

The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

Nov. 23-29, 2001



Driving In A BUYER'S MARKET

- GOVT. - MAOISTS TALKS
- CONSTITUTION DAY
- NEPAL LEVER'S ANNIVERSARY
- ANFA ROW

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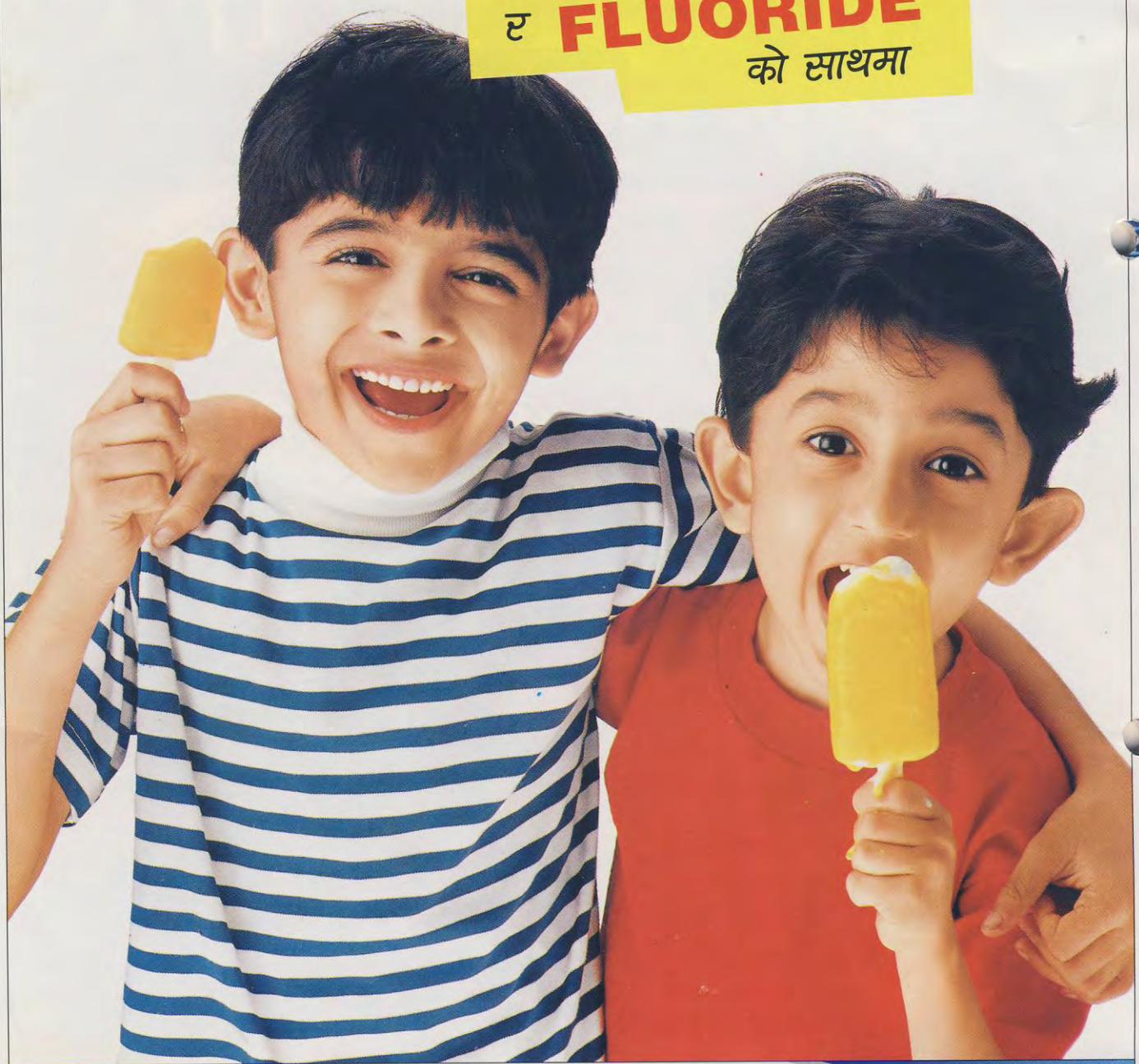
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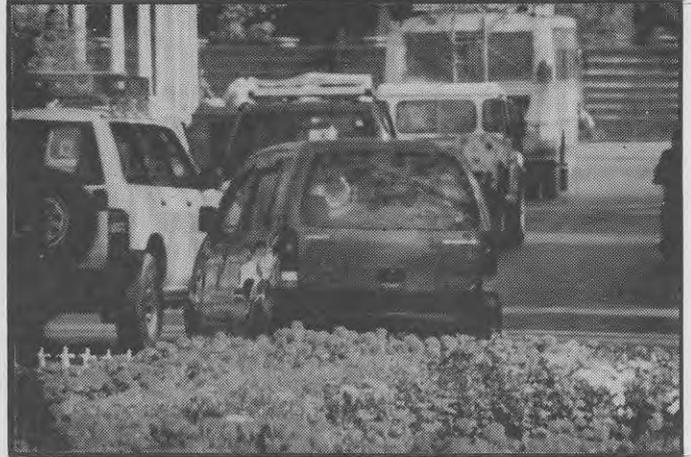


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COVER STORY : Driving In A Buyer's Market

Despite its small size, Nepal's car market, particularly the small-type, is replete with variety of latest models

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CONSTITUTION DAY : Ritualistic Respect

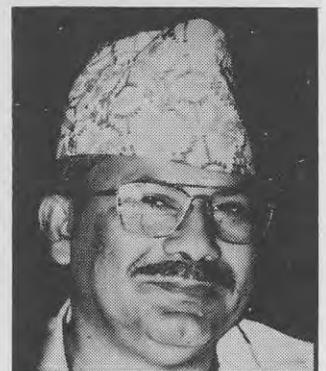
Political leaders provide lip-service as usual

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INTERVIEW: Madhav Kumar Nepal

Leader of the main opposition, Nepal, talks about the issues facing the nation

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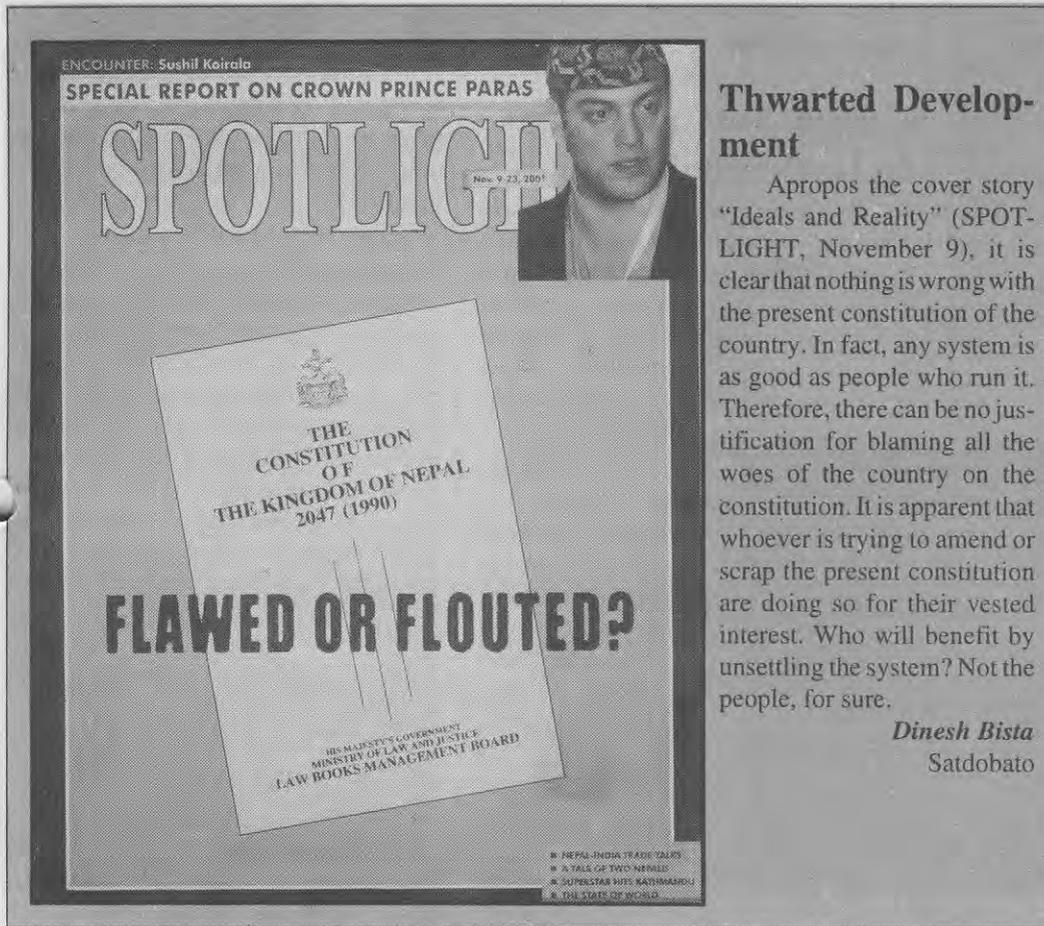
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EDITOR'S NOTE

The unwarranted delay in reaching a mutually satisfactory solution is only contributing to generate a vicious situation which will help neither the Maoists nor the Deuba led Nepali Congress government. If the Maoists are trying to cash in on the weaknesses of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, naturally they could not be faulted. That Prime Minister Deuba has miserably failed to exploit the extra-ordinary global situation and force the Maoists to accept his terms is a clear manifestation of his imbecility cannot be denied. At a time when the whole world is suffering from extreme recession and Nepal's economy in particular is almost at the verge of bankruptcy, the insensitive expansion of his cabinet, totally ignoring all national constraints, has only helped to demonstrate his insatiable greed for power and authority. Moreover, even after four months in office he seems to be quite far from achieving his only mandate — the solution of the Maoist problem. His utter failure to impress upon Nepal's traditional friend not to grant sanctuary to the Maoists, who have been arraigned as terrorists by them, exposes his disinclination to solve the problem, and might even prove the lurking doubts in many minds that he might be harboring some sympathy for them. Since the early end of this vexing issue has become most imperative if the country is to get back to the rails, Prime Minister Deuba should lose no time in pressurizing the Maoists to agree to a reasonable solution. Since the country cannot wait indefinitely Deuba has to act *sine mora*. If he cannot rise up to the occasion, surely Nepali Congress has some more young men with better credentials, better morals and better dynamism.

Time may be running out even for the Maoists. By dilly-dallying to arrive at a settlement, the Maoist leadership is not only loosening its grip but also eroding its image with the local populace. There was a time when a large section of even the intellectual Nepalese community looked up to the Maoist leadership to replace the so called democratic leadership that did not hesitate to rape the country. The poor people in remote areas hailed them as saviors. But the unimaginative excesses in loot, abduction and murder committed by the Maoist cadre have not only struck severe blow to their popularity but started generating extreme revulsion towards them. It seems Maoist leadership has become sensitive towards such happenings and has made attempts to control their cadres. The Maoist leadership should never lose sight of the truth that extremism and violence never pay in the end. At a time when the whole country is groping for honest patriotic leadership, the Maoist leaders could have met the aspirations of the Nepalese people, had they resorted to mainstream politics. It seems they have missed the bus. Not only that, if the reports published in some local weeklies are correct, they are giving in to bravadoes that will take them nowhere and only expose their immaturity. Instead of sticking to unattainable and illogical demands, the Maoist must negotiate with one objective — dismissal of puppet antinational government and formation of a caretaker government of honest and patriotic people representing all sections of Nepalese society that will conduct next election that will be free and fair. Our poor country has been plagued by destabilising activities of the invisible inimical forces for more than a decade and if all the patriotic forces do not join hands to fight this evil, the very existence of the nation might be at stake. Will the Maoist leaders take up the gauntlet and come forward to unite with the nationalist forces to save the sovereignty and independence of the country? ■

Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



Thwarted Development

Apropos the cover story "Ideals and Reality" (SPOTLIGHT, November 9), it is clear that nothing is wrong with the present constitution of the country. In fact, any system is as good as people who run it. Therefore, there can be no justification for blaming all the woes of the country on the constitution. It is apparent that whoever is trying to amend or scrap the present constitution are doing so for their vested interest. Who will benefit by unsettling the system? Not the people, for sure.

Dinesh Bista
Satdobato

result of the constitution. To cover up their illegal acts and wrongdoing, politicians are pointing fingers at the constitution. Then there is a group of guerrillas who claim to represent the people and at the same time fear rule through the ballot. The trigger-happy bunch is also working to undermine the constitution. The situation is truly chaotic.

Jeevan Gurung
New Baneshwore

Stability Is The Key

The proclamation of Prince Paras as the Crown Prince by King Gyanendra was not unexpected ("Continuity And Stability", SPOTLIGHT, November 9). Nepal being a country with diverse ethnic communities, the monarchy had functioned as a rallying point, establishing itself as the key to national stability. The proclamation of the Crown Prince is bound to have a positive effect. Time demands all Nepalese to shrug off their prejudices and work towards strengthening the stability of their nation.

Gauri Shrestha
Sanepa

Playing Politics

Everybody is playing politics with the constitution. ("Ideals and Reality", SPOTLIGHT, November 9). The leaders are changing their tune everyday. A leader of a party says one thing, which is immediately refuted by another leader of the same party. What is this nonsense? Haven't our leaders gained enough maturity in the last 12 years of meddling with this system? It does not seem so. The present constitution is a fine one. While it may not be a perfect one (which one is?), there is no need to discard it as demanded by the Maoists. What are these Maoists up to, any way? Do they think that their pre-historic views are going to stand the test of the 21st century? They are living in the past. Let them.

Giridhar KC
Balaju

A Whipping Boy

The constitution has become a favorite whipping boy for the leaders who failed to deliver in the past one decade ("Ideals and Reality", SPOTLIGHT, November 9). It is ridiculous to surmise that people believe corruption was instigated by the constitution or, for that matter, crime was encouraged by the document. The constitution is not an end in itself. It is the means by which the collective goal of a nation can be reached. In fact, it is mere commitment to abide by the rules while achieving the goal. At present, there is no need to bring about any amendment to the document.

Satish Basnet
Gairidhara

Abandon Rigidity

No constitution is rigid.

The same is true with ours. ("Ideals and Reality", SPOTLIGHT, November 9). Timely amendments are welcome. But those calling for amendments should first make clear which provisions they want to amend and why. If the public is convinced, it can be done. However, baseless allegations against the constitution are rooted in cynicism. Despite the constitution not being beyond reproach, there should not be unjustified demands that could upset the democratic system.

