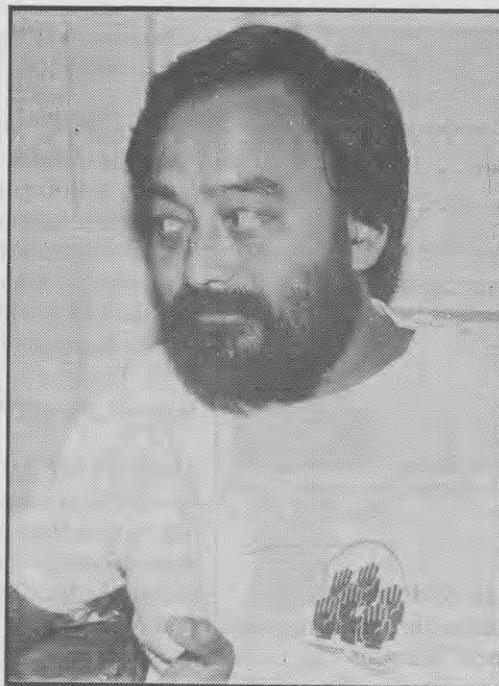
900 Nepalese Peacekeepers To Leave For Sierra Leone

Nepal is preparing to send around 900 Royal Nepalese Army personnel to take part in peacekeeping operations in the African country of Sierra Leone for the first time, reports said. A senior army official said the battalion could leave for the African country some time in May. Some 1,000 Nepalese peacekeepers are already serving in the UN missions in Lebanon and East Timor. No official announcement has been made on the matter.

The United Nations has asked Nepal provide up to 2,000 soldiers in its peacekeeping missions annually. Nepalese officials urged UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, during his visit to Kathmandu last week, to double the number of Nepalese peacekeepers. The army battalion visiting Sierra Leone would bring home foreign currency equivalent to Rs 150 million over a period of six months, the report said. *Kantipur March 18.*

'Environment For Dialogue With Maoists Not Congenial'

Professor Kapil Shrestha, member of the National Human Rights Commission, has said the current environment is not congenial to hold dialogue with the Maoist rebels. Talking to a weekly news-



Shrestha

paper upon his return from the Maoist strongholds of Rukum, Rolpa and Salyan recently, Prof. Shrestha confirmed that except the district headquarters, all the

areas in these districts were under the rebels' control. Prof. Shrestha said the Maoist movement was not going on in a way that would transform society. The rebels' focus has been on expanding their organization and strengthening their security situation, he said.

It seems they are preparing for a big battle with the government and have even recruited children below the age of 16 years in their guerrilla force. The Maoist cadres have high morale and do not believe that they will gain anything out of dialogue. Several unseen forces are backing the Maoist movement. If the dialogue takes place, they will also make their moves. No dialogue should take place before the ruling party and the government develop a clear approach toward the Maoist rebellion and ensure minimum consensus among

major political parties, he said. In fact, there is no strong foundation for productive talks, said Prof. Shrestha. *Deshanter March 18.*

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King Birendra receiving credentials from the envoy of Zimbabwe.

THE NEPALESE GOVERNMENT IS GOING TO MOBILIZE nearly 26,000 of its employees to conduct the national census 2001, official Gorkhapatra daily reported Thursday. The tenth census, which will take place in June, is expected to cost up to Rs 280 million. School teachers are also being mobilized to conduct the census. A number of international agencies are supporting the exercise. Experts say Nepal's population may have reached 23.4 million. **THE GOVERNMENT OF** Switzerland has agreed to provide a grant assistance of Swiss Franc 268,091 (equivalent to Rs 11.8 million) to the Nepalese government. The grant assistance will be used to carry out road network planning, strengthening the Department of Road's capability and implementing road maintenance and rehabilitation policies under phase III of maintenance, rehabilitation and coordination unit of the Department of Roads, among other things.

PROPERTY WORTH MILLIONS OF RUPEES WAS DAMAGED when a group of about 500 people torched nearly 150 houses belonging to 50 families at ward No. 7 of Malhiniya village development committee in the eastern terai district of Saptari Wednesday night. The group also looted approximately 280 quintals of rice from the houses of VDC chairman Arun Kumar Goit and other people the same night. Police suspected the assailants to be Maoist rebels. Earlier, a group of nearly 500 people had attacked a police post at Mahua. They were later dispersed as police resorted to blank fire. The same group later surrounded the nearby village and set the houses on fire, police sources said.

THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN HAS AGREED TO PROVIDE a grant assistance of Japanese Yen 880,248 million (equivalent to about NRs 538.7 million) to the Nepalese government under the debt relief measures of the government of Japan. The grant assistance is in lieu of the repayment of the principal and the accrued interest on the outstanding loan extended by the Japanese government to Nepal. The grant assistance under the notes exchanged Thursday is the fourth portion of Japanese grant under the debt relief measures of the Japanese fiscal year 2000. With this grant assistance, the total grant extended by the Japanese government to Nepalese government under the debt relief measures

amounts to more than Rs 1240.4 million in the Japanese fiscal year 2000.

A SEGMENT OF THE SINDHULI ROAD HAS BEEN opened to traffic at Dhulikhel beginning Friday. The road, which extends from Dhulikhel to Bhakunde Besi, is part of Section IV (Dhulikhel-Nepalthok) of the Sindhuli-Banepa road that will serve as an alternative land route linking the capital with the eastern part of the country when it is completed. Of the four sections, Section I — the 37 km section from Bardibas to Sindhuli bazaar — has already been completed and was opened for vehicular traffic in 1997. The road is being constructed with the assistance of the Japanese government.

AS PART OF THEIR CAMPAIGN TO GET 50 PERCENT concession in public transport, students belonging to the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) burnt a government-owned vehicle Tuesday and vandalized nearly a dozen government vehicles. The ANNFSU has called upon the students not to pay more than 50 percent of the fare while using public transport. Public transport operators have already organized shutdown strikes against the student organization's demand and have made it clear that they cannot fulfill such demands. The conflict is likely to continue as the government officials' attempt to broker a negotiation between the transport operators and students has failed.

POLICE INTERVENED IN A MEETING OF THE UNDERGROUND Maoists at Anekot in Kavre, to the east of the capital, and took into custody more than 60 Maoist activists, reports said. Kantipur daily reported that helicopters hired by police dropped security personnel at the site to avoid rebel ambush. Two policemen were injured when the rebels threw petrol bombs at them. This is the first time that police intervened in a Maoist meeting. They had organized similar open meetings in adjoining Sindhupalchok and Dolakha districts.

RURAL TOURISM IN NEPAL CAN HELP IN REDUCING poverty, said experts participating in a day-long seminar on "The role of private sector in developing rural tourism." Addressing the program, organized by Remote Area Development (RAD) Nepal, tourism expert Dr. Surendra B. Pradhanang said though tourists were gradually getting attracted toward rural parts of the country, the government and entrepreneurs were still ignoring the potential. According to 1999 statistics, 85 percent of the total expenses made by tourists is spent in urban areas.

PRIVATE AIRLINES OPERATORS HAVE PROTESTED against the government's decision to raise fees for landing, flights and leasing of parking space by up to 400 percent. They have demanded that the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) review its decision to raise the fee for parking space within the airport from Rs 100 per square foot to Rs 500 per square foot. Kantipur daily quoted Senior Executive Manager of Buddha Air, Ghanashyam Bajracharya, as saying that the operating expenses of the airlines have shot up after the government's decision. He alleged that the government was ignoring the interests of private airlines operators. ■

"I smell a conspiracy. While parliament itself is deadlocked, parliamentary committees are busy issuing directives to the government."

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, addressing a public program.

* * *

"That is a meeting to escape the turmoil. It is a strategy to stutter in radio and TV amid the gathering of hapless people."

Khadga Prasad Oli, leader of the Unified Marxist Leninist, commenting on the gathering of party leaders called by Prime Minister and President of Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala, in Space Time.

* * *

"The RPP refrained from taking to the streets because it would jeopardize the democratic system itself."

Krishna Pratap Malla, an MP of Rastriya Prajatantra Party, in Nepalipatra.

* * *

"Both the Nepali Congress and Unified Marxist Leninist are bourgeois parties. They cannot give any direction to the country."

Narayan Man Bijukchhe, president of Nepal Workers and Peasants



Party, in Bimarsha.

* * *

"I am clear — Congress will never improve."

Kuber Sharma, president of Green Nepal Party, in Budhabar.

* * *

"From the perspective of the overall political situation of the day, dialogue is not imminent. Even if a dialogue does take place, there is very little chance that it would be effective."

Prof. Kapil Shrestha, member of the National Human Rights Commission, in Deshanter.

* * *

"I don't understand why they made them. I am not interested in making such vulgar sculptures."

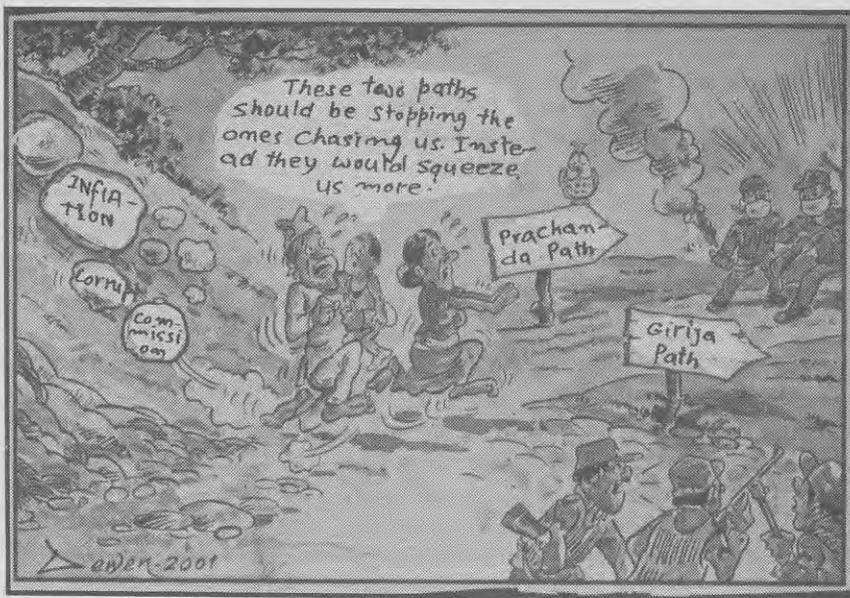
Bal Krishna Tuladhar, senior sculptor, asked why ancient sculptors made vulgar and erotic images, in Chhalfal.

* * *

"I didn't get remuneration for Darpan Chhaya. In fact, I was honored to get a break from Tulsi Ghimire's film."

Utam Pradhan, actor of the superhit Darpan Chhaya, in Ghatana Ra Bichar.

* * *



Samacharpatra

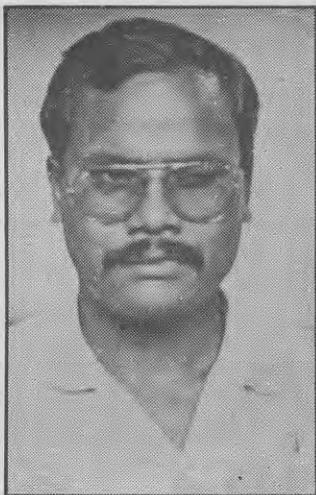
New-Found Unity

Nepalese politicians mirror the unpredictability of their colleagues in other parts of the world. This trait was on vivid display in parliament last Wednesday. While all CPN-UML members were pressing for the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala inside the House of Representatives, leader of main opposition party Madhav Kumar Nepal and some senior Congress members, including Minister of Local Development Govinda Raj Joshi, were engaged in more relaxed confabulations within the legislative premises. Koirala advisers Puranjan Acharya, Kanchan Pokharel and Congress MP Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta joined Joshi in listening to what Nepal had to say. Their discussions lasted for an hour, until the speaker adjourned the house for the day. It seems the differences between the prime minister and the leader of the main opposition party are not as unbridgeable as the tense parliamentary stand-off makes them out to be.

