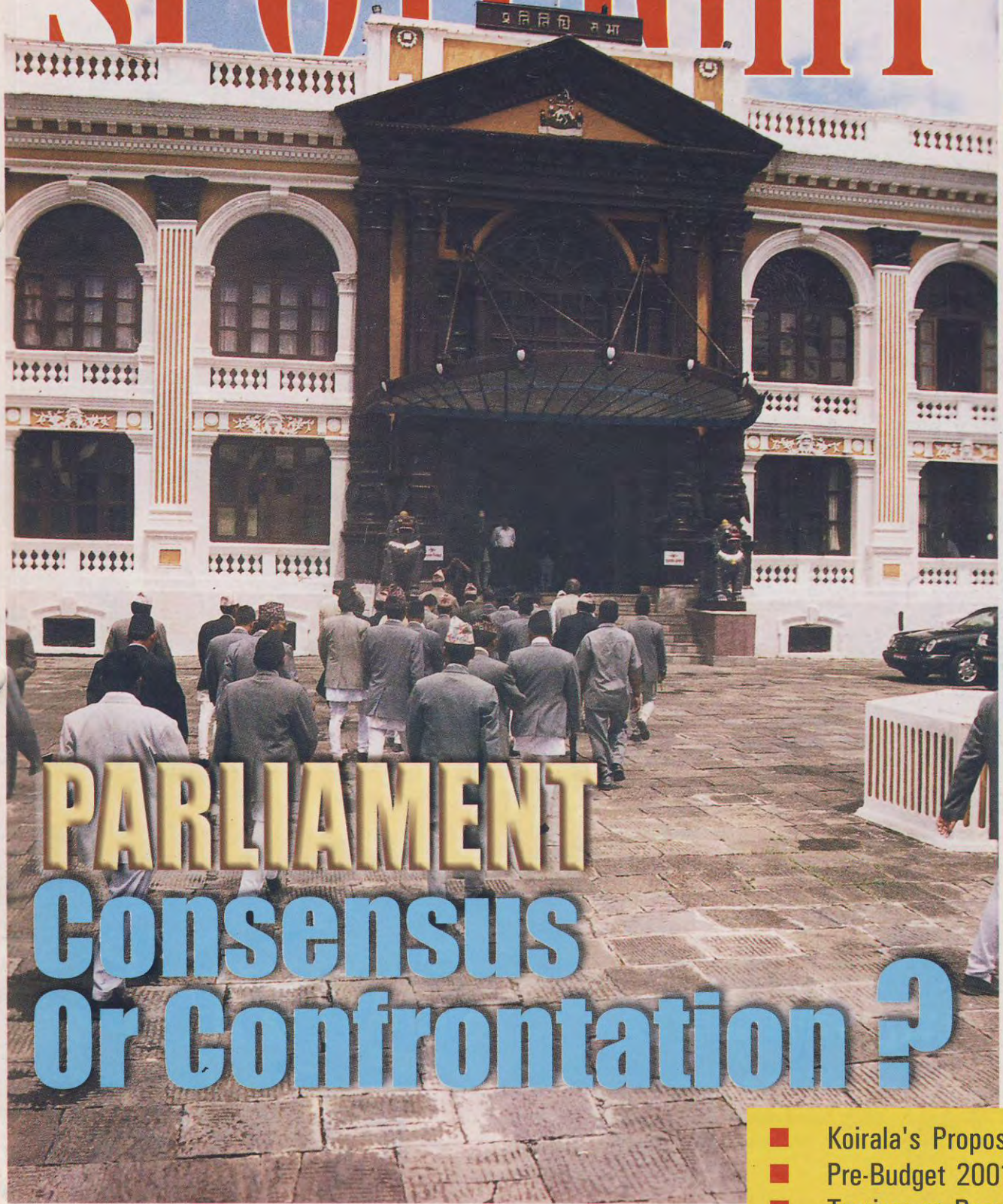


The National Newsmagazine

SPOTLIGHT

June 29-July 5, 2001



PARLIAMENT Consensus Or Confrontation ?