Pradeep Kumar Thapa
Ghattekula

Confusion And Chaos

The endless statements against the constitution have led to confusion and chaos among the people. ("Ideals and Reality", SPOTLIGHT, November 9). The common Nepali is confused whether his woes are a

Trade Talks

India does need to show magnanimity in dealing with its smaller neighbor like Nepal ("Coming Closer?" SPOTLIGHT, November 9). The 1996 trade treaty had opened up opportunities for Nepal to narrow its trade deficit with India. But now, Indian officialdom wants to set things in reverse gear by refusing to renew the treaty. India knows that Nepal is hugely dependent on its southern neighbor on matters of trade. However, resorting to arm-twisting will not help India's interest in the long run.

Shiva Nath Lamsal
Kopundole

Princess Prekshya Dies In Chopper Crash

Less than six months after her husband, Dharendra Shah, died from injuries sustained during the June 1 shoot-out in the royal palace, Princess Prekshya died on Monday in a helicopter crash in Rara lake in Mugu district. She was traveling in a Fishtail Air chopper along with five other people. Palace official Dan Bahadur Shahi, Iswor Basnet, an acquaintance, and the

dailies report Nov. 13.

Ganga, Jamuna Arrive In Kathmandu

Ganga and Jamuna, the Nepalese Siamese twins who underwent the world's first successful separation surgery at a Singapore hospital last year, arrived in Kathmandu Sunday morning. Family members and close relatives, amid a crowd of reporters and photojournalists, wel-

comed the twins at the Tribhuvan International Airport. The twins returned home after doctors in Singapore said they were medically stable. Accompanied by their mother, grandparents and a doctor, Ganga and Jamuna were rushed to their temporary residence in the Nepalese capital after their arrival aboard a Singapore

Airlines plane. The twins' father, Bhusan K. C., said he was elated to receive his daughters back in good condition. Dr. Basanta Panta, chief of the Department of Neurosurgery at the Kathmandu Model Hospital, who accompanied the twins from Singapore, said the children did not have any major complications. They would mainly be provided with rehabilitation services, he added. Dr. Panta said no spe-

cial medical care was required for them. Born at the Maternity Hospital in Kathmandu 18 months ago, the twins were taken to Singapore in October last year where surgeons separated the babies conjoined at the head. In a nearly 100-hour-long operation in April, surgeons at the Singapore General hospital detached the two babies, creating medical history. The babies were then discharged to the Intensive Care Unit in the same hospital for postoperative management. Dr. Panta said a medical team would supervise the health of the twins regularly in Kathmandu and would keep in touch with the doctors in Singapore. Doctors said the children would need to go back to Singapore within six months to one year in order to reshape their skulls. *Leading dailies report Nov. 19.*

US May Provide 10 Helicopters

The US government has promised to provide Nepal 10 modern helicopters to fight terrorism, according to a senior Nepalese official. "As a part of its effort to eliminate international terrorism, the United States has promised to provide us with 10 modern bullet-proof helicopters," said Devendra Raj Kandel, Minister of State for Home. Addressing a party gathering in the western town of Pokhara Kandel said, "Those helicopters are being sought to protect the nation's integrity, and they can also be used against the terrorist activities of Maoists." He said negotiations to this effect were moving on

positively with the US government and that Nepal was fairly confident of acquiring them. "Even if the US does not provide us the choppers, we will buy them anyway." He said the acquisition of the helicopters would help end the practice of chartering helicopters for police operations. *Leading dailies report Nov. 12.*



Photo: Nepal Samachar Patra

Late Princess Preyasha

pilot, Rabin Kadaria, are missing and presumed dead. The remaining two, Lt.-Col. Dr. Rishi Khatri and Sharada Singh Suwal, the personal physician and personal attendant of the princess respectively, were injured and flown to Kathmandu for treatment. The police, army and local officials have launched an intensive search operation. According to initial reports, the royal party chartered the helicopter early on Monday in Nepalgunj for what appeared to be a sight-seeing tour of Rara lake and surrounding areas. It first flew to Shey Phoksundo lake in Dolpa district and then went to Rara lake. From there, it took off at 11:25 am for Surkhet, but immediately crashed into the lake. An eyewitness told reporters that the helicopter had taken off from the nearby army helipad and crashed two minutes later, after one of its propellers hit the water. Princess Prekshya is survived by three daughters. The late princess had been in Nepalgunj for a few days with her two daughters. She had gone there to settle a dispute in the Laxmi Rosin and Turpentine Industry, which she owned. *Leading*



Ganga, Jamuna with family

Photo: Gorkhapatra

US Firm Gets RBB Management Contract

The board of directors of Nepal Rastra Bank, the central bank, has selected a US company, Deloitte Foichu Tomatsu, to run the loss-making state-owned bank, the Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB) under a management contract initially for two years. According to a daily newspaper, the US



RBB

company had demanded US\$ 5.9 million in its financial proposal as management fee from the government as against the proposal of US\$ 8.1 million by Arthur Anderson, a British company. The management contract is part of the government's financial-sector reform program being launched under a US\$ 25 million loan assistance from the World Bank. The process of handing over the management of Nepal Bank Limited, another loss-making state-owned bank, is also under way. *Space Time Nov. 19.*

Solar-Powered Villages In Tanahu

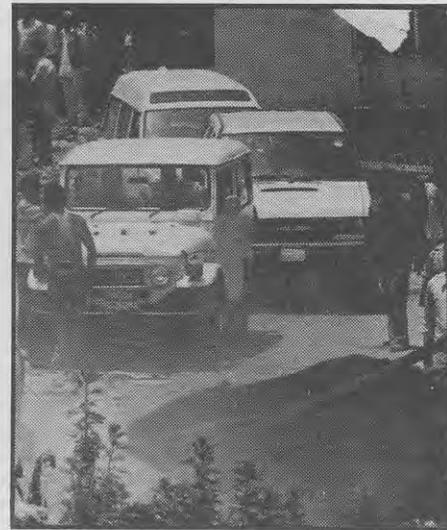
The use of solar power for electrification is gaining popularity in villages of Tanahu district. While most people are using electricity for lighting and running fans, radios and other light appliances in Raipur Village of the district, 25 families are watching colour television using solar power. In the village, 61 houses have installed solar sets and there is a demand for

another 50 sets. In some of the mid-western and western districts of the country, such as Tanahu, Syangja, Kaski, Baglung, Parbat, Myagdi, Gulmi, Arghakhachi, Lamjung, Gorkha, Palpa, Chitwan, more than 2,000 people have benefited from some 15,000 solar sets. A home photovoltaic system costs between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 40,000 per set. The government provides a subsidy of Rs. 8,000 per set for remote areas, Rs. 10,000 for moderately remote areas and Rs. 12,000 for very remote areas. In addition, the customers also get regular maintenance services along with a two-year guarantee for the solar equipment and a 25-year guarantee for the solar panel. *Nepal Samacharpatra Nov. 8.*

Vehicles Use Kerosene Instead Of Diesel

According to petroleum dealers and some vehicle entrepreneurs, more than 50 percent of the trucks and buses in Birganj are using kerosene instead of diesel. Although Nepal Oil Corporation officials admit that vehicles are using kerosene in place of diesel and say they are authorized to impose strong penalties on those doing this, no action has been taken. Most petrol pumps are openly supplying kerosene to buses and trucks.

As the price of kerosene, which is subsidized by the government, is Rs. 8.50 less than diesel, this practice has resulted in lower operating costs and reduction in fares. Previously transportation of goods from Birganj to Kathmandu used to cost up to Rs. 9,000 per ton. Now it has gone down to Rs. 6,000 or Rs. 7,000 per



Vehicles

ton. Close to 500 buses and trucks depart from Birganj to different parts of the country every day. Although the use of kerosene reduces the operating costs, it damages the vehicles and increases emissions. *Kantipur Nov. 8.*

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The body of late Princess Preyiksha being taken to Aryaghat for last rites

PERPLEXED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH THE UPPER House returned, without discussion, the Bill to Amend the Civil Code (11th Amendment) passed by the Lower House, women's rights activists have urged lawmakers to pass the measure as soon as possible. They say that despite being riddled with many discriminatory provisions, the bill would establish some of their rights. According to Dr. Shanta Thapaliya, a leading women's rights activist, the bill could solve 50 percent of the problems of women. She urged the lawmakers to immediately pass the bill, which has come under sharp public scrutiny as well as intense debate. Activists are demanding equal property rights to daughters. The government, however, passed the bill from the Lower House after including a provision that required women to return such property once they were married.

PEOPLE LIVING IN DADHIKOT VILLAGE IN BHAKTAPUR have formed a committee to oppose the establishment of brick kilns in their locality. Local residents claim that pollutants from the brick kilns are responsible for respiratory diseases in children. They also blame brick industries for the loss of soil fertility through their use of top layer soil. Kantipur daily quoted Ram Krishna Karki, coordinator of the local committee as saying that the local people had filed a protest letter with the Department of Small and Cottage Industries (DSCI) against the establishment of new brick kilns. He said that two years ago, they had collected 434 signatures and submitted protest letters to various government organizations, including the District Administrative Office, DSCI, and Ministry of Population and Environment, urging them to remove existing brick kilns from the area. Almost all the brick kilns located in the area are accused of violating the government's environment protection regulations.

SEVENTY-TWO MPS FROM THE RULING NEPALI CON-gress party have demanded a judicial probe into the road accident involving their party chief Girija Prasad Koirala. On Saturday (Nov. 10), a jeep carrying the former prime minister had collided with a mini-truck while he was returning to capital from Banepa. Koirala and others in the vehicle were unhurt. In a joint statement, the parliamentarians said such a sensitive issue demanded more than an ordinary probe.

PRIME MINISTER SHER BAHADUR DEUBA HAS PROM-ised to set up a Dalit Commission during the winter session of the

parliament. "I assure you that Bill on Dalit Commission will be tabled in the 21st session of the parliament," he said in an address to a workshop on the state's responsibility to end untouchability and the state of Bill on Dalit Commission. Deuba said the country could develop only if there is equality and urged all political parties, including the underground Maoists, to cooperate with the government in ending untouchability. The workshop was organized by Mukti Samaj and the Informal Sector Service Center.

A CHARTERED TWIN OTTER PLANE OF YETI AIRLINES, a private company, escaped an accident Saturday after a hawk hit its cockpit near Lamra village in the remote northern district of Jumla. The aircraft was transporting food belonging to Nepal Food Corporation from Surkhet to Jumla in the mid western region. Captain Kosh Bahadur Thapa received minor injuries on his head. The other three crewmembers were unhurt. The plane was badly damaged. The mishap occurred just two minutes before the plane was scheduled to land at Jumla airport, officials said. The crew was airlifted to Nepalgunj. Captain Thapa has returned to the capital.

CONTRACTORS BASED IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT HAVE confiscated construction equipment belonging to the state-owned National Construction Company Nepal (NCCN), protesting against the government's decision not to employ local contractors. The government has hired NCCN for the construction of a bridge and maintenance of the 19-km long Devighat-Galchhi road in the district at a cost of Rs 20 million. Kantipur daily quoted the local contractors as saying they could complete the job at half the allotted sum. They alleged that the NCCN sub-contracted the job to other companies by taking certain percentage as commission. Chairman of the local contractors' association, Bharat Khadka, said the government would benefit by encouraging competition.



Joshi receiving the award

A SPEECH PROGRAM ON THE PROMOTION OF PEACE through education was held recently in Kathmandu by the National Federation of UNESCO Associations of Nepal. Speaking on the occasion, Ramesh Nath Joshi, an educationist and acting president of the federation, said a peaceful society could be built by including peace in the education curriculum so that children learn about its significance since their formative years. Minister of State for Education N.P. Saud was also present in the program. Joshi also received a prestigious James T. Doty award presented to him by the US-based organization called People to People International for his contribution to build peace. ■

“Will the representatives come from another planet if an election for a constituent assembly is held?”
Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, criticizing the Maoists' demand for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, in Gorkhapatra.

* * *

“This shows the government's weakness.”

Girija Prasad Koirala, former prime minister and president of ruling Nepali Congress, criticizing the government's decision to repeal the public security regulations in response to the Maoists' demand, in Kantipur.

* * *

“Their decision is good and correct.”

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, former prime minister and senior leader of the ruling Nepali Congress, commenting on the Maoists' decision to abandon their demand for a republic, in Kantipur.

* * *

“From the standpoint of constitutional development, the last 11 years were not only positive but also encouraging. But from the standpoint of political decision-making, these years were not only negative but also discouraging.”

Dr. Surya Dhungel, constitutional expert, in Deshantar.

* * *



Gorkhapatra

“As the meeting decided to give priority to least developed countries for the membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), it will help our bid.”

Bhanu Prasad Acharya, Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, after returning from the WTO Doha conference, in Gorkhapatra.

* * *

“The Nepalese government announced several incentives for Information Technology at a time when this sector is heading towards recession from boom. Perhaps we lost opportunities because of the delay.”

Allen B. Tuladhar, chief executive of Unlimited Numedia, a software company, in Gorkhapatra.

* * *

“We will stage a hunger strike after Tihar.”

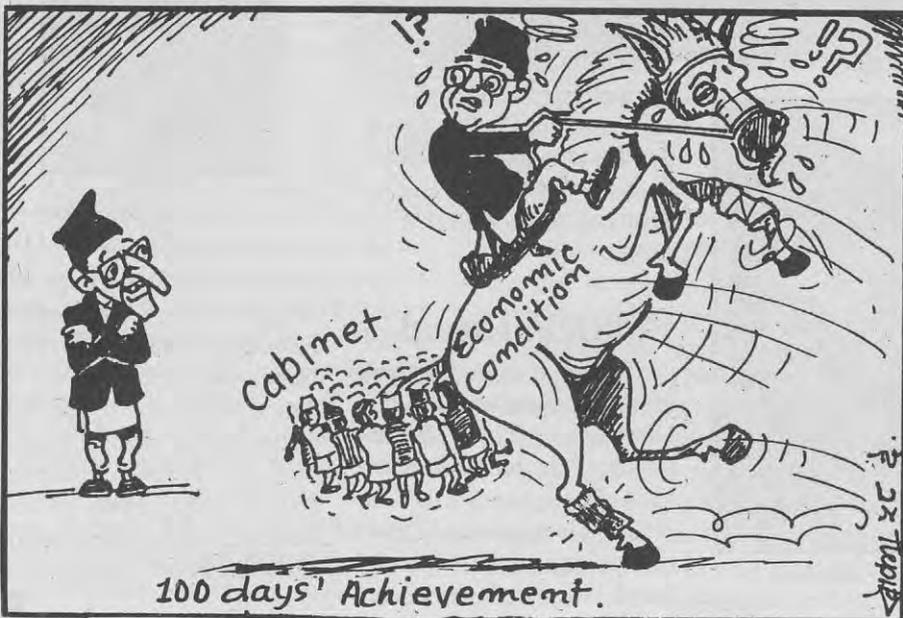
Dhojman Moktan, karate gold medalist in the 8th South Asian Federation games, referring to the government's failure to keep its promise of providing land and property to all Nepali gold medallists in the games, in Spacetime daily.

