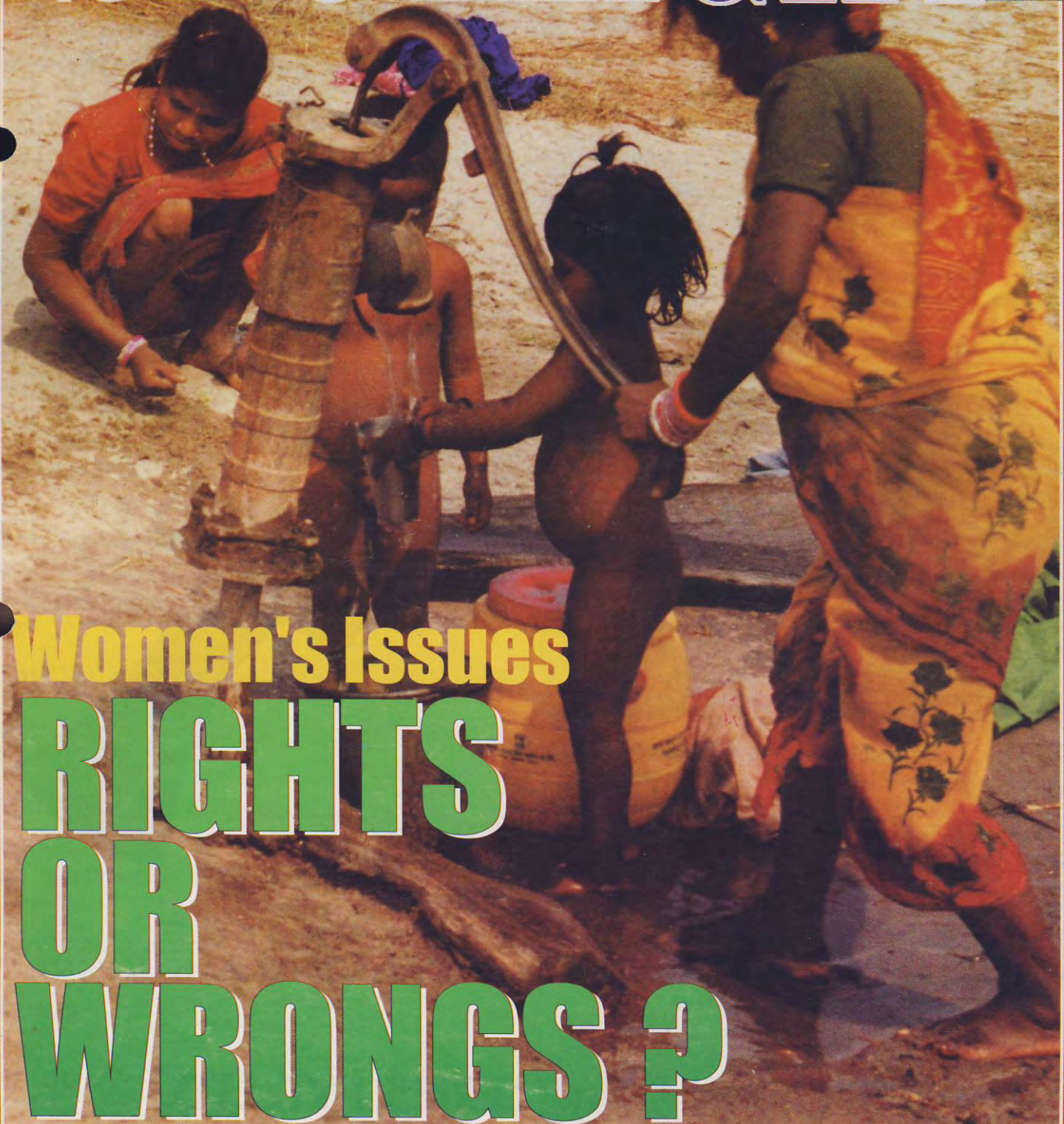




The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

March 9-15, 2001



Women's Issues RIGHTS OR WRONGS??

Special Report:
Maoists At A Turning Point

- Impact of Indian Budget
- Nepse Crashes, Share prices fall
- Community Forestry: Under Threat

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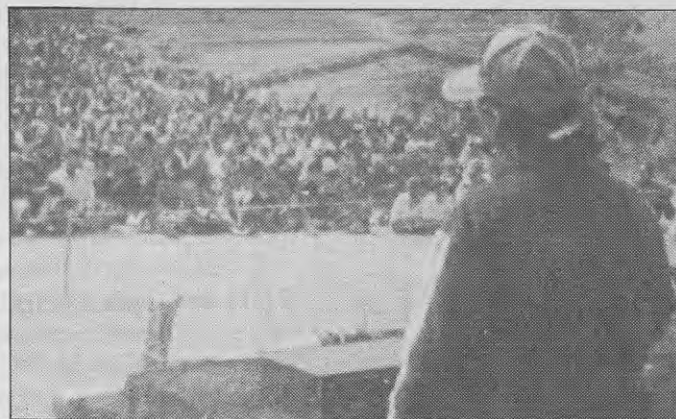
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COVER STORY : RIGHTS OR WRONGS?

By projecting the issue of property rights only, Nepal's women's movement has overlooked other crucial aspects-the education and stability of the family unit.

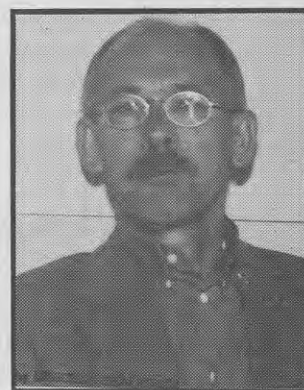
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SPECIAL REPORT : Maoist Movement

As the second national conference of the underground party adopts a 'flexible policy' it might signify a turning point in the 5-year-old insurgency.

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INTERVIEW : JAN deWITTE

The Honorary Consul of Royal Netherlands Consulate says the democratic process in Nepal is moving.

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SPOTLIGHT

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Ten thousand miles away from home worries do not seem to stop chasing. Till writing this column on 5 March the impasse in Nepal's Parliament does not seem to resolve. It is totally unimportant whether the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is right or the opposition. That the poor country and the unfortunate people of the miserable country are suffering needs no emphasis. In such critical situation what has impelled the Prime Minister to embark upon a foreign jaunt beggars our ordinary comprehension. More enigmatic is the French decision to receive the beleaguered Nepalese Prime Minister who may have to quit in a very ignominious way. Since it has become very difficult for us to appreciate the moves of either government, we will wait for the visit to end before we announce our verdict.

* * *

Undoubtedly, King Birendra's visit to the friendly country of the People's Republic of China has been 'remarkable.' In our last issue of the magazine we had wished the monarch a very happy and successful visit. That the visit was more successful than we had wished for is the true reflection of the respect the people and the government of China hold for our sovereign and the sincere friendship they cherish for the Nepalese people. Since we are not aware of the details of the outcome of the visit, we are not in a position to comment. But we can rest assured that there could be nothing to worry at all and the relations between the two countries must have attained to even greater heights.

* * *

That India has at last, relented to the meeting of the foreign secretaries of the SAARC countries must be taken as a positive step in the right direction. The set back the organization had to endure due to India's unwillingness to participate in the dialogue along with the Pakistanis after Pervez Musharraf's take over has adversely affected the development of SAARC hurting the interest of the smaller members to a greater degree. It is indeed a great pity that the towering stature of India in South Asia has not been able to generate the kind of confidence that is so indispensable to turn SAARC into an economic bulwark. Attempts to win over their unstained allegiance by punitive policies or exploiting their smallness and other vulnerabilities have always been counterproductive to Indian interest must come home to the Indian policy makers. The sooner the better. They have to understand now after more than five decades, that they can never step into the shoes of their colonial masters. SAARC is an institution that can unite all the members into a solid bloc capable of withstanding great pressures, political or economic. It would be in India's overall interest not to hurt the smaller neighbors by ignoring the speedy development of SAARC. As such forgetting the misguided policies of the past India should start giving second thoughts to focus on safeguarding the interests of all the SAARC countries. ■

Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher

FACE TO FACE: Rebecca McDuff INTERVIEW: Dr. Mohan Man Sainju

The National News Magazine

SPOTLIGHT

March 2-8, 2001

Economy Walking on a TIGHT ROPE

Special Report: CIAA Vs Attorney General

Economic Concerns

The road ahead for newly appointed Finance Minister Dr Ram Sharan Mahat is indeed rough, to say the least ("Walking On A Tight Rope" SPOTLIGHT, March 2-8). The basic economic indicators are not good enough and it would be an uphill task for the minister to maintain a growth rate above 6 percent. Instead, the decision to set up an armed police force will eat away a large part of the country's scarce resources. Times are really bad for Nepal in terms of economic prospects. An experienced person like Dr. Mahat will have to employ all his knowledge and experience to overcome the troubles.

Kiran Shrestha
Ghattekula

witnessed in general elections, with apparently huge money spent on posters, pamphlets and so on. I wonder where the money comes from. Is there no authority that can investigate these matters? The situation is getting worse. The best solution could be doing away with this whole concept of elections in campuses. This is irrelevant in a democratic country.

Rabindra Karki
Bagdole, Jawalakhel

Wrong Priorities

Your cover story "At The Crossroads" (SPOTLIGHT, Feb 23-March 1) is probably one of the most realistic portrayal of the progress made and problems faced by Nepal's education sector over the last five decades. However, the story was completely silent about the significance of technical education in Nepal.

My main concern is with the growing population, unemployment and poverty in the nation. A developing country like ours lacks technician and researchers to harness its potentials. To overcome this gap, children need to be technically educated from the very initial stages of the learning phase.

A recent World Bank report provides an interesting data: only 6 percent of the education budget is invested technical education. If this trend continues, the number of academically educated persons will rise in no time. But where are they going to find jobs? On the other hand, do we keep on hiring technicians from abroad? I would like to thank your team for bringing out such an interesting article. Keep it up.

Iswar Pokharel
Vijay Chowk

Acharya Escapes

The appointment of Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat as finance minister in place of Mahesh Acharya suggests that the latter was terrified of the dreadful economic situation of the country ("Walking On A Tight Rope" SPOTLIGHT, March 2-8). Having presented the budget, Acharya was likely to receive the bulk of criticism for failing to deliver. That might be why he decided to abandon Bag Durbar.

Binaya Dhoj Joshi
Samakhushi

Salary Vs Efficiency

Mahesh Acharya raised the salaries of civil servants substantially in last year's budget hoping that would result in greater efficiency ("Walking

On A Tight Rope" SPOTLIGHT, March 2-8). Now the time has come to evaluate how much that decision achieved its goal. Otherwise, government employees might continue with their tradition of asking for a raise but not doing their job well. A carrot-and-stick approach must be followed to ensure bureaucratic efficiency.

Ramesh Satyal
Jhamsikhel

Broken Promises

Nine months after Mahesh Acharya presented the budget, the Nepalese people are forced to reflect on the heap of broken promises ("Walking On A Tight Rope" SPOTLIGHT March 2-8). Where does the promise of imposing fiscal dis-

cipline lay? How much development work has been done in Maoist-affected areas? What's happening with the much-touted civil service reforms? These are but a few questions that demand urgent answers.

Sabin Thapa
Kuleshwor

Detach Politics

The over-politicization of educational institutions has led to the deterioration in the quality of education in the country ("At The Crossroads" SPOTLIGHT, February 23-March 1). The recent student union elections in campuses across the country was a glaring example of how politics is driving away academic spirit. The campaign in the student election was very much like that

Ambassador Gautam Returns Home

Royal Nepalese Ambassador to the United States, Damodar Gautam, has returned home after the government abruptly recalled him before the completion of his tenure, a newspaper report said. Gautam refused to comment on the affair but sources said he was engaged in a "letter war" with Foreign Secretary Narayan S. Thapa regarding the government's decision. He even challenged Thapa to mention if he had made any mistake during his assignment in Washington D.C. Thapa did not respond. The government had decided to recall Gautam, a former chief secretary, reportedly because of the prime minister's "unhappiness" over his performance. Gautam returned home after completing less than two and half years of his four-year term. *Nepal Samacharpatra* March 2.

Nepal Condemns Taleban ACT

The Nepalese government has condemned what it described as reprehensible acts of the Taleban government to demolish the statues of Lord Buddha in Afghanistan. In a statement issued Thursday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it is a matter of deep concern for the

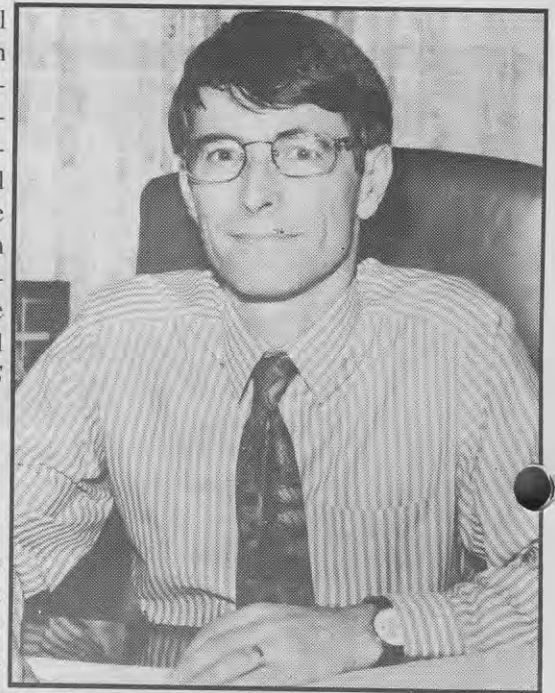
government and the people of Nepal that two ancient Buddha statues in central Bamiyan province of Afghanistan have been partially damaged and disfigured. "It is, therefore, only appropriate that we call upon all the peace-loving people and governments worldwide to join hands and begin diplomatic representations in an effort to preserve and safeguard this world cultural heritage," the ministry said. *RSS reports* March 2.