Foe Turned Friend

The recently renewed relations between Nepali Congress youth leaders and former ministers Bijaya Kumar Gachchedar and Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta — once known as die-hard loyalists of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala — reaffirm the dictum that there are no permanent enemies or friends in politics.

The personal relations between Gachchedar and Gupta were so sour until a few months back that each



Gachchedar : Friends again

wore a scowl when he passed by the other. The catalyst for this new-found relationship was Koirala recent decision to transfer Gupta from the high-profile Ministry of Information and Communication to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. Gupta exhibited his displeasure not only by abandoning the Koirala cabinet but also by joining hands with a bitter rival of the prime minister.

Bhattarai's Whim

Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai is known as a man of abundant wit. When he was on a trip to New Road to buy his evening newspapers and paan recently, he told an acquaintance that he had become leader of a new party — Nepali Congress (Dissidents). When the man asked Bhattarai whether he had registered the new party with the Election Commission, the former prime minister turned furious. He ordered his bodyguard to immediate escort the man out of his sight. It seems that Bhattarai's wit is at its best when he is sure there would be no follow-up questions.

REVELATION

'We Have Not Backed Out From The Anti-Govt Struggle'

— RABINDRA NATH SHARMA

Former minister and RPP leader RABINDRA NATH SHARMA declares that his party will not join the street protests announced by communist parties. However, Sharma told reporters, his party will continue supporting the communists inside parliament in seeking the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. Excerpts:



Why has the RPP backed out from its stand that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala must resign?

You are making a wrong comment, because the RPP has not backed out from the joint struggle. We have only decided not to be part of the joint street demonstrations. We will continue our struggle till Koirala resigns.

But UML leaders are accusing the RPP of betrayal. How do you look at this charge?

We have not betrayed anyone, as we clearly told the CPN-UML from the beginning that we were not in favor of their agitational politics. We will not support their street demonstrations.

You have said that the RPP's actions are more democratic than the communists'. But aren't you also part of the agitational politics we are seeing inside parliament?

Look, every political party has its own way of formulating policies. We think this is not proper time to go for street demonstrations.

The RPP's recent activities have proved hollow your claim that you are the alternative democratic party. How do you see your performance?

Every democratic party has its own way of opposing the government of the day. We have not been doing anything undemocratic. Opposition parties are stalling parliament in our neighboring country, too. In a parliamentary democracy, we are doing what the parliamentary course normally is.

If Koirala continues to refuse to resign, what step will you take?

Prime Minister Koirala does not have any other option. I continue to believe he will resign. ■

Speaker Finally Speaks

After nearly a month of the ritual of calling parliament into session and then adjourning it a minute later, Speaker of House of Representatives Taranath Ranabhat made some extra effort last Wednesday. His efforts helped stretch the opposition members'

sloganeering for more than an hour. An anti-Koirala dissident, Ranabhat has come under criticism for not doing enough to restore order in the house. For his part, Ranabhat, who lost his bid for membership of the party's central committee during the elections held in Pokhara last month, appears to believe that it is payback time. ■

UML POLITICS

Street Strategy

After failing to force the prime minister to resign in parliament, the main opposition takes to the streets

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

A senior Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) leader, K. P. Sharma Oli, was in his style Monday while announcing the much publicized protest programs against the year-old G. P. Koirala government. "This government has failed on all fronts and we are compelled to launch the protest programs in the street in order to kick it out," declared the former home minister and convenor of the central protest mobilization committee of the party.

Oli, however, could not give details about the proposed protest programs. "The details about the joint protest programs would be made public after consulting other opposition parties," he said. All the UML had in the cards for now was to organize mass meetings in different parts of the country on April 8 this year to mark the people's movement.

Why the UML, that had succeeded in

rallying the support of five opposition parties in the parliament (except Nepal Sadbhavana Party) in demanding resignation of Prime Minister Koirala for his alleged involvement in the Lauda Air deal, went alone in announcing the street protests could not be known. While small left parties in the parliament saw it as a tactic to bulldoze them, the centrist Rastriya Prajatantra Party leaders were cautious enough not to fall in a trap. "We will not take to street protests in demanding the resignation of the prime minister," said Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, vice-chairman of the RPP.

Gauging that its move to disrupt the parliament could not only backfire, it could also expose its real intention, if any, the main opposition party may have decided to draw people's attention through street protests, say analysts. Interestingly, the party deliberately chose Oli as the convenor of the campaign, who reportedly was unhappy over the party's decision to disrupt the

parliament.

On its part, the ruling Nepali Congress was able to temporarily manage its internal dissension and get the party united in backing the prime minister to face the opposition (See separate story). The defiant Koirala put on a brave face and accused the main opposition of disrupting the parliament with a view to stop the Bill on Armed Police Force from being passed in the parliament. "The UML leaders are addressing joint mass meetings with the Maoists and have agreed to work jointly (to oust me)," Koirala told his party workers.

Interestingly, the main opposition has found itself in a Catch-22 position. Upon learning that its base is getting eroded fast by the Maoist rebels in different parts of the country, the party wants to establish as a strong alternative force, say insiders. But, for the time being, it may have little option than to seek Maoists' support to provide protection to its cadres.

Such a game could be suicidal for the main opposition party over a long run. UML leaders, hence, refute any such allegations. "It's wrong to say that we are working jointly with the Maoists. In fact, ours is the only party that has reached the areas considered to be Maoist strongholds and spoken to the people against them," said UML general secretary Madhav Nepal. He was referring to a recent peace rally organized by the main opposition party in Maoist-affected Rapti zone.

Nepal further claimed that the move of the opposition to disrupt parliamentary proceedings was constitutional as well as legal. "G. P. Koirala is a leader of corrupt people and he must be kicked out of the government immediately," he declared.

Ironically, the main opposition, said to be a government-in-waiting, has fallen short of asking for mid-term polls to seek fresh mandate. All the party seems to be wanting now is to provide outside support to the intense in-fighting within the ruling party and let it collapse due to internal reasons. A weak Nepali Congress could result into its political gain, the party strategists say.

Whether that will happen or not, the street protests announced by the party are likely to keep its workers engaged for some more time to come. ■



leaders of opposition parties : One-point agenda

CONGRESS POLITICS

Koirala At The Helm

In the face of mounting pressure from within the party and outside, Prime Minister Koirala wins vital support from Nepali Congress workers

By KESHAB POUDEL

Whether you call it a mela or a meeting, the two-day informal gathering of the ruling Nepali Congress backed beleaguered Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala against opposition efforts to oust him.

presidents of Congress District Committees and a majority of MPs in the parliamentary party, Koirala has gained much-needed ground. Former prime minister and senior Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai did not attend the meeting, but he did not stop his followers from participating.

“Prime Minister Koirala has made



Ruling and opposition MPs : Divided we stand

Although Congress rebels, including former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, NC central committee member Pradeep Giri and Chiranjibi Wagle, castigated Koirala for failing to fulfill his commitment to maintain law and order, they remained tightlipped over the opposition parties' resignation demand.

Amid overwhelming support from

a major political decision by summoning the meeting of party workers to seek their advice,” said a political analyst. “This was a very shrewd way of testing his strength in the party.”

At a time when the country's political process is virtually paralyzed, following the opposition parties' campaign to stall the proceedings of parliament, Koirala has cemented

his position for the time being.

The Congress meeting also shows how committed party workers are to upholding the democratic process. When parliament is blocked unconstitutionally by the opposition parties, including four communist groups and the RPP, all Congress members openly expressed their support for following established democratic procedures.

“We have many differences with Koirala and his style of working, but we cannot toe the opposition parties' line,” said Wagle, a powerful member of the dissident group.

Congress members seem to be aware that any unprincipled precedent set in parliament today may boomerang on them tomorrow. If one has to resign merely on the basis of allegations, no prime minister would be able survive in office for more than couple of weeks.

“The recent actions of the communist parties and the RPP show that they are not committed to the democratic process and the present system. As Prime Minister Koirala has already declared that he would step down as soon as he is found guilty of any offence by the competent authority, there is no reason to stall parliament,” said former minister Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta.

Congress workers are equally angry with RPP leaders whom many considered their closest allies in the opposition. “Congress took all the heat for having decided against taking action against former panchas on the basis of the Mallik Commission report, and the RPP is rewarding in this way,” said a Congress insider. “It was Girija Prasad Koirala who recommended against taking action against the panchas on the ground that they would be able to teach their political successors the lessons of governing.”

Even after having received strong backing from the party, the road ahead for Koirala is no less bumpy, especially with the country's politics heading towards anarchy. ■

HIMALAYAN EXPO

Boosting Trade

The expo is expected to attract new ventures into the country

By A CORRESPONDENT

The House of Rajkarnicar, a pioneer organization involved in exhibition and events, is going to organize the 11th Himalayan Expo from April 20 to 24.

With the opening up of the economy in 1990, the number of trade exhibitions continue to increase. This has paved the way for a search of new markets for domestic products and has provided an opportunity for local industries to look for raw materials at competitive rates.

Unlike other such events, Himalayan Expo has its own characteristics, as it provides a forum for Nepalese businessman and foreign industrial groups to come together.

During the forthcoming exhibition, the House of Rajkarnicar will be organizing programs to facilitate interaction among participants, including the clients and buyers. "Such programs will help to identify potential buyers and sellers and bridge the gap between them,"

said Birendra Rajkarnickar, managing director of the House of Rajkarnicar.

According to the organizers, the event is expected to bring in nearly 200 exhibitors from about one dozen countries and draw nearly 75,000 people including over 45,000 business visitors.

Nepal Export Mart, that aims to promote Nepalese exports, will be a special feature of Himalayan Expo. There will be the US and British pavilions, German Catalogue show and exhibition from the NSIC Techmart India. The US pavilion will be organized by the Nepal-USA Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the US Embassy. Likewise, the British pavilion will be jointly organized by the British Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the British Embassy under the

sponsorship of the British Trade Partners, UK. "The Himalayan Expo has been a very important event for the Nepalese business community as it provides an all-important forum to Nepali and foreign businessmen alike," said Narendra K. Banyat, President of Nepal-USA Chamber of Commerce and Industry, at a reception organized by the US embassy to introduce the US pavilion here last week.

The NSCI Techmart India is expected



Expo : Increasing Business

to put up about 25-30 companies offering very appropriate small-scale industrial machines and equipment for medium and small-scale industrialists of Nepal.

In order to make the exhibition a success, the House of Rajkarnicar has been able to mobilize assistance from a number of organizations including the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Trade Promotion Center, Qatar Airways and bi-national chambers.

"We are also planning to organize the China Pavilion and other complementing theme events in advance of the Expo," said Birendra. "The change and development will continue to be an inherent element of Himalayan Expo's dynamic revolution in 2001." ■

PARLIAMENT

Deadlock Continues

The parliament continues to be disrupted thanks to the opposition's uncompromising attitude

A day after the Nepali Congress party threw its weight behind Prime Minister G.P.Koirala and urged Speaker Taranath Ranabhat to take all necessary measures to bring the House into business, people had expected an interesting turn of events Tuesday. But, as Nepal Sadbhavana Party lawmaker Hridayesh Tripathi declared that his party was going to boycott the parliamentary proceedings, other opposition parties followed suit. Tripathi said his party had decided to boycott in order to register protest against the government's move of issuing ordinances 'bypassing the parliament.'

The NSP's move, analysts say, may have avoided a possible clash between the ruling party and opposition. But as the government seems to be keen to get the ordinance to set up an Armed Police Force passed by the House, confrontation between the treasury and opposition may be imminent. Moreso, as the opposition has even prohibited Prime Minister GP Koirala from making his statement in the parliament. The opposition and ruling lawmakers had even engaged in a physical duel last month as the former tried to stop Minister for Tourism Omkar Prasad Shrestha in making his statement in the House.