* * *

“She eats everything I tell her not to. Who will marry her if she gains more weight? We are scared.”

Ram Prasad Bhattarai, father of Goma Kumari Bhattarai, who at 18 years weighs 118 kg, expressing concern over his daughter's obesity, in Spacetime daily.

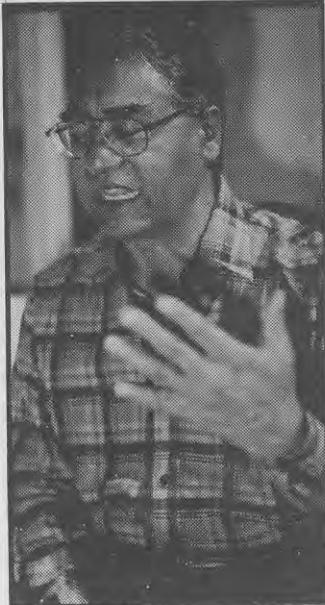
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Deshantar

Deuba's Woes

Supporters of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba appeared alarmed when his predecessor, Girija Prasad Koirala, began a whirlwind tour of the country. Although Koirala has not yet unleashed his customary full-blown criticism of a government led by a party colleague, Deuba's fol-



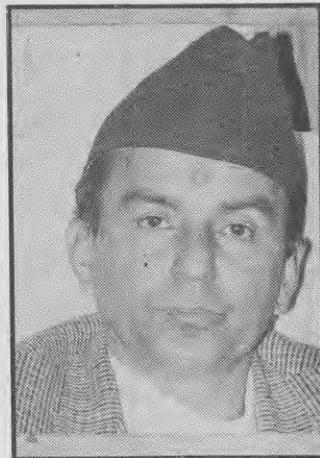
Deuba : Rising insecurity

lowers see the former prime minister's tour as part of a plan to topple their leader. There are ample reasons for suspicion, though. When no followers of Deuba are invited to Koirala's mass meetings, the prime minister's men have to rely on speculation, rather than first-hand information, on the rival camp's strategy. And suspicion fuels further suspicion. After completing 100 days in office, Deuba aides feel their boss's troubles have begun. Whatever the motives of Koirala, Deuba is desperately looking for some reassurance. If they are kept in the dark for too long, Deuba supporters might decide to

launch a pre-emptive strike by openly criticizing the rival camp.

Poudel's Double-speak

Former deputy prime minister and Nepali Congress Central Committee member Ram Chandra Poudel has again proved his gift for double-speak. Since his resignation from the Girija Prasad Koirala cabinet a few months ago, Poudel has failed to find a comfortable place in internal party politics. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Koirala are cold-shouldering Poudel. The man has become a leader without allies within the party. To regain ground, however, Poudel has chosen the path of opportunism. Two weeks ago, when Poudel shared a dais with Deuba, he hailed the prime minister's role in dealing with the Maoists and criticized Koirala. Last week, when Poudel was with Koirala in the eastern town of Jhapa, he spared no time in defending Koirala's role in forming public opinion against the Maoists. Since one of his contemporaries is the prime minister and the grand old man of the Nepali

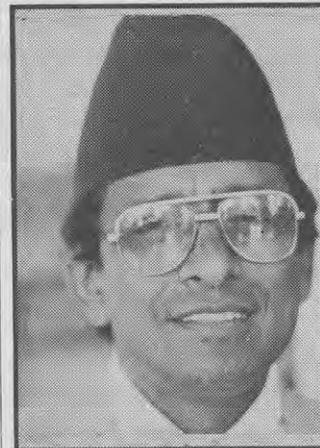


Poudel : Back and forth

Congress is showing no signs of vacating the top party position any time soon, Poudel does not see a viable alternative to speaking from both sides of his mouth.

Sparring Speakers

Relations between House of Representatives Speaker Taranath Ranabhat and his



Ranabhat : Chilly relations

predecessor, Daman Nath Dhungana, seem to have hit a new low. At a recent talk program organized to discuss the constitution, the two men spent most of their time comparing and contrasting their own roles. It was not clear what drew the two men into a competition to establish their supremacy in a public forum. But the tone and tenor of the exchange provided enough evidence of the chill that has set in.

Political Ritual

When it comes to celebrating, Nepalese leaders have some peculiar characteristics. The birthday of the head of state, national day and other anniversaries are important occasions for rejoicing. But the way leaders celebrate

Constitution Day is rather strange. Although all political leaders violate key constitutional provisions day in and day out, they find Constitution Day an opportune time to realize their mistakes. If anything, our leaders need to celebrate Constitution Day every day of the year by firmly adhering to its letter and spirit.

Deuba-Nepal Duel

When leader of the main opposition Madhav Kumar Nepal's described Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba as an immobile lump of flesh, the premier was certainly not amused. Nepal's characterization came in the context of his accusation that Deuba was little more than a power-hungry politician. The premier didn't



Nepal : War of words

find the opposition leader's metaphor particularly apt. Although he listened to Nepal's blistering criticism with calm, Deuba launched his own tirade against the opposition leader, saying that he lacked patience. However, could the premier really have ignored the reality that a patient opposition leader is a contradiction in terms? ■

CONSTITUTION DAY

Ritualistic Respect

It is time to discuss concrete programs of social and economic transformation rather than dwell on abstract ideas on amending the constitution

By KESHAB POUDEL

At a time when the country is facing manifold challenges in the field of social and economic transformation, Nepalese politicians and intellectuals are involved in an unending debate on the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990 which has nothing to do with the overall development drive of the country.

The Maoist insurgency broke out in 1996 following a decision by the Supreme Court to reinstate the House of Representatives. In the first five years under the new constitution, the country saw only two prime ministers. But after the Supreme Court's decision, Nepal has seen six prime ministers. "If efforts to amend the constitution are made, the country will be plunged into further chaos," says a political analyst. "As there is a mechanism to internally improve the constitution, touching the constitution is not going to fulfill the interest of any party," he says.

After a few years of relative stability and peace, controversies have been arising regularly following the Supreme Court's misinterpretation of constitution in 1995. The decision also paved the way for seemingly unending

political uncertainty as well as chaos and violence. Although the decision has been accepted by all, it has stripped the prime minister of his ability to discipline members by dissolving the House of Representatives, which is a leading cause of today's political instability.

The Nepali Congress, which secured an absolute majority in the last election, has seen three prime ministers in its two and half years in power. When a small misinterpretation by the court can bring such unbearable instability and chaos, amending the

constitution would open a Pandora's box.

"The constitution must be allowed to evolve and develop," said Taranath Ranabhat, speaker of the House of Representatives, addressing a program organized by the Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercises (SCOPE) on the 11th anniversary of the promulgation of the constitution. "There is no need to go for amendment."

During its 11 years of existence, the constitution has set many norms and values and evolved itself into a well-accepted document. The executive, judiciary and legisla-



Demonstrators : What do they want ?

ture have been exercising the roles and duties assigned by the constitution. Although there are many shortcomings in the functioning and decision-making process of these institutions, they have been able to improve their performance with the passage of time.

Although the pace is too slow, the constitution is taking Nepal toward political stabilization and the consolidation of rule of law. After the mysterious killings at the Royal Palace that convulsed the nation, the constitution proved its resilience by functioning normally. A new king has been enthroned and a new crown prince has been proclaimed under the provisions of the con-

stitution. Several prime ministers, chief justices and members of parliament have been replaced.

"It is too early to evaluate overall performance of the constitution," said Ranabhat. "We are yet to practice and implement all the articles of the constitution."

But other senior leaders are in favor of an amendment. "If improvements are required, then the constitution should be amended," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of CPN-UML, who was a member of the panel that drafted the constitution. "The process of amending the constitution is nothing new in a democracy."

This is not the first time that politicians have been raising questions about the constitution. In fact, such questions began to be raised from the day after His late Majesty King Birendra promulgated it in 1990.

Despite the sense of cynicism gripping the political environment today, it is clear that the constitution has been successful in

developing a system of democratic governance through the institutions under it. Three national elections and two local polls have been held under the constitution. "The constitution is a document based on certain principles of checks and balances," said Purna Man Shakya, president of SCOPE.

In developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and developing countries like India, no one indulges in needless debates over the constitution, as it is regarded as a document capable of refinement through effective practice. Although the United Kingdom has no written

constitution, it is regarded as a model democracy in the world.

Politicians from almost all Nepalese parties, most with little or no understanding of constitutional practices, have been leading the debate on amending or abrogating the constitution, citing the larger interest of the country. As long as it functions properly, the constitution does not need to be amended. Where certain improvements are required, it is capable of developing its own mechanisms. What would really be in the national interest is a healthy debate on ways of accelerating the social and economic development the constitution envisages. ■

HEALTH

Remedial Risks

Doctors urge you to get help for seasonal allergies

BY AKSHAY SHARMA

Now that fall is in full swing with falling leaves and shorter daylight hours, people are stocking up on over-the-counter remedies for allergies. But non-prescription antihistamines and decongestants can have serious side effects, some of which you might not even notice while you are taking them. And many people don't respond to them at all. That's why doctors advise allergy sufferers to get tested, get treated, and get better.

"Allergies affect up to 30 percent of the population, and their toll is increasing worldwide. The disease often lasts year-round, but has spring, summer, and fall variations caused by different airborne pollens or fungal spores. From mid-August through the first frost, weeds are the major trigger for much of the country," says Dr Surendra Maharjan.

Unfortunately, it's a little more complicated than that.

"Warm temperatures and a lot of rain can lengthen the pollen season, no matter where you live," says an allergy and immunology specialist, "And throughout the year, outdoor molds can increase suddenly without any set pattern."

That's why it can be so hard to tell the difference between a cold and seasonal allergy, Dr. Maharjan says, adding that the medical term allergic rhinitis is often the diagnosis when patients say they can't shake a cold. "But the symptoms are quite a bit different," he says.

"Here are some ways to tell the difference: Itching of the nose, ears, or mouth is a hallmark of allergies. Spasmodic or

'machine gun' sneezing is common with allergies. Nasal secretions are thin and colorless with allergies, thick and opaque with a cold. Colds are often accompanied by a fever, sore throat, or cough. Colds are usually gone within 14 days," he adds.

Some people just tough it out with their allergy symptoms, and others rely on over-the-counter medications for relief. "The problem is that non-prescription antihistamines have a sedating effect, and two-thirds of those who take them aren't even



People in street : Vulnerable to allergies?

aware that they're sedated," says another allergy and immunology specialist.

Dr. William E. Berger, the author of "Allergies and Asthma for Dummies", says that over-the-counter decongestants also pose a risk. "Decongestants raise your blood pressure and heart rate, so they shouldn't be taken with other stimulants like diet pills," he says. He also warns that they should not be taken with the class of drugs called MAO inhibitors, like Nardil and Parnate, which are used to treat depression.

Dr. Berger advises allergy sufferers to talk with their doctors before taking non-prescription remedies, especially if

they have high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, or thyroid problems. He also offers some simple techniques for avoiding seasonal triggers: "Stay inside early in the morning and late in the afternoon. Keep windows closed while at home or in the car. Take a shower as soon as you get home."

If these measures fail, you may want to seek medical treatment for seasonal allergies. For mild symptoms, your doctor can prescribe a non-sedating antihistamine, says Dr. Prasanta Barakoti.

"If symptoms are more severe, they can be managed with a nasal steroid spray like Flonase or Nasonex, along with an antihistamine-decongestant combination like Allegra-D or Claritin-D," he says.

Dr. Barakoti, who helped write a set of national rhinitis guidelines, that most patients have a combination of seasonal and year-round allergies. "In some parts

of the country, pollen and mold last so long that the seasons overlap," he says. "Many people also have indoor triggers, such as dust mites, pet dander, and cockroaches, making seasonal symptoms even worse."

That's why allergy testing is so important, says allergy and immunology specialist Dr. William Dolan, a professor of pediatrics and medicine at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta who is currently in Kathmandu. "If we know what the triggers are, we can get a much better handle on symptoms," he says. "And

contrary to popular belief, allergy testing isn't painful and doesn't require any injections. We just lift up a few cells, exposing the skin to a small amount of extract" of the substance suspected of triggering allergy symptoms.

For those who don't respond to drug therapy or can't tolerate it, doctors often recommend allergy shots. "Desensitization involves exposing a patient to increasing amounts of various triggers until they're symptom free," Dr Dolan says. "It's effective and covered by most health plans but should start right after the pollen season ends to help get ready for next year." ■

THIRD ROUND OF PEACE TALKS

Deadlock in the Making

Though the Maoists agree to 'drop' their demand for a republic, the government is unlikely to accept their call for a constituent assembly

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

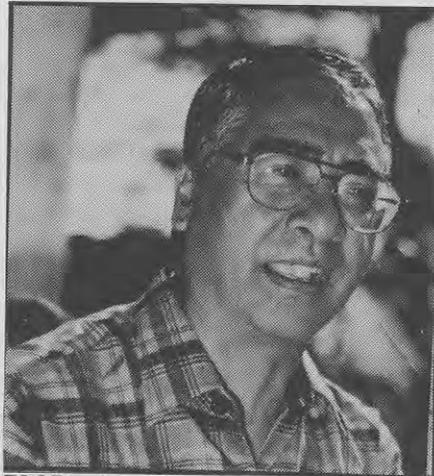
After nearly ten weeks, the government and Maoist negotiators were back at the posh Godavari Village resort in the capital valley on the eve of the Tihar festival. But they hadn't come any closer to resolving the six-year-old insurgency.

Though the three-member Maoist negotiation team led by Krishna Bahadur Mahara notified the government that the party had decided to drop its demand for making Nepal a republic, it could not convince the government negotiators about the need for forming an interim government and holding elections to a constituent assembly of the two major Maoist demands.