Religious Groups Slam Move

A number of organizations have condemned the Taleban government's decision to destroy more than 2,000-year-old Buddha idols in Bamiyan province of Afghanistan. In a statement, Dharmodaya Sabha, a Buddhist organization, said the despicable act of the Taleban government deserves condemnation from all. World Hindu Federation, Human Rights Organization of Nepal and other organizations have also condemned the Taleban government's recent decision. *Compiled from reports* March 5.

ADB To Provide Over Rs. 22 Billion Loan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to provide a loan worth Rs. 22.64 billion (US\$ 306 million) to the Nepalese government to help implement projects focusing mainly on poverty alleviation during the next two years. Talking to reporters Friday, ADB resident representative Dr. Richard Vokes said 75 percent of the 2002-2004 loans would directly address poverty reduction, pri-

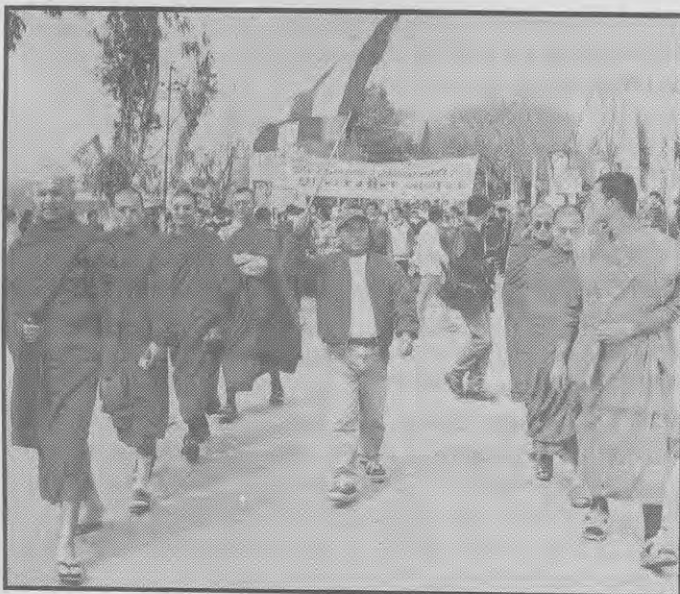


Vokes

marily in social infrastructure and agriculture sector. Most of the proposed loans would come in small packages. The bank is also a lead financier in the Melamchi Water Supply project and the Kaligandaki a hydro-electricity project. Meanwhile, an ADB mission that visited Nepal last month, held consultations with senior government officials on issues related to ADB's support for the government's poverty reduction strategy, and initial work to prepare a Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreement between ADB and the government, among others. *Compiled from reports* March 3.

Army To Stop Illegal Trade

The government is preparing to mobilize Royal Nepal Army personnel to control illegal trade at five major customs points bordering India and China, a leading newspaper reported Friday. After police and local administration failed to check growing illegal trade, the government has decided to mobilize the army, a senior official at the Finance Ministry said. The government is drawing up plans to mobilize the army at Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj customs bordering India and at Tatopani customs bor-



Buddhists in a protest rally

dering the Tibet autonomous region of China. Nearly 250 army personnel will start patrolling the open border at these custom points beginning this month. According to a report compiled by the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, goods worth nearly Rs 10 billion are entering Nepal from India and those worth Rs 1 billion from Tibet annually without paying duty. If the illegal trade could be controlled, Nepal's customs revenue could go up by nearly 50 percent, the report said. Officials hope that with the mobilization of army, other criminal activities along the border could also be checked to a great extent. **Kan-tipur March 2.**

Ex-Kamaiyas To Get Land Within Two Months

The government has directed the convenors of the land registration committees being sent to the districts to complete the work of registering the land being occupied by the landless and former kamaiyas (bonded laborers) within the month of Chaitra (mid-April) this year, RSS news agency reports. According to the Ministry of Land Reforms and Management, a meeting held under the chairmanship of Minister for Local Development Govinda Raj Joshi also directed the district executive committees concerned to extend necessary cooperation to the land registration committees. The government has decided to provide up to five kathas of land to the former kamaiyas in Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts. The Nepali Congress government had declared the kamaiyas free from debt bondage in July last year but is yet to properly rehabilitate them. Meanwhile, former US President Jimmy Carter has written letters to King Birendra and senior government officials drawing their attention to the pathetic conditions in which former kamaiyas are living. **Compiled from reports March 1.**

'Hotel Strike Will Cause Huge Losses'

After hotel employees unions declared that they would resort to nationwide strike beginning March 15 to press



Tourists in a hotel

their demand of 10 per cent service charge, Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) has said the proposed strike would demolish the entire industry. Terming the strike as 'illegal', HAN said during each day of strike the number of average tourist arrival of 1,500 per day will come down to zero; tourism receipts of around 460,000 dollars per day will be lost and the nation will lose about Rs 5 million being collected daily from the tourism sector as value added tax (VAT). Similarly, the daily transaction of around Rs 55 million in the tourism industry will come to a halt as 350 travel agencies, 846 hotels, 400 trekking agents, 70 rafting companies and 600 restaurants will be closed. Moreover, the strike will put around 1.5 million hotel employees and their dependants under financial crisis, the association said. Hotel workers have

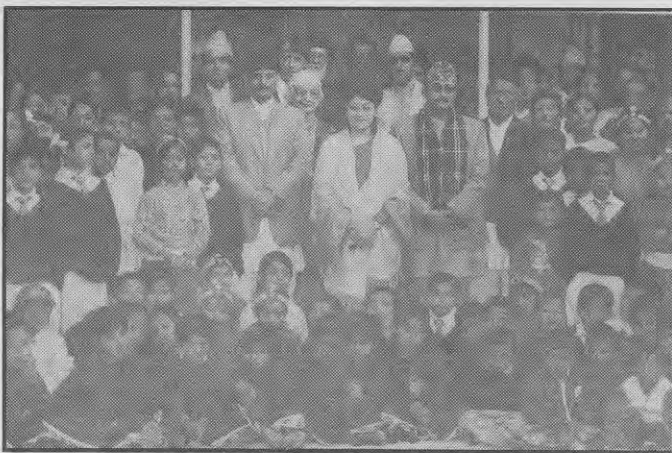
threatened to go on a nationwide strike if their demand of mandatory introduction of 10 percent service charge is not met. **Compiled from reports March 2.**

Verdict On Lauda Air Deal In Mid-April

The Supreme Court has said it will rule on the controversial Lauda Air deal on April 18 this year. The court is hearing the Lauda Air deal case in response to a petition filed by advocates Gopal Sivakoti "Chintan" and Rajaram Dhakal in November last year arguing that deal was illegal and full of irregularities. The writ had named the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretariat, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, RNAC, ICTC and Nepal Rastra Bank as respondents. **Compiled from reports March 3.**

French Programs On NTV

Canal France International (CFI) has been providing French television programs to Nepal Television (NTV) for the last two years, according to its representative Sophie Le Bars. CFI is a program provider funded by French Foreign Office. It provides programs based on education, scientific discoveries, sports and entertainment to television stations worldwide. In Asia, the CFI has been providing program to countries like Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Nepal, among others. 'We buy programs from different French television stations and provide that to stations the world over,' Sophie said. Many times, the French programs are provided with English subtitle. 'We are also interested in providing programs to private television stations,' she said. To avail of CFI's facilities, the station has to buy a decoder after which they can downlink the programs for free.



Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya and Crown Prince Dipendra at the inauguration of the building of Child Heaven International Canada

FOUR HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS HAVE DEMANDED that the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) also be involved in the verification process of Bhutanese refugees. The governments of Nepal and Bhutan have set up a Joint Verification Team (JVT) for this purpose. In a memorandum submitted to Foreign Minister Chakra Bastola and Bhutanese Foreign Minister Jigme Y. Thinley separately, Human Rights Watch, Lutheran World Foundation, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and Refugee International have expressed apprehension about the procedures for joint verification. These groups have questioned what they said was lack of clarity regarding the documents required for the verification, absence of any independent appeal process and absence of provisions for refugees to be accompanied to their verification interview, if any. The JVT visited seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal in late January but is yet to agree upon a mechanism to kick-start the verification process. Nearly 100,000 Bhutanese refugees are languishing in these camps for more than last one decade.

NEPAL PRODUCED MORE THAN 400 TONNES OF SEEDS IN 2000, up from 270 tonnes in 1998. According to Seed Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (SEAN), seeds of radish comprise nearly 50 percent of total seeds produced in Nepal. According to fortnightly magazine NEPAL, in the last fiscal year 1999/2000, Nepal exported more than 250 tonnes of radish seeds to Switzerland, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Japan. Seed producers have alleged the government of ignoring this important sector. SEAN has demanded concessional loans and duty concessions in the imports of packaging materials for seed producers, among others, with the government.

AT LEAST 26 CHILDREN HAVE DIED OF MEASLES IN REMOTE northern district of Kalikot, authorities said. According to local VDC officials, the epidemic started sometime last week, and had severely affected children aged one to 12, mainly in Chhapre, Pankha and Chilkhaya village development committees. Officials at the District Health Office in Manma said they were unaware of the measles outbreak. Chief District Officer of Kalikot, Mukunda Dhakal, however, said he had directed concerned authorities to dispatch paramedics to the affected villages.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAS DISPATCHED A TEAM OF medical doctors to Jhapa to make necessary arrangements for preventing the recent outbreak of mysterious fever epidemic in Siliguri and surrounding areas in India from spreading to bordering areas on the

Nepalese side. According to director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division at the Department of Health Services Dr. Mahendra Bahadur Bista, the team will collect and test blood samples of the people of some VDCs in eastern district of Jhapa. So far, there is no indication of the disease spreading to the Nepalese side, the division said.

ROYAL NEPAL AIRLINES CORPORATION (RNAC) SUFFERED a loss of over 80 million rupees due to the wide body Lauda Air jet during the one and the half months period ending mid-January this year, Kantipur daily reported. According to the statistics provided by RNAC to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the parliament, the corporation had earned a profit of over Rs.90 million during October-November last year before the B-767 Jet arrived. But in the following months, losses mounted to over Rs. 29 million and Rs. 120 million respectively. RNAC had leased the aircraft from Lauda Air, an Austrian company, for a period of 18 months beginning December 2000.

A MONTH AFTER THE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE-HIT Gujarat state of India, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has said it will conduct a study on Earthquake Disaster Mitigation in the Kathmandu valley. The 12-month long study will be conducted in close association with Nepali officials, reports said. Experts say if a large-scale earthquake occurs, Kathmandu valley will suffer immense damage to human lives and property. They warn that Nepal is ill prepared to face a massive quake that is likely to hit this Himalayan kingdom in the foreseeable future.

IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR 2000/01, total government expenditure has decelerated due mainly to the deceleration in development as well as freeze in expenditures despite a significant growth in regular expenditure. According to a report published by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), during the review period resource mobilization grew by 18.2 percent as a result of higher growth in both revenue receipts and foreign cash grants. However, because of high government spending, budgetary deficit widened. The rate of inflation, on point-to-point basis, was recorded at 2 percent, mainly because of the decline in the prices of food and beverage group. In the external front, a robust growth of exports accompanied by a comparatively slower growth of imports helped narrow down the trade deficit during the review period.

PRODUCERS OF NEPALI CINEMA HAVE DEMANDED THAT the government recognize them as a 'manufacturing industry.' President of Nepal Film Producers' Association and noted actor Neer Shah said 200 percent customs duty, need to obtain license for the import of film making equipment and bureaucratic hassles, among others, have discouraged producers from making further investment, said Shah. According to entrepreneurs, the Nepali film industry presently has an investment of over Rs 160 million but occupies only 5 percent of the total film business in the country. The Bollywood films occupy the rest, Kantipur daily reported.

THE FINNISH EMBASSY IN KATHMANDU HAS EXTENDED A grant assistance worth Rs 4.4 million to launch 'Democratic Education and Library Development Project' in Palpa and Kavrepalanchok districts. Nepal-Finland Society (NFS) will implement the project. An agreement to this effect was signed by Charge d' affaires at the Finnish embassy, Asko Luukkainen, and President of Nepal-Finland Society Ram Thapaliya amidst a ceremony here Friday. The project will help establish 10 well-equipped libraries and impart democratic education to high school level students through interactions at the village as well as national level. Established 10 years back, the society now has nearly 500 members. ■

“**H**e may be visiting France to engineer another 'Lauda scandal'. Perhaps, his visit is part of the game-plan to bring in Air Bus (for the Royal Nepal Airlines).”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, UML general secretary, addressing the press in Dang, in Kantipur.

* * *

“**P**lacing Nepal on the priority list of French aid recipients is my main agenda.”
— **Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala**, talking to reporters before embarking on an official visit to France.