If the deadlock continues, the government may have no other option than to abruptly end the parliament. This will only help those political forces who are out to prove that the parliamentary system of governance can't fulfil people's aspirations. ■

NEPSE'S SWINGS

Stock Slump

Two weeks after witnessing a sharp fall, Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) is still struggling to stabilize

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

The country's only stock exchange is yet to get over the sharp plunge it took on Wednesday, February 28. In the two weeks that followed "Black Wednesday" — when the index fell by 5.5 percent (22.71 points) equivalent to the erosion of two billion rupees in terms of market capitalization on a single day — the stock exchange has shown signs of instability.

In the immediate week that followed, the NEPSE index recovered slightly to gain 4.67 points only to lose 7.49 points in the following week. Experts say the sharp oscillation of the NEPSE index means the bourse is yet to recover from the shocking slump it went through in February. Market watchers predict a sluggish index in coming months. As the current period is also considered a lean season for the secondary market, the onset of spring will not bring good news to investors.

"Our capital market is heavily dominated by the transactions of shares of commercial banks and financial institutions. Any movement in these institutions has a direct impact on the bourse," said a stockbroker.

Banks and financial institutions do over 90 percent of the transaction at NEPSE. Of the 110 listed companies, only 37 represent the manufacturing sector.

The current slack in the NEPSE index can also be attributed to the sluggish trading of shares of financial institutions. The weekly report issued by the stock

exchange confirms that the participation of commercial banks in the total transaction was reduced to 60.33 percent last week.

This is the time when most of the banks and financial institutions will have closed down their books. The speculative drive that had pushed the NEPSE index — mostly because of the rise in the share prices of commercial banks — earlier is almost non-existent now, as most of the banks have already decided whether to issue bonus shares, dividend or rights

issue to shareholders.

Only Nepal Arab Bank Limited and Bank of Kathmandu remain to close their annual accounts. "That is why we are witnessing sluggish trading at the stock exchange," said Bishnu Chapagain, vice president of the Nepal Stock Brokers Association.

Most of the major banks and financial institutions have completed their annual general meetings and there is no fresh incentive to the speculation-driven investors to put their money in the secondary market.

"We lack informed investors who put their money based on fundamental of business. So we do not foresee any sudden change in the present course taken by the bourse," said Madan Raj Joshi, general manager at the Nepal Stock Exchange. Joshi believes the bourse will bounce back after June/July, when the new fiscal year begins.

The slump at NEPSE preceded the plunge of the stocks and shares witnessed around the world, including in neighboring India. The sharp plunge taken by Bombay Stock Exchange and NASDAQ could also have some impact on NEPSE's trading — in psychological terms, if not others.

Chapagain believes the international fall in share price will not affect NEPSE because it does not have foreign or institutional investors. "Many of our policies like double taxation — on profits as well as dividends — discourage institutional and foreign investors from putting their money here. So the slump in the world market will have little impact here," he said.

Though the upheavals in international markets may not affect NEPSE, the fact that it seems to be driven by speculations rather than substance, and is way too heavily dominated by financial institutions, mean that some concrete policy measures are vital if the government wants to see a thriving capital market. ■



NEPSE Trading Floor : Back and forth

PASHMINA'S WOES

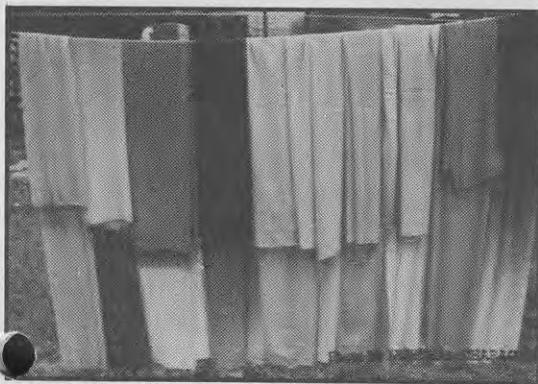
Going The Carpet Way?

After maintaining healthy progress in the last few years, the Nepalese pashmina industry seems to be headed downwards

By A CORRESPONDENT

The pashmina industry of the country is at the cross-roads. After succeeding to make a mark at the international market in a short period, the industry is now facing threats to its very survival.

In the last few years, the pashmina industry had shown signs of becoming a major contributor to the country's foreign exchange revenue. In the fiscal year



Pashmina shawls : Questions of quality

2056/57 (1999/2000) pashmina worth more than Rs 6 billion was exported, which improved to more than Rs 5 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year 2000/2001.

But allegations of deterioration of quality of Nepalese pashmina have led to a drastic reduction in the volume of exports in the last few months. The orders from abroad have stopped coming, says Pushpa Man Shrestha, managing director at the Nepal Pashmina Industry. Shrestha is also a member of Nepal Pashmina Industries Association. The association has recently formed a task force to study the recent decline in the sector.

Japan, America and Europe are the

major markets for pashmina products. Lately, there was a big fashion for wearing pashmina shawls and other pashmina attires in the international market.

Nepalese pashmina are reputed for their quality. But now there are allegations that industries are mixing woolen yarns for bigger profits, thereby bringing down the quality.

Officials blame the deterioration in the quality of pashmina on the mushrooming of the industries and increase in competition. Many of them try to sell low-quality products in a bid to make quick profits.

During the early and mid-nineties, Nepalese carpets made headlines by registering a staggering growth. But their downfall was as swift as their ascent.

The issues of child labor, deterioration of quality and limited market segment led to the downfall of the industry, which is still struggling to recover from the bruises of the past.

Instead of taking cue from what happened to carpet industry, pashmina-wallahs seem to be following the same route. Nepalese envoys and honorary consuls stationed abroad have started writing letters to pashmina entrepreneurs mentioning the deterioration of quality and the likely decline of exports if the trend continues.

Beside the risk of losing the market abroad due to sub-standard quality, there is another worry looming large for the Nepalese pashmina industries. The 16 percent countervailing duty slapped by the Indian government recently through its budget, is likely to affect the export of Nepalese pashmina — 43 percent of which are exported to European countries through India. ■

Shocking Shutdown

In a decision that shocked the IT community in the country, Himalayan Infotech, a leading company that was involved in providing the Medical Transcription service, decided to pull down its shutters, laying off around 400 employees — two weeks ago.

According to insiders, the Himalayan Infotech had an understanding with the US-based Heartland company to provide medical transcription services. Its services used to be routed through another company based in Bangalore, India.

"We are shocked that after taking such an arduous training for more than six months, and just as we were actually starting our job, the company closed down," said an employee. The employees allege that the company was unfair in sacking them so suddenly. "We are yet to receive the deposits the company cut from our salaries," said another exasperated employee.

The company is yet to provide reasons for the closing down. Its employees say that although the company did promise to send interested ones to Bangalore, there was no basis to believe them now. The chief of the company could not be reached for further comments.

While the experts have been trying to project Nepal's potentials in cashing in on IT-enabled services like medical transcription and call centers, the closing down of Himalayan Infotech has ignited fresh doubts.

"We are concerned by what happened at the Himalayan Infotech. Definitely, this has hurt the credibility of Nepalese IT sector. We are taking this as a lesson for better management at our own company," said Allen Tuladhar, CEO of Unlimited Numedia. His company is also involved in the Medical Transcription.

Many industry-watchers say that the closure of Himalayan InfoTech could be the result of "putting all eggs in one basket". The company had focused in medical transcription alone and, worse, it had a single client.

Though Tuladhar says there is no panic situation, he conceded that the time has come for deeper analysis before investing. "I, for one, would not want to end up as a CEO of a collapsed company. As we live in the same environment, Himalayan InfoTech's downfall comes as a case we all must closely watch and prevent from happening in future." ■



A guest house in Thamel : Boggled down by problems

TOURISM INDUSTRY

What Next?

Despite the government's move to bring hotels and restaurants under the Essential Services Act the tourism industry is yet to show a semblance of stability.

By KESHAB POUDEL

Apsara Sapkota performs traditional dances every evening at Bhancha Ghar, one of the well-known Nepalese-style restaurants of the capital, earning Rs. 5,000 a month. Sapkota, 21, an undergraduate, started her career in 1998 as a traditional Nepalese dancer. Coordinated by former Miss Nepal, Sumi Khadka, Sapkota's group of six girls provides foreign visitors glimpses into Nepalese culture.

There are more than 1,000 dancers like Sapkota who have been making a livelihood by introducing foreign visitors to this facet of Nepalese tradition. Nigma Sherpa and Kanchi Tamang have another story to tell.

They remained idle for a week when a trekking group cancelled their visit because of the strike called by hotel workers. As many trekking groups cancelled their trips in the wake of the hotel workers' strike, Sherpa and Tamang lost their temporary jobs. As there are a large number of people who rely on the tourism sector, any

disturbance or instability threatens their livelihood.

Even a minor disruption can turn the lives of people like Sherpa and Tamang upside down. Along with formal workers of the organized sector, tourism provides income opportunities for a large number of informal workers in the unorganized sector. The voices of these people have been ignored in the long-running dispute between hoteliers and hotel workers.

Nepal's economy risks facing a negative multiplier effect if tourism industry continues to pass through difficult times. The situation is worse for the banking sector. As a major source of investment, disturbances in the sector are bound to have a significant negative impact in economic transactions.

Disturbances in Tourism

Nepal's tourism sector continued to grow by seven percent a year until the end of 1999. After the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight bound for New Delhi in December that year, the sector has nose-dived. Although there has been a slight growth in third-country arrivals, the flow

of Indian tourists has been reduced to a trickle because of the exaggerated and negative publicity Nepal received in the Indian media's coverage of hijacking aftermath.

The resumption of Indian Airlines flights after a gap of six months brought some respite and Nepalese tourism officials and entrepreneurs were hoping to recover from fallout of the hijacking. However, the violent protests against anti-Nepalese remarks attributed to Indian film star Hrithik Roshan — which the actor assiduously denied ever having made — sent the wrong signals in the Indian market again.

"A mysterious succession of events has been hitting our ailing tourism sector," says Anil Pandey, general manager of Bhancha Ghar. "Whenever the industry tries to recover, someone injects it with a new dose of poison. Our industry is dying slowly. If things continue this way, Nepal's tourism will never be able to recover."

Frequent 'bandhs' (general strikes) and other violent activities have further battered the industry. One the country started expecting relative normalcy, hotel workers announced their agitation over the demand for the imposition of a 10 percent service charge on tourists.

Effects of Disturbances

Because of periodic disturbances, Nepal's economy is bracing for long-term impacts. As the number of tourists declines, many workers are being laid off. A sector that was among the fastest-growing sources of jobs has virtually frozen recruitment.

"The real effects of the one-and-a-half years of disturbances will be much higher than expected. Many small hotels have already started trimming down the number of employees," said a senior official at the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

According to official figures compiled by the Nepal Tourism Board, tourist arrivals by air went down by 10.61 percent last year compared to 1999. Indian tourist arrivals have declined by an average of 30 percent.

"My livelihood will be severely affected if the tourism sector continues to

ail," says Sapkota. She says she cannot get her present salary in any other job available. "I am paid Rs. 5,000 to perform 35 minutes of dance every day. A decline in the number of guests means a reduction in my monthly income."

The worries of workers like Sapkota are understandable, especially in view of the limited job opportunities in other sectors. Hotel workers have resumed work after the government brought the hotel and restaurant sector under the Essential Services Act. Nevertheless, the strike held last November and the events of last week have tarnished the image of Nepal as a reliable tourism destination.

"The government decision to impose the Essential Services Act is a commendable step. I think the government has finally understood the importance of the tourism sector to the national economy," said Madhav Om Shrestha executive director of Hotel Association Nepal (HAN). In the last six months, the industry has lost more than a billion rupees of transactions. Each day of disruption costs Rs. 340 million, including Rs 5 million in VAT and Rs 50 million in other taxes."