Emerging from the five-hour talks on Nov. 12, Mahara told reporters that his party could not bow further. "The ball is now in the government's court," he said. Chief government negotiator Chiranjivi Wagle insisted that as the Maoists had withdrawn their demand for a republic, their other demands could be fulfilled within the ambit of the current constitution.

Though both sides have agreed to sit for a fourth round of talks by the end of November, there is little they could agree on, analysts say. As the government and Maoist head toward a virtual deadlock, pressure is mounting on the government to deal with the rebels in a tough way. "The Nepali Congress can in no way accept the demand for a constituent assembly. The Maoists must stop their terrorist activities now or face the consequences," warned Nepali Congress President and former prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala. He also criticized Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's government for failing to put pressure on the rebels.

The main opposition leader, Madhav Kumar Nepal, went one step ahead. Talking to reporters in the capital Monday, the UML general secretary said, "If the government



PM Deuba : Hope against hope

fails to deliver and still holds on to power, we will exert public pressure to unseat Mr. Deuba." The UML had disrupted the entire 19th session of parliament this year demanding the resignation of then-prime minister Koirala. Nepal was particularly furious about the government's inability to protect his party cadres from alleged Maoist atrocities.

Prime Minister Deuba said he was trying his best to find a peaceful solution to the six-year-old insurgency. "I will see to it that the upcoming fourth round of talks becomes decisive," Deuba told reporters in Banepa Monday. "There has been a significant improvement in the law-and-order situation in the country over the last four months."

But such an 'improvement' had not come without a price. Though the rebels have stopped military assaults on remote, isolated police posts, they have continued their spree of extortion, abduction and murder of opposition party activists. The government had to withdraw the Public Security Regulation and

begin the process of releasing nearly 70 rebels to draw the Maoists for the third round of talks.

As the negotiations drag on, the people have begun feeling disenchanting. The first

round of talks on August 30 was a mere formality. In the second round, at the Tiger Tops Resort in the mid-western district of Bardiya in the middle of September, the Maoists formally put their agenda to which the government made its initial response. The third round of talks, too, failed to give any way out of the imbroglio.

The Maoists may be trying to be flexible with the government but can't abandon their agenda under pressure from their cadres. In an interview with the pro-Maoist Jana Disha daily Monday, chairman of the Maoist party Comrade Prachanda said his organization had decided to focus on elections to the constituent assembly "to award the right to the sovereign people to decide on the issue of republic.

"Now we have to see if the government opposes (our proposal for the elections of) the constituent assembly under pressure from the anti-national and fascist forces or moves ahead by taking the people into confidence," he said.

Analysts say the mere formality of talks and lack of continuity on issues raised earlier are likely to undermine the entire exercise. "The recent talks have generated nothing but chaos," Dr. Krishna Hachhethu, a political scientist, told Kantipur daily. "It seems the local Maoist commanders are against the talks and it is unlikely the Maoist leadership will join the mainstream if the present constitution is amended."

Ruling party leaders, however, believe the Maoists will still try to convince their cadres and join the mainstream. With international opinion against all forms of terrorism growing and major Nepalese political parties rejecting their agenda, the Maoists seem to be running out of options. "The demand for a republic was never a genuine one for the Maoists. It only served as a cover," said Narahari Acharya, a Nepali Congress ideologue and a member of the government's negotiating team. "I am not sure whether they will continue their demand for constituent assembly. All they want is to reach power (through an interim government)."

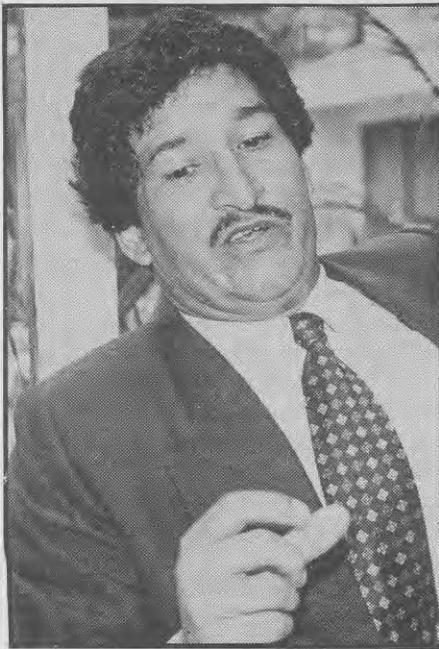
A little known outfit, the CPN (Maoist) has emerged as a major political force by employing sheer violence by launching the so-called 'people's war.' The death of nearly 2,000 people over the last six years might pave a way for the insurgent group to share power, but the costs of the needless violence may prove to be too heavy for the country. ■

ANFA ROW Tussle Continues

A year after the bickering began, the leadership of the country's apex football body stands more divided

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

Once again the country boasts of two parallel football associations - one recognized by the National Sports Council (and, by extension, the government), and the other by the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Gita Rana leads the former while Ganesh Thapa continues to straddle the latter. Both describe themselves as



Thapa : Buoyed by int'l support

the elected president of the legitimate All Nepal Football Association (ANFA).

While the people were celebrating Dashain and Tihar, the ANFA leadership was locked in a bitter battle. The Thapa and Rana camps were unable to bury their hatchet. Over the last few weeks, Thapa held elections for the association unilaterally, like he did last year, in the

presence of officials from the AFC. Once again, he was elected president unopposed.

On the other hand, Rana regained her position by defeating rival Tasi Ghale in the contest for the presidency of the ANFA. For the last 13 months, she had been heading the ad hoc committee of the ANFA. She now claims to be leading the legitimate ANFA.

With the two personalities having failed to reconcile their differences, the loser obviously is going to be Nepalese football. As international football governing bodies like FIFA and AFC are steadfastly behind Thapa, the government-recognized ANFA can be expected to face trouble in the days ahead. FIFA president Sepp Blatter has already sent a letter congratulating Thapa.

"I am going to bring the goal project soon," said a confident Thapa after the election result was announced. The \$1 million project had been awarded to Nepal two years ago during his tenure as ANFA chief. But it failed to materialize after the association was polarized between the Thapa and Rana camps.

"He (Ganesh Thapa) breached the tripartite agreement reached in Singapore by holding the election unilaterally," alleged Rukma SJB Rana, president of Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC) and convenor of the ANFA election. He said he would work hard to win international recognition for the Gita Rana-led ANFA.

Binod Shankar Palikhey, member-secretary of the NSC, was more acerbic in his comments against Thapa. "We will see how Thapa will bring money in the name of ANFA after this election," he was quoted as saying in a daily newspaper. He even hinted at the possibility of impounding Thapa's passport.

Thapa remains upbeat. He claims that after the election, the problems plaguing Nepal's football sector would be solved. The election, he said, had to be organized hastily because FIFA and the AFC had fixed a November 15 deadline. He accused Education Minister Amod Prasad Upadhyaya, former Education Minister of State Dilendra Prasad Badu, NOC President Rukma SJB Rana and NSC Member-Secretary Palikhey of attempting to sabotage the sport.

The deep fissures in the national football association have seeped into the district associations. Many clubs are divided over whom to support. "This is really weird. If we support Thapa, we will be de-recognized by the government-controlled ANFA. And if we support Rana, we will be losing international recognition. There really is no choice. The government must intervene to solve this problem soon," said a club



Rana: Enjoys national recognition

manager.

Nepal lost an opportunity to host the World Cup qualifier tournaments last year thanks to the bickering among the football officials. Yet, they do not seem to have learnt any lesson. Unless there is a single ANFA recognized nationally as well as internationally, the future of Nepalese football would remain bleak. ■

WTO MINISTERIAL MEETING

Something for Everyone

The agreement to launch a new trade round may be good news, but countries like Nepal need to work hard to enter an open trading regime

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

Besides its Al Jazeera TV channel that enjoyed exclusive coverage of the Afghan war, the Qatari capital of Doha was in the news last fortnight for another reason. Trade ministers of 142 member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and several others as observers had gathered in this Gulf sheikhdom to discuss promoting free trade around the world.

Though the third ministerial level conference of the WTO failed in Seattle, USA in late 1999 amid unprecedented protests from different lobbies and a tug-of-war between the developed and developing countries on the issue of launching a new trade round, the Doha conference began on a more

accommodating note. As the values of liberalization, globalization and free market lay under attack from the global terrorism, the members of the multilateral trading regime had no alternative to accommodating each other's concerns.

The extended six-day conference (Nov. 9-14) adopted a work program, described as "broad-based and balanced," in the form of two declarations-- a main declaration and one on intellectual property (TRIPS) and public health and another on implementation to address developing countries' difficulties in implementing current WTO agreements.

The main ministerial declaration includes elaboration of objectives and timetables for the current negotiations in agriculture and services, negotiations or possible negotiations in a range of issues such as

industrial tariffs, trade and investment, trade and competition policy, some aspects of trade and the environment, implementation, and so on. The declaration also called for addressing "the particular vulnerability of least developed countries and the special structural difficulties they face in the global economy." Negotiations under the work program are to be concluded not later than January 1, 2005. Thanks to relentless lobbying by the developing countries, the all-night consultations on November 14 agreed to postpone negotiations on the issues of investment, competition policy, transparency in government

purchase and trade facilitation (collectively called new issues) till 2003.

On the issue of fixing environmental standards for trade, the conference proposed to start negotiations after the fifth ministerial conference of the WTO in 2003.

The developing countries saw the amendment to TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) to allow countries to low priced patented drugs in case of a public health emergency as a significant victory. For Nepal, prompt accession to WTO and preferential access to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the markets of the rich countries were high on the agenda.

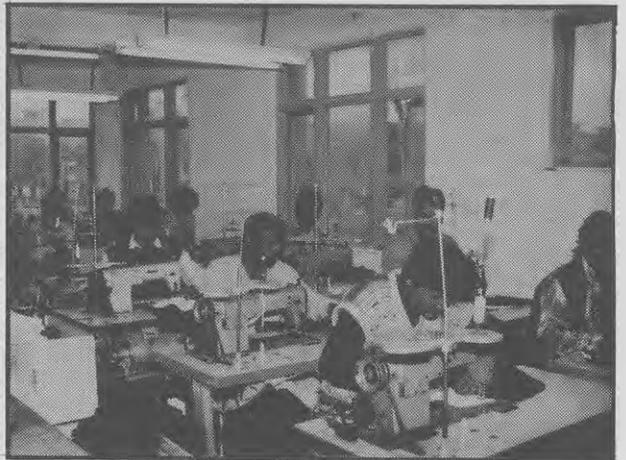
Addressing the ministerial meeting as an observer, newly appointed Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies Purna Bahadur Khadka said meaningful integration of LDCs into the world economy had emerged as a major challenge in the Doha meeting. "Facilitating accession of LDCs that have completed the minimum requirements with commitments towards WTO provisions should be seen as a logical first step in integrating these countries into the rule based multilateral trading," said Minister Khadka. He also welcomed the entry of China into WTO.

With a view to joining the multilateral body, Nepal has completed all the initial mandatory requirements, including transparency in trade policies and commitments in goods and services sectors. But critics said expectations of higher levels of commitment than those undertaken by the current LDC WTO Members, among others, have resulted in such a situation that not a single LDC has succeeded in acceding to the WTO since its establishment in 1995.

"We believe trade needs to be considered within a broader development context. Nepal hopes to achieve the development goals by integrating its economy into the multilateral trading system with commitment to the principles and provisions of WTO," said Minister

Khadka.

As Nepalese officials hope to accede to the WTO by the end of 2002, the Doha conference gave the Nepali delegation an opportunity to learn about the push and pull within the world body. "The Doha meeting has reinforced the international community's commitment toward the multilateral trading system through WTO," said Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, national program director of the UNDP-assisted Nepal's Accession to WTO project and a member of the Nepalese delegation. "For Nepal, the provision of technical assistance to remove supply constraints of the LDCs and formation of a working group to study the foreign debt are positive developments. Although LDCs could



Garment Industry : What will be their future ?

not get what they expected, every country got at least something out of the Doha meet."

This is because of the poor bargaining capacity of the LDCs, said experts. They could not change substantially the portion related to LDCs in the draft declaration. "The bottom line is that we must enhance our competitive strength," said Prachanda Man Shrestha, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies and a Nepalese delegate. Added Rajendra K. Khetan, vice president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), "Before becoming a WTO member, Nepal should devise ways to protect the domestic industries that will be hurt in an open trading regime. We should promote areas like tourism and offshore banking which don't fall under WTO regime."

Upon his return from Doha, Khetan was worried to see that the Nepalese private sector had very little interest and knowledge about the all-important WTO meeting. "Our private sector hasn't prepared seriously for the post-WTO regime. So, we must complete our homework and try to cash all the facilities due to the LDCs before joining the WTO," he added.



Ghose (standing) : Hoping for brighter future

NEPAL LEVER

Partner In Progress

In the midst of manifold problems gripping the industrial sector, Nepal Lever Ltd increases its dividend

By A CORRESPONDENT

Nepal's industrial sector is ailing. Frequent political and social disturbances have severely affected output. The changes in the export provisions in the Indian budget have also adversely affected Nepal's exports to India.

Nepal Lever's domestic sales have gone up by 21 percent, although overall exports are down. Despite such a difficult situation, the good news is that Nepal Lever has increased its dividend. According to the company, the board of directors at their recent meeting recommended a dividend of Rs. 55 per share, an increase from Rs. 50 per share last year. Despite the lower profit, the decision reflects continued confidence in long-term growth prospects, especially in the domestic market.

Nepal Lever reported a turnover of Rs. 1.54 billion and after-tax profits of Rs. 68 million last fiscal year. While the do-

mestic business maintained its growth momentum, achieving a 21 percent increase in turnover to Rs. 704.3 million, the export turnover was lower by 27 percent, at Rs.836.7 million. According to the company, the after-tax profit has dropped to Rs. 68 million, mainly because of a slowdown in exports.

The domestic business growth of 21 percent required heavier market investments in an intensively competitive environment. Higher interest burden is attributed to the accumulation of the dues with the government on account of duty drawback on exports and VAT refunds exceeding Rs. 200 million.

The export business of the company was adversely impacted by changes introduced in the last Indian budget, wherein the advantage of lower countervailing duty for the company's customers in India was withdrawn. According to the company, the disadvantage of non-refund of excise duty

for raw and packaging materials source from India continues. Amid higher excise duties in the export of the raw materials, the export of the company's toothpaste became uncompetitive.