* * *

“**E**verybody should now think with a cool head. It is not proper to continue obstructing parliament.”
— **Lokendra Bahadur Chand**, former prime minister and leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, in Bimarsha.

* * *

“**W**e will not back down from our demands for the PM's resignation under any pressure.”
— **Pashupati SJB Rana**, lawmaker of Rastriya Prajatantra Party, in Drishti.

* * *



Buddharah

“**I** have already formed my opinion. I am for giving the ancestral property rights to daughters.”
— **Taranath Rana Bhat**, Speaker at the House of Representatives, in Ghatana Ra Bichar.

* * *

“**I**t is not a simple labor movement against the hotel owners but a political game that is far away from reality.”
— **Narendra Bajracharya**, President of Hotel Association of Nepal, about the ensuing differences between hotel workers and owners, in Jana Bhawana.

* * *



Nepalipatra

“**A**ll kinds of alternatives should be explored without putting prime minister's position at risk.”
— **Sarbadhan Rai**, Nepali Congress MP, in Nepalipatra.

* * *

“**T**he situation five years ago was hopeless. But now, Nepal is regarded a model country to make exemplary progress in the control of tuberculosis.”
— **Dr. Dirgha Singh Bam**, director of National Tuberculosis Center and SAARC Tuberculosis Center, in Punarjagan.

* * *

Friend Of All

Eleven years ago, when Girija Prasad Koirala declared that the success of the People's Movement was a victory not only for the Nepali Congress and communists but also for the panchas, infuriated comrades at the open air theatre tried to drown his speech in a crescendo of hoots. Last week, when leading figures of that despotic system now grouped as the RPP criticized Prime Minister Koirala, communists found themselves nodding in appreciation. RPP leader Surya



Thapa : Foes turned allies

Bahadur Thapa must have felt an immense sense of triumph in being able to share the stage with communist leaders, including the radical CPN-Masal, at that same theatre. Indeed, politics is the art of the possible.

Bhattarai's Strategy

Congress leader and former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai is a shrewd practitioner of politics and his reputation for frequent flip-flops appears to have helped him. After the publication of his authorised biography a few months ago, many saw in Bhattarai someone who he was



Bhattarai : Center of attractions

not. The good intentions expressed in the book are nowhere to be seen in the no-win politics Bhattarai has been indulging in these days. Until a few months ago, Bhattarai's Bhainsepati residence was quiet, as only a small number of supporters would be seen hanging around. After the CPN-UML, joined by four other opposition parties, embarked on a strategy of stalling parliament to press for the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Bhattarai's residence has become a beehive of power brokers. From Koirala to UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, everybody seems to want an audience with the septuagenarian Bhattarai. This time of the year seems to belong to Bhattarai.

Ranabhat's Wrath

Nepalese politics seems to be a platform for revenge and everyone is taking his or her share of it. Enraged by his defeat in the recent party general convention elections in Pokhara, speaker of the House of Representatives Taranath Ranabhat seems to want to show that he still has the power to harm others. The events of the last three weeks show that

it is not the opposition parties but the speaker himself who wants to stall the house. He suspends house sessions even before the opposition chants have taken their politically acceptable pitch. It's as if opposition members and Ranabhat have made a secret pact to paralyse the house.

Poudel's Silence

Contrary to his character, Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel has remained



Poudel : Silence is golden

tight-lipped over the opposition parties' demand for his boss's resignation. Nobody knows the reason behind Poudel's strategy. He is usually among the first to open his mouth whenever there is a crisis in the party. Some of his colleagues link his silence to a desire to step into Koirala's shoes, should the prime minister choose to step down. If the power of silence can be used for political advantage, why should Poudel speak?

Popular Fatwas

Issuing fatwas seem to be an established norm in Nepalese politics. As parliament remains stalled following the joint fatwa of Madhav Nepal and Surya Bahadur Thapa against Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, it is now the time for hotel union leaders to edicts against hotel owners. Although Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world, fatwas do not seem to go against its political traditions. ■

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HIGH-LEVEL VISITS

Exposure To Nepal

Visits by top-level dignitaries give Nepal much-needed exposure

By A CORRESPONDENT

Nepal has seen some important visits in the last three weeks. Just a day after the visit of Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian to Nepal, King Birendra left for a five-day state visit to the People's Republic of China. The day after the King arrived, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala left on a four-day official visit to France.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan scheduled to arrive in Nepal on a two-day official visit on March 12. Annan's visit will give much publicity to Nepal at a time when it is trying to develop a regional UN Peace Keeping Training Center in the country. The UN chief's visit will also reinforce the bonds of cooperation between the world body and Nepal.

Since 1958, Nepal has sent more than 35,000 peacekeepers in various operations throughout the world. Annan's original itinerary included Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Later, he cut his Pakistan stay by a day to visit Nepal. Annan will be the fourth UN secretary-general to visit Nepal, after U Thant, Kurt Waldheim and Javier Perez De Cuellar.

Haotian's visit to Nepal, the first by a Chinese defence minister, came as a boost to Nepal-China relations. "The King's visit to China has its own regional significance. On the bilateral front, it has helped to consolidate our traditional relations," said a former Nepalese diplomat.

Following the restoration of democracy, this is the first time Nepal has seen such hectic activity on the diplomatic

front. But the internal political scenario hardly paints a flattering picture of Nepalese democracy, with opposition parties boycotting parliament to force the Koirala government to resign.

Because of the obstruction of parliamentary procedures, a legislative del-

Actually, then-prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was scheduled to have visited France last year. But he canceled the trip after Koirala tabled a no-confidence motion against Bhattarai in the Nepali Congress parliamentary party.

Prime Minister Koirala's visit to France - one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and an influential member of the European Union - will also benefit the country. As Koirala is the second Nepalese prime minister to have visited France — after Jung Bahadur — the trip assumes its own significance.

"The visit by Prime Minister Koirala



PM Koirala Leaving for Paris : Strengthening ties

legation from Cambodia canceled its weeklong visit. Prime Minister Koirala's visit to France went ahead in the midst of stiff opposition from his critics.

Interestingly, Nepal has made significant gains in the last year on the diplomatic front. After his visit to India, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala travelled to the Federal Republic of Germany and New York to address the United Nations General Assembly. The visit to France is Prime Minister Koirala's third foreign trip after assuming power 11 months ago.

will help to identify areas of cooperation between the two countries. Prime Minister Koirala is likely to discuss trade expansion, investment and increased aid from France for Nepal's economic development endeavors," said Gyan Chandra Acharya, spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Frequent exchange of visits help to enhance Nepal's image in the world. "Such high-level visits are specially beneficial for small countries like Nepal," said the former diplomat. ■

MAOIST MOVEMENT

Going The Prachanda Way

As the insurgency enters its sixth year, the underground party seems to be looking for a safe exit. Is it real, and if so, why?

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

As their communist 'comrades' were diverting the attention of the government by disrupting parliament proceedings for several weeks, the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) had a chance to conclude its second national conference quietly in a remote mid-western village of the kingdom. Though the dates and venue of the conference have not been made public as yet, it was obvious that the outcome of the conference was of much greater significance.

In a statement issued on February 25, the Maoist party said it had decided to adopt the "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism-Prachanda path" as its guiding principle. The conference also decided to replace the all powerful post of the party general secretary by that of chairman. General Secretary Prachanda has been unanimously elected to the post of chairman, the party said in a statement. The party claimed that there was no



Comrade Prachanda : Looking for a place in history

bonafide Communist Party in the country (other than itself) after the third convention of Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was over in 1962. The party's much-publicized statement was able to stir the hornet's nest, especially among the fellow communists themselves.

"The 'Prachanda path' is nothing



Dr. Bhattarai : Explanatory notes

but an ideological deviation in the Maoist party," declared leader of the main opposition, Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), Madhav Kumar Nepal, in Dang, Sunday. "The so-called 'path,' that points toward low-capitalist thinking of that party, has exposed the real face of the Maoist by promoting the tendency of Worshipping an individual."

Added Mohan Bikram Singh, a semi-underground leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal), "By proposing to form an interim government participated in by all sides and election to the constituent assembly under that government, the Maoists want to transfer power from people to the monarchy. All they want now is the direct rule of the King."

The Maoists proposal to form what they say 'new Soviet Federation' in South Asia has also drawn flak. "This is a ploy to further strengthen the Indian hegemonism," said Bamdev Gautam, general secretary of the CPN (Marxist-Leninist)."

Maoist leaders don't agree. In an article in Kantipur daily, senior Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai said the 'Prachanda path' has devised a new path with adjustment between the long-term 'people's war' and 'armed mass uprising' on the basis of the concrete analysis of the present world situation and five-year-old success of 'people's war.' "The proposition of an interim government with representation from all sides and formulation of the constitution by people under that government is a very important proposition in the context of present political crisis and 'power balance'."

If we avoid the communist jargons, it becomes obvious that the Maoist leaders want to give a safe landing to their five-year-old 'war' and are also willing to take part in the parliamentary elections under an interim government in which they are also represented, say analysts. "By talking of Nepalese model of revolution, Maoists have accepted to take part in the parliamentary poll under constitutional monarchy. This shows that they now want to give safe-landing to the people's war."

Even if it is so what may have led the Maoist leaders to find a short-cut out of their protracted 'people's war' at a time when the G. P. Koirala government has failed to mobilize support from within the ruling party and the opposition in taking strong measures against the rebellion. Moreover, the rebels have mounted a number of successful attacks as that in Dunai, Dolpa last year and have been causing a huge loss to the security forces by ambushing them and laying down land-mines.

Analysts say the changing domestic and international situation may have compelled the Maoists to have second-thoughts about their adventure. While the year-old Koirala government has ini-

tiated efforts to set up a 15,000-strong Armed Police Force, appoint regional administrators and form special courts to deal with the insurgency despite many hitches. Regional and internal situation too is not in their favor. With the end of the cold war, Nepalese Maoists can't expect international support as seen in the case of the US-Vietnam war. Moreover, neither India nor China would want to see an armed insurgency escalate in Nepal.

Though they are frustrated to see growing corruption and inefficient governance, Western powers too would, in no way, support a Maoist rebellion against a democratic dispensation in this Himalayan kingdom. In a recent interview, US ambassador Ralph Frank said most of the demands put forward by the Maoists were valid. He even said the donor community was ready to assist development efforts in the Maoist-affected areas if the problem was resolved in a constitutional and peaceful way.

Under pressure from both within the country and abroad, the government and rebels seem to be exploring ways and means to come across a table of negotiations. Chances of such negotiations seemed remote after the Maoist rebels targeted Chief Justice Keshav Upadhyay last month. As soon as the decisions of the second national conference of the Maoists were made public, human rights organizations initiated efforts to mediate between the two warring sides. "I have got feelers that the rebels are ready to hold talks with the government provided the latter fulfils their minimum demands," said Padma Ratna Tuladhar, a human rights activist who had brokered a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel and a Maoist leader, Rabindra Shrestha, last year.

Minimum demands put forward by



A public program organized by Maoists : Do people support them ?

the Maoist leadership includes making public whereabouts of all the Maoist activists and supporters who have disappeared or are under custody by the government. In a positive move, the government made public whereabouts of nearly 300 Maoist activists on Tuesday. "We are always open for dialogue," said Poudel.

Analysts say when the two sides sit for dialogue, the ball will start rolling. "Though I don't believe that the Maoists will take part in the central level elections under present circumstances there are possibilities of their agreeing to other solutions within the present constitutional framework," said Govinda Neupane, a leftist ideologue said to be close to the Maoists. "Once you sit for negotiations, give and take is inevitable."

The government seems to have lost most of its energy in identifying the source of support to the movement and ways to counter it. "There have been two hypotheses of support to the Maoists by royal palace and by India. As pro-palace forces would not like to see the rebellion to go out of the control and India is also planning to deploy army to monitor

Nepal-India border, the Maoists may not have other alternative than to adopt 'flexible policy' for a safe landing," said Prof. Dhruva Kumar, a strategic analyst at the Tribhuvan University's Center for Nepal and Asian Studies. "This shows that the terrorist challenge to the state in the form of Maoist insurgency has now transformed into a political challenge. If all the political parties that believe in the present constitution and democratic polity don't take these developments seriously the scope for Maoists would become further widened."

The second conference of the Maoists (the first conference had taken place five years ago) has adopted two main slogans: "Let's expand and consolidate people's local government and base areas" and "Let's move forward in the direction of forming people's government at the central level" as its main strategic slogans. Though the underground party has a long way to go in its professed path, there are indications that the unwarranted violence—that has already claimed more than 1500 lives since February 1996—could come to an end if both sides behaved responsibly. ■

COMMUNITY FORESTRY

Under Threat

The proposed Forest Act 1993 amendment bill imposes restrictions on the management of community forests

By KESHAB POUDEL

If the proposed amendment bill on community forestry passes in its original form, Nepal's forest sector will see the imposition of centralized ideas worse than those witnessed during the autocratic Panchayat period.

Even during the Panchayat days, policy makers realized the need to involve the community in the area of natural resources management. The realization came after the massive deforestation following the referendum of 1979, when more than one-third of Nepal's forest cover was cleared.

Even today, one can see clear differences between government-managed and community-managed forests in terms of production and protection. The forest managed by the government is declining day by day, while that managed by the community is flourishing.