Many blame hotel workers for creating uncertainty in the tourism sector. However, the workers defend their action as a legitimate effort to press their demand for a 10 percent service charge. "I don't agree with the contention that our demand is responsible for the decline in tourist arrivals," says Bishnu Lamsal, coordinator of the Hotel Workers Joint Action Committee. "The country has been facing disruptions from many other sources, such as the Maoist activities and the overall deterioration in the law-and-order situation. We are always in favor of negotiations to settle our problems permanently."

The uncertainty is also harming other areas, including the rafting industry. "We have received many cancellations because of the uncertainty prevailing in the hotel sector," says Kumar Ranabhat, president of the Nepal Association of Rafting Agents. "Even after the truce, the situa-

tion remains unpredictable."

Economic Costs : According to a study, the strike hampered the business of 350 travel agencies, 400 trekking agencies 600 restaurants and 800 hotels across the country. The numbers of passengers on domestic flights also dropped drastically. As uncertainty hovers over the sky, the future of 1.5 million people employed in the sector remains uncertain.

A committee set up under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission, Prithvi Raj Ligal, recommended the introduction of tourism service fees instead of service charges, but the workers are firm on their original demand.

The problem can be solved if the prime minister takes the initiative," says

want a permanent solution because these problems will hamper both hotel workers and hoteliers," Minister of State for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Mahadev Gurung told SPOTLIGHT.

The dispute needs to be settled as soon as possible for Nepal to regain confidence in the international market. "We will take all necessary steps to reduce the negative impact on the tourism sector," Minister Gurung says. The national economy has already suffered immense damage from the disruption of the tourism sector. Even after the resumption of work, the tourism sector is yet to stabilize. For the time being, the workers can get some respite. Any new disruption would put the future of 250,000 workers in jeopardy.

The contribution of tourism to the gross domestic product of Nepal increased from 1.4 percent in 1983/84 to about 3.6 percent in 2000. The sector's contribution in the increase of merchandise export was 32.8 percent last year compared to 34.1 percent in 1999. Its contribution was 50 percent in 1994/95.

According to a study, the tourism sector created 122,745 permanent jobs. This means it has engaged approximately one percent of the country's total potential labor force. In 2000, the country earned more than US\$150 million in foreign exchange.

"An important economic aspect of tourism is its linkage and relations with other sectors of the economy like textile, agriculture, gem, jewelry, arts, handicraft and culture," said Maheswor Bhakta Shrestha, a tourism expert.

"If things remain unchanged, Nepal will lose its image as a popular and placid destination," says HAN executive director Shrestha.

From a dramatic hijacking to exaggerated reports of bird hits at Tribhuvan International Airport to the violent response to remarks an Indian actor said he never made, Nepal's tourism industry has passed through several painful phases over the last one-and-a-half years. Who knows what else may be in store? ■



A tourist trying to get through locked hotel : Access

Dr. Narayan Manandhar, one of the consultants on the committee. "I don't know why no one is taking any initiative."

Hoteliers, who argue that imposing the service charge would cripple the tourism industry, say they want a lasting solution. "We want to solve the problem for good," said HAN executive director Shrestha to BBC Nepali Service.

Hotel workers, who are considering going to court against the government's move to invoke the Essential Services Act, also wants some face-saving formula. Our doors are always open for negotiations, but the hoteliers are not showing any flexibility," says Lamsal.

The government, too, seems anxious to resolve the dispute expeditiously. "We

FOOD HABITS

Eating Out Is Becoming The In Thing

Urbanization and liberalization have joined hands to change the food habits of Kathmanduites. With little appetite for the incessant health warnings coming from the West, the younger generation is making the fastest move towards fast-food outlets.

By AKSHAY SHARMA

Among the many changed ways of Kathmandu's people is the way they eat. After a decade of democracy-driven liberalization, sociologists say they have seen a drastic change in the food habits of the urban people. Some experts argue that these changing food habits are the outcome of rapid urbanization itself.

There are many establishments in Kathmandu today that home-deliver or home-pack your meals. This has led to a rise in the number of people who do not cook at home. The younger generation

in particular are going in for fast foods in full speed.

There is a mouth-watering array of special discounts. "Buy momos and get a soft drink free," reads one ad. "It is unbearable for someone on an empty stomach to pass by a momo shops," says Sumesh Dhungel, a regular momo eater.

Momos are a staple diet for Kathmanduites. Moreover, it the fastest food around and is easily available. However, many people who understand how the momo business operates wonder whether the hot and juicy dumplings are free of health risks. "Lean and gaunt water-buffaloes are brought to

Kathmandu in highly deplorable conditions. Some barely survive the journey. Have you ever wondered what risks you are taking by eating such meat?" asks Iswor Rokaya.

"If the population in America would stop eating meat, it could provide the whole Indian population that are derived from food," says the Vegetarian Society of New Jersey, United States of America.

Extrapolating that nugget of information, it can be affirmed that if the urban population of Nepal quit eating meat, the starving rural population would surely have enough to eat.

The Nepalese people are not un-



Nepalese cuisine : Still high on menu

aware of research findings in the West on the impact of diet on health. The media, medical professionals, and experiences narrated by friends and associates tell us that diet is a strong factor in heart disease, osteoporosis, stroke, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, dental disease, cancer, and gastrointestinal diseases.

Saturated fats and cholesterol originating from animal products promote the development of diseases because the body has a difficult time moving them through the bloodstream. The bloodstream is the avenue for getting nutrients throughout the body. Some imagery may help to understand how this works.

In Layman's Terms

Think of your veins and arteries as roads by which nutrients enter and wastes exit the body. Think of meat as a slow moving vehicle within your system. It

runs hot and slow-spewing black smoke from the muffler.

Faster, sleeker vehicles (nutrients without fat and cholesterol) have to pass through it to get where they have to go. Each time you eat, you contribute to the traffic on your body's roadways. When you ingest meat, you not only put a "lemon" on the road, slowing up the traffic, but the "lemon" takes its toll on the road itself. The body works harder to digest meat. It takes what nutrients can be used and pushes the remains on. These remains leave debris (plaque) on the road (arterial walls).

Some people put so many "lemons" on their internal road systems; they have major traffic jams (disease). Sometimes, roads have to be closed and alternate routes bear increased nutrient traffic. So, why are you a vegetarian? Maybe to prevent so much stress on the body's roads.

Health experts recommend that you increase your intake of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains for optimum health. Plant-based diets are lower in total fat than animal-based diets. The bodies of vegetarians who adhere to a balanced diet seem to absorb vital nutrients better than others.

They generally have lower rates of the above-mentioned diseases and higher energy levels. The body doesn't send out flares when its roads begin to deteriorate. It sends in repair cell crews. It rides around the "lemons" and deposits of fat sludge on the side of the road

stoically and successfully for years.

But as the traffic becomes dense, and the roads continue to deteriorate, good cell crews cannot reach areas in need and a major illness develops. Disease doesn't have to be the great awakener to a healthy diet. Learning to nourish your body without meat is a great start, say experts.

Who Is A Vegetarian?

Vegetarians do not eat meat, fish, or poultry. An increasing number of vegetarians also abstain from using any animal products, including dairy, eggs, and honey. These vegetarians are called vegans (pronounced VEE-guns), by experts.

Among the many reasons for being a vegetarian are health, environmental, ecological, and religious concerns, dislike for meat, compassion for animals, economics, world hunger, and belief in non-violence.

Nutritional experts have affirmed that a vegetarian diet can meet all known nutrient needs for people of all ages. The key to a healthy vegetarian diet, as with any other diet, is to eat a wide variety of foods, including fruits, vegetables, plenty of leafy greens, whole grain products, nuts, seeds, and legumes.

"Vegetarians have the best diet. They have the lowest rates of coronary disease of any group in the country. Some people scoff at vegetarians, but they have a fraction of our heart attack rate and they have only 40 percent of our cancer rate," says Dr William Castelli, director of the Framingham Heart Study, the world's longest ongoing investigation into heart disease and diet.

"There are so many unhygienic places around town where I'd rather prefer not to go to," says Subash Lohani. "I don't like chicken. What I love best is the curry that comes with the meat." Subash says he seldom eats meat, probably once in a month.

The New Habits

Two young men have set out to make the already popular food chains in the capital sit up and take notice. Gagan Pradhan and old his school friend Bishheswor Tandulkar, who owns a plot

of land in Kathmandu, got together to open a restaurant.

"Our targeted consumers are teenagers because they like fast food," says Gagan, the director of the newly opened "Drive-Thru" opposite to the famous pan-pasal that got washed away by the Tukucha (river) during the last year's monsoon rains in Kamaladi.

A Volkswagen Beetle is perched on the roof to attract potential consumers. A restaurant upstairs can seat 66 people. The place, which was opened on August 24 last year, has parking space for up to 20 cars. There have been stories about the outlet in the newspapers. Gagan and Bishheswor plan open another chain of eateries.

"We haven't seen the place, although we adore fast food,"

say teenagers Roshi Manadhar, Nita Shrestha, Sanjana Manadhar, and Pratika Gurung, who study at the



Nepalese consumers : Swayed by winds of change

Kathmandu Institute of Science and Technology.

Many experts prefer to use the term

"junk food" because of their perceived health disadvantages. But Kathmandu's new generation is not bothered. Sanjana and Nita say: "Call it whatever you like — junk food or fast food — but we don't think it is bad for health. They contain everything of nutritional value. It is expensive but we manage to save money once in a while and go out for "junk food."

Gagan, 26, studied hotel management in Sydney, Australia and returned to Nepal last year. "I was inspired by my experience at hotels I worked in and observed while I was abroad. My family, which is in the travel business, fully supported me when I decided to get together with Bishheswor," says Gagan. He also operates the Himalayan Java (Kathmandu International Coffee-house) at Thamel, which is associated with the Specialty Coffee Association of Nepal.

Bishheswor owns the area and Gagan manages it. It is a partnership they contemplated from their early school days.

"I know what we have started is not popular with everybody — some people think it's just an imitation of

Ahimsa And Vegetarianism

An important characteristic of Hinduism is the ideal of ahimsa. Eastern thinkers regard ahimsa, "non-injury" or the absence of the desire to harm, as one of the keystones of their ethics. Historically, ahimsa is unrelated to vegetarianism; in ancient India, killing people in war or in capital punishment and killing animals in Vedic sacrifices were acceptable to many people who for other reasons refrained from eating meat.

"Some become vegetarians because of the unhygienic way street vendors sell meat," says 21-year-old Subhu Panta. "Some avoid meat because of religious reasons."

However, the two movements, ahimsa and vegetarianism, reinforced one another through the common concept of the disinclination to kill and eat animals, and together they contributed to the growing importance of the protection and veneration of the cow, which gives food without having to be killed.

Neither ahimsa nor vegetarianism ever found full acceptance. Even today, many Hindus eat beef, and non-violence (as the ideal of ahimsa is often translated) has never been a notable characteristic of Hindu behavior.

"Can you say no to a meal of meat someone has taken hour to prepare just by announcing that you are a vegetarian?" asks Sumesh.

"It's a big problem for vegetarians like me when people ask me over for a meal," says vegetarian Krishna Shrestha.

Well all know that eating meat can be bad for health. But the urge to resist a plate of hot momos when your stomach growls is indeed terrible if you are a meat eater and are passing by places that sell meat.

McDonald's," Gagan says. He believes the venture will gain growing popularity in the days ahead. "We are planning to create a chain along the highways."

The place is not as popular as other fast food outlets, but it could soon be overwhelmed with orders. Jem Kumar Rajak, who lives in nearby Putali Sadak, says he likes the idea of getting good food fast. "I first went to their outlet for ice-cream. The food is good, too," he says. "Although the place is expensive, it has the potential to challenge older and more established food-chains. This new concept could attract more and more people."