"Even exports of soaps are becoming increasingly uncompetitive, given the package of tax incentives available to new investments in India," said M.K. Sharma, director, Nepal Lever Limited and vice chairman, Hindustan Lever Limited. "Besides, the extraordinary delays in settlement of duty drawback claims and several unanticipated ad hoc and arbitrary tax decisions by the revenue administration are imposing additional burden on the company in general and the exports business in particular. This coupled with the impact of export tax is threatening to render the exports business unviable in the longer run," he added.

In line with its stated strategy of focusing on developing the local market, the company has continued to invest heavily in expanding the domestic business. "Had it not been for the disturbances in the last two months of the fiscal year, which affected markets across the country, the domestic business would have grown further at much higher rates to tack more than 30 percent growth rates achieved in earlier years," said Sandip Ghose, managing director of Nepal Lever.

Nepal Lever launched many products and re-launched existing ones, offering a wide variety of choice to the consumers. "The company now has a comprehensive portfolio of products, which are of truly international standards," said Ghose.

Some of the new launches were Wheel Detergent Bar, Vim Dishwashing bar and Lifebuoy Active and the core brand like Lux, Close-Up and Pepsodent went through comprehensive re-launches. For the first time, leading Nepalese

film star Karishma Manandhar appeared in advertisements endorsing the brand. The company also re-launched Close-Up with fluoride and Pepsodent with Superior Germicheck Plus Formula, in line with the company's objective of customizing its product range to cater to local needs.

"We will produce quality products at competitive prices to cater to the interest of the local customer," said Ghose. "Our new products are competitive in quality and

reasonable in the price. This is the reason why most of our products are leading the market."

Close-Up continues to be the undisputed leader market leader in Nepal and Pepsodent has more than doubled its market share in the past year. The company recently launched a new variant of Lifebuoy with Active B that is effective against germs.

Despite the deteriorating law-and-order situation in the country, Nepal Lever has made every effort to expand its reach. The company organized a series of interesting experiments in order to tap markets in the remote corners of the country.

"We take the deteriorating situation as a challenge as well as opportunity to expand the market base. Hindustan Lever has faced the situation like in Nepal in the several parts of the India. We were actively marketing during the violence in Punjab and have been working in the Assam," said Sharma.

Nepal Lever also is involved in various social projects. The company has initiated an ambitious program of contacting schoolchildren throughout Nepal to impart the oral health education, in collaboration with a leading NGO. "We have organized several dental camps and a mobile medical unit is being operated in Hetauda by the Company's Employees Trust to provide emergency service to residents of Makwanpur district," said Ghose. The company is participating in a major initiative for the restoration of heritage sites in collaboration with the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

"We will continue with our strategy for aggressive development of the local market by introducing consumer-relevant product innovations and building a robust distribution infrastructure in the country," said Ghose.

Expansion of Nepal Lever's activities will also generate more jobs. "We will participate in the process of income and employment generation and remain totally committed to improving the quality of life in Nepal. To fulfill our endeavor we need the support from all sections of the society," said Sharma.

In the course of expansion, the company has trained large number of workers in rural parts of the country. "Through the

training imparted to its 100 percent local force, the company is developing technically skilled manpower in the country," Sharma said. "Similarly, the creation of ancillary units is raising overall technological capabilities," he added.

As Nepal and India are working to find an amicable solution to their trade disagreements, there is a hopeful sign that the renewal of trade agreement between Nepal-India will once again support the drive of Nepal Lever to export its products in India.

"Nepal India-Chamber of Commerce

and Industry and Confederation of Indian Industry have already urged the government of two countries to agree on proposal to allow the entry of products like ours in the Indian market as in previous years," said Ghose.

Obstruction in the export and disturbances in the domestic sector has hampered the overall production. With a gradual improvement in law and order inside the country and a narrowing of the gap between Nepal and India on trade policies, there are hopeful signs of a return to normalcy in the coming years. ■

TEMPLE TIGER

Conservation Commendation

A Nepalese enterprise wins the prestigious Tourism for Tomorrow Award

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when the country's tourism industry is facing one of its worst times, a Nepalese enterprise has helped to lift the spirits of the sector by winning an international tourism award.

British Airways awarded the first prize of the Tourism for Tomorrow Award-2001 to Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge of Nepal for its contribution to protected areas and national parks at a gala ceremony held in London on October 2.

Chosen through global competition, the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award is considered among the most prestigious in the tourism industry. It is given annually to a project for its contribution to the local natural and cultural environment and for improving the impact of tourism on the environment. Temple Tiger was selected from among 141 applicants from 59 countries.

The chairman of the Tourism for Tomorrow global panel of judges, Professor David Bellamy, a renowned conservationist, introduced the Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge to the eminent gathering after it was declared the winner, according to a Temple Tiger press release. Professor Bellamy said that Temple Tiger deserved the award because it aims to promote conservation through tour-

ism and offers local communities alternatives to destructive practices such as logging and poaching.

Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge was selected from among a number of highly commendable projects, including the Scottish Seabird Center, UK, Bush and Beyond Guided Trekking, New Zealand, Nusantra Diving Center, Indonesia, Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, USA, and Danube-Drava National Park, Hungary.

Speaking about the merits of the award, British Airways chairman Lord Marshall said, "We are proud to sponsor these awards which showcase the most worthy sustainable tourism projects in the world. The number and incredibly high quality of this year's entries reflects both the growth of, and the industry's commitment to sustainable tourism around the planet in recent years."

This is the second time Nepal has received the prestigious award. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project received the honor in 1992.

The other prominent personalities in the panel of judges were Sir Crispin Tickell of the UK governments Panel on Sustainable Development, Rita Gardner, director of the Royal Geographical Society, Graham Boynton, travel editor of the Daily Telegraph, and Ross B. Simons, director of the Smithsonian Environment Research Center. ■

CAR SALES

A Multitude Of Models As Market Grows

In the last few years, the capital has woken up to a thriving car market - especially the 2-box family cars. The variety of models running in the crowded city thoroughfares belies the small size of the market. Though less than 1,500 such cars are sold in the country each year (more than 80 percent in the capital alone), the growth potential seems to have attracted manufacturers from Daihatsu to Tata and from Toyota to Maruti. The percentage of Nepalis who can afford the luxury of owning a car remains paltry, but it appears to be growing by the day, marking the arrival of a new set of upwardly mobile families.

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

After rummaging for three months amid seemingly endless visits to car dealers, Dipesh Karki (name changed upon request) finally decided to present his family with the latest model of Tata Indica V2 this Dashain.

A middle-level officer working in one of Kathmandu's proliferating joint-venture banks, Karki got a loan from his office to buy the car. "I really didn't know that we had so many varieties of cars available here," Karki said. "While some friends told me to buy a certain model, others gave entirely different suggestions. I was simply flabbergasted

by the array of models available."

Unable to make up his mind even after scratching his head for months, Karki began surveying the market himself, weighing the pros and cons of each model. "It was then that I found out how impressive the models were. Some were economical, others were high-powered and still others were spacious. They



Small cars in Kathmandu : Growing attraction

were all so very good. But I had to choose one - and I did," he said.

Karki and his likes do have an impressive array of family-car models to choose from. While only a few years ago, anyone wanting to buy a car had to go either for the highly expensive Japanese models or the limited versions from Indian manufacturers, today's dealers are literally cutting each other's throats to impress the people with their sleek models.

Whether you're interested in space, power or appearance, Nepal's automobile market is full of models of different shapes, sizes and price tags.

Following the boom in India's car market, the floodgates in Nepal didn't take long in opening. From Daewoo to Hyundai and from Tata to Diahatsu, all names are available in the country. And each of these manufacturers has come up with different models. For instance, Maruti comes with Zen, Alto and 800; Tata with Indica and Indica V2; Opel with Astro and so on. That apart, each of these models comes with a variety of options like AC/non-AC, power, engine-type, interior facilities like music systems and so on. The addition/deletion of these facilities raise/reduce the price as well.

The bulk of the sales is in Kathmandu, which occupies 80-85 percent of country's total market. Pokhara, Narayangadh and Butwal follow the capital. Most of the major car manufacturers have opened showrooms in these cities, too.

Buying a car seems to be the latest fad for the upper and middle classes of Kathmandu. While the more affluent buy Prados and Pajeros costing millions, most of the buyers are content with riding

cheaper ones. But in this market, cheaper does not necessarily mean bland. Scrambling to get their attention, the manufacturers are building sleeker models all the time, slashing the prices as well.

What Are Small Family Cars?

Though there is a wide variety of cars available, they can be broadly grouped in two categories in Nepal's context. They can be either 2-box small type like the Maruti 800 - 5 seater - or the 3-box sedan-type like the Maruti Esteem/Baleno.

Since the prices of the sedans are relatively higher, they are beyond the grasp of the majority of the middle-class population. Because of lower prices, people from this group prefer smaller versions, which have been conveniently called family cars.

The revolution of the small family-car market began with the middle-class boom that coincided with economic liberalization in neighboring India. The Indian middle class has become economically so strong that there are more than a million Maruti 800 owners in that country.

Lured by the expanding size of the Indian market, many international car manufacturers like Fiat, Suzuki, Toyota, Hyundai, Daewoo have opened their plants in the world's second most populous country, churning out tens of thou-

Some of the models available (in 2-box family car type) with indicative prices (in NRs):

1. Maruti

- a. Maruti 800 — 6,57,000
- b. Maruti Zen — 9,60,000
- c. Maruti Alto — 9,26,000
- d. Maruti WagonR — 10,00,000 +

2. Tata

- a. Tata Indica
- b. Tata Indica V2 (1400 cc) — 8,98,000

3. Daewoo

- a. Matiz — 8,45,000

4. Diahatsu

- a. Mira
- b. Cuore

5. Hyundai

- a. Santro — 8,45,000
- b. Santro Deluxe — 10,50,000

6. Fiat

- a. Uno

7. Nissan

- a. March (Sedans)

8. Peugeot

- a. Partner

9. Toyota

- a. Echo — 23,00,000

10. Opel

- a. Astro
- b. Corsa

11. Maruti

- a. Esteem
- b. Baleno
- c. 1000

'Our Sales Have Not Improved Since The Royal Palace Killings'

— J.R. BHANDARI

J.R. BHANDARI is the vice-president of the Chaudhary Automotive Division. The division is the sole dealer of Maruti for Nepal. He spoke to SANJAYA DHAKAL on the car market in the country and Maruti's performance. Excerpts:

What are your impressions of the car market here?

Last year, sales had taken off strongly because of facilities like hire purchase and installations. But this year, following the royal massacre, we have witnessed a dip in the sales of passenger cars and others.

What models of Maruti are available in the car/van category and how are your sales?

Last year we sold 1,200 vehicles in car/van category. Among all the manufacturers active here, we have the most models on offer. Besides the 5 basic ones, we have 9-10 varieties of models. We cater to both the small family car market (Zen, Alto, 800) to high end ones like Esteem and Baleno. Except the high end models, others cost between 670,000 and 1,050,000.

Why is the Maruti 800 the leading model in terms of sales?

The reason lies in its price as well as performance. Besides, many of them are used for passenger taxi as well. All of the Maruti products are Euro II compliant.

You said your sales took a dip following the royal palace killings. Could you elaborate?

After the royal killings, our sales have not improved. The tourism sector is faring badly. The whole economic scenario is dismal. Compared to the previous fiscal year, our sales in the 2058/59 could come down by 30 percent or so if the situation does not improve.

What is the profile of car buyers?

Mostly they are professionals and executives. Institutions are other big customers. As far as families are concerned, the decision to buy a particular model of car is made collectively most of the time.

How do you see the future of Nepal's car market?

Well, it does not seem very impressive at present. Road congestion is increasing. Taxation is on the higher side.

sands of attractive models each year.

The spill-over effect from the Indian market can be witnessed in Nepal, too. All the latest variety coming up in India make their way towards this Himalayan hinterland every so often. The result: one can find Kathmandu's streets literally brimming with the latest versions of modern cars.

Many believe the market for these small cars have the greatest potential to explode. Price constraints do not permit

most Nepalis to choose from Japanese models. They are finding solace in the cheaper brands.

Straight out of the assembly lines, the latest models find throngs of customers ready to take them. Until a few years ago, there used to be a long queue of people waiting to get their hands on these cars. Because of increased imports and other reasons, customers today do not have to wait that long.

Who Buys These Cars?

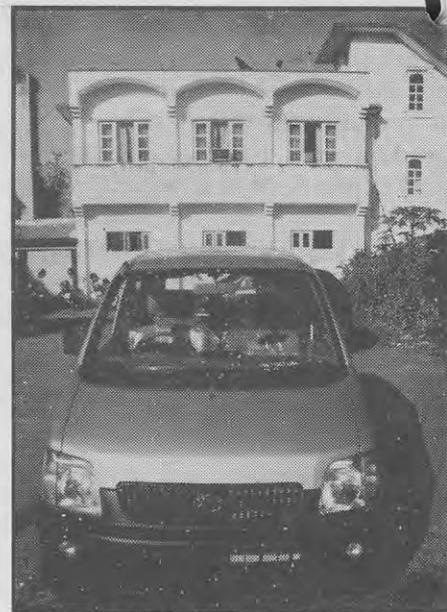
The price range of small 2-box family cars is not too high. They are available from Rs. 657,000 to Rs. 1,200,000. Most of the Indian joint-venture models come in between this range. Japanese and other foreign models cost considerably more.

The increase in the number of Nepalis who can afford to buy cars is surprising. The middle and upper middle classes are the main customers. From bankers to businessmen and from professionals to executives, the bracket of buyers is expanding.

That apart, with facilities like hire purchase, installments and loans on offer, people are scrambling to lift new models off the showrooms. The traffic jam of customers still gets intense at times, forcing them onto the waiting list again.

"When I wanted to buy a car, I had to encounter showrooms that were empty. Everywhere I went, I was told to wait. But having no particular model in mind and being an impulsive buyer, I instantly bought the car that was in the showroom," said Sunil Shrestha, a computer professional who owns a gleaming red Hyundai Santro.

But not everyone is as impulsive as Shrestha when it comes to making that kind of investment. Karki waited for a



Small family car : Latest fashion



New car : Small is beautiful

couple of months before buying the model of his choice. The varied behavior of buyers raises another set of questions about the factors underlying car sales.

The surge in car sales can be attributed to the diminishing alternatives for investment. "Thanks to the economic slowdown, people have very few places to put their money in these days. Consequently, they are investing in vehicles," said Rajan Shrestha, technical manager at the Tata Engineering, Sipradi Trading Ltd.