At a time when forest areas controlled by the government continue to shrink and become unmanageable, the government is desperately making efforts to weaken the successes of community forestry. The recent controversy in Banke and Morang districts underscore the vulnerability of forest areas controlled by the government.

With backing from forest officials, forest products were illegally extracted in those two districts. When there is growing pressure on the government to hand over the forest in the inner terai and Chure areas, the rationale behind the government's intention to place the forest under its control cannot defies comprehension.

"The intention of the government is to gain control of forest products preserved by the community," said Hari Bhattarai, president of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Group. "We will fight till the end to prevent the government from interfering with community forestry."

If parliament passes the proposed Forest Act 1993 amendment bill, Nepal's two-decade-long efforts in successful community

forestry will be relegated to history. According to the Community Forestry Division of the Department of Forest, until March 2001 9,874 forest users groups occupied 747,908 hectares of land.

At a time when the government-managed forest is totally on the path to destruction, the proposed amendment will discourage the community in managing the resource. According to the proposed amendment bill, the government gives powers to forest officials to intervene in the decision-making process of users groups to redefine the existing



Terai forest : Still sparse

community groups. Government officials argue that they need certain authority to regularize community forestry. "When the communities' members are exploiting the forest products on their own, we have no alternative to stepping in to prevent them from monopolizing the forest," said a senior official at the Ministry of Forest on condition of anonymity.

Others dispute that contention. They concede that some things may be going wrong in the management of community forests, but insist that the government's heavy hand is not the solution.

According to proposed Clause 2 (da), Community group means a group formed to use and manage the leased forest under Clause 31 (Cha) and users registered under Clause 42. This means the community forest user group has to register itself with the District Forest Office.

Under Clause 2, new sub clauses propose to limit community forestry in the terai and Chure regions and communities would not be allowed to manage forests within demarcated forest areas. The proposed clause defines demarcated forest as forest areas covering 50 hectares of land in the national forest of Terai, Chure and Inner Madhes. This clause limits the right of the community to manage the small portion of community forests in these areas.

The bill also proposes that forests within the terai, Chure and inner Madhes be managed under the guidance and supervision of the government. In the name of community participation, it offers limited opportunity for the local community. The government will seek the support of the community to contain smuggling of forest products, to put out fires and to manage grazing.

For the community, government officials would be empowered to issue a permit allowing them access to national forest areas to cut grass and fell trees freely.

In the sharing of resources, the government has set certain terms. The government will use 25 percent of the resources accumulated through forest management for the development of local communities. Ten percent of the resources would be given to District Development Committees and 15 percent would be allocated to community user groups or Village Development Committees with the concurrence of the forest officer. In the terai, Chure and Inner Madhes, the government will hand over separate plots outside the demarcated forests. The government will prepare a procedure for the sale of such forests on the basis of annual production.

The forest users groups would have to deposit 40 percent royalty accumulated by selling the forest products in the account of district forest offices.

The bill also has a provision that would not allow community forests in areas adjoining national parks. All forests adjoining protected areas would fall under the control of the national park. Those areas which are handed over before the act comes into force should be handed over within six months to the concerned officials. The government can retake the community forests that do not function properly.

As community forestry is an example in encouraging democratic exercise in the grassroots level, the intervention of the government would destroy the core democratic philosophy: for the people, by the people and to the people. ■

INDIAN BUDGET

Close Watch

The new Indian budget may have both good and bad lessons for Nepal

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

As Indian Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha was presenting the annual budget estimates for fiscal year 2001-02 last Wednesday (February 28), Nepalese businessmen and officials were glued to their television sets. It is because Nepal can't avoid the impact of Indian budget on its economy. With a view to reducing government spending and containing fiscal deficit within 4.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), Sinha promised to accelerate privatization, widen the tax base and downsize the government. "This is a budget for carrying forward the second generation of economic reforms," he declared.

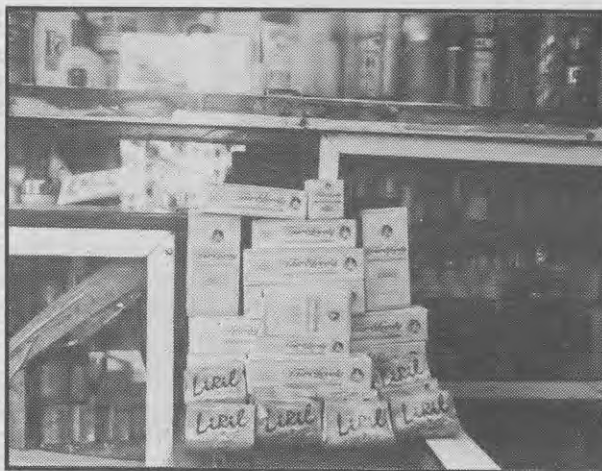
Both analysts and industry people in India were gung-ho regarding the budget. "After ten years, the Finance Minister does an almost perfect 10," said Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar, a noted columnist in *The Economic Times*, a leading Indian business newspaper. "Forget the usual tax changes, this landmark budget has a far broader vision of transforming India into an Asian miracle economy through second-generation reforms."

For Nepal, the new budget may have far-reaching consequences to its economy mainly in foreign trade, foreign direct investment and revenue collection. The new provision in the Indian budget of introducing countervailing duty (CVD) on Maximum Retail Price (MRP) may have an adverse impact on Nepalese exports to India.

"The provision to levy CVD on MRP is very disturbing. It will not only erode the competitiveness of Nepalese consumer products in the Indian market, but will also have a serious impact on the export of consumer products from Nepal," said Sandip Ghose, managing director of Nepal Lever Limited, a subsidiary of Hindustan Lever Limited, India. The new provision may have an adverse impact on exports of toothpastes and

soaps, among others, from Nepal to India. Dabur Nepal and Nepal Lever earn billions of rupees every year by exporting their products to India and thus help bridge the vast trade deficit between the two countries.

In last year's budget, India had introduced a provision of 4 percent special additional duty to all the imports into the country. Nepali business community protested against that decision, saying that it was against the bilateral trade treaty. As per a treaty in 1996, Nepalese manufactured goods, except liquor, tobacco and perfumes, enjoy duty-free ac-



Nepali products : Feeling the heat

cess into the Indian market. The Indian government later withdrew the provision in the case of Nepal after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's visit to New Delhi in August last year.

The hike in freight charge by the Indian government would also have impact on Nepal's foreign trade. "Definitely, it will have an impact on our exports and imports the extent of which is yet to be assessed," said Rabindra Man Pradhan, President of Nepal Freight Forwarders Association. "Being a land-locked country our freight charges are already high. Now the hike in Indian railway freight will further erode our competitiveness."

With a view to liberalizing the stringent

labor laws in the country, Minister Sinha has introduced flexibility for companies with less than 1,000 workers to lay off or retrench staff, while tripling the compensation payable from 15 days' salary for each year worked to 45 days; enabling employers to use contract labor for short periods without being obliged to make them permanent workers.

As Nepalese entrepreneurs complain of stringent labor laws within the country, they will find it hard to compete with India in attracting foreign investment. "It will be more difficult for us to function under existing Labor Acts," said Mahesh K. Agrawal, former president of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "In order to attract foreign direct investment we should develop certain areas in the model of export processing zones in China."

Officials don't agree. "Our labor and investment policies are transparent and still compatible with that of India," said Dr. Shanker Sharma, member of National Planning Commission. "There may be some long-term changes in our industrial structure due to tariff reductions effected in India."

Sinha has cut the peak income tax and corporate tax, cut the peak customs rate to 35 per cent and promised to move over the next three years towards the Asian rate of 20 per cent. As part of his liberalization drive, Sinha has fleshed out the deregulation schedule for sugar, fertilizer, petroleum and drugs; repealed the Sick Industrial Companies Act to make it easier to wind up companies; introduced group insurance for organized sector workers to help tide over periods of unemployment; providing educational loans to students.

As India has reduced customs duty on the imports of gold by 15 percent, it might lead to further decline in gold imports in Nepal. Nepal was importing gold in the past primarily keeping an eye on the Indian market. Nepal had initiated policies to liberalize her economy much before than India did. But it seems India is slowly catching up. "In terms of openness and market oriented index we are still ahead of India," said Dr. Sharma. "Now we need to give emphasis on sustainability and diversification of our export sector."

The Indian experience that poverty could be reduced by 27 percent through broad-based economic growth is also encouraging to Nepal, said Dr. Sharma. "We can learn a lesson from them," he said. ■



NEPSE trading floor : Bear is back

NEPSE'S FALL Bear Comes Hugging

Last Wednesday's fall of the NEPSE index by 22.71 points ends the investors' honeymoon at the bourses

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

When the Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) index started to rise considerably since Shrawan (July/August) last year, most of the investors and market-watchers had termed it the return of the bull. But after Wednesday's (February 28) plunge, they are having second thoughts.

After the plunge taken by the NEPSE in the aftermath of 1994 mid-term election and amid political instability, many critics had written it off in the face of eroding confidence of investors.

However, the investors began to come back to the capital market oversubscribing the share-calls by Hotel Radisson and Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank last year. That prompted the NEPSE index to move upwards. Even then, some critics had raised doubts as to the sustainability of the index rise. But when

the indices rose from 358.08 (July 17) to 545.82 (November 23) even the harshest of critics subdued their voices.

But the worst nightmares of the investors were about to materialize. After the peak of November 23, the NEPSE index continued its free-fall. Last Wednesday's plunge by 5.5 percent or 22.71 points to reach 375.29 (from 398) was merely a part of that. The index is now back to 391.59 point (March 6) after it recovered slightly on Monday.

What is significant about the Wednesday's fall was its suddenness. Although the index was coming down, nobody imagined such a huge fall in the single day. Experts put the loss (in terms of market capitalization) of Wednesday's fall at around two billion rupees.

Many investors, whose wealth wore away, were found knocking the doors of authorities aggressively in a bid to stop the plunge. They alleged the brokers, stock exchange officials and insid-

ers of banking and financial institutions to have formed an unholy nexus to "corner and rig" the share prices.

"Look at the reputation of banks whose share prices took a nose-dive that day. All of them including Nepal Bangladesh Bank, Bank of Kathmandu are in a sound financial position and are giving bonus shares. There is no justification in the fall of their prices," said Hem Dhoj Joshi, an exasperated investor, who was closely following the movements at the trading floor on Friday (March 2).

But the brokers and stock exchange officials deny the allegations outright. "There is no way brokers and stock exchange officials can rig the market movement. They are guided by various market forces," said Madan Raj Joshi, general manager at the NEPSE.

"Brokers have no hand in the slide. The inside information can be had by investors also," said Bishnu Prasad Chapagain, vice president at the Nepal Stock Brokers' Association.

In fact, experts say a combination of various factors could have worked to bring down the market. A couple of months ago, Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) had asked all the commercial banks to raise their capital base to Rs 500 million within this fiscal year.

As many banks like Nepal Bangladesh Bank, Nepal SBI had the capital base quite low to the prescribed standard, investors were putting their money on these banks hoping that they would be issuing bonus shares and right issue shares to increase their capital base. But recently, the NRB said its prescription was not a legal provision but only a direction leading to a frustration among the investors.

The ensuing political instability and the fear of more trade strikes as businessmen are planning to protest against some provisions of the Value Added Tax (VAT) fuelled the fire. "In the aftermath of Hrithik episode, many investors, feeling unsecured, have withdrawn their investment to the tune of 5 billion to 6 billion rupees from the NEPSE and taken that away to India leading to resource scarce here," said Bishnu Prasad Chapagain.

That apart, nearly two billion rupees of investors' money is currently locked in government securities and share applications of Nepal Merchant Finance Company, Sagarmatha Insurance and Siddhartha Finance. "This money, otherwise, would have been invested in secondary share market," said Chapagain.

Likewise, many investors, are currently not enthusiastic about secondary market as they are waiting to invest in finance companies following the directives by the NRB asking them to go public. "All of these factors worked in combination to tumble the share prices," said Joshi.

But there are many others who believe that the present plunge was only natural given the "lack of relativity in their prices".

"It is a wake-up call to the investing public. Obviously, the share prices were bloated. The investors need to take more interest in the fundamentals of the companies and not merely engage in speculative investment," said Jeffrey Cox, Chief Executive Officer of Nepal Grindlays Bank Limited (NGBL).

As an indication of the speculative trading in the NEPSE, NGBL's share prices took a plunge instead of increasing even when the bank offered 100 percent dividend to its shareholders two weeks ago.

The problem with the NEPSE is that among its 110 listed companies only 37

are manufacturing industries. While most of the banks and financial institutions are doing well at the bourses, only 4 manufacturing industries (all of them MNCs), are in profit.

Over ninety percent of transactions at the NEPSE is done by the banks and financial companies. Any upheavals in their price have a cascading effect on the overall index.

"If you look at the position of banks, you will find that their loan/credit flow are improving. But if you look at the manufacturing industries, you will find their records grim. So, where is the money going? This is indeed peculiar," said Joshi.

Joshi says that a large part of Nepal's economy is unrecorded. "We have not been able to do proper accounting of our economy. Even at the NEPSE, many listed companies dilly-dally in providing their records."