Rokaya, who lives barely 500 meters from the establishment, hasn't been to the place. "But the way the people are flocking to the place, I think the fast-food trend is catching on."

People like Sudhir Sherchan, who works at a leading hotel in Kathmandu, have doubts about the health value of fast food. "But I still enjoy regular bites of hamburgers. I haven't been to Drive-Thru, but I do go to some of the older outlets in town," he says.

Older Habits Die Hard

The growing trend toward eating out is not lost on entrepreneurs who offer traditional Nepalese food. If you are looking forward to a thrilling experience with Newari cuisine, Woo Shee may be one of the places to consider.

The location and ambience of such places may have changed in recent times, but these establishments have survived throughout the centuries.

There are still some local places that will continue to compete, says market analyst. Newari food is considered among the best of the local cuisine and the bigger restaurants do not overshadow these outlets.

"It is a Nepali or a traditionally Newari restaurant and bar. We cannot afford to go to bigger restaurants where you have to pay Rs 150 or more for a shot of drink. But Dabal dai serves what I interpret as Nepali tequila. My five friends and I had our full liter and it only cost us Rs 200. What can you

'Human Beings Are Meat Eaters By Nature'

SUMESH DUNGEL, 28, a social science student.

When you know that eating meat can be like sowing the seeds of diseases, why do you like to eat meat?

There is an abundance of proteins in meat. It's the law of nature for a human being to eat meat. We are hunters. Like tigers, we have our eyes on the front. We are not cows that chomp on grass, who have eyes on the sides of their heads. Every hunter of prey in nature has eyes on the front.

There are four momo shops in the vicinity where I live and it is very hard to ignore the aroma. I used to have at least three plates of momo a day before. I can't resist the urge and my weight nearly reached a ton. I like pork momos and I believe that if you are young and you have the resistance power to digest meat, then you should go ahead. The fastest food in town is momos.

Do you see the extent to which the eating habits of people in Kathmandu have changed?

People prefer not to cook at home because they do not have enough time. It's a busy world in which we live. If you take out meal from a restaurant and eat it at home, you have the choice to prepare or cook it again as it suits your palate. It's nice to sit with your family and enjoy a good meal since there are so many unhygienic places to eat in town. Besides, you have spare time if you don't cook at home.

How hygienic it is to dine out?

It is said that eating pork can cause diseases. But if you keep pork in a freezer for eight hours, the worms in the meat die. It's up to every individual to separate if some food is hygienic or not. A foreigner might suffer from various diseases eating the same meat in the same manner as I do. But I can digest the food. You can get food poisoning from eating cabbage. It might happen with any food you intake. ■



afford to buy with Rs 200 in bigger restaurants? asks Sachin Bohara, 35, a frequent visitor to Dabal Manandhar's establishment.

Dabal Manadhar, who runs the place, is famous as Dabal dai. It has a reputation for serving a variety of Newari dishes. And menu changes every season.

Narendra Thapa Magar, 45, of Ason says he has been going to Dabal dai's place for at least twice a week for the last 10 years. "You can't get this kind of satisfaction even in a five-star hotel. Dabal dai is the simply the best place in town," Narendra says. "I was attracted to Dabal dai's place because you can get quality food and liquor at a very low cost."

Dabal dai serves a variety of deli-

cious Newari dishes like 'wo' (eggs fried with mas), 'tisha' (bone-marrow cut into pieces), fried tongue, three-piece (made of skin meat and fat), 'barr' (the white substance between the skin and meat, which is a delicacy), 'chwayela' (salt, chilli and spices are added to boiled meat usually roasted without oil), 'chachila' (minced and boiled meat), 'chatamari' (popularly known as Nepalese pizza), 'khago', 'nhephu' (fried brains of goat), 'chohi' (fried blood), among others.

Winter adds new varieties of food and liquor. 'Takha' (spiced boiled meat eaten with beaten rice) and 'sanyakunya' (which looks like jelly made from small fish and is served in clay pots) are among other popular items on Dabal dai's menu. And the variety of

soups and pickles that are served along with these dishes add up to a very nice combination.

Asim Tandulkar, a frequent diner at Dabal dai's, says: "These types of places must have existed for centuries. I remember Dabal dai's place ever since I was a kid. We used to go there for barr, which is my favorite dish. It is like chewing on hard rubber,"

When your throat dries up the next time and you are desperate for a drink, try out places like Dabal dai's that give continuity to traditional cuisine amid a changing clientele. "Places like Bhanca-Ghar, Bhojan-Griha have managed to attract customers, especially tourist, by serving Nepali cuisine in all its rich variety," says Badri Shrestha, a food enthusiast.

If you want a drink of any fruit, ask Dabal dai and chances are that he has it



Dabal dai's restaurant : Mouth-watering menu

'Vegetarianism Is Rooted In Logical Principles'

BINAY SHRESTHA is a graduate student in sociology

Why did you quit meat?

I used to eat meat on a regular basis until three years ago. I believe in Ahimsa (non-violence). It is terrible on our part to slaughter animals to satisfy one's palate.

What influenced your decision?

Well, three years ago I read this book — I don't remember the writer or the name of the book. But the philosophical, religious and other arguments changed my life. And I became a vegetarian because it offered logical answers on the virtues of becoming a vegetarian.

How do you fulfill the protein your body needs?

Well many things have the required protein your body needs, such as mushrooms and pulses.

How do you assess the changing food habits of people of Kathmandu?

It's mostly western influences that have left the younger generations drooling for fast food. Meat and liquor have been always a perfect blend. And since there has been a rise in the consumption of liquor, the rise in the consumption of meat occurs naturally.

Home packing offered by many vendors in Kathmandu is convenient to most of us. Otherwise, I do not see drastic changes in the food eating habits of the Nepalese people because momos are still the fastest food around.

People also prefer to take food home instead of cooking because they want to enjoy a variety of flavors. This change may be due to laziness or they may be celebrating. ■



— quality home-brewed fare ranges from pink anar (pomegranate) and purple amala to red pan (beetle-nut) drinks. One shot of any drink cost Rs 10 and a quarter goes up to Rs 30.

"These drinks have a sexy aura. I was impressed with the variety of dishes," says Rajesh Subba of Thahithi, after his first visit to Dabal dai's.

"'Bhutan', 'cheura' (beaten rice) and woo are very good. The 'ela' (liquor) doesn't give you a hangover. It's far better than distilled liquor. The liquor kicks you in the head but you can walk straight even if you have had a couple of glasses more than you should have," says Andre Baker, a tourist who discovered Dabal dai's place by accident.

Bhim Khadka, who works for Dabal dai, ran away from his home in Diktel, Khotang in eastern Nepal seven months ago to earn money in Kathmandu. "I worked for a cake shop in Bijuli Bazaar but the owners never paid me," Khadka says. "A foreign diplomat comes here occasionally and takes loads of food after he's had his meal here."

With their recipe of affordability and quality that tickles the taste buds, these places are flourishing all over Kathmandu Valley. ■

FOOTBALL

Counting The Victims

The continuing dispute in Nepalese football has started taking its toll — the national football coach is the latest victim

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

The British coach to Nepalese national football team, Stephen Constantine, resigned following the “no-end-in-sight” dispute in the national football association.

Though Constantine did not specifically mention the reasons for his resignation, it is obvious what made him take the decision. He is reported to have tendered his resignation to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). It is the AFC that sends foreign coaches to train the national team here.

Interestingly, a day after Constantine resigned, a group of national footballers released a statement saying they would now join the Ganesh Thapa-led football association. “I am happy that the footballers have decided to come to the ANFA fold. Their decision will better the country’s reputation,” said Thapa.

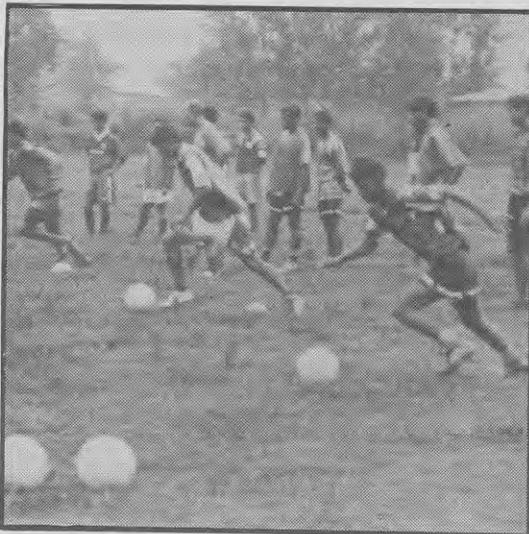
But Geeta Rana is unhappy over the recent developments. “(By moving over to Thapa’s fold) The footballers have invited anarchy in the country,” she said. According to her, the National Sports Council (NSC) was corresponding with the AFC to make the latter recognize her ANFA and allow the team sent by her to participate in the World Cup qualifying matches scheduled to be held in Kazakhstan in April.

Following last October’s controversial election of Ganesh Thapa, under the supervision of officials from AFC, as the president of the All Nepal Football Federation (ANFA) and the prompt declaration of its illegitimacy by the National Sports Council, which then went ahead to appoint school principal-turned-football administrator Geeta Rana as President of its ANFA ad hoc committee, the Nepalese football has

been hit by series of misfortune.

First it was the unprecedented chance to host the World Cup qualifying round. The International Football Federation (FIFA) took away that chance from Nepal and handed it over to Kazakhstan.

The international football-governing body was forced to take the decision as the Nepalese government was not prepared to recognize Thapa-led ANFA. The FIFA



Nepalese football : Kicked around

itself was not prepared to recognize the Rana-led football association.

As if this was not enough, now chances are high that Nepal will not even be able to participate in the qualifying round.

FIFA may not accept any team sent by Rana-led ANFA while the government will refuse to recognize any team sent by the Thapa-led ANFA as national team of Nepal.

The resignation by Constantine does not come as a shock to sports commentators. “One could guess his predicament. Which team is he supposed to coach when the players of the national team are divided among the two associations?,” asked a

sports analyst.

What has baffled sports-watchers, however, is the timing of the Nepalese footballers decision to join the Thapa-led association.

Constantine had come to Nepal in 1999 on a three-year contract to coach the national team. His tenure had witnessed some positive developments in Nepalese football. Last year, the Nepalese football team became the first runner-ups in the Eighth South Asian Federation Games. And the youth team of Nepal made history by succeeding to enter the second round in Under-16 Asian championship a couple of months ago.

But all these feats will be reduced to nothing if the current turmoil is not resolved soon. Recently, the AFC decided to refrain from actually handing over the money from Goal Project, which Nepal had been awarded last year by the FIFA, unless the controversies are resolved.

Under the Goal Project, Nepal was promised assistance worth one million dollars which would be used to augment the sports infrastructures in the country.

Meanwhile, there is a greater danger of Nepal being suspended from international football tournaments. Sports commentators have not ruled out the possibility that the FIFA could decide to suspend Nepalese football in near future. Just recently, the FIFA suspended the football team of Guinea after the government there failed to reinstate the national football association despite its deadline.

But Rana dismisses the possibility. “Which ANFA would FIFA suspend? As far as we are concerned, we are not even recognized by the federation. We are least concerned what action it takes against the Thapa-led association.”

She also accuses Thapa of trying to breach upon the apex court’s decision. “His ANFA was constituted illegally — after the court had issued a stay order against holding any election at the ANFA.”

As brick-bats fly across, there is a slim chance that the dispute would be resolved unless the higher-up authorities right to the political level come to terms with the ensuing trouble and resolve it for good. Otherwise, this could well be the beginning of the end for Nepalese football. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY

Snapshots Of Culture

A new breed of photographers struggle to depict the country's tradition and heritage

By AKSHAY SHARMA

A team of young Nepalese photographers is entering an arena largely occupied by members of an older generation. Today more people are using the camera in many more ways than, say, 10 years ago. Experts say that nine out of 10 of those who handle the camera are people who are either convinced of their artistic bearings, already are professional photographers, or are confident of the potential photographers lurking behind them.

