

our country, where the term "Erblast" (inherited burden) was introduced into the political vocabulary, just as well as in Nepal. For everything that does not function properly in Nepal, for all shortcomings and hindrances in development, the Panchayat System is blamed. But in fact, problems have remained the same and people as well - apart from the politicians who are now in power or are still fighting for power. Likewise, the vested interests - first of all land property - are vehemently defended today no less than before by those who enjoy them. When I worked in Nepal during the Panchayat era, I happened to see during the village elections how poor, small farmers elected the big landowner or the moneylender, not only because he was the only one who knew reading and writing and was at home on the political scene, but also because as a tenant or debtor they were dependent on him. This may not have changed very much and often project proposals fail to consider land tenure as an important datum.

We shall see whether the multiparty-democracy can handle the basic problems of economic development in Nepal, with the same people, the same civil servants and the same advisers, better than its predecessors: population increase, devastation of resources, the open border to India, transport problems and - as a consequence - the generally spread misery of a substantial part of the population.

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INTERVIEWS

Kathmandu - Present and Future: An Interview with Mr. P.L. Singh, Mayor of Kathmandu

Susanne von der Heide

The interview was taken by Susanne von der Heide on the 25th of April 1993 in Chetrapati, Kathmandu. Mr. Singh has now been Mayor of Kathmandu for nearly one year. He is a leading member of the ruling Nepali Congress Party.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q: People have long since expressed concern for the future of Kathmandu City. What are your immediate plans and what are your experiences so far?

A: Well, the experience for Kathmandu is primarily that prior to the election, I thought that Kathmandu City was suffering from 'cancer' - but, what I found out, is that the city is suffering from an 'overflow of Aid'.

Q: What exactly do you mean by that?

A: Well, as you may well be aware, Nepal is considered one of the poorest countries in the world. This has had the effect that Nepal in recent years has had no problem with donor-countries being willing to implement a large range of aid-projects in various fields. Let me make one point clear: the Nepalese people are grateful for this. However, what I soon realized as mayor is that the city doesn't have any infrastructure and planning, even to deal with this flow of projects being steadily offered us. And moreover, this has been totally neglected in former times. For instance, there are already a number of projects concerning water supply, but we do not up till now have any overall planning in respect to the basic organisation of this supply, a crucial thing for the functioning of any city. So first we need to have a manageable infrastructure.

Q: What have you achieved so far?

A: Let me say something first. Another problem has long been pressing. I have to clean the city of junk. Previously, some foreign projects have been targeting this problem, not unsuccessfully, but we have only seen the beginning. Even before I could start doing anything about the problems, my primary task was to gain a fair overview of the extent of the scrapes facing my administration. It would have been far too easy just to initiate a number of projects in the most problematic areas such as solving water need, electricity, garbage, pollution, town-settlement problems, road-building etc. without having any previously conceived basic planning. This is what has taken most of my time in the last nine months, simply fact-finding and organisation. So far I tried to clean several places in Kathmandu successfully. But that can be seen only as a beginning.

Q: As a frequent guest to Nepal, this is something which always strikes the visitor, the lack of infrastructure. Since this has now become a top priority for you, what are your visions for the city beyond that?

A: I want the Kathmandu Valley to become green and pure again. To achieve that objective, I must start, even on a small scale, to implement ecologically sensible initiatives. But more generally, my visions for the city include a number of considerations. Firstly, the cultural perspective, that is to preserve my culture. Secondly, to safeguard the environment and the natural beauty of this valley. These factors are also decisive for our foreign friends. Thirdly, I especially want to put an emphasis on agriculture and horticulture, since, in keeping with my pre-electionary statements, Kathmandu must again become clean, green and healthy. At the moment, Kathmandu is exactly the opposite. It is not green, not clean and therefore not healthy.

This must now be done, because unless we make it clean, no one will come and visit us. You know that tourism is our "golden goose". If the tourists don't come anymore, I don't think we shall be able to survive in the future. Proper actions must therefore be taken within three to four months. I have to say this, not only to the locals and nationals, but also to the international community, that Kathmandu is otherwise dying.

Q: What are the perspectives within this short period; to do action-planning in view of the necessary cooperation with the central government?

A: Although it is a city problem, that is, a municipal matter, it has not yet become the municipal matter it should. In other words, although we are talking about decentralization, there is still centralization. Naturally, the necessary executive power has to be transferred to the municipal level within the next three or four months. Power has to be shared.

Q: In what condition did you find Kathmandu when you became mayor?

A: The whole city was in a big mess, just like a fish-market! To start cleaning up is not easy, where shall you begin?

Problems are everywhere. Just to get an overview, I regularly meet with colleagues and experts on global and urban planning in order to exchange views and to learn. Through these meetings I hopefully get some lessons from more "mature" cities and at the same time they get to know my situation. I am convinced that the exchange of views will be useful for my city.

Q: How do you face the discrepancies in your administration?

A: There is a task-force, and the UDLE (Urban Development through Local Efforts, a German project) is there to assist me. They have just started and within the next weeks I shall hear more about the results.

Q: Do you plan to form administrative committees where people will have responsibility for certain sections and areas of the city?

A: Certainly. I believe in decentralization. I believe in action-oriented programmes, because in the last thirty years there were so many seminars and workshops and if you collect all the published documents, it will fill more than a library. But that's it. I am not going to make the same mistake and for me time is precious.

Q: How is the reaction in the population so far?