In fact, many say, that the absence of the practice of providing true financial pictures to the stock exchange market could lead to long-term impact on the bourses. "The NEPSE should start delisting the companies

Top Ten Companies (On the Basis of Amount Traded)

Name of the companies	Amount traded (in million)
1. Bank of Kathmandu	601.21
2. Nepal Indus. & Com. Bank	260.26
3. Nepal Bangladesh Bank	251.34
4. Nepal Arab Bank	215.15
5. Nepal Bank	140.56
6. Nepal Grindlays Bank	125.32
7. Nepal SBI Bank	113.04
8. Himalayan Bank	75.57
9. Everest Bank	74.41
10. Nepal Indosuez Bank	67.41

to 40 thousand rupees investment," said Joshi. There are 150,000 to 200,000 investors in the country. If you take into account the multiple accounts, the number could be up to 550,000.

The small investors are generally unaware of the intricacies of stock pricing. They invest on whims and speculations and follow the larger crowd. "In India, you will find that the 90 percent of the Bombay Stock Exchange's turnover is in the hands of institutional investors like mutual funds, life insurance corporations etc," Joshi said. The institutional investors are not easily swayed by unproven rumors and they make the investment based on fundamentals and long-term return.

As the NEPSE seems to be recovering from Wednesday's crash, market-watchers are predicting a long hard summer for the bourses. They say that a bearish trend could haunt the stock exchange for at least a couple of months more.

"But after some months when the investors will get the refund of Siddhartha Finance and Merchant Bank, we hope there will be more transactions in the secondary market. But it will take time for the investors' confidence to return," said Chapagain.

Meanwhile, market-watchers believe that the government should do something in order to restore the confidence of investors and prevent such crashes in future.

Top Ten Companies (On the Basis of Market Capitalization)

Name of the companies	Capitalization (in million)
1. Nepal Grindlays Bank	9337.59
2. Nepal Arab Bank	7384.56
3. Himalayan Bank	6242.4
4. Nepal Bangladesh Bank	3498
5. Nepal Indus. & Com. Bank	3250
6. Nepal Indosuez Bank	3248.41
7. Nepal Lever	2785.12
8. Nepal SBI Bank	2761.2
9. Bank of Kathmandu	2698.2
10. Nepal Bank	2471.85

listing the companies that do not provide proper records on time," said Cox. According to him, NGBL is among the few companies that provide all the necessary records to the NEPSE.

Another problem with the country's capital market is that it is dominated by uninformed investors. "Almost 99 percent of our investors are individual ones. Most of them are small investors with 20 thousand

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Property

Versus

Stability

Led by a few women belonging to the urban elite, Nepal's women's movement has ignored many genuine problems faced by rural and middle-class women. In the name of granting equal rights to daughters on family property, activists are ignoring the importance of a stable family unit that safeguards their interest during times of crisis. Are we rushing headlong for a remedy that may be worse than the malady?

By KESHAB POUDEL

Bir Maya B.K., 30, a resident of Dhangadi in western Nepal, wept twice. Her eyes were swollen as she narrated her pathetic situation and requested Maiti Nepal's President Anuradha Koirala to take in her two daughters in the Shelter home. Koirala accepted B.K.'s request.

However, that did not stop B.K.'s tears. Although it was a painful moment for a mother to leave her children, B.K. did so with a strong heart and with hopes of a good future for the girls.

Disowned by her husband, who left

home after marrying a second wife, B.K., a mother of two daughters and a son, did not have any property. Nor did she have a place to live with her three children. For B.K., Koirala came as a savior. She helped her to establish a tea stall in Dhangadi a few years ago.

With hopes of providing good education to her two small daughters in a good atmosphere, B.K. came to Maiti Nepal's office after an 800-km bus journey.

B.K. believes that education is the best way to build self-confidence in women. After her husband's second marriage four years ago, she understood the importance of building confidence. "I

don't want my story to be repeated. If my daughters get educated at Maiti Nepal, they will have gained the confidence necessary for survival," B.K. said. "Education is the only way to change the fate of poor people like myself who do not have property either in their parents' home or spouse's house."

The women's movement in Nepal has passed through several phases of struggle and made some important achievements. However, problems faced by women like B.K. are yet to be addressed. The campaign led by the urban elite on ensuring equal rights to daughters on parental property has pushed the real issues of women in the backburner.



A rural woman : Carrying the burden

In a country where millions of rural women live under the absolute poverty line, ensuring the right to parental property will make little difference. Since the parents do not have property in the first place, what can they expect to share?

B.K.'s plight is just one example from tens of thousand of cases in Nepal's rural areas where a husband remarries at the slightest pretext, such as a small disease.

"I have to accept hundreds of such girls and women along with young girls returning from Indian brothels," Koirala said. "In the last few decades, we have made some important progress in generating awareness among women, but we are yet to instill a sense of confidence in them. As long as women remain illiterate and unaware about their legal and other rights, nothing can change their fate."

Status of Property Rights

Compared to other countries in the region, Nepal's legal system is regarded as more progressive in terms of partition of property. The Human Development Report in South Asia 2000 says that Nepal's laws are relatively women friendly. According to the existing laws, women and daughters are given two different legal statuses in terms of property rights.

As a daughter, she is entitled to get property equal to the son if she remains unmarried beyond the age of 35 years. As a married woman, she is entitled to half of the share of her husband's property. Where then is the question of inequality between men and women and husband and wife?

Experts from industrialized countries and women belonging to the urban elite do not see things this way. They insist the lack of access to the family property and control over resources are one of the major factors that hamper women's equal participation in development activities and the decision-making process.

They argue that the Civil Code of Nepal 1963 has many provisions that deny the right of a woman to parental property. "The sooner an amended act is passed, the better the future of the women," said advocate Pushpa Bhusal. "It will replace some of the discriminatory provisions."

As daughters are denied the right to parental property, their access to credit is limited because both formal and informal credit institutions cater to those who can provide collateral. All formal credit institutions seek tangible collateral for loans. Hence, women are effectively ex-

cluded from institutional credit since they have little access to inherited property.

In a country where a large number of people who live below the poverty line do not have ancestral property to divide, changes in the system would only benefit the upper strata of the population who are already enjoying many benefits. Women in rural and poor families will have to bear greater burdens and consequences that could drastically change the structure of the family as a social unit.

Instead of advocating the genuine concerns of women, women groups are proceeding on the wrong assumption that inheritance of family property is going to end all forms of discrimination against them. Experts argue that the proposed bill will bring more trouble to the family of rural and urban areas where the social structure will be altered.

Consequences of Proposed Bill

In urban areas where prices of property are very high, giving equal rights to daughters on parental property will have some significant impact. But it will come as another burden for families who are already reeling under a system where undeclared dowry in the form of gifts has come to be accepted as the norm.

The daughter's right to parental property will make the situation worse in rural areas where the husband physically assaults a wife merely for failing to lend 100 rupees. If she takes property, she may fall into a death trap.

In the prevailing situation, less than 10 percent of top-class elite have valuable property to share equally with sons and daughters. Even under the existing laws, they are free to distribute property as they wish. If someone is capable and willing to grant property to their daughter, no law prohibits them. In many cases, parents are granting property and daughters are enjoying it.

The other category, which involves more than 20 percent of poor families who have poor parents, has no property to partition. For them, the bill is meaningless. Enshrining into law something they cannot get would not make any difference to them. Another 50 percent of the population live below the poverty line and do not have anything to share.

The upper-middle-class, who comprise 30 percent of the population, are already offering so much dowry in marriage and regular gifts to the daughter. They will come under greater burden.

For the middle-class population, marriage has become a very difficult ritual. It is very hard for them to find a suitable groom for their daughters even after offering undisclosed amounts of

substantial gifts. If the proposed bill become law, then the question of giving and getting dowry cannot arise. Instead, the prospective groom will put a pre-condition to the prospective bride and her family: bring parental property.

In a society like ours where dowry is rampant and unnecessary expenditure increases the cost of marriage, daughters will fall victim as soon as the family

property is apportioned equally among them. Partition of property includes the sharing of both assets and liabilities. If a woman is found to carry debts, who will be ready to marry her. In the present situation, no family would welcome a girl coming with debts.

What proportion of the population is talking about property rights? The law would affect less than 10 percent of the population but destroy the entire family unit in the country. Under existing law, when a girl or daughter gets married she has the right to get half of the husband's property, whereas the daughter's husband's family does not have such rights. The newly married is going to get a better life in the husband's house in terms of property rights.

The remedy is going to be more dangerous than the malady itself. It will affect the institution of family, the interest of daughter and a society as a whole. In the quest for making an equal society, it will create more complications.

"As long as discriminatory laws against women continue to exist, women will not get equality. How can a woman claim equality when she does not have the right to claim parental property," said advocate Shanta Thapaliya at a seminar titled "Women in Nepal's Socio-economic Development", organized by Women Entrepreneurs and Media Li-
"Although the constitution guarantees equality to women, there are many discriminatory laws that need to be amended."

If the existing property laws are executed properly, they will be more than enough to guarantee the rights of women. The problem is illiteracy, lack of awareness on women's rights, limited access to justice, ineffective execution of judgments of the court. Women are not able to enjoy what the law has given to them.

Women's Achievement

According to the country briefing paper "Women In Nepal" prepared by the Asian Development Bank, Nepalese women have made significant gains in social indicators like female literacy rate (6 years above) increased to 27 percent in 1996, compared with a meager 4 percent in 1971. Mean age of marriage for girls

'Women Need Programs That Build Confidence'

— ANURADHA KOIRALA



ANURADHA KOIRALA is a prominent figure in the campaign against the exploitation of women. Koirala is the president of Maiti Nepal, an NGO working against girl trafficking and violence against women. She spoke to SPOTLIGHT on various issues relating to discrimination against women. Excerpts:

What are the major problems Nepalese women are facing?

Illiteracy, lack of awareness of their rights, trafficking, violence and sexual exploitation are some of the major problems being faced by women in Nepal.

Women need measures that build confidence. If we instill confidence in women, they will be able to settle every problem on their own.

How do you evaluate ongoing programs aimed at uplifting the status of women?

Definitely, we have seen some changes in the quality of life in urban women, but the majority of rural women still live below the poverty line. We cannot claim that women are liberated on the basis of changes in the status of a selected group of women.

What do women activists need to do?

We should carry out more action-oriented programs in rural areas. Until a few years ago, girls were trafficked from Sindhupalchowk district only and most were illiterate. But now the situation has changed. Girls from all the districts are being sold. Some of these girls are high school dropouts.

What should the government do?

The government must offer greater educational and job opportunities for women.

How do you assess the women's movement in Nepal?

The women's movement is confined to workshops held in five-star hotels in the capital. How can they sort out the problems of poor women living in the rural parts of the country?

What has Maiti Nepal been doing?

We are running transit camps in border areas to check girl trafficking as well as giving shelter to girls returning from brothels in Bombay and other parts of India. But now we are facing a resource crunch, since donor countries are not providing sufficient funds to run such useful projects.

increased by more than 2.5 years between 1961-1991. The total fertility rate has fallen to 4.2 in 1996 from 6.3 in 1976. Maternal mortality has gone down, universal immunization has been achieved against certain diseases, and no gender discrimination is observed in nutritional status. There has been progress in immunization and the breast-feeding of infants and young children. Male and female infant child mortality rates have fallen significantly and life expectancy of women has increased by more than 11 years in last 25 years.

Despite these achievements, there are persistent problems combined with emerging issues, such as increasing female trafficking and the feminization of agriculture. In education, both the low level of women's participation and the gender gaps in literacy rate, enrolment rates and attainment rates are staggering and early marriage remain major problems in the rural areas.

One can see the disparities in the available infrastructures. Women in the high mountains and remote hills and economically disadvantaged groups face greater accessibility problems than women in the better-off households, urban areas, and the terai plains in general.

"We have to build confidence among women so that they can become more powerful and strong in the world," said Laxmi Sharma, a prominent women entrepreneur who started her business from scratch. "I am proud to say that I have been able to achieve success through confidence and dedication," said Sharma, the first women tempo driver. "Nepalese women have to show that they can stand on their feet if the right opportunities are given."

A large number of women are today involved in non-agriculture sectors. From administrative to the professional sectors, women are emerging as a major work force in urban areas. Because of education, many women are taking a leading role in the industrial sector.

"Women are coming up in different fields. More and more women are involved in the scientific sectors including forest, engineering, animal husbandry, electronics," said R.B. Shrestha and R.B.

Pradhan in their paper presented at the seminar in the "Women in Nepal's Socio-Economic Development". The right kinds of opportunities are the most important things for the development of women.

"The opportunity I received helped me to become self-reliant," said Jamuna Shrestha, another participant. "As a daughter born into an average family, I could not get adequate money from my parents to start my business."

There is a marked difference between women belonging to the upper-class urban elite who have been involved in foreign-financed NGOs and members

miniature of the state and the state cannot replace it. It disciplines the society, performs the welfare functions, and maintains law and order within the family. Because of relative stability in the family, Nepal has been able to cope with all kinds of upheaval. The results of a broken family will have far-reaching negative consequences.

International conventions on human rights and political rights also stress the need to strengthen the family. Article 23 of International Convention on Civil and Political Rights declares the family as the fundamental group unit of society that is



Young Girls : Unaware of their rights

of radical wings of political parties. For the past several years, this class of women has been in the forefront of demanding drastic changes in parental property rights. As a result, the family relationship in Nepal is coming under threat.