Thirty photographers participated in a nationwide photo competition and festival that was organized in the capital recently. Ashesh Dongol walked away with the first prize of Rs 15,000 for his work titled "Sacrifice of the snake on the day of Balachaturdashi". Shree Prakash Bajracharya won the second prize of Rs 3,000 for his "Bisket Festival with Lingo (the tower)". Suman Maharjan's "Ornament Searching Festival" bagged the third prize of Rs 2000.

Trophies, certificates and special prizes were awarded to 10 photographers. Their works were on exhibition at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka for five days. The venue then moved to Pahen Chhen, Bhaktapur Durbar Square and then to Brikutimandap, Kathmandu.

Ashesh Dongol spoke to SPOTLIGHT on how he was drawn to photography. "My elder brother was very interested in photography. My father had

bought for him a Pentax camera. I can't remember the model. That was the first camera I used."

He added: "I admired my brother's photographs, especially his night photography. Even when I was in school, I used to spend all my lunch money on buying postcards. At first, 50 percent of my photographs was spoilt. But one learns from experience. I remember I used to use a Rollei camera." Rollei has certain features that are quite unique compared to other cameras. It's fully manual and the

Thirty photographers participated in a nationwide photo competition and festival that was organized in the capital recently. Ashesh Dongol walked away with the first prize of Rs 15,000 for his work titled "Sacrifice of the snake on the day of Balachaturdashi".

flash is attached at the bottom of the camera, unlike other cameras that have their flashes on the top."

When asked about the scope for photographers in the country, he said: "If you want to be a professional and pursue the field seriously, there is definitely a big scope in photography. Photographers in Nepal do not take their work seriously. And the general public would rather just snap away with automatic cameras and hang them on the wall, instead of buying

photographs these days. I have been taking photography seriously for the past one and half years since our team was registered."

The team, called "The Neo- Generation", also includes Prashanta Shrestha, Kishor Maharjan, Kusal Bajracharya, Chandra Man Maharjan, Manil Shahi and Bhuwan Bhochibhoya.

The aim of the exhibition was to enhance the inner skills of photographers, to broaden the scope and develop professionalism in photography, to provide windows to up and coming photographers, and to promote internal tourism. The festival was the first of its kind.

"I always used to admire my elder brother's photographs and still wonder how he shot them. My target is to do something for Nepal aside from enhancing my own skills," Ashesh said. "Photos help give us a true insight into Nepalese culture. Our culture seems to be disintegrating. The panoramic scenes of Nepal are truly worth being photographed."

Asked what he does before taking a shot, Ashesh said: "I build a concept before I take a picture. I frame the shot in my mind and just snap away using all the means of being an artist. Photography is an addiction. And it's a simple task of capturing light and playing with it. Going through photographic training does not help enhance your skill. It's all up to you."

Ashesh uses a Nikon FE now to capture images, but still considers himself an amateur photographer. He says young photographers face their own set of problems. "Some of our photographs were stolen at the exhibition in Bhaktapur. The Free-lance Photojournalist Association has helped us. It's hard to find sponsors."

Those interested in helping the team can contact members at kissori@email.com ■

'The Govt Aims To Rehabilitate Kamaiyas Before The Onset Of Monsoon'

— MOHAMMED AFTAB ALAM

Minister of State for Land Reform and management **MOHAMMED AFTAB ALAM** is known as a man of action. Elected to the House of Representatives from Rautahat district, Alam affirms that he will sort out the problem of kamaiyas very soon. Alam spoke to **KE-SHAB POUDEL** in his office on the activities taken by his ministry on rehabilitating kamaiyas. Excerpts:

Even after the government announced the emancipation of kamaiyas, it is said the practices continue to exist in a limited way. Is this true?

This is only a rumor created by some people who want to extract resources in the name of bonded laborers and kamaiyas. The kamaiya system has now been completely abolished in the region.

How do you see the problems of kamaiyas?

Definitely, everything is not right. The Ministry of Land Reform and management also realizes the need to provide immediate relief to kamaiyas, who are in a very difficult situation. As Minister of State of Land Reform, I have already issued guidelines to the officials to make immediate arrangements for the welfare of kamaiyas.

The government is being accused of doing nothing for kamaiyas after they were emancipated five months ago. How do you respond to this accusation?

I agree that we were not able to handle the issue properly in the first few months. The number of kamaiyas is so large that the government was unable to provide necessary support to them. In the first phase, we concentrated our efforts on freeing kamaiyas.

The constitution has already banned slavery in all forms.

How can you describe your decision to free kamaiyas as emancipation?

Whatever the constitution says about slavery, the nature of the kamaiya system shows that it was also a by-product of slavery. This is the reason the government declared the emancipation of kamaiyas.

What follow-up steps are you taking?

I have already asked ministry officials to start the rehabilitation of the kamaiyas, which number about 15,000 families. We now have a plan and program to rehabilitate them. With support from the international agencies like DFID, GTZ and UN organizations, the government has been launching programs to provide food and temporary shelter for kamaiyas.

How long would it take to fully rehabilitate kamaiyas?

We want to rehabilitate them soon in various areas in the three districts of Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. Within the next two months, all kamaiyas will have their own land and shelter. The government wants to rehabilitate kamaiyas before the onset of the monsoon.

Because of the inability of the government to provide shelter, many kamaiyas are forced to live in a situation worse than that they were previously in. How can you guarantee that their fate would be better after rehabilitation?

The government has already decided to provide five kathas (half acre) of land to each member of the family for permanent shelter. Along with the land, the government is also planning to start the vocational training programs for them.

Who bears responsibility for the current plight of kamaiyas?

I have already told you, there might have some been mistakes in the early stages of rehabilitation. We were unable to perform our task to the desired extent because we were inexperienced.

But some local NGOs are accusing the government of slackness in coping with the kamaiya issue. How do respond?

In the name of non-government activities, some organizations have been playing in the hands of particular political parties. We don't want to play politics in such human issue. We also have reports that some NGOs have misused funds receive to help kamaiyas.

What is the situation now?

The ministry has opened a branch office in Nepalgunj to coordinate the rehabilitation programs going on in the Kailali, Kanchanpur and Bardiya districts.

The relations between kamaiyas and local landowners are so bad that the landowners have started to hire laborers from across the border. What is the government doing?

After distribution of the land, the status of the former kamaiyas will change from a landless group to a people with some land. I don't think it would be viable for landowners to continue hiring foreign workers. This is only a temporary phenomenon.

What challenges is the government facing in rehabilitating the former kamaiyas?

There are many challenges in front of the government while working to bring kamaiyas into the social mainstream. One of the urgent tasks is to inject self-confidence among former kamaiyas. To this end, the government has prepared a plan to provide vocational training for kamaiyas. We are also considering a proposal to extend interest-free loans to kamaiya families to ensure their rehabilitation.

How have you acquired land for distribution to kamaiyas?

We have already selected plots in Kanchanpur and Kailali districts. After demarcation, we will hand over the land to former kamaiyas along with legal right of possession. ■



CITIZENSHIP ROW

Awaiting Court's Verdict

After two days of hearings on the citizenship amendment bill, many new constitutional queries emerge

By KESHAB POUDEL

Although the House of Representatives passed a bill on such a sensitive issue as citizenship without taking into consideration the opinion of the citizens, the hearings in the Supreme Court provided the opportunity to start a nation-wide debate on the constitutional and legal aspects of the bill.

Although King Birendra's letter to the apex court is just concerned with whether the bill is in consonance with the constitution, lawyers and eminent constitutional experts dwelled on many other aspects, including whether the legislation could be termed a finance bill, whether the King had any other option and whether there was any other way out.

In view of the country's geography, sandwiched between Asian giants China and India — the world's two most populous countries — there has been growing concern that any change in the existing legal provisions on citizenship would alter the demographic profile of the small Himalayan kingdom. This was precisely what eminent lawyers pointed out in the court in the course of presenting their views. The lawyers put constitutional options and other issues before the seven-member bench of the Supreme Court.

Headed by Chief Justice Keshab Prasad Upadhyaya, the bench included justices Laxman Prasad Aryal, Kedarnath Upadhyaya, Krishna Jung Rayamajhi, Govinda Bahadur Shrestha, Hari Prasad Sharma and Arbinda Prasad Acharya.

As the arguments started getting repetitive, the mood in the court was getting weary. But that changed as soon as eminent constitutional lawyer Ganesh Raj Sharma raised some important — and previously unheard — arguments.

Does the King have the sole option of sending any controversial bill to the Supreme Court for its opinion or does he have other choices? Sharma maintained that the King could have returned the bill to a joint session of parliament with a message instead of send-

ing it to the apex court.

Sharma argued that the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 gives the right to the King to send such a bill to a joint session of the house.

After a long controversy, King Birendra sent the bill to the apex court seeking its opinion on whether Clause 2 of the Citizenship Amendment Bill 1964 is in consonance with Articles 8 and 9 of the constitution, under the Article 88(5).

Article 88(5) says: If His Majesty wishes to have an opinion of the Supreme Court on any complicated legal question of interpretation of this Constitution or of any other law, it shall, upon consideration on the question, report to his Majesty its opinion thereon.

In two days of hearings at the Supreme Court, most of the senior advocates argued over the periphery of the bill. Sharma, however, brought up constitutional alternatives in facing such a situation.

When all his colleagues confined the debate to whether Clause 2 of the bill is against the spirit of the constitution or not, Sharma argued that the King also has the right

to send the bill to a joint session of parliament with a message before sending it to the court.

According to Article 54(3) of the constitution, His Majesty may send a message to either of both houses of parliament. The House receiving such message shall, as early as possible, consider the matter mentioned in the message and submit its opinion to His Majesty.

Contradictory to the opinions of his colleagues that a finance bill cannot be sent to the joint session of parliament, senior advocate Sharma argued that King can send any issue to the joint session of the parliament with a message. He said that constitutionally, the King could still send it to the joint session even after receiving the apex court's opinion.

"The court also considered the effect of its opinion and opened the way to referring the bill again to parliament," said Sharma.

Although the King sought the court's opinion on Clause 2 of the bill, lawyers argue, the court reply has to incorporate such matters as whether the legislation is a finance bill and other constitutional issues.

The lawyers also question the role of Speaker of House of Representatives to term every kind of bill as a finance bill. If every piece of legislation is called a finance bill, many constitutional provision will be useless. "It cannot be accepted as a finance bill," said advocate Sharma. If it is a finance bill, it has to be tabled by finance minister." The fact that he allowed the home minister to table the citizenship amendment bill, which is related to sovereignty and internal matters, forces us to consider whether this is part of the 'politics' of the speaker."



Supreme Court : All eyes on it

Senior advocates Motikaji Sthapit, Damannath Dhungana, Krishna Prasad Panta, Surbagya Ratna Tuladhar and advocate Bishowkanta Mainali also argued that the bill is against the spirit of finance bill and is ultra virus.

"It can never be termed as a finance bill. It has already been amended five times in the past as an ordinary bill. Even in 2048 when it was amended for the fifth time, it passed through a process of an ordinary bill. But this is the only time that the bill has been put through the process of a finance bill," said Mainali.

The objectives of the bill is itself against the constitution, as it was introduced to award citizenship to offspring of natural citizens. The sixth amendment was presented to provide citizenship to the sons, daughters and relatives of the natural citizens and those who are in the process of naturalization and their children," said Mainali, who pleaded as amicus curie. "Section 3 of the Citizenship Act 1964 is now incorporated as a part of the Constitution. The clause put the word after decent and birth. That birth posed is prospective effect which includes birthright to the naturalization citizens."