But not everyone is sanguine about the future of Nepal's car market. "No business in the country is doing well at the moment. The same is true for the automobile sector," Lokmanya Golchha, president of Nepal Automobile Dealers' Association, was quoted in a daily recently. "This sector had witnessed good growth over the last two years. But during the last six months, there has been a big recession."

Golchha's sentiments are echoed by J.R. Bhandari, vice-president of the Chaudhary Automotive Division, which is the sole agent for Maruti in Nepal. "Our sales have taken a dip following the June 1 killings in the royal palace," he said.

Despite this dismal prognosis, there seems to be no let-up in the import of

'Kathmandu Has The Lion's Share Of The Market'

— RAJAN SHRESTHA

RAJAN SHRESTHA, technical manager at the Tata Engineering, Sipradi Trading (P) Ltd., has been observing Nepal's car market for years. A former employee at Maruti and Toyota, Shrestha is a mechanical engineer. He spoke to SANJAYA DHAKAL about the status of small family car market in the country. Excerpts:

How do you find the market for small cars in Nepal?

Well, the market is expanding. The trend is positive. Every year 1,200 to 1,300 of such family cars are sold here. Despite the economic slowdown, we are keeping our fingers crossed. The slowdown is everywhere. Even in India, vehicle consumption has come down. But here in Nepal, people with money increasingly prefer to invest in cars. They have been withdrawing money from banks and, with nowhere else to turn to, are spending it on vehicles.

How is the Tata Indica doing?

Tata as a whole is doing good in Nepal. Last year, the growth rate of Sipradi Trading was highest among all the subsidiaries of the Tata system in the world. In the small car market, too, we introduced Indica here last September. Ever since, we have been experiencing a reasonably good response. Our market share is 37 to 38 percent. In the last two months, our business took off really well, maybe because of the festive season. We sold 107 cars then. Most of them were diesel-type.

What are the specialities of Tata Indica?

Nobody can beat us on safety. We have cases where people have come out unscathed from badly toppled cars. Our vehicles are fitted with a crumple zone between the engine and bumper. The bumper itself is of a shock-absorbing type.

Which models are popular here?

Earlier, Maruti had a monopoly. Then Santro came and picked up quite well. But now, Indica is coming up strongly. We are already No. 1 in India. Earlier in India, Contessa was known for its luxuriousness, Ambassador for spaciousness and Maruti for economy. Tata Indica has tried to combine all three of these characteristics. We have sleek models, five people can easily travel in Indica and our price is not very high compared to others.

Apart from Kathmandu, which other cities are these cars sold in?

Kathmandu still has the lion's share of the market. Almost 83 to 84 percent of cars are sold within the valley. Pokhara is second largest market. Then come cities like Hetauda, Butawal and Narayangadh. Bordering towns like Biratnagar do not register high sales due to various reasons. Around 7/8 cars are sold in average in Biratnagar each month.

What are the major problems of the country's car market?

While the growth rate of family car is 14-15 percent per year, the expansion of road is less than 1 percent. Kathmandu is already quite crowded. The cars also suffer from high taxation. They have to bear almost 143 percent custom duties, 10 percent VAT and all.



Latest model's car : Sleek and neat

top-of-the-line models in the country, perhaps because many people feel the current slump to be temporary.

Favorite Models

In terms of price, there is no alternative to Maruti 800, which is the best-selling model in Nepal. The Hyundai Santro, too, is a favorite among many for its sleek look and attractive price. The Tata Indica was introduced here in September last year. Since then, sales have been picking up quite impressively. "In Nepal, there is an annual market for 1,200-1,300 cars in the 2-box category alone. And this is increasing at the rate of 14 to 15 percent each year," said Shrestha.

According to Shrestha, the market share of Tata Indica is already 37 to 38 percent. Last year the company sold 450 units. "However, over the last two months or so, business has been really picking up. In Dashain and Tihar, we witnessed a sharp increase in our sales," he said.

Road Condition

The condition of roads, however, is appalling. Compared to the rate in which the number of vehicles is growing, roads have remained stagnant. With every passing year, congestion in the streets of

cities like Kathmandu only gets worse. "While the growth rate of family car sales is 14-15 percent, roads are expanding by less than 1 percent a year," rues Shrestha.

According to the Department of Transport Management, the rate of vehicles entering Nepal has been increasing by 10-16 percent every year since 2046/47 (1990/91). Official figures (updated in June 2001) show that there are 305,395 vehicles registered in the country, with the bulk of them (171,678, or 56 percent) listed in Bagmati zone alone. Among the total number of vehicles, motorcycles comprise 57.7 percent and private car/jeep/van form 19.3 percent.

Ride Ahead

Despite the bumps it has encountered, Nepal's

car market seems set for a smooth ride ahead. In the decade since the restoration of democracy and adoption of economic liberalization policies, the surge in the sales of private cars has been all too apparent.

Till now, Nepal is still the extended arm of Indian car market and no manufacturer has been focusing its attention solely on the market here. However, companies are beginning to take a closer look. A decade ago, it was rare to see fleets of private vehicles parked outside a department store or a movie theater. Today, wherever you go, whether it is marketplace, parks, zoo or other public places, stacks of neatly parked Alto, Zen, Matiz, Indica, Santro or Cuore are a common sight

The increase in car sales, especially small family cars, has also indicated the arrival of a completely new set of well-to-do middle class in Nepal. These people have money to spend on vehicles and are doing that.

As the middle class is considered the engine of economic growth everywhere, the surge in this segment of Nepal's population is a welcome sign. But the country has a long way to go before a sizable proportion of the people start driving around in their own cars. ■

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HYATT REGENCY GOLF TOURNAMENT Charitable Contest

A leading hotel organizes a golf tournament and donates the proceeds for the cause of underprivileged children

By A CORRESPONDENT

Although golf was introduced in Nepal several years ago as a game exclusively for expatriates, it has gradually established itself as a favorite sport among Nepalis. The number of local tournaments has been growing over the years. Moreover, Nepalis are dominating many of these tournaments.

Apart from the Surya International Golf Tournament, hotel groups, including Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza, have been organizing tournaments to promote Nepalese golf players and to generate a spirit of healthy competition.

Hyatt Regency's initiative is expected to help to further popularize golf in Nepal and offer foreigners another opportunity to test the golf courses of the country. Over the last few years, the number of golf courses has increased. The Gokarna Golf course enjoys the reputation of being the only one in Nepal that meets international standards.

Nepal won the first Hyatt Regency Kathmandu Nations Cup, which was held at the Gokarna Golf Resort. The tournament is to be held annually from next year. However, Hyatt has gone a significant step further and shown that by organizing such tournaments, it can also contribute to noble causes. The funds collected from the participation fee of Rs.1,500 will go to CWIN, a leading non-government organization that has been working for the welfare of underprivileged children in Nepal.

"The rights of children has been a philanthropic cause very close to Hyatt International and our hotels around the world have been actively raising funds or providing voluntary time toward varying needs of the individual locations," said

Martin van Kan, general manager of Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. "In Nepal, a lot of children needs required to be addressed. The right to education is an important step towards building the future of any child," he said.

Nepal I won the tournament, which drew the participation of 16 teams from several countries. In the closest to the pin

commitment," said van Kan, distributing prizes to the winners.

The major objectives of the program include international team participation, diverse competency and good sportsmanship. The organizers have made special efforts to accommodate a large number of participants.

Altogether 72 individuals representing 16 teams took part in the tournament. Gorkha Brewery, Necon Air, Regal Business Link, National Life and General Insurance., Agni Enterprises, Sharp, Himalayan Bank, Singapore Airlines, Adam Smith Institute, Shangri-La Village Pokhara, Chaudhary Group, ICTC, Sambu Constructions, McCann Erickson and Coca-Cola were co-sponsors of the tournament.



Winner team : Playing with a cause

Photo: Kantipur

categories, Tashi Tshering won the competition and Tashi Ghale won the longest drive. C.B. Pradhan Nepal and Joan Sobieniak were declared the best gross in the men's and ladies' events respectively. A team from Denmark and Germany won the award in the best-dressed category.

"Organizing the event for a philanthropic cause gives the tournament a deeper sense of achievement. The enthusiastic response of our participants and all our co-sponsors has added to our

The initiative of Hyatt Regency marks a positive step toward highlighting the problems of Nepalese children throughout the world. There are 203 Hyatt Hotels and Resorts around the world, which offers a wide network to advance such vital causes.

Furthermore, Hyatt Regency's endeavor to support the poor and underprivileged children of Nepal can be expected to encourage other organizations and entrepreneurs to help disadvantaged sections of society. ■

'We Are Ready To Face Elections Under An All-Party Government'

— MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL

CPN-UML general secretary and main opposition leader MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL is working to bring all opposition parties on a single platform. In the process, he has held several rounds of consultations with leaders of other opposition parties in parliament and those outside. As the government and Maoists prepared to resume peace talks, Nepal spoke to KESHAB POUDEL at his residence in Satdobato on major national issues. Nepal, who has been leading his party for most of the period after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, seems to be preparing for snap elections. Excerpts from the half-hour conversation.

How do you evaluate the current political situation?

The situation is bleak and uncertain. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's government has proved inefficient and incompetent in its first 100 days. The law-and-order situation is gradually worsening and the economy is heading toward collapse. As you know, Deubaji is just like a lump of flesh with no mobility. He is primarily concerned with retaining his post. What can we expect from him? I don't believe the Nepali Congress government has the will to tackle the major issues before the nation.

Was it the non-performance of the government that prompted you to call for fresh elections?

What I meant is that if somebody fails to run the government, he must quit in favor of an alternative. What is the rationale of remaining in power without being able to deliver the results you promised? Every party and individual wants to go to power to do something to the country and people. This government is doing nothing except wasting time and resources for personal interests. I have opposed the ineffectiveness of the government. If you lose relevance and the government is non-functional, the people have the right to decide.

You mean elections?

We are ready to face elections, but they must be held under an all-party government. If we evolve such a system, nobody would have to harbor misgivings about the electoral process. We will announce our formal decision in due course. National decisions must be taken on the basis of the wishes of the people. We believe the country cannot be run in the way it is being run today. The country is demanding a new direction.

If there were an agreement to form an all-party government, would you be ready for elections?

We do not have the authority to announce elections. But we are ready to test our mandate among the people if it is required. In two rounds of meetings, all

opposition parties shared the concern that this government has failed to show efficiency and has lost its utility. The participating parties also condemned the activities of the Maoists. We also discussed the prospect of fresh elections, forming an all-party government and other burning national issues. Some parties want fresh elections and others are in favor of an all-party government that would include the Maoists. We have also been discussing the matter within our own party.

What is your stand on the current debate on the constitution?

We are in favor of amending the constitution. As you know, the constitution itself has made clear provisions for amendments. Therefore, discussions on amending the constitution should not be a matter of undue anxiety to anyone. There are many lapses in the constitution and we want to correct them.

What are the specific lapses and how are they obstructing democratic governance?

There are many lapses as the constitution was prepared 12 years ago. For instance, there is confusion over the rights of the prime minister, the Constitutional Council and the anti-corruption body. Most importantly, we need to provide constitutional guarantees to local bodies.

But two senior Nepali Congress leaders have said it is too early to amend the constitution. How do you view their comments?

I don't agree with them. There is always a possibility to amend the constitution if there are loopholes. For instance, there is a need to re-establish the right of the prime minister, to clarify the role of the Constitutional Council, to strengthen anti-corruption bodies and so on. I don't understand what is wrong in taking a course that is specified in the constitution.

The people in charge of state institutions will remain the same even after the constitution is amended. How can the rewriting or revising of certain provisions in the basic law alone change things?

We are not like citizens of the United States or the United Kingdom. We are Nepalis who have our own customs and traditions. If we are able to rewrite key provisions in the constitution in keeping with these realities, it will definitely bring change. For instance, we ask drivers not to park in the wrong side but they have been doing so. If you enact legislation forbidding such parking, people will be compelled to follow it. I want similar provisions in the constitution.

There is always the possibility of amending the constitution through implementation and interpre-

We are ready to face elections, but they must be held under an all-party government. If we evolve such a system, nobody would have to harbor misgivings about the electoral process. We will announce our formal decision in due course.

tation. Why you are insisting on a formal amendment?

I don't think the constitution can be amended through interpretations. Some people are calling for patience. Twelve years have passed since the promulgation of the constitution. How longer do we have to be patient? In a situation where a strong group is demanding a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, we can show that many things can be improved by amendments within the system. There is no need for such an assembly. The present constitution was the result of a long struggle by the people. The right way now is to start an honest and healthy debate on improving the constitution.

Is there any guarantee that a constitutional amendment can bring desired results?

Every country has its own traditions. If there are abuses, we must go for amendment. Let's start discussions on identifying what articles we need to amend.

You have been in the top leadership position of your party for most of the past 12 years. How do you evaluate the role of political parties, including your own?

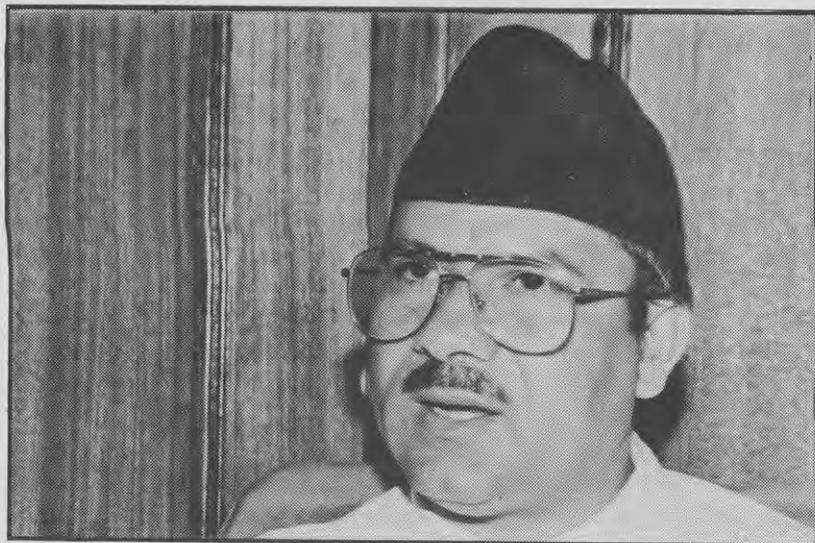
I have been working as general secretary of the party since May 1993. This is my ninth year as general secretary. I have been in the party politburo for the last 12 years, since the unification of the party. If we see the history of the CPN-ML, I was one of the founder members of the party and elected as a politburo member when it was formed in 1978. This is my 24th year in politics with the CPN-UML. Actually, we set up a Coordination Center in 1975 as an organized party. I have spent more than 30 years in the communist party, having secured membership in 1969. Since joining the revolutionary party, I have seen many of our colleagues leave the party and some even sidelined from it. In my experience, it is very difficult to continue in the party. There are only a few persons like myself who continue to be in same party for such a long time. In my career as a communist worker, I have maintained my sincerity and commitment to the cause of communism.