Ignoring Family

Nepal's property rights are based on the family, but the proposed bill ignores the importance of its contributor. Unlike other countries, property can be transferred from family to family in Nepal. One cannot find such a system in the Hindu law of India, Muslim laws or laws of the industrialized western world. According to the concept, the family is a

entitled to protection by society and the state. Article 16 of the Proclamation of Teheran by the International Convention on Human Rights says the protection of the family and the child remains the concern of the international community.

Even international conventions do not encourage confrontation in the family. Article 6 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women calls for safeguarding the unity and harmony of the family, "which remains a basic unity of any society." All appropriate measures should be taken to ensure equal rights between genders, it adds. Many covenants enshrine the prin-



Working women : Better environment wanted

principle that the upbringing of children requires a sharing of responsibilities between men and women and society as a whole.

If the proposed bill is passed, the family risk destabilization. An unstable family is always a threat to the safety of women and children. As weak members of the society, they are always prone to violence and atrocities by other groups. All documents relating to human rights emphasize the need for safeguarding the unity and harmony of the family, which remains the basic unit of society.

The existing property law in Nepal is based upon the need of promoting and preserving the family. The rights of the family supersede the rights of an individual, whether it is men or women. In urban areas, the traditional structure of the joint family system has been widely in practice.

The main hurdle to getting a share in parental property is the institution of marriage, as women are entitled to the property of the husband as soon as she gets married. For women, it would be unusual to live alone. As Simone De Beauvoir mentions in her book "Second Sex", women have a physically weak bargaining position for marriage. This makes them leave the parental family and join the family of the husband.

According to Nepalese tradition, a person can leave the family but the family does not permit the property to go with her. As a wife, she gets equal share with her husband. This has been the law in

Nepal. It may seem very strange but it has endured since time immemorial.

The property law in Nepal confers the rights of a girl. The Muslim world offers no such rights to women and the present Hindu law in India is also much different than Nepal's. Despite abject poverty in vil-

lages, the family system has been preserved mainly on the basis of family ownership of property.

The wife has the right to an equal portion of the husband's property. The silent majority does not support the agitation of the urban women in favor of the right of women to the parental property.

"We will not allow the bill to be passed in parliament as it will destroy the

family structure in the Madhesiya communities of the terai region. A bill that may suit Pahadiyas may not necessarily be suitable for Madhesiyas," said MP Badri Prasad Mandal, parliamentary party leader of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party.

We need a new economic foundation. Women will suffer in any kind of disorder falling on the family. Women lag far behind men in access to property, credit and modern avenues of education, skill development, technology and knowledge.

The position of the daughter is temporary. As soon she marries, she comes the wife. If a woman remains unmarried, she will remain entitled to her parental property. Education and maintenance should be a mandatory parental responsibility and property should be based on a will system.

Women from all parts of the country have been striving for equal opportunities in all spheres. Their emphasis is on education and awareness for women's overall development.

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NMA CONFERENCE

Health For Humanity

The 20th All Nepal Medical Conference discussed ways of providing medical services throughout the country

By AKSHAY SHARMA

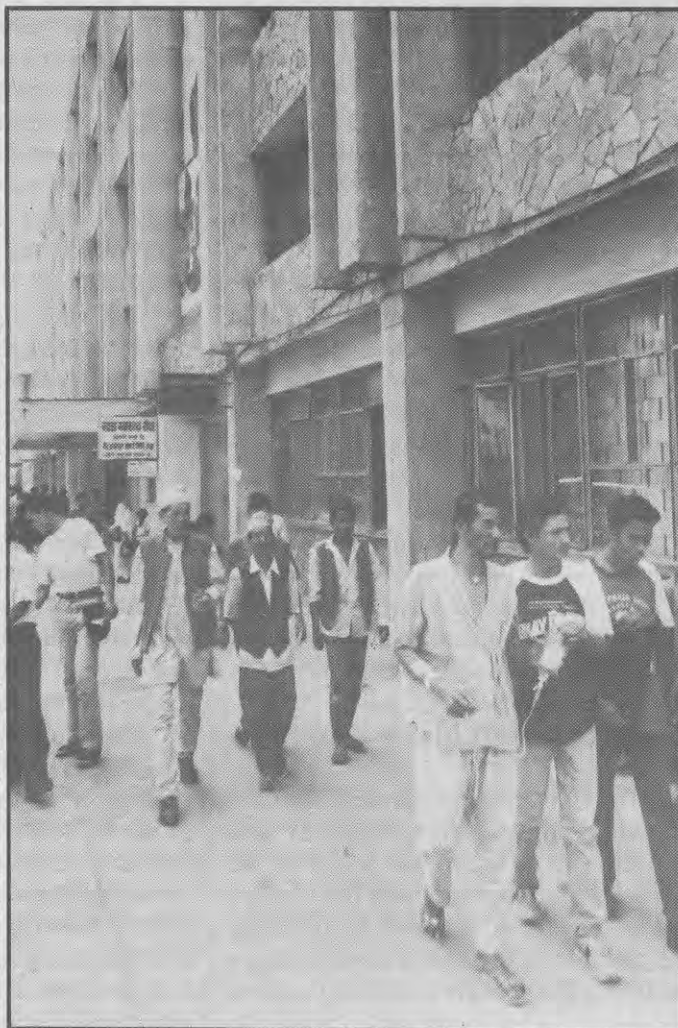
The 20th All Nepal Medical Conference of the Nepal Medical Council (NMA) provided an opportunity to professionals to share experiences, develop new friendships and renew old ones.

"I think the conference can contribute significantly for the betterment of health care in the country," said Minister of Health Ram Krishna Tamrakar. NMA is also celebrating the 50th anniversary of its establishment. The agenda for discussions was broad and held special contextual significance. Speaking on gender perspectives in health, Dr Chatra Amatya from the Department of Health Services, said: "In health, gender analysis contributes to the understanding of differentials between women and men, for example, risk factors and exposures, mutations, frequency and serving of disease and social responses to it. Access to health care is the distribution of power and taking better responsibilities.

Speaking on the integration of general medical services with leprosy in a tertiary referral center in Nepal, Dr Rachel Hawksworth said, "In addition to providing a tertiary referral service for leprosy patients in the central region of Nepal, the hospital also gives primary health care to many villages in south Lalitpur."

The doctor is currently working for the 120-bed Anandaban Leprosy Hospital situated 15 kilometers south of Kathmandu in the Lele Valley. "Our study... looks at the types of patients needing admission, when referrals to

higher hospital was needed, and the length of stay of the patients. Over 250 patients were admitted with non-leprosy problems over the period of time, the majority of the treatment of acute infections (Mainly respiratory and gastrointestinal). A small percentage was obstetrics cases, and a few required transfers to Kathmandu for further investigation and treatment. This demonstrates the feasibility of integration of leprosy with other medical services."



Patients at Bir Hospital : Access to health difficult

The presentation of Dr N. Jha of the Department Of Medicine, Dharan, was oriented toward the study of knowledge, attitude and practices about family planning methods among the Musahar community of Sunsari. "Our aim is to find out the existing knowledge about available family planning methods among the Musahar community - to assess the attitude toward family planning methods and to know the common family planning methods used by them."

Supporting the fact that family planning is an important factor in reducing fertility and said, "The total fertility rate is 5.5 and an average of 5.4 in districts with their average size of Sunsari. Likewise, crude birth rate among the Mushahar community is 55 per 1,000 population. The low literacy rate, low family planning income, low immunization coverage and the high consumption of alcohol are salient features of the Musahar community. The family planning program must be targeted by first looking at the high fertility rate, low literacy and socio-economic status "

As part of its golden jubilee celebrations, the NMA also organized a trade and sales exhibition for manufacturers of surgical equipment, pharmaceutical houses and other business houses. There were also special schemes, souvenir items. Doctors from around the world presented videos, slides and their ideas at the conference.

As Dr Vijay Kumar Sharma, the chairman of the organizing committee, put it, "The NMA has been actively involved in social welfare and advances in scientific knowledge. Advances of medical technologies are occurring at an unprecedented rate, but the challenge for us today is to provide basic health care to all parts of the country. This conference provides us with the forum for wide discussions to develop a practical approach to strike a balance between the recent advances in science and basis health care." ■

'Looking at the past ten years gives more hope'

— JAN deWITTE

JAN de WITTE, Honorary Consul at the Royal Netherlands Consulate and director of SNV Netherlands Development Organization - Nepal, spoke to KESHAB POUDEL on various issues related to development activities and the political process in Nepal. Excerpts:

How do you describe the overall aid of the Netherlands government to Nepal?

SNV as a technical assistance organization started its program in 1980. After its establishment, the Netherlands government started funding its programs, mainly rural development programs, in the Karnali zone and in Mechi Hills. In the past few years The Netherlands funded quite a number of programs, varying from supporting wildlife conservation organizations like World Wildlife Fund to Tsho Rolpa Glacier Leakage Repair and others. Since one and a half year a move was made toward support in two sectors.

What are the areas of cooperation now?

The Netherlands Government is willing to support natural resource management, mainly biodiversity. The second area is governance with a focus on decentralization and women rights. SNV is moreover active in the field of private sector development. We are preparing, together with the government, five-year programs in each of the sectors. Several stakeholders are also involved and a thorough analysis has been conducted. Of late, we have had a meeting with the Ministry of Finance and other concerned Ministries and it was agreed that time has come now to write an implementation strategy in order to complete the plans.

What about the Netherlands-aided biogas project?

Funded by HMG/N, the Netherlands and German governments in terms of programme management, subsidy and credit, biogas is one of the important programs in relation with rural energy supply as well as the environment by replacing firewood, dung cakes and - to a lesser extend - kerosine. Biogas has not only contributed to environmental protection but also helped to reduce the workload of especially women and girls as well as to safeguard their health. It has also helped in

producing organic fertilizer. In many ways, it has proved very useful. From the very beginning the private companies have been our main partners in the dissemination of biogas in Nepal. Recently we started, together with AEPC and MoST, exploring modalities to transfer the functions of our SNV BSP office to a Nepalese entity. We were pleased to celebrate the occasion of distributing the 50,000th plant amid a program where the crown prince was also present. I have the impression that it is very much-appreciated program in Nepal.

You said the private sector is also taking part in the program. What role are private parties playing in the biogas sector?

Private biogas construction companies recognised under the programme take care of marketing, construction and after sales service of biogas plants. There are 49 such companies working in Nepal, covering all together 64 districts.

What is the response of the people to the program?

The rural population is quite interested and demand is increasing annually. Cooking on biogas is not only easier and quicker, but also significantly reduces the exposure of smoke for the family. In addition biogas provides the light in the rural areas. A family with two-three cows or buffaloes can install a biogas plant. The biogas subsidy and credit facilities bring biogas within the reach of a large part of Nepal's rural community.

As donors have been complaining about the difficulties they face, what is your impression on the overall environment for development projects in the country?

The Nepalese Government is preparing a foreign aid policy that reflects the international discussions on ownership, sector wide approach and so on. We feel comfortable with that. Of course, several of the mechanisms that have been proposed in the policy have still to be worked out. Donors and HMG/N have to get together to make practical and clear agreements on reporting, project formulation and the responsibility for follow up. In the practical environment of the programs we support, in the Karnali, Mechi Hill and Chitwan the environment is not always conducive. Especially in remote areas

If there is a demand for the resignation of Prime Minister of a majority party, one has to go by the agreed rules of the parliamentary process, where everything can be decided on majority basis.

the presence of the Maoist movement makes that for example issues of governance become unclear. SNV tries to work in balance with all political parties and movements, mainly ensuring that people can participate in the governance process and benefit from development efforts.

What are your observations regarding the local governance?

We have different experiences in different districts. If you make a comparison between Mechi and Karnali zone, there is more economic potential in the Mechi and thus more potential for collecting taxes and funds for the development budget. Furthermore it is not easy to find and keep the right professionals in remote places. In Karnali zone, we find that there are no planning officers, engineers and overseers. SNV wants to build the capacity of the local bodies. But I do not know many Nepalese civil servants that voluntarily go to Humla or Jumla and work there happily, even if they have gone.

As a citizen of world's industrialized and democratic country, how do you see the democratic transition in Nepal?

Looking at the past ten years gives more hope for an interesting future than the immediate past. Looking at the past 10 days I would say that parliaments are meant to play an important role in democracy. And although some action in the parliament was noticed, no sessions were held, according to the newspapers. The reason may be justified or not, but the game has not been completely played according to the rules. If there is a demand for the resignation of Prime Minister of a majority party, one has to go by the agreed rules of the parliamentary process, where everything can be decided on majority basis.

Is it easy to run the democratic institutions in the country like Nepal which just has the five-decade-old experience of process of modernization?

It will never be easy and calm in politics and in democratic institutions. In The Netherlands we have a parliamentary democracy since more than 150 years and also in these days our politicians are criticised for mistakes or corruption. The difference between Nepal and Holland may be only a matter of degree. Of course a longer tradition and an economic prosperous environment facilitate to run democratic institutions. But the democratisation process in Nepal may go faster than it went in The Netherlands. A younger generation is coming to power and will probably benefit from experiences elsewhere and hopefully avoid all the mistakes made somewhere else in the world.

How do you see the accountable and the local elected authorities dealing with the people's problem?