Some of the amicus curie, however, disagreed with his arguments and suggested that King cannot hold a finance bill for a such long time. "Constitutionally the King is bound to give Royal seal to a finance bill," said senior advocate Mukunda Regmi. "The court cannot do anything when the constitution itself speaks about the provisions governing a finance bill."

"If the bill is against the spirit of the constitution, the court can declare it as such after the royal seal is affixed," said Regmi.

In such a situation, what opinion should the apex court give to the king on the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill? Simply, the court can send its recommendation to the King that the bill should be forwarded with a message to a joint session of parliament.

Toeing the line of Regmi, senior advocate Biplendra Chakrabarti argued that the King has no option other than to give his assent to the bill. "The King cannot return a finance bill and it is the prerogative of the speaker of the House of Representatives to specify the nature of a bill," said Chakrabarti.

Other advocates argued that there was no need to amend the act just to simplify the procedures of distributing citizenship. "It is not legal or other complications but the inefficiency of the administration that hampers the process of distribution of citizenship cer-

Legal Clauses On Citizenship

According to Article 8 of the Constitution of Nepal 1990, Citizenship at the Commencement of the Constitution: At the commencement of this Constitution, the following persons who have their domicile in Nepal shall be deemed to be citizens of Nepal:-

a) Any person who is a citizen of Nepal by virtue of Article 7 of the Constitution of Nepal (1962) or Section 3 of the Nepal Citizenship Act, 1964,

b) Any person who has acquired naturalized citizenship of Nepal by virtue of Section 6 of the Nepal Citizenship Act, 1964.

Article 9 speaks on Acquisition and Termination of Citizenship after the commencement of the Constitution:

(1) A person who is born after the commencement of this constitution and whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the birth of the child shall be a citizen of Nepal by descent.

2) Every child who is found within the Kingdom of Nepal and the whereabouts of whose parents are not known shall, until the father of the child is traced, be deemed to be a citizen of Nepal by descent.

3) Whenever any territory is acquired by way of incorporation into the Kingdom of Nepal, every person of having his domicile within such territory shall become a citizen of Nepal, subject to provisions of existing laws.

4) After the commencement of this constitution, the acquisition of citizenship of Nepal by a foreigner may be regulated by law which may, inter alia, require the fulfillment of the following conditions:

a) that he can speak and write the language of the nation of Nepal;

b) that he is engaged in any occupation in Nepal;

c) that he has renounced his citizenship of another country and

d) that he has resided in Nepal for at least fifteen years.

5) Notwithstanding anything contained in Clause (4), a woman of foreign nationality who has a matrimonial relationship with a Nepalese citizen and who has initiated proceedings for renunciation of her foreign citizenship, and any other person, who has renounced the citizenship of Nepal and has gone to a foreign country who has renounced his foreign citizenship, of Nepal.

6) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-clause b) and d) of Clause 4, the son or daughter of descendant of a citizen of Nepal and who has resided in Nepal for a period of at least two years may acquire the citizenship of Nepal on such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by law: Provided that this clause shall not be applicable in the case of descendants of naturalized citizens.

7) The termination of the citizenship of Nepal shall be as determined by law.

What Clause 2 of the Nepal Citizenship Act Amendment 2056 says:

In Clause 2 of the Citizenship Act by and birth is added in the main content of descendants.

Likewise in the same clause of after sub clause 5, 7, 8 and 9 are added and in sub-clause 6 and anybody who was born in Nepal under subclause 1 but the father does not acquire the citizenship certificate should get the Nepalese citizenship certificate by birth.

Likewise Under the subclause 7, 8 and 9, many new measures are introduced to pave way to acquire the citizenship certificate.

tificates," said Dhungana. "The court must warn the speaker not to take an illegal path," said Dhungana.

Attorney-General Badri Bahadur Karki defended the bill on the ground that there are a large number of people who have not been able to acquire citizenship just because his or her father does not have a citizenship certificate.

"As our citizenship laws do not make it compulsory to obtain citizenship certificate. There are a number of cases where the father failed to obtain the certificate. Now because they are dead, their sons and daughters are being denied the chance of obtaining citizenship certificate. The proposed bill simply attempts to remedy such problems," he said.

A son or daughter of a deceased father would have to prove the status of the citizenship of his or her father. In the absence of such provisions, sons and daughters of fathers who died before obtaining the citizenship certificate would never get their citizenship certificate. The whole game is to politicize the issue," said Attorney-General Karki. "The amendment is needed to pave the way for a large number of Nepalis to have failed to get citizenship certificates because of parental negligence."

As it is a highly sensitive issue, citizenship must be debated before changing any procedures. The debate is revolving more or less around politics rather than the difficulties in the legal procedures. ■

BOOK Tales Of Truth

Madhuban Poudel's short stories span the spectrum of Nepalese society

By A CORRESPONDENT

With more than half a dozen books of short stories to his credit, Madhuban Poudel has established a firm foothold in this popular literary genre. "Ma Ra Mero Paribesh" (Me and My Surroundings) is a collection that is potent in its description of the difficulties people are forced to grapple with every day.

Recognized as one of the accomplished storytellers of contemporary Nepalese literature, Poudel uses simple but power-



ful expressions to paint the harsh and grim realities of life. Clarity of vision and strong underlying social messages are the hallmarks of his stories.

The author draws his characters and plots his story lines from real-life situations of Nepalese society. He candidly presents events, ideas and perspectives in all their complexity and depth.

In this collection, Poudel tries to explain the inner feelings and suppressed stories of women. While seeking to give expression to the aspirations and expectations of women, Poudel fulfils an immense social responsibility.

Although his stories revolve around on the core Nepalese reality where women are expected to suppress their inner feelings, Poudel shows that they can establish themselves in society and gain the recognition that is their due without having to lose their sense of pride or make needless compromises.

Poudel has clearly depicted the enormity of the challenges women have to overcome in their quest to survive in society. In such stories as "Patita", "Bhagnabashes", "Akal Bahadur", "Sifarish" and "Jyanmara", Poudel brings out the evil forces that lurk on every step of the woman's way.

While gauging the impact of deep-seated hopes and desires on his characters' everyday life,

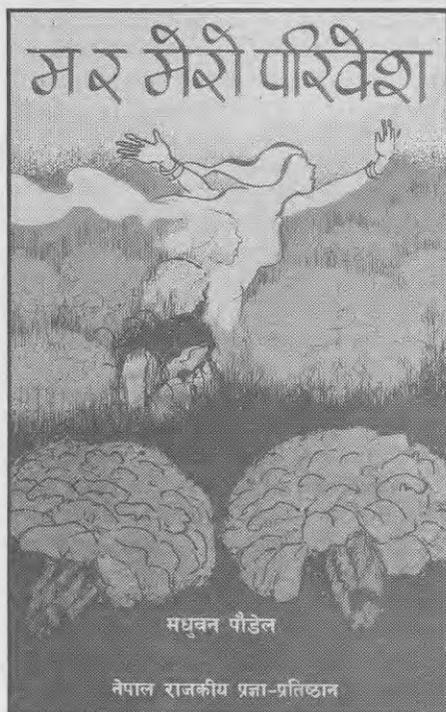
Poudel also successfully analyzes the psychological traits that influence the human experience. He tries to explain human emotions in the context of social, biological and other core elements. He tackles basic human instincts and contradictions without being abusive in any way.

Poudel is very careful in his choice of words and portrayal of sentiments. The quality of his language and the focus of his projection of human desires add to the value to his writings.

Be it "Patita" or "Bhagnabashes", Poudel surveys the deep poverty gripping a large segment of Nepalese society and is robust in his portrayal of the misfortunes that come along with it.

Poudel does not hide his inner revulsion at the social malpractices he is writing against. In reality, he talks about the collective responsibility of society to improve its lot.

Whether they are written in the context of Nepalese surroundings or foreign lands, Poudel's stories span the spectrum of human strengths and weaknesses. Poudel has been able to maintain remarkable consistency and continuity in painting a broad canvas of the social reality that is Nepal.



Ma Ra Mero Paribesh (Me and My Surroundings)
Written by Madhuban Poudel
Published by Royal Nepal Academy
Price: Rs.37.50
Pages: 83

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TRANSITION

RETURNED: Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, after completing a two-day visit to Nepal.

ACCEPTED: The resignations of Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister **Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta** and Minister of State

for Labor and Transport Management **Surendra Hamal**, by His Majesty the King, on the recommendation of the prime minister and in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990.

RELIEVED: Secretaries to His Majesty's Government **Dan Bahadur Shahi, Mohan Dev Panta, Hiranya Lal Regmi, Damaru Ballav**

Bhattarai, Khagendra Basnet and Karna Bahadur Chand, of their services after taking voluntary retirement, by the government.

Secretaries to His Majesty's Government **Padam Prasad Pokharel and Biswonath Sapkota**, of their services, after completing their five-year tenure, by the government.

LEFT: Navin Prakash Jung

Shah, vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University, for Vietnam, to participate in the meeting of universities of Asia and Norway.

RELEASED: Krishna Sen, editor of Janadesh weekly, from police custody.

ELECTED: Shakuntala Khatri, as president of Nepal Psychological Association. ■

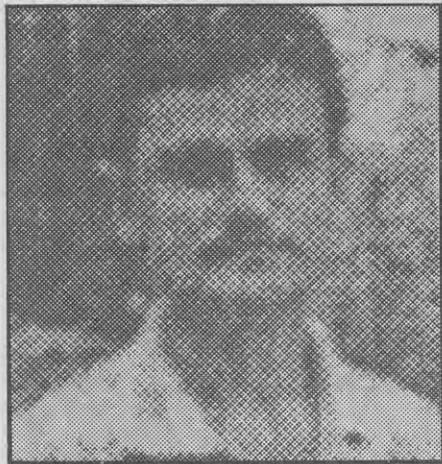
KRISHNA SEN

Free At Last

Thanks to the court, a dissenting journalist is finally free

By A CORRESPONDENT

Editor of Janadesh weekly, Krishna Sen, could not believe that he was back to the business at his office. After spending more than two-years in jail on fabricated charges, Sen was finally re-



Sen : Free

leased from Mahottari district prison last week under intense pressure from the media community, both within the country and abroad.

Police had taken Sen into custody as soon as he was released from Rajbiraj prison last Tuesday as per the Supreme Court order on March 8. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York based media rights watchdog and several rights organizations denounced the government move to re-arrest Mr. Sen.

Police had first arrested Sen in Kathmandu in April, 1999, and detained him under provisions of the Public Security Act. The arrest came after that week's edition of the weekly featured an interview with Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, a top

Maoist leader. The Supreme Court first ordered Sen's release on August 10, the same year. But according to his attorney, Yekraj Bhandari, police and district officials conspired to keep the journalist in detention by forging release papers and

then "re-arresting" him days' later on false charges. In February 2000, Sen was secretly transferred to the southeastern district of Siraha. Authorities then charged him with carrying illegal weapons under the provisions of the Arms and Ammunitions Act. In August last year, Sen was transferred yet again, this time to Rajbiraj jail. Legal proceedings in Sen's case were postponed repeatedly throughout 2000. Early this month, the Supreme Court of Nepal ruled his detention illegal and ordered his release.

"I will continue to write for the sake of people and country," said Sen upon arriving in Kathmandu.

BHUTANESE REFUGEES

Verification, Please!