- Koirala's Proposal
- Pre-Budget 2001
- Tourism on Recovery
- Cricket Crisis

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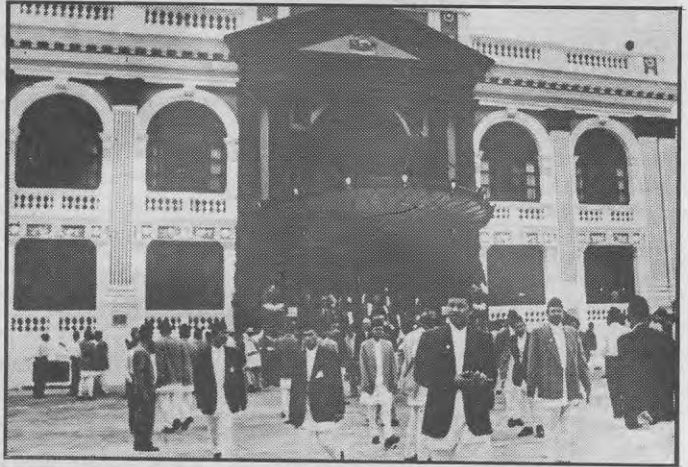
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COVER STORY : THE EGUSIVE CONSENSUS

The 20th session of parliament begins amid political uncertainty and huge national tragedy.

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CIAA : Morality In Jeopardy

The govt.-formed committee to probe irregularities in Mahakali Irrigation Project, summons the country's top anti-corruption body's chief.

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ENCOUNTER : Col. Mark Dowdle
The military attache at the British Embassy talks about many issues, including that of British gurkhas

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The gruesome tragedy that struck Nepal on the night of June 1, 2001 has exposed the true character of the Nepalese politicians and officialdom. The tragedy exterminated the whole family of the reigning monarch and cost the precious lives of five other close relatives. That this sort of ghastly happenings could take place inside the Royal Palace in the midst of a family gathering has brought to light the appalling lacunae in the security system in the Palace. It is, indeed, very strange to see not one official in the whole Kingdom had the guts to accept moral responsibility for the saddest episode. Even those whose one and the only function is to protect the person of the monarch have shied away from accepting their failings. Since the politicians who have assumed power in the last more than a decade have clearly demonstrated their lack of love for their country and their poor people, no one needs be surprised if they have been insensitive to the heartrending happenings. Naturally, they do not have any love or respect for the institution of monarchy. Even those who were closely associated with the late King for years did not think it proper to shoulder any kind of moral responsibility. Their strong attachment to their jobs and the manifold sinecures that go with them have outweighed all other humane considerations of morality, dedication and loyalty. Their callous behavior has justified the sobriquet of 'mercenary' applied to Nepalese defence forces. We do trust King Gyanendra will lose no time in revamping the security system in the Palace and issue necessary instructions to investigate meticulously the antecedents of all the personnel that are employed there.

* * *

Even after four weeks of the dreadful happenings a large number of people have not been able to reconcile to the new situation. Indeed, the enormity of the tragedy has numbed their senses. The love and affection they bear for their King is making it difficult for them to accept the truth. Moreover, the insensitive and childish manner in which the findings of the two man high powered commission constituted to probe the sad incident at the Royal Palace were presented, has not helped to ease the situation. Speaker Taranath Ranabhat, one of the two members of the commission seems to have missed his profession. He would be a bigger asset to a circus company. Even though the report has established, once and for all how the havoc was perpetrated, some sinister elements have not ceased spreading rumors and generating misgivings in the minds of the people. They are trying to insinuate that it could be a conspiracy planned, aided and abetted by some nefarious foreign agency. It is high time the government scotched such baseless rumors that keep on poisoning the minds of simple Nepalese people.

* * *

The twentieth session of the parliament has started. Before the end of the week King Gyanendra would be reading out the plans and programs of the government for the year ahead. But, as usual, the political climate persisting in the country does not bode well for the Nepali Congress government. Still, the Nepali Congress politicians, instead of strengthening the monarchy at such a critical time, seem to be resorting to weaken it. They seem to be totally unaware of the fate awaiting them when they will be made to account for all their illgotten wealth. The country can no more bear the burden of corruption and non-performance. The people have a limit to their patience. If the politicians still fail to read the writings on the wall, they must be prepared to meet the consequences. ■



Madhav Kumar Rimal
Chief Editor & Publisher



Commendable Job

Despite the difficult circumstances, the two-man commission did a good job in bringing out a relatively thorough report on the palace killings ("Fuzzy Picture", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). It was for the first time in history of Nepal that commoners were allowed to probe an incident in the palace. It is of no use for people to continue speculating and circulating rumors about what happened on the night of June 1. What happened was most unfortunate, but what can we do now? The show must go on. Let us join hands in time of this great sorrow and work for the country.

Rishiram Parajuli
Chandol

was most solemn. There was no room for humor there. The perverse laughter from reporters was overshadowed by the sense of humor of the speaker. The way he pointed the gun, which wiped out almost our entire royal family, toward the reporters and the way the reporters laughed at that gesture were all in very bad taste. No sane Nepali would have liked to see such a scene at such serious program.