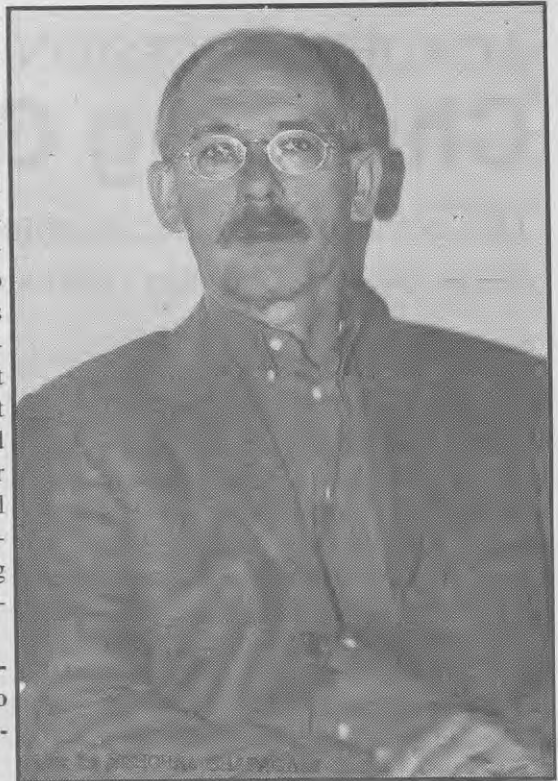
It seems as if not all authorities have the same drive towards accountability. But in many places too one notes that awareness and education among villagers is lacking and that they do not have sufficient power to call the elected bodies to task. Part of our programs is social mobilisation and education of people in making use of their rights as citizens.

Nepal is a small country in South Asia, how do you see the economic potential of Nepal?

Situated between two big neighbors, there is definitely easy access to large markets. At the same time however their manpower is not expensive and they also have potential. Economically, I would say agriculture, non-timber forest, hydropower and tourism offer most potentials. If the government makes the trade taxable, this will be more beneficial. All the illegal tree felling and trade mean that the potential is there. Regulations and clear property arrangements may help benefit more people from this potential. Of course, tourism is an important sector but it is a risky and very sensitive sector. Tourists will immediately stop coming if the law and order deteriorates. One needs to attract tourists to rural areas too. More income can be gained outside Kathmandu Valley, if basic conditions for tourism elsewhere are developed.

Other donors are complaining about the issues of good governance in Nepal. How do you look at it?

From a governance perspective one difficulty is that there is a central government and 75 district governments, with a huge gap in between. In each district there are facilities of education, but they are controlled from the center. Now the government proposes the regional administration but mainly for the security purpose and not for the development. There is no intermediary between different districts. The central government is very much Kathmandu valley focussed and may not be able to give sufficient attention to rest of the country. ■



In The Netherlands we have a parliamentary democracy since more than 150 years and also in these days our politicians are criticised for mistakes or corruption.

ACADEMIC SESSION

Changing Gears

The government's decision to reconfigure the academic calendar creates confusion

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

For the last couple of decades, the month of Falgun (February/March) has indicated the start of the new academic session. For various reasons, it was found suitable by students, parents as well as teachers. But now the government is planning to begin the academic calendar in the month of Shrawan (July/August).

The government has been working on changing the academic calendar for a long time. But the central decision, which apparently was made without adequate preparation, has now created a situation of confusion among the schools.

"Already it is the end of Falgun and we are still at loss about the academic session. We are still waiting for the clear decision from the ministry," said a public

school teacher.

The government says that the new academic calendar is in conformity with the regional/international practice as well as the country's fiscal year. But teachers and parents do not agree.

"In the name of pursuing a regional calendar, we should not forget our culture and environment," said a guardian.

Agrees, Min Bahadur Bista, an educationist. "The decision (to change the academic calendar) can not be justified as it was made by the bureaucrats in Kathmandu without consulting the local stakeholders."

According to him, the role of the ministry should have been limited to fixing the number of instructional days and date of national examinations. "Beyond that, the local schools should be left to decide when they want to start their sessions," he said.

The academic session that used to begin in Falgun after two months of winter vacation (Poush and Magh months) had many features that looked after the country's unique climate and culture.

"It took care of our farming cycles, festivities and climatic conditions," Bista said. "And as far as the regional/international practice is concerned, that is not a big issue. Look at thousands of people like us who have gone abroad to study at some point of their life. We didn't face big problems because of this disparity in academic calendar."

Lately, the government, too, seems to have eased of its position regarding the decision to begin the academic session from Shrawan. Last week, the education secretary had announced that the government would take into account the recom-

Crying Buddha

Shoving aside the international outcry, the Afghan militia began destroying the third and fifth century Buddha statues in Bamiyan since Saturday, March 4, 2001. The fundamentalist Taleban regime, struggling for international recognition, further gave away their hardline bigotry by deciding to follow the edict of its one-eyed leader Mullah Omar. The 'supreme' Taleban leader ordered his fanatic soldiers to destroy the historic artifacts saying they were an 'offense' to Islam. No amount of international pressure could make the trigger-happy Taleban regime withdraw its decision to settle the tallest-known Buddha statues in central Afghanistan. Leaders from around the world have condemned the Taleban's decision to destroy the Bamiyan Buddhas — the historic artifacts that are the reminiscent of pre-Islamic Afghans. Nepal, too, joined the international protest. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala expressed deep regret on the Taleban regime. Various Buddhist organizations in the country have denounced the decision to bring down the statues. The zealots have earned the international condemnation for imposing strict laws down-trodding the basic human rights in the name of Islamic Shariah law. The United Nations sent a special UNESCO envoy to convince the Taleban against destroying the statues of Buddha. But the extremists have already made it clear that they will not back off from the decision saying it was an internal affair of Afghanistan. At present, only three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, have recognized their regime. ■

mendations by teachers and experts while implementing the decision.

But as yet, there has been no further development as to whether the government will go ahead with its previous decision or pay heed to the genuine complaints from the teachers, students and parents. ■



Ministry of Education : In controversy

ANFA DISPUTE

Battle Over Due Process

The government threatens to delegitimize the football association led by Ganesh Thapa

By KESHAB POUDEL

When Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is challenging his opponents in the House of Representatives to follow the rules of the game to oust him, his lieutenant in the Ministry of Sports and Education is making every effort to oust the legitimately elected

brother Kamal is a powerful member.

Despite the interim order of the Supreme Court on maintaining the status quo on issues concerning ANFA's status, the government seems determined to use every means to delegitimize the ANFA led by Thapa and end its influence in the country.

Thapa was elected in the presence of representatives from the International

of law, how can the prime minister argue against the use of similar methods against him in parliament by the opposition?" asked advocate Bishnu Bhattarai, Thapa's lawyer.

As Thapa secured his protection through an interim order from the apex court, the government is making every possible effort to stop the Thapa-led ANFA's activities.

The government and the National Sports Council prevented Thapa from renting the national stadium to organize birthday cup football tournament. Because of this, ANFA is organizing the tournament at Bharatpur.

"We are now in the process of de-regulate the ANFA led by Thapa and there will be only one ANFA soon," Minister of State for Sports and Education Dilendra Prasad Badu said at a press conference last week. "We have already asked the International Football Federation (FIFA) to register the ANFA led by Geeta Rana."

Although the court has already issued an interim order, the minister and other officials backed by the government seem to in a determined move to kick Thapa out.

The Thapa-led ANFA, too, is making efforts to show its existence in the country. Despite the government's adversarial attitude, Thapa is now organizing different programs to attract the football players. "As the legitimate football organization, we are making efforts to start football tournaments in different parts of the country," said Thapa. "We are committed to the development of football."

With the intervention of Minister of State Badu, the member-secretary of the National Sports Council set up an ad-hoc ANFA committee by bringing together candidates defeated in the ANFA convention that elected Thapa as its president.

In democracy, the rule of law must prevail — be it in parliament or in the football association. If Prime Minister Koirala wants a fair game in parliament, he must ask his minister to uphold democratic practices in ANFA. ■



Thapa at a press conference : Clipped authority

All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) led by veteran national soccer player Ganesh Thapa and to legalize the ANFA ad-hoc committee set up in its place.

There is a tinge of irony in the standoff between the government and Ganesh Thapa. While Thapa is being victimized by Koirala's minister on the football ground, Koirala is under pressure from opposition groups including the RPP, of which Ganesh Thapa's

Football Federation and Asian Football Confederation FIFA/AFC on October 16 in defiance of the government's wishes. The government responded by sending the police into the ANFA complex. Although the government formed a parallel committee to challenge Thapa, FIFA and AFC have recognized him as a legitimate president of ANFA.

"When one of Koirala's ministers is using bullying tactics to replace the rule

SNOOKER CONTEST

Pool Popularity

Surya Tobacco Company is organizing the first Surya Nepal Snooker Challenge 2001

By AKSHAY SHARMA

Snooker, pool or billiards has become popular around the country. And it is now one of the most popular games among the youth. "Earlier there used to be only six or seven tables available in clubs. Now the sport has become more popular because there are

Challenge 2001. The Surya Tobacco Company has been organizing a brigade of other sport events like this before.

The event began on March 1 and will continue until March 17 for participants in Katmandu only.

"It's always been Surya Tobacco Company's endeavor to provide the best



Snooker players : Getting popular

more than 800 tables in Kathmandu alone. We have been trying to introduce the sport for more than a decade now. And we have definitely seen improvements," said Ang Kami Sherpa, executive member of Billiards, Snooker and Pool Association speaking to SPOTLIGHT about how the game became popular in the country.

Surya Tobacco Company is organizing the first Surya Nepal Snooker

sporting experience to the people of Nepal by organizing International Class Tournaments like the Surya Nepal Masters Golf tournament or the Kukhuri Gold Cup. We wish to expand our portfolio of international class tournaments by introducing our first but this event will be held annually," said Binod Jung Thapa, the senior branch manager of Surya Tobacco Company.

The event has an entry fee of 300 rupees. "The entry fee will be kept by the clubs and the rest of the amount will be deposited to the Snooker Association," said Dinesh Gurung.

"The situation in the country is the main reason behind our games being delayed. The controversies arising in the sports in the country is a major set back for organizing events. Recently football player refused to play football and these types of scenarios are holding us back from organizing such events like this," said Thapa.

"We expect 1,000 participants. We plan to make it an annual event in other major cities in the country," pledges Thapa.

The tournament boasts of cash prizes, runner-ups and prizes for the highest break in the game. The total prize money will be Rs 172,000

Rajesh Bajracharya of the Snooker Association said, "We have changed a few rules and regulations. Like if you hit the cue ball and it bounced back from the wood we considered it as a foul. But we are applying new rules on a handbook provided to us by the Asian Federation."

The game is to be organized at: The Cosmos Solarium, Tripureswor - Exclusive Snooker, Sundhara, - Everest Snooker, Thamel - Plaza Snooker, Baudha - Garden Snooker and Pool at Naya Bazaar, Chetrapati Lounge Snooker, Chetrapati, - Black and White Snooker and Pool, - Boudha, - Greenland Snooker and Pool, Baneswor, - Heaven's Snooker, Kumaripati, - Classic Snooker, Kirtipur, Naasal Snooker, Putalisadak, -The Circle, Chabahil, Dragon Snooker, Maharajgunj, Centre Point Snooker and Pool House, Ratna Park and The Snooker Maze, Jyatha respectively.

"I have already filled out the registration procedures and I have been practicing my moves," said Roshan Subha of Bagbazar. ■



TRANSITION

RETURNED: His Majesty King Birendra and Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya, after completing a state visit to the People's Republic of China.

LEFT: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, leading a Nepalese delegation including For-

eign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola and Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, on an official visit of Republic of France, at the invitation of French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

APPOINTED: Kumar Prasad Poudel, Ananta Raj Pandey, Bijaya Raj Bhattarai, Tika Dutta Niraula and Chandni Prasad Shrestha, as the regional adminis-

trators of eastern, central, western, mid-western and far western development region respectively, by the government.

Shyam Krishna Kasaju, as the member of the Administrative Court, by the government.

TRANSFERRED: Keshav Raj Rajbhandari, Secretary at the Cabinet Secretariat, to the Ministry of

Land Reforms and Management and **Yoddha Shah**, Secretary at the Ministry of Land Reforms and Management, to the Cabinet Secretariat, by the government.

PERMITTED: Twenty-two expeditions from 11 countries, to scale six different peaks in the next spring season, by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation. ■

'For A Fistful Of Rupees'

— YOSHREE

Experts say 90 percent of the youth in Nepal face addiction-related risks. **AKSHAY SHARMA** recently met a 26-year-old man, who wanted to be identified as **YOSHREE**, who spoke about the hideous turns his life had taken. He explained to **SPOTLIGHT** how drugs and other social ills influenced him and how his life changed when he found out that his sister had been sold to a brothel in Bombay. He believes he can be of help to agencies fighting the drug menace and the flesh trade. Excerpts:

How did you get into drugs?

Drugs were legal in Kathmandu in the 70s and society plunged into them. Most of the addicts were frustrated youth. Many were influenced by seniors.

What influenced you?

When I was 14 or 15, I was influenced by gang fights and things like that. I noticed that some seniors were smoking cigarettes. So I picked up the habit, which led me on a completely different path. Some people did it for the sake of friends and brotherhood. Others did it out of frustration and desperation. Some of my friends died because they shared needles.