A: There is a good response and my visions are well received. But what does a good response mean, considering the fact that people here for the last thirty years have been treated like politically immature children, not knowing what responsibility, awareness and consciousness actually mean. I therefore regard it as one of my major objectives to create a sense of awareness and engagement among the population, an awareness which simply hasn't existed before.

Q: It is generally known that mental changes demand hard work. This must be a huge challenge. How will you cope with that?

A: Aside from getting the overview concerning the problems and initiating investigations for building an infrastructure, I have in the last five to six months tried to convince people with arguments, but these are not enough, therefore I attempt to increase their awareness in different fields, such as family-awakening, - for hygienic and sanitary reasons, group-awakening, which means that people themselves take initiatives, establish organisations concerning their own problems. An increasing awareness of the individual versus the group and vice versa. This, in the long run, will conduce to a heightened awareness of nature. People's participation is crucial.

Q: This, I presume, is grassroots policy - Nepalese way?

A: Exactly! I want decentralization and people's participation so I must encourage people to shape their own future. That means grassroots in the most common sense.

Q: Have your personal feelings changed from when you took over the chair and up to now?

A: Before my election as mayor I thought that the population problems needed priority, but after having been in the chair for some months now, I tend to give poverty problems the highest priority. But a foreigner who comes to Kathmandu thinks immediately about our pollution problems. It seems all problems start with 'p', poverty, population, pollution, parking concerning traffic, but 'p' can also stand for prime minister, political parties, and police, and can also be people's participation which I am emphasizing, and my name starts also with 'p' so I don't know if there is going to be a problem with me.

More than ever, I wish that we could show more discipline, then it wouldn't be so difficult for me to work - it would be easier to implement things. Being a mayor, I don't want to be like a Pradhan Panch before. My job is to plan and devise strategies, and not to take it as an ordinary routine job.

Q: You mentioned the traffic problems here in Kathmandu. What are you going to do in the future?

A: For the moment I can tell you that with the help of the Japanese government, a new bus-terminal is going to be established outside the valley, so the location of the old bus-stand was wrongly situated and has contributed seriously to the pollution in the area. To regulate traffic, there will moreover be a link-road to the bus-stand so that people have easy access. I plan a shuttle bus-service for 24 hours to secure cheap travelling for the common people. People in the bus-service will be trained and right now I am getting experts from India to start with that.

Q: What about the pollution from the three-wheel rikshaws?

A: I want to get rid of them in the long run and new licences have already stopped being issued. Once I give better service to the people by, for example, having a better infrastructure, there shall be new jobs, also for the unemployed scooter-drivers.

Q: Nepal's largest exporting industry, carpet production, has become environmentally unbearable, because a part of the production includes the chemical washing of the carpet. I know that certain factories have been urged to shift out of Kathmandu, but many are still situated in the city. What do you want to do about that?

A: The prime minister is committed to that and I endorse it. Instead of forcing them to leave, we should try to persuade them - public pressure is already there.

We should give a sort of initiative on a district level: the plans are, for example, to shift the carpet industry to places in the Tarai. There is enough space and water, so new commercial zones could be established there; and if carpet washing is necessary in the Tarai it should be done as in Kakani where ecologically safe carpet washing takes place! Until now the German-Swiss carpet washing project is the only environmentally clean one. I want the Kathmandu Valley to have pollution-free industries. Like I said in the beginning we plan to concentrate on agriculture and horticulture: I see a good future for herbal and seed production as well as for tissue culture. With our Japanese friends we have discussed these matters and they have shown great

interest in cottage industries producing computer spare parts in the valley. Considerations are so serious that we are negotiating on having a direct flight from Osaka to Kathmandu in 1994.

Q: My last question leads back to the problems you are facing with the carpet industry and factories. What will you do about child labour and prostitution in these factories?

A: At the moment I try to get more facts and figures in order to take immediate action as soon as possible. UNICEF, for example will soon start up a project which will bring children into SOS children's villages. But this can only be seen as a beginning.

Thank you very much for this interview.

On Political Culture in Contemporary Nepal: An Interview with Professor Lok Raj Baral

Martin Gaenzle

Lok Raj Baral is Professor of Political Science at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, where he was head of the Political Science Department from 1976 to 1988. As a critical observer of political developments during the Panchayat period he first published *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* in 1977 - after which his position as a professor was temporarily endangered - and then *Nepal's Politics of Referendum: A Study of Groups, Personalities and Trends* (1983). A later study, published in 1990, dealt with *Regional Migrations, Ethnicity and Security: The South Asian Case*. His latest book titled *Nepal: Problems of Governance* (1993) came out recently: this he had prepared before the democracy movement in 1990, but he revised the entire manuscript after the fundamental political changes which were brought about during that year. Being the president of the newly-established Political Science Association of Nepal (POLSAN), he convened the first South Asian Political Science Conference in June 1992, the proceedings of which he edited under the title *South Asia: Democracy and the Road Ahead*. (1992). He is also the president of an NGO called "Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercise" (SCOPE) which aims at strengthening the process of democratization. Professor Baral hit the headlines early 1993 when he was asked to chair the advisory committee on the controversial Tanakpur issue in January. As the Supreme Court had ruled in December 1992 that the agreement between Prime Minister Koirala and his Indian counterpart on the Tanakpur barrage was in fact a treaty requiring ratification, the government was under pressure to decide on the exact status of the treaty, and therefore the mode of ratification, i.e. either by a simple or a two third majority in parliament. As this question had been left open by the Supreme Court, the government sought advice from the "Baral Committee" which eventually