How difficult is it to run a party?

Running a party with a nation-wide network is very challenging. In an open atmosphere, it is sometimes very difficult to lead the party organization, which has units in the ward level. Our party has a wide range of workers in the grass-roots level. It is very difficult to expand the party organization, increase membership and attract workers from other party. Transforming the mind-set of common people who are mostly attuned to a feudalistic culture is another challenging task. Another difficult task is to put a man or woman within a party's culture and ideology. I can proudly claim that, comparatively speaking, there is no organized, systematic and disciplined party like the CPN-UML in Nepal. Our party has the capability to embody the interests of different groups. We are strong because of discipline and united because of our cause and principles.

How do you assess the Maoist problem?

The Maoists have already killed 38 of our workers.



But we still think the problem is political in nature, but their activities expose them as extremists. They have killed honest and capable comrades of ours. Extremists always consider other political forces as rivals and they don't want to recognize opposition. They are very intolerant. The Maoists want to establish a one-party authoritarian system. This is a force that does not believe in rationality. Nobody can feel safe by backing the Maoists. Political parties, journalists and many other sections of society have faced the consequences of backing the Maoists.

Your party also started building itself through violence. How do you see the spread of the Maoist 'people's war'?

It is important to know who is behind the movement. I don't want to go into details here. In Nepalese society, there is a section of people who want immediate change. When they fail to see their demands being fulfilled, such groups of people lead the voice of discontent. The frustration and anger is also a result of the inefficiency of the Nepali Congress government. When people lose their faith in the government, such violence is inevitable. When the government tries to discourage the use of peaceful means of protest and resorts to oppression, people will automatically react. When there is no option for peaceful means, the violence preached by the Maoists becomes appealing. Nepalese society is mainly a petty bourgeois society and lack of patience is one of the characteristics of such society. A group wants quick results. Their anger is for a short-lived but it is so powerful. It quickly heats with high power. Once it cools down, it will hardly absorb any temperature.

Do you see any threat to the CPN-UML?

The CPN-UML is not a temporary party but one that expects to remain forever in the service of the people and country. Our party wishes to survive for a long time with full strength and energy. Many parties that evolve over a short time are also dismantled very quickly. Over the long term, there is no place for parties that emerge quickly. We have two tendencies in any group. One wants to move rapidly while the other seeks

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to go slow and steady. We want to attain comfortable speed with total command of the steering wheel. We adopt our ways considering the global trend. We want to move ahead with determination. One of the reasons behind the upsurge of the Maoist movement is the non-delivery of the Nepali Congress government. The Maoists have used rampant corruption, politicization of institutions and Congressization in the bureaucracy as the ground to wage violence.

Some intellectuals and politicians are accusing the ruling and main opposition parties of creating the present mess. How do you respond?

We are not responsible for this situation, as we were in power for only nine months out of the last 12 years. Such accusations are just a way of shifting responsibility to another party that has nothing to do with mismanagement and rampant corruption. If the same standard is applied, what is the role of the press? What is the role of intellectuals? It makes no sense to blame others. The party in power must accept responsibility for non-performance. If the captain of the plane cannot take command, how can you blame the co-pilot? The Nepali Congress is commanding the aircraft and we are like the co-pilot. If you consider our nine-month rule, it was one of the greatest eras in Nepalese history.

True, the Nepali Congress has secured majorities in two general elections. But how can you evade responsibility as leader of the main opposition party, who is regarded as the "shadow prime minister" in a parliamentary system?

Don't get confused by these theoretical terms. I am not a "shadow prime minister" at all. This term can only be used for intellectual exercise. If you see the experience of the last three years, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's shadow prime minister was Girija Prasad Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba appeared as the shadow prime minister of Koirala.

But in parliamentary practice, the person sitting to the right of the prime minister is regarded as the head of the government in waiting. Don't you agree?

Theoretically, you may be right. But when our voice goes unheard and when there is no respect for such practices from the party in power, how can you call me the shadow prime minister?

What option do you have then?

We have two options. We can follow the model of Bangladesh and boycott parliament or trade blows with ministers inside parliament. Do you think these are proper ways? We are trying to stay clear of the extremes. We have been trying to convince the people in a different way.

But your party also launched a street agitation, sit-ins and other disruptive activities to pressure then-prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala to resign. You led other opposition parties in boycotting the entire winter session of parliament.

We have always set limits on political propriety. When the prime minister involved in a scandal refused to take moral responsibility, we had no other option. Moreover, our activities were peaceful. Although Koirala resigned following our pressure, many intellectuals criti-

cized us for taking such a harsh course. Some intellectuals always criticize us no matter what we do. When we registered a motion of no-confidence, they criticized us. When we lent support to the positive decisions of the government, the same people criticized us for joining hands with the ruling party. I would love to know what they want us to do.

What is the responsibility of the main opposition party?

If government fail to deliver the goods, the extreme right and extreme left will try to exploit public disgruntlement. As you know, the government is wholly responsible for delivering the goods. Of course, we may also have some weaknesses but the primary duty falls on the government to provide efficient administration and other mechanisms for delivery. Unless the government acts, the opposition alone cannot do anything. We have already proved during our nine-month tenure that our party is the only party that can give an honest and efficient administration. I can personally claim that our party is clean. If someone can prove that our party is corrupt, we are ready to face any kind of punishment.

But your party was accused of corruption when it shared power with the Rastriya Prajatantra Party a few years ago.

As you know, those who were with us at that time are no longer with the CPN-UML. I again claim that ours is the cleanest party in the country. I would challenge anyone to show any evidence of corruption against our ministers during our nine-month government. We have been able to maintain a clean image through our action and vision. We have not taken unlawful donations. We have not taken money through inappropriate means.

You don't collect donations?

We collect donations from time to time, but we have never forced business organizations or businessmen to pay up. We have set limits in terms of fund-raising. Our party has a strong committee system that audits accounts. Our party operates on a transparent system.

If this is so, then why were so many of your senior party colleagues defeated in the election? Don't you think voters are more aware than political parties are?

Yes, voters are mature enough to reward and punish politicians based on their record, but most of our candidates lost because of rigging by the Nepali Congress.

What impact will the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States have on Nepal?

We have already condemned the terrorist attacks of September 11. No rational human being can support such dastardly acts. Terrorism in any form is condemnable. But we must also understand the root causes of terrorism. There is a need to eliminate terrorism, but one cannot justify the killing of innocent people in the name of wiping out terrorism. Rational thinking is needed before any action against terrorism is taken. Nepal is in a very vulnerable position as it lies between India and China. Before taking a decision on allowing a third country to use our land and airspace, we should have considered the broader national perspective. The decision of the government to permit US planes to refuel in Nepal was highly immature. ■

We are not responsible for this situation, as we were in power for only nine months out of the last 12 years. Such accusations are just a way of shifting responsibility to another party that has nothing to do with mismanagement and rampant corruption.

ART

Picture Perfect

Two virtuosos display works of splendor at Siddhartha Art Gallery

By AKSHAY SHARMA

Brilliant works by Sandy Shum and Jyoti Dawadi are currently on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery in Babar Mahal. Michael Gill, executive director of the Fulbright Commission, inaugurated the show on November 6. "The two artists' work are very different from each other but both have used multimedia. They have used computers to use and enhance their works that are quite admirable," said Gill.

Dawadi is often a victim of mistaken identity. "He looks like Jerry Garcia," someone at the inauguration was heard saying. Dawadi's work reflects the spirit of nature and the abstract forms of Hindu and Buddhist rituals that are usually found in Nepali culture. He has explored his art into a greater depth through the computer and through his unique language of abstraction. Three different bodies of work are presented at the exhibition and can be exhibited on large screen projections and animations — which are on the web at <www.akash-himal.com> in various prints and dimensions.

"Value" is conceived in response to all conflicts where firearms are used to settle disputes. "Value is an artwork that compares how much rice can be purchased with the money it costs to buy a rifle. To visualize this measurement, a pyramid of dhan — rice husk — will be created, and a replica of the rifle is placed on top of the mound."

It dramatizes how precious resources are diverted from society and draws attention to the emotional toll of violence in communities around the world. "Value" is a memorial to the victims and a means to stimulate dialogue toward the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In remembrance, the names of those who have died will be exhibited on the mound of dhan to initiate the healing process. Visitors are encouraged to publicly express personal and collective grief through lighting oil lamps and burning incense. In the second phase of this installation, the dhan will be put into jute sacks of various sizes and marked with the names of other countries torn apart by armed

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struggle. The sacks will be stacked to create a new, commemorative mound. This time, the replica rifle will be laid on the ground beside the mound to symbolize the end of violence.

In "Value", dhan is used as a metaphor for peace and regeneration. "This artwork is inspired by the poetry of my grandfather, Dharani Dhar Koirala, who anguished over Nepal's destiny fifty years ago: Nepal your smiling face/Would I see it or die without/This is the worry that

aches my heart/Towards hope or despair," Dawadi says.

Through an accompanying banner, "Value" incorporates these poetic lines to build upon the ideas of peaceful, social change that were pioneered by an earlier generation of Nepali activists. In contrast to the mound, which is a temporary installation, the 72 x 66 inch, digitally printed banner, is a permanent component of this artwork. Dawadi's work is supported by Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Artists' Society of Nepal, Human Rights Organization of Nepal, Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square Conservation Program and New Art Circle.

"It's all digital work generated through computers. The image is just bits and bytes and the art is in an abstract form," Dawadi told SPOTLIGHT. "I then enhance those images through my fingers and the mouse."

"I take earth, powder it and use Nepali paper and render these images through computer programs," he added. "The concept of my art is primal and normal as Nepal is now which is passing through the agricultural stage to the massive scale of globalization," Dawadi explained. "I have focused on this topic and we need to move on. In the West, art and culture are separated, not like in Nepal where they are a part of daily life. I hope that we don't lose that in the mist of globalization."

"In America the image of Nepal is a poverty-stricken Third World nation and through these images I have created, I want people to see it's not like that," Dawadi added. "I first scan my images then layer them, it is a fun thing to me actually. Not many people are doing this in Nepal and the purpose is to motivate the younger generation of artists through my work. Most of my work is muted on tantric philosophy," he added.

"My roots are Nepalese and my father is a writer. And I work on my art in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA," he added. On the transformation of the art scene in Nepal, he said: "There are more galleries coming up. It wasn't possible to do exhibitions like these before."

"I hope that the mercenary image of the workaholic will be changed in some

ways if we were to focus more on art. The image needs to be changed into something else," he added. Dawadi, who has a Ph.D. in political science, says, "I am not a trained artist and somehow it has become my life now. The younger generation should come and see my work and I hope I have made a little contribution in the world of art in Nepal."

Sandy Shum, who specializes in impressionistic photography, sums up her purpose in a sentence. "I wish to provide a moment to pause and reflect on the wonderland grace that occurs in the dream light of daily life," she told SPOTLIGHT. "I work by hand on each photograph to create a painterly quality, resulting in image full of depth and texture."

Sandy was born in and grew up in Hollywood, California and went to Hollywood High School. "I have lived and traveled in Asia for over a decade." Her Impressionistic Photography portfolio includes images from Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Bhutan and California. "My mother took me to art class when I was young. I love books, music, pottery and joyful creations," said Sandy, who has a B.S. in mechanical engineering. The theme of her works is "Impressions of Asia".

"This is my first exhibition in Kathmandu and it is my favorite place and Baudhanath captures my imagination. My works are ambiguous — people look at it and find it hard to recognize if it is a painting or a photograph. To pause in your daily life is very important," she said. "We all lead a busy life and to pause to look at things brings a little peace to your daily routine."

Sandy, a Buddhist, says her work is her eye on the world. "I wish to create images that bring beauty and peace to our lives. I started out in 1998 and focus on things that you come to see in daily life. And the viewer might say that 'why didn't I see it like this before?' The things that are in your ordinary life are the focal point of my art."

"When I walk around and notice something through the corner of my eye, I enhance these images I see. I really enjoy the work and am very happy when an art is finished," she said. "When you look at it, it

will bring joy to your daily life."

"I try to look at the beauty and peace in the lives of people when I work. I want to create joy into the hearts of people and to make them say, 'I might have thought of that'," Sandy said.

Asked what her philosophy of life is and how she reflects it through her art, Sandy said: "I focus on simplicity, functionality and impermanence. My symbol and images are straightforward. Paula Wenzl, a photographer based in California, taught me this technique. I am fascinated by impressionistic painters and how they capture light, motion and freshness."

Her methods of painting and drawing are hand embellishing Polaroid photographs. "Everyday I am grateful that some object of beauty is brought to my attention. That is what I try to share through my art. My motto is to strive in compassion in every action," she said.

"My images are held in private collections internationally. Whether the artist is French, American, Thai or Nepalese, one must create the art that naturally arises from one's heart."

The show will be held until November 26 at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, from 11am to 6pm. ■

THAI Voted Among Best Asia-Pacific Airlines

Thai Airways International was voted among the top three Asia-Pacific airlines and received the top honor for Best Economy Class, according to the Business Traveller Asia-Pacific Readers' Poll survey published in the October 2001 issue of the magazine.

THAI was also ranked among the top five for overall Best Airline, Best Business Class and Best Frequent Flyer Program. In addition, Bangkok voted among the top five business cities in the world, while the Banyan Tree Phuket (Thailand) achieved second place in the Best Resort Hotel in the Asia-Pacific category.

Business Traveller Asia-Pacific conducted the independently planned survey, which ended in July 2001, by distributing 10,830 questionnaires to single subscribers with copies of the magazine.

The valid returned questionnaires represented 13 per cent of the response. According to the Business Traveller Magazine, 75 per cent of respondents to the poll took more than 10 flights over a 12-month period and almost 25 per cent notched up more than 40 flights.

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TRANSITION

LEFT: Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, Minister for Finance, for New York, USA, leading the Nepalese delegation to the 56th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, Minister for Information and Communication, for Beijing, China, for a week-long visit, at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart.