Do you see hope for people who want to get out of their addiction?

Some people like me have survived and recovered. You need proper guidance for that. These people need to be taken away from their old environment. Parental guidance plays a big role. Many addicts I have met say they were influenced by movies. I have seen some people who have synchronized their lives with music and drugs.

How did you get deeper into this quagmire?

I started out with cigarettes, then went on to try marijuana. I was frustrated with life when I found out that my sister had been sold to a brothel in Bombay. I was too small to do anything for her. Until then, I did not know I had a sister.

Who was the person that sold her?

His name is Babu Ram Tamrakar. I

do not understand why he had to sell my sister for a fistful of rupees. He himself later died of AIDS. I do not know how things turned that way. My father was in the Royal Nepal Army and died in



Lebanon. After I knew I had a sister, I went to Bombay. I now know that some high-class people were behind the whole affair.

How did the family that was supposed to take care of you treat you?

They did not treat me very well. Then I left their home and worked for some months in Chinatown Restaurant in Thamel. I often went to see my sister in Bombay, but we could not face each other because of the circumstances. It was hard on both of us. I worked at Santa Cruz Juice House in Bombay as a cashier for a year.

What did you do next?

I went to Sikkim and joined the Boys Club there. Then began what I thought was a promising career in sports. But soon I met with an accident while working at a diesel power company there. I was bedridden for two months. That spelled the end of my soccer career.

Why didn't you go to the higher authorities or the police for help?

I was too small then. I do not remember what I was accused of, but I had to suffer when I went to the police. I have heard about NGOs like Maiti Nepal who are working in this area, but I'm a small fish in this cruel ocean. Who will listen to me? I have seen women running away from brothels in Bombay, but the police often take them back to that hell.

Did your father leave behind any property?

I remember we used to own some land in Arubari in Baudha. But I was too young to understand those things. And since my father was mostly away, I was in one boarding school or another as a child.

Carrying The Burden

Although there is no record of the number of trekking porters in Nepal, a rough estimate can be made. Some 100,000 tourists come for trekking every year, and if we assign two porters to one tourist, there will be 200,000 porters. The Nepalese porters suffer from many problems. Because of the lack of awareness, they suffer from high-altitude sickness, snow blindness and frost-bites. To address the problems of porters, International Porters Protection Group (IPPG) and Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) of King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) jointly organized a program jointly. The program titled 'Sustainable Tourism Training Workshop for Trekking Porters' discussed on the ways to help make the porters' profession more safe and rewarding. 'We hope to educate the porters so that they will know how to avoid high-altitude sickness and other diseases they are likely to encounter,' said Prakash Adhikary, IPPG's Nepal representative. More than 30 porters from Dhading, Gorkha, Kavrepalanchowk and Solukhumbu districts took part in the two-day program. Most of the porters are uneducated and from very poor backgrounds. "They are not aware of their rights. Many times we can find them carrying overload for the sake of extra money," said Adhikary. The participants of the program stressed the need to standardize the porter's remuneration and the amount of weight they carry to bring down the prevalent practice of exploitation.

But the property my father must have left behind was fraudulently taken away from me. I never got a penny.

What about now?

I have survived this roller-coaster ride. But the images come back to haunt me at times. I will fight this disease. I think I could be of help to agencies working against such drugs and women trafficking. My battle against the kind of people that ruined my life will continue. Yoshree can be contacted at Yoshree11@yahoo.com ■

Now In Town

BOOK

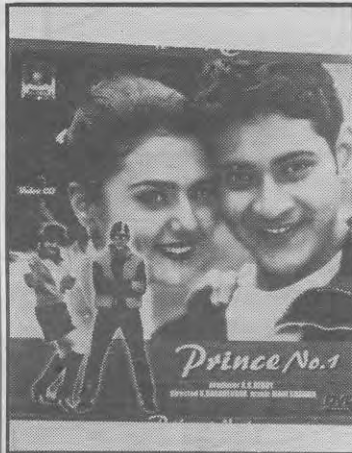
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(Source : Himalayan Book Center, Bagh Bazar, Kathmandu, Ph : 242085)

Video (English)

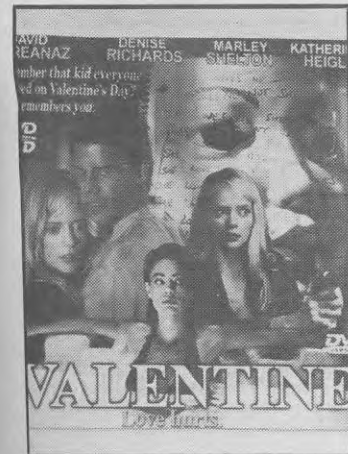
- Hannibal
Disappearing Acts
Valentine
Hard Eight
Vertical Limit
Fast Away
Down To Earth
Sweet November
U-772
2001-Aspace Travesty



Hindi

- Prince No 1
Grahan
Aashiq
Kasoor
Khiladi 420
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Kuch Hathi Kuch Meethi
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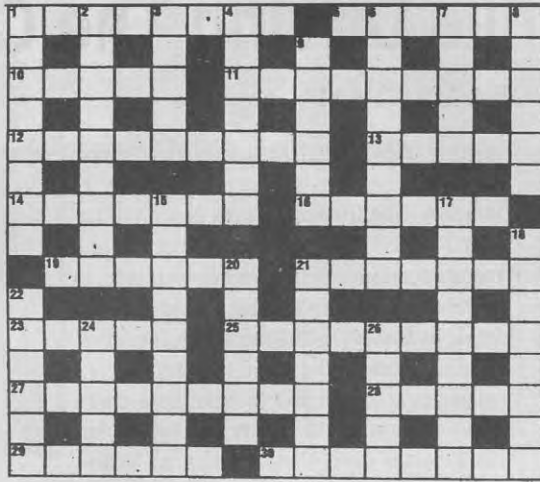
FRED BASSET



ERNIE



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Complained as hair turned grey (8)
5. Accepted it's a sin (6)
10. So-called Pope digesting scripture slowly (5)
11. Soldier mostly working with one in hardship (9)
12. Skulduggery as old paintings considered by restorers? (5,4)
13. Piece of information workers discovered during current stop-page (5)
14. Outdoes students generally returning star mark (7)
16. Showed fury as editor edited (6)
He won't accept a measure of fine quality (6)
21. Roman general with a vice we hear (7)
23. A mate involving pawn capture comes as shock (5)
25. Claim there's no time to tuck into cheese in restaurant (9)
27. Signs of aging in Conservative ranks shown by measure (5,4)
28. Whale noise initially captured by instrument picking up sound (5)
29. Made fun of being badly dressed (6)
30. In summary, university is very dear (8)

DOWN

1. It's rarely valuable (4,4)
2. Not knowing or caring, one blunders (9)
3. Unknowns holding fortune in foreign currency (5)
4. Capitalize on stunt (7)
6. It afforded noblemen a progressive education (5,4)
7. Uplifting material for poet (5)
8. Energetic worker needing Monday off (6)
9. Argue as motorcyclist hems in front of car (6)
15. Straw bedding in empty pasture to hold a sick animal (9)
17. Naturally, nobody uses it in speech (9)
18. Offhand gesture of affection concealing extremes of love (8)
20. Physio needed in a succession of games (6)
21. List of work round flat put up — one's doing a conversion (7)
22. Relish resistance as cupholder (6)
24. One of those in sharp row may come up with a mouthful (5)
26. Author climbing this small tree (5)

Across: 1. Grizzled 5. Agreed 10. Lento 11. Privation 12. Dirty work 13. Datum 14. Sunspot 16. Rioted 19. Denier 21. Agrippa 23. Appal 25. Brasserie 27. Crowsfeet 28. Minkie 29. Raged 30. Precious
Down: 1. Gold dust 2. Ignorance 3. Zloty 4. Exploit 6. Grand tour 7. Elliot 8. Dynamo 9. Bicker 15. Pallasse 17. Esperanto 18. Careless 20. Rubber 21. Adaptor 22. Saucer 24. Prong 26. Sumac

SOLUTION

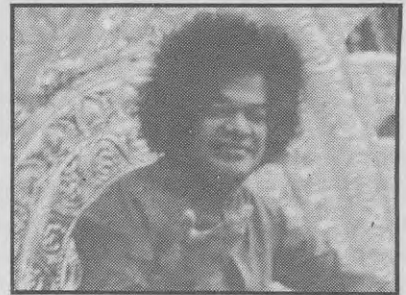
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*“Sing and Praise His
endless attributes. Singing
and listening to His Name
and keeping Love for Him
in mind will make sor-
rows disappear and
happiness will take the
place, wherever you be.”*

SATHYA SAI BABA

NEPAL'S WATER RESOURCES STRATEGY FORMULATION

Paving The Way While Driving The Car

By DR. UPENDRA GAUTAM

Preparation of a national water resources strategy for Nepal is at the final stage. According to Purna Bhadra Adiga, executive director and convener of this exercise at the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS), Ministry of Water Resources, the synthesized draft of the strategy will be duly deliberated upon at a national workshop.

His Majesty's Government started the first phase of the national water resources strategy formulation in 1995. In this phase, issues and problems in the water sector were reviewed and identified. This phase was completed in 1996. After a gap of two years, the second (current) phase of strategy formulation got initiated in January 1999. WECS contracted a team of national consultants who were organized into a Water Resources Strategy Formulation (WRSF) Consortium to undertake the comprehensive strategy formulation exercise. The two-year contract was made under a competitive services procurement arrangement that was agreed between HMG and the World Bank.

The main objective of the WRSF exercise was "to help efficient and judicious harnessing of water resources for accelerating the economy to a high growth path on a sustainable basis." WRSF Consortium recommended a "strategic policy framework" constituting seven major policy-components to realize the objective of the WRSF exercise. These components were specified as: i) development and management of water resources should be on a holistic and integrated basis; ii) development of water resources should be on a sustainable basis; iii) delivery of water services should be efficient and affordable; iv) economic efficiency and social equity should be considered in water pricing and cost recovery; v) participation and consultation should be institutionalized in water-related decision making process; vi) sharing of water resources should be based on clear and unambiguous legislation on water right on domestic front and on international rules and conventions in the case of international rivers; and vii) institutional framework should be well in place for clear demarcation of policy, operation and regulation functions, restructuring of relevant entities on river basin basis and strengthening of central planning organization.

In the opinion of Dr. Badri Prasad Shrestha, team leader of the WRSF Consortium, "the country's water resources strategy has to be guided by a comprehensive national perspective and it should be able to resolve the problem of poverty." Indeed, in the context of poverty and vulnerability of a majority segment of the population, the social well-being should be the primary goal of Nepal's water resources development and management strategy. Poor, women, and potential project-affected persons should constitute as the primary target social group that needs to be mainstreamed with water resources development and management if social well-being and equity in resources distribution is to be achieved.

After several rounds of ups and downs, breaking and joining of hearts, prejudice and patience, tears and cheers, which are natural and well anticipated in this sort of complex but pioneering national exercise, WRSF Consortium completed its contractual task in De-

cember, 2000. It submitted the final report on water resources strategy along with 15 annexes. The fifteen annexes pertain to national water resources policy framework, macro-economic framework, water pricing and cost recovery, river basin planning framework, hydrology, geo-seismology, water resources database, environment, social concerns, legal aspect and international cooperation, institutional framework and mechanism, water supply and sanitation, hydro-power and power market, irrigation and river transportation.

The most observable constraint during the whole exercise was the personalized or factional position that the actors stuck to while participating in the administrative and/or WRSF consultative meetings. Such tendency was more pronounced in Kathmandu meetings than at the regional meetings that were held in Chitwan, Pokhara, Nepalgunj and Biratnagar. Participants in the regional meetings were more open and understanding, more consensus and result-oriented. This clearly underlined the need for an enlightened national leadership in the water sector, which derives sustenance from diverse stakes and potential of its own people and is able to take risk for the comprehensive, equitable and industrial utilization of water resources. The challenging situation, in which both the concerned officials and consultants worked in Kathmandu, therefore, can be characterized as "paving the way while driving the car."

WECS, which is supposed to be responsible for the national water resources strategy review and development on a continual basis, has since been working on the WRSF Consortium report. It has prepared a draft document. This document is stated to be "a synthesis of people's aspirations and down-to-earth realities and attempts to show a road ahead leading to water-induced prosperity, not a mirage."

The document presents the strategy in a logical frame inter-linking the goal, purpose, outputs, and major activities with one another in the time slice of 5, 15 and 25 years. WECS intends to present this synthesis document in a national workshop after duly completing internal peer review and preparatory works. The national workshop will be organized sooner than later, says Ram Nath Kayastha, project manager, WRSF Study Project. Presumably, the workshop will lead the WRSF process to the ultimate consensus, which has become the most essential hallmark of a successful polity in many societies. Once a national water resources strategy is in place and effectively operational, it is hoped for that the country will be able to take initiatives and make responses on an appropriately institutionalized basis and both the authority and accountability of the leadership is in force and regularly implemented. ■

A retired Associate Professor at Tribhuvan University and Foreign Affairs Editor of the vernacular Nepal Post, Dr. Gautam is associated with Consolidated Management Services (CMS) Nepal, which was a leading member of WRSF Consortium.



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