Even after a week of their arrival, the members of Joint Verification Team (JVT) comprising Nepalese and Bhutanese officials were still working out the modalities to kickstart verification of the Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal till Monday. As the officials were tight-lipped nobody had any idea when the verification would actually kick off. Reports said the JVT had decided to start the process in its office itself rather than going out to all seven camps due to "security reasons." The Bhutanese team is led by Sonam Tenjing and Nepalese team by Usha Nepal. The Foreign Ministers of Nepal and Bhutan had agreed to set up a JVT late last year during their meeting in Kathmandu to verify the nationality of the refugees living in the camps. The refugee community and rights organizations have asked for third party involvement, to be specific that of the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the verification process. "It's very im-



Bhutanese refugees : Ray of hope

portant to give a fair picture that things are happening in consonant with international norms," said Ratan Gajmere, a Bhutanese human rights activist. Added Rakesh Chhetri, another Bhutanese rights activist, "Since such a verification is taking place for the sometime anywhere in the world, involvement of an international agency like UNHCR will help both the parties to make an appeal in case any conflict arises during the course of verification." The Bhutanese refugee community had also demanded UN mediation in the process during UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's recent visit to Nepal. But so far there are no indications that either government will agree on such demands.

Now In Town

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WHY IS THE HUSBAND ALWAYS THE LAST TO KNOW?

8-4
Chin Chawne

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THE NORM

SO I MET A WOMAN AT A CAFE...
Last table- I'll arm-wrestle you for it. OR- We could share?

THE MORE WE TALKED, THE MORE I LIKED HER.

AND THE MORE I LIKED HER, THE MORE NERVOUS I BECAME.

AND THE MORE NERVOUS I BECAME, THE MORE THE CLAUSTROPHOBIA KICKS IN.
You look pale. Maybe you should cut back on coffee?

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BETTER OR WORSE

YOU GOT YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE? ELIZABETH, I'M SO PROUD FIRST OF YOU!! TRY, TOO!!

I'M SORRY I CAN'T BE THERE TO GIVE YOU A BIG HUG AND CONGRATULATE YOU IN PERSON, HONEY!

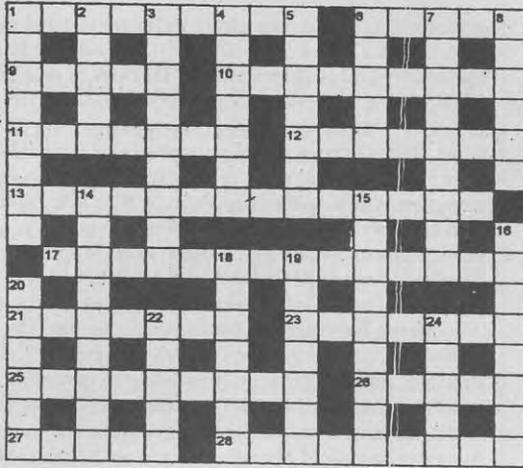
THAT'S OK, MOM. I KNOW THAT GRANDMA AN' GRAMPA NEED YOU RIGHT NOW.

BESIDES, THE LONGER YOU STAY AWAY - THE LONGER I CAN HAVE YOUR CAR!!

8-4
Lynn

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CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Fishing adviser said cut must go back — it takes fish (9)
6. Fruit pulp —oh. No! (5)
9. Tear off to secure Times special edition (5)
10. Collection available after fall not in spring (9)
11. Hulls the target for this missile (7)
12. State school, one with a place for son inside (7)
13. Men locked together in conflict (9,2,3)
17. Constitutional reform leaving many questions unanswered (5,9)
21. What traveler carries in toboggan is a joke (7)
21. Holding degree, I understand a Japanese art form (7)
25. Complicated art repels mural craftsman (9)
26. Clung to by climber, I struggled (5)
27. Forcing oneself forward to back up throw (5)
28. Mob leader expected to accept point put by giant (9)

DOWN

1. Cousin of ours sending fruit round to consume (5,3)
2. Italian footballers start off season (5)
3. Ignores evidence of spring (6,3)
4. Ruin depressed English playwright (7)
5. Muscle from dinosaur missing middle section (7)
6. Singer is favorite around ladies' organization (5)
7. King penguin originally fed outside old shelter (9)
8. Used to be inexperienced, raising capital (6)
14. It can clarify how vocalist introduces himself to girl? (9)
15. Spike becoming heartless and showing impatience (9)
16. One Creakle caned often having to lift bottom right up and spread legs apart (8)
18. Protested scripture was not infallible (7)
19. Wit from English, stock examples (7)
20. For such a good meal, drink outside and drink inside (4-2)
22. Fittingly put to use after change of heart (5)
24. Getting on, making name in a band performance (5)

Across : 1. Guillemot 6. Papaw 9. Extra 10. Rainwater 11. Torpedo 12. Estonia 13. Prisoners of war 17. Fifth amendment 21. Luggage 23. Ikebana 25. Plasterer 26. Iviad 27. Pushy 28. Demagogue
 Down : 1. Great ape 2. Inger 3. Leave suit 4. Marlowe 5. Triceps 6. Pewit 7. Potentate 8. Warsaw 14. Isinglass 15. Fidgeting 16. Straddle 18. Averred 19. Epigram 20. Slap-up 22. Aptly 24. Aging

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“Praise the Name of the Lord, the most High who hath created and completely formed His creatures and who determineth them to various ends and driveth them to attain the same.”

SATHYA SAI BABA

Nepalese Power Sector: Caution And Care

By S.B. PUN

The origin of the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) started with the enactment in 1978 of the Public Utilities Regulatory Policies Act (PURPA) by USA to grapple with the issues then prevailing in their power sector. In the 1970s, USA saw both the interruptions and the price increase shocks of the Middle East crude oil; the American utilities' dream of cheap, perpetual power from nuclear plants ran into high cost overruns and insurmountable environmental problems after the dangers of American Three Miles Island and the Russian Chernobyl nuclear accidents. In those days, a Californian electric utility forecast that its average tariff will triple to more than 25 US cents per KWh within a decade. With such doomsday forecast the US government was forced to act. So what PURPA originally envisaged as encouraging the development of co-generation and small power production units to decrease the dependence on imported fossil fuels, ended up with the US regulator, the Board of Public Utilities, opening up the entire power sector to the IPPs in 1988. This has revolutionized the power sector globally by bringing in the concept of market forces and competition in an otherwise monopolistic sector.

After nationalizing its power sector in 1946 Britain finished its last rural electrification schemes by the early 1960s and the growth of the power sector was dependent entirely on the growth of the existing load. The monopolistic utility always tended to give an overoptimistic load forecast, fueled by the keen desire to keep the British manufacturers and workers happily employed. But this sadly resulted in serious over investment, over manning and inefficiency. Only in the 1980s was it felt that the power sector direly needed the stimulus of profit motive and the environment of competition. Besides, even in Britain there was always the danger of the government's temptation to use the public sector as instruments of government policy. With the strong, no nonsense Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the helm and espousing the philosophy that the government is there only to govern, the famous public sector monopoly of Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) and the Area Boards fell to restructuring and privatization under the 1989 Electricity Act and after a long inning of 43 years.

UK's previous Telecommunication and Gas privatization had aroused considerable criticism as these were transferred from the public sector to the private sector monopolies. So this new 1989 Electricity Act restructured CEGB into three competing generating companies (National Power, Power Gen and Nuclear Electric) and a transmission company, the National Grid. There were questions as to why only three large generation companies and not more were formed. Equal access to transmission and distribution networks was accorded to all the new generation players, the IPPs. The 12 distribution Area Boards of England and Wales were converted into 12 distribution companies. The main mechanism under which UK's pool system works is that all generators submit a competitive bidding in half hourly increments to the central pool daily, 24 hours ahead. Theoretically, the pool is supposed to rank the order of the generators accordingly and make the most economic dispatch. In practice, the low bidding generators like Nuclear, Hydro, French import and even the efficient combined cycle gas turbine operators ended up getting the system marginal price of coal plant operators irrespective of the price they had quoted. This kind of operation was not intended and it will never bring low cost energy to the consumers. There are other associated problems like despite the bidding, forced plant outages do occur, the bundling up of generators at a particular region and the resulting bottleneck due to transmission overloading, etc. But one can never find a perfect system, a Nirvana so to say, that satisfied everyone.

The Conservative and Orthodox — France with a Difference : One must bear in mind that both France and UK nationalized their power sector in 1946 right after the Second World War. From the British Model, let us simply cross the English Channel onto the French soil, and marvel at the monolithic 100,000 MW plus giant Electricity de France (EdF), the government's public sector undertaking. The French Government appears to have kept EdF very much under quarantine, not to be infected by the contagious American and British liberalization and privatization "flu". This is because the French government envisioned EdF as its main critical player in its strategic national energy planning process. France has no indigenous source of energy; and with the 1973 Middle East oil shocks, France decided that its future energy, must

come from its own nuclear plants and embarked on a massive nuclear power program. This is where EdF fitted in. There are now 57 nuclear reactor plants operated by EdF producing over 70,000 MW of power. UK and Italy import 2,000 MW each, Germany about 1,500 MW and Switzerland about 1,000 MW from EdF. Despite its 100,000 plus employees and 22 million consumers at home, EdF is a strong global player, foraging around for mergers, takeovers, equity partners in all types of projects and pick up even management and consultancy services. It is an envy of all major power sector players and demonstrates that given the "enabling environment and the right vision" public sector undertakings can and do work. With an apology to Shakespeare, allow me to misquote Caesar's friend, Mark Anthony, "The evil that Public Sector Monopolies do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones

Mixed Experience : Nepal despite its tiny 350 Mw system has had various dosages of private and public sector experiences. It is badly in need of attracting private capital by liberalizing its power sector. The multilateral donors are changing their roles from the lenders to the public institutions to that of the facilitators to the private investors. The various UK, French and American models of liberalization are on the table. Which models will fit where will depend from country to country (developed, developing and in transition economies) and their historical and cultural background. The Ukraine government, wanting to be seen very European but different from Russia, adopted the UK model in 1995 but by 1998 admitted that it was a complete failure. The public sector EdF in France is still going strong in its 55th year and its monopoly on generation and transmission is not expected to be relinquished. The bottom line to the public versus private debate has been aptly uttered by an EdF employee, "As long as the consumers have access to a safe, adequate and reliable service at a reasonable cost, no one really bothers who is running the show, the public or the private". I am afraid our supply is neither secure and reliable nor at a reasonable cost, and hence the need to encourage the private sectors. There is no doubt that the private sector increases efficiency and reduces cost; and liberalization with the shift from the subjective government influence to that of the more objective forces of competitions and market, facilitates the sorely needed investment into Nepal for its economic growth. But the security of energy supply aspect should always be borne in mind, no country can afford to overlook it despite the globalization. On the Benefits and Deficiencies of Energy Sector Liberalization discussion at the 17th Congress of the World Energy Council at Houston in 1998, the following two messages clearly dominated the scene:

—In the fervour of the power sector liberalization, the 85% of the Nepalese population, who have no access to electricity, should not be left at the mercy of the market forces. Government intervention may be required to protect the vulnerable groups.

—Power sector liberalization is in an initial phase and while the results so far are quite encouraging, there are challenges and difficulties ahead. There is, hence, the need to proceed with caution and care.

In fact, Dr. Gerhard Ott, Chairman of the Study Committee on the Benefits and Deficiencies of Energy Sector Liberalization at the 17th Congress of the World Energy Council, Houston in 1998 appeals both to the energy industry and to governments, "to advance and to accelerate liberalization in the energy sector, although in view of the concerns and challenges to be met — with caution and care."

Finally, liberalization and privatization cannot be viewed as a panacea to cure all the diseases in the Nepalese power sector. Look at the richest American state of California, presently in the throes of unbelievable rolling power blackouts that we in Nepal were so used to. Many believe that this is the direct outcome of the "muddled" deregulation in the Californian power sector. The Californian politicians are baying for blood as the state's consumers experienced blackouts only during the Second World War during the 1940s. Lest we too may not make the same mistakes that others made in their power sector liberalization, it is the "cautious and caring" hand that is required and not the "hurrying and trembling" hand of the past decades. Otherwise, we too may one day wake up like the Californians with the blackouts that most had not seen in their entire lifetime. ■

Mr Pun writes frequently on water resources issues

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