Sarbadhan Rai, Minister of State for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, for London, United Kingdom, to participate in the ninth meeting of the task force to protect children from sexual exploitation in the tourism sector.

Chitrallekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, for Manila, Philippines, leading a delegation of women, to participate in a regional seminar on women in

media/politics.

ARRIVED: Purna Bahadur Khadka, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, from Doha, Qatar, after participating in the World Trade Organization conference.

FELICITATED: Lok Bahadur Chemjong, of Dhankuta, **Khadga Bahadur Chokhyal**, of Baglung, and **Rana Bahadur Lama**, of Kathmandu, for

their role in establishing democracy in the country in 2007 B.S. (1950 AD), by the Martyr Thirbam Malla Memorial Foundation.

FORMED: A one-man commission headed by **Narendra Bahadur Neupane**, former justice of the Supreme Court, to probe the recent road accident involving former prime minister and Nepali Congress president **Girija Prasad Koirala**, by the cabinet. ■

How To Avoid Low Back Pain

By Dr. ARVINDA K. SINGH

In today's fast-paced society, low back pain has become a common problem, especially in urban areas. However, it can be avoided by performing simple exercises each day. The following are common tips to avoid the occurrence of low back pain.

While Standing and Walking:

1. Stand with low back as flat as possible. By standing tall and sucking in and out of a tense abdomen, the lower back is straightened. Walk, stand and sit as tall as possible.
2. Bend knees when leaning and avoid leaning whenever possible. Instead, squat with a straight low back.
3. Avoid high-heeled shoes, they shorten the Achilles tendons and increase Lourdes's.
4. Avoid standing for long periods. If it is necessary, alternate leaning of left and right feet and, if possible, use the bent-knee position as this flattens the lower back.
5. When standing, do not lean back and support the body with the hands. Keep the hands in the fringe of body and lean forward slightly.
6. Open the door wide enough to walk through comfortably.
7. Carefully judge the height of curbs before stepping up or down.

While Sitting:

1. Sit in such a way that the lower back is flat or slightly rounded outward, but never with forward curve.
2. Sit so that your knees are higher than the hips. This may require a small footstool for a short person in a higher chair.
3. Begin contact with the back 4 to 6 inches above the seat and provide a flat support throughout entire lumber area.
4. Do not sit on a soft or overstuffed chair or sofa.
5. Do not sit with legs straight out on a footstool
6. Never sit in the same position for prolonged periods. Get up and move around for a while.

While Driving:

1. Push front seat forward so that your knees will be higher than the hips and the pedals are easily reached without stretching.
2. Sit with back flat. Do not lean forward. Sit tall.
3. Add a flat backrest if seat is soft while traveling long distances.
4. Be sure that your seat has a properly adjusted headset.
5. If on a long trip, stop every two hours to get out of car and walk about. Tense the abdomen and flatten the back for several minutes.

While In Bed:

1. Sleep or rest on a flat firm mattress. If not available, place a bedboard of three-quarters of an inch of plywood under the mattress. A board of less thickness will prevent proper spine alignment.
2. When sleeping, the preferred position is on the sides with both arms in front and the knees slightly drawn towards the chin.
3. Don't sleep on your stomach.
4. When lying on the back, place a pillow under your knees.
5. When lying in bed, don't extend your arms above the head.

Relax at sides.

6. Sleep alone on an oversized bed.
7. While getting out of bed, turn over one side, draw up your knees, then swing your legs over the side of the bed.

When Lifting Weight:

1. When lifting weight, let the leg work, using the large muscle of the thigh instead of the small muscle of the back.
2. Don't twist the body, but face the object.
3. Never lift with your leg straight.
4. Don't lift from a bending forward position
5. Don't reach over furniture to open and close windows.
6. Tuck in the buttock and pull in the abdomen when lifting.
7. Lift a heavy load not higher than the waist and light load not higher than the shoulder.
8. Lift the object holding it close to the body.



(The writer is senior physiotherapist at Capital Hospital and Research Center)

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Other Attractions:

- ✓ Restaurant
- ✓ Kiddies Games
- ✓ Souvenir Shop

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Now In Town

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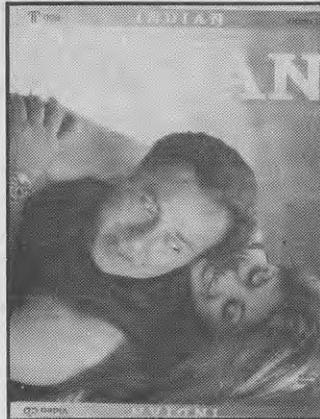
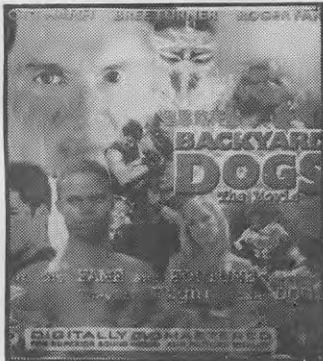
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Video (English)

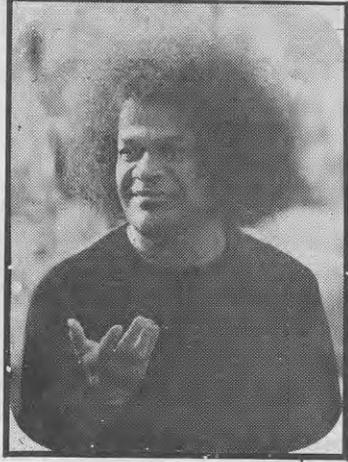
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- From Hell
- Max Keeble's Big Move
- The One
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- Croky Romans
- Hard Ball
- Training Day
- Creepshow II
- Jeeper's Creeper's



Hindi

- Belagam
- Ashoka
- Indian
- Kasam
- Rehna Hai Tere Dil Main
- Pyar Zindagi Hai
- Yeh Tere Ghar Yeh Mera Ghar
- Mitti
- Kiyon Ki Mein Jhooth Nahin
- Ajnabee

(Source : Super Star Video, New Road)



“Do not get attached to worldly things and pursuits. Be, in the world but, do not let the world be in you.”

- SATHYA SAI BABA

ANDY CAPP



GARFIELD



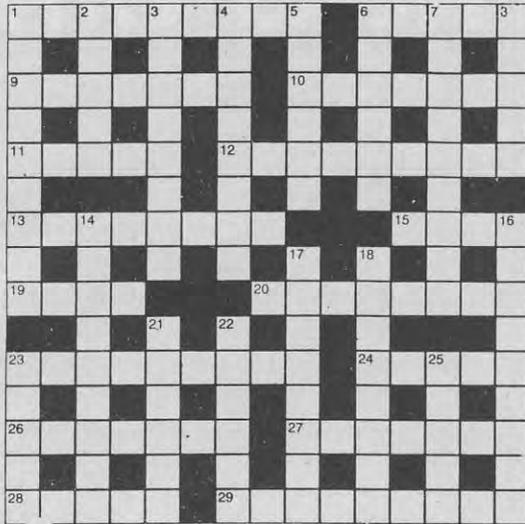
FRED BASSET



OVERBOARD



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Abigail's dismal day off (5,4)
6. Matches containing sulphur in bunches of five (5)
9. Open cart covered by elegant umbrella (7)
10. Lash out, left locked inside plant (7)
11. Joint given to one about to leave (5)
12. Familiar US stars, including outstanding diver (3,6)
13. Pre-arranged drill without approval, among rocky bens (8)
15. It's no more than a drop of water (4)
19. Noisily opening carriage (4)
- Resumed, given international honours again (8)
23. Invoice timber for hoarding (9)
24. Stalks maiden on trail (5)
26. Capture in sudden attack (7)
27. Leather case in rambling hostelry, not closed (7)
28. Outcome of a word in confidence on'es given away (9)

DOWN

1. One leaving papers around found a *Listener* under bed (9)
2. Under protest, bishop has to stand down (5)
3. Second team cap or lid (5-3)
4. Did Babel spread improvised words? (8)
5. Condescend to accept direction in project (6)
6. Write up tablet if needing stimulus (6)
7. Tip to get rid of old car (5,4)
8. A bit of Asparagus — mint may be added (5)
14. Picture, even so, is not wholly devoid of animation (5-4)
16. Fatty type of make MOH ponder (9)
17. Try graphite first for slugs (4,4)
18. Graduate composer getting up function (8)
21. A bishop, by roman law, has to recant (6)
22. Brownie's eccentric cycle (6)
23. Support for anecdotes taken from Xenophon's history (5)
25. Extremist, having given up painting, left university (5)

DOWN : 1. Litterbug 2. Demob 3. Screw-top 4. Adlibbed 5. Design 6. Fillip 7. Scrap heap 8. Spear 14. Still life 16. Endomorph 17. Leadshot 18. Bachelor 21. Abuse
 22. Camera 23. Basis 25. Ultra
ACROSS : 1. Lady's maid 6. Fists 9. Tumbrel 10. Spurge 11. Elbow 12. Big dipper 13. Bespoken 15. Mere 19. Gait 20. Recapped 23. Billiard 24. Haulm 26. Seizure 27. Holster 28. Sieve 29. Aftermath

SOLUTION

BRIDGE

55

NORTH
 ♠ K 8 6
 ♥ 8 6 5
 ♦ K 6 4
 ♣ Q 9 3 2

WEST **EAST**
 ♠ 5 3 ♠ J 10 2
 ♥ Q J 10 3 ♥ A 9 4 2
 ♦ Q 10 9 2 ♦ 3
 ♣ A 10 6 ♣ K J 8 7 5

SOUTH
 ♠ A Q 9 7 4
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ A J 8 7 5
 ♣ 4

Vulnerable: North-South
 Dealer: West

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

Opening lead: Heart queen

"You pay a great deal too dear for what's given freely."

— SHAKESPEARE

When declarer gives you an opportunity to score a small trump, should you grab it while you can? Be careful. Not many declarers are certified members of the Philanthropic Trick-Donating Society.

West leads his heart queen to East's ace, and East returns a heart to South's king. After South cashes the ace and king of trumps, he leaves a trump at large to begin the diamonds. He cashes dummy's diamond king and leads another diamond. Should East ruff with his "useless" trump jack?

If he does, he is betting South has forgotten to draw East's last rump. If East accepts South's gift and ruffs with his trump jack, South enjoys an easy time. He cashes his diamond ace and ruffs a diamond with dummy's last trump, limiting his losses to only a heart, a club and the diamond ruff.

It's a different story if East is suspicious and refuses to ruff. After East discards, what can South do? If he cashes his ace and concedes a diamond, West will cash his club ace and lead a fourth diamond for East to ruff. And if South finishes in diamonds, the onetrick set arrives even sooner.

Ruffing one of declarer's winners is a good strategy; ruffing one of his losers is usually worth nothing. ■

Banking For The Rural Poor

By BAL RAM POUDEL

The modern banking sector has developed significantly after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. More than a dozen joint-venture banks (JVBs) are in operation today. These banks are in cutthroat competition in urban areas to optimize profits. Credit card, Automated Teller Machine, diverse banking transactions, mobile banking are some of the modern facilities seen in the major cities of Nepal these days.

The rural poor might have expected the development of the banking sector to contribute in a meaningful way to bringing them out of their poverty. Many policy makers probably had the same feeling. The rural branches of two old commercial banks, Nepal Bank Ltd. (NBL) and Rastriya Banijya Bank Ltd. (RBB), too, might have expected the new banks to support their decades-long

endeavors to serve the rural poor.

The contributions of the RBB and the NBL in rural Nepal are laudable, although they were set up with same objectives of the JVBs - to provide banking services to the nation and optimize profits for investors.

In Nepal, more than 80 percent of the population resides in the rural areas. Unemployment, endemic poverty and lack of economic opportunities are major hindrances to national development endeavors. Development efforts are now being gradually diverted toward rural areas. In the absence of the rural community's easy access to banks, however, these efforts would prove meaningless.

In many places, it takes up to two days' walk to reach to the nearest branch of the RBB or the NBL (and in some instances, the Agriculture Development Bank), which are located at district headquarters. Transportation, where it is available, is expensive for most people.

The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the nation's central bank, develops policies and priorities for effective operation of financial institutions. Another important function of the central bank is to streamline financial institutions in keeping with the nation's development priorities.

The NRB requires banks to open one rural branch or two sub-urban ranches (branches in adjoining Village Development Committees of specified municipalities) before they can open an urban branch. In addition, a bank is required to invest 12 percent of its total investment in the priority sectors.

Saving and credit groups and co-operatives are symbols of local efforts and initiatives. Their effort to serve the community as an alternative banking system needs to be appreciated. How-

ever, low capital base, insufficient educational and management skills as well as lack of clear vision for the future are hindering them. Because of legal provisions, cooperatives have very limited banking functions. Moreover, they are mostly limited to areas where other development programs are implemented with external support, mainly through NGOs and INGOs.

Is this what the rural poor were expecting? Are existing policies properly implemented in order to ensure the welfare of the rural poor? Isn't the urban-centered banking approach unfair to the majority of Nepalis who live in rural areas and are the backbone of national economic development? There are reports in the media that priority-sector investment is often placed as fixed deposit in the same JVB in the name of some rural development bank. The penalty that the NRB may impose for violating these rules (either opening branch or investing into priority sector) is very soft on offenders.

The nation needs to concentrate on how policies and practices could be made more equitable toward the needy and the rural poor.

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could be made more equitable toward the needy and the rural poor. One very courageous step would be to ask these banks to invest by opening branches in specified areas. The NRB can do this by ranking the districts according to the economic development index as well as economic viability. Furthermore, District Development Committees could be involved to determine the priority for specific locations

(say, Village Development Committees). The requirement to open rural branches before opening an urban branch should be strictly implemented. Priority-sector investment needs to be accelerated and banks should invest only through their own rural branches rather than keeping funds in fixed deposits at urban centers in the name of some rural financial institutions.

The present policies need to be reviewed and reworked. The NRB needs to fulfill its supervisory role effectively and honestly. Another important task is to provide better guidance to saving and credit cooperatives so that, in the end, they could serve the wider community more effectively. The major challenge undoubtedly would lie in implementing these policies effectively.

Economic upliftment of the rural poor is essential not only for the nation but also for the JVBs and other financial institutions in order to maintain their present level of profitability over the long term. Only then can our vision of development and a more equitable society be translated into reality. ■

(Mr. Poudel is an ACCA student)

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