Deepak Shrestha
Pulchowk

Tourism In Tatters

A series of unfortunate incidents in the country have gradually pushed tourism to the brink of total collapse ("Downward Spiral", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). Being a mainstay of Nepalese economy, any negative effect on tourism is bound to have a corresponding effect on overall national life. As the country is passing through its most difficult period, everybody, including the political parties and civil society, must sit together to frame plans to develop this sector.

Samita KC
Chabahil

Why Did He Do It?

The probe committee failed to establish the motive behind the palace killings ("Fuzzy Picture", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). There must have been some very solid reasons for Crown Prince Dipendra to turn his guns on his parents. The love for some woman does not sound too convincing a motive. The committee would have done a better job had it tried to unearth the real reasons behind the massacre. If it was unable to complete the investigation on time, it could have sought another extension.

Harsha Gurung
Sanepa

Wishes To New King

Now that the probe committee has presented its findings, King Gyanendra has the unenviable job of ruling a country that

is surrounded by all kinds of problems ("Fuzzy Picture", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). In these trying times, all Nepalis should help the new monarch in his task. By expressing his firm commitment to constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, the new king has already won many hearts. He now has to consolidate his strength and help his country take off for a better tomorrow.

Sanjib Basnet
Balkhu

Questions Remain

Even after the presentation of the report by the probe committee, there are still many questions that will continue to haunt Nepalese minds for years to come ("Fuzzy Picture", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). The sudden and unexpected killings at the royal pal-

ace have left a vacuum in the country. People are still in a state of shock. Questions like what, how, why continue to hover around. This is the biggest tragedy this country has had to face since modern Nepal was established by King Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great more than 200 years ago.

Sudan Amatya
Koteshwore

Ill Humor

The behavior exhibited by House Speaker Tara Nath Rana Bhat and some reporters during the press conference organized to present the probe committee report was highly objectionable ("Fuzzy Picture", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). It was strange to see reporters laughing and cracking jokes even as the speaker was reading the report. The occasion

Stop Politics

Politics must be put on suspended animation at least for one year to allow the country to recover from the current tragedy ("Downward Spiral", SPOTLIGHT, June 22). People representing all political ideologies must join hands to clear the present environment of uncertainty and let the vital organs of the country function without hindrance. This kind of suspension would help the economy. Tourism will also benefit. The most pressing problem we face today is that of poverty. To overcome this, we must develop our economy and put petty politics on hold.

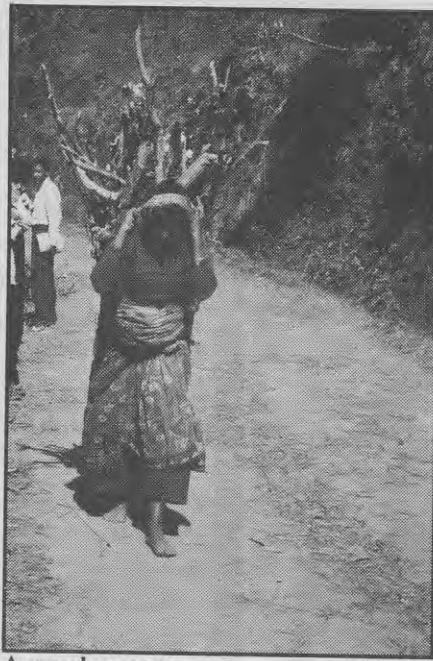
Ujaya Rana
Kumaripati

Maoists Call Nepal Bandh

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has called 'Nepal bandh' (nationwide shutdown strike) Thursday, July 12 to protest against the government's recent decision to enforce the Public Security Regulations 2001. In a statement, chairman of the underground party, Comrade Prachanda, said his party would carry out a series of protest programs against the new regulations, which he said "has murdered the outcome of the historic people's movement of 1990." He alleged that the government was going to impose the regulations upon the irate people after committing 'royal palace massacre' as guided by domestic and foreign reactionaries. The Maoists' protest programs include burning copies of the regulations on June 25, launching an information campaign between June 26 and July 6, burning effigies on July 7, holding torch processions and organizing 'people's action' between July 8 and 11, and organizing the shutdown strike on July 12. *Compiled from reports June 24.*

Indian Agriculture Export Policy Could Affect Nepal

The proposal of the Indian government to grant direct subsidies to farm produce export, in addition to removing all existing quantitative restrictions on their exports, could spell disaster for Nepalese farmers, Kantipur daily reported Friday. The daily quotes The Economic Times, an influential Indian newspaper, as saying that a proposal to this effect, presented by the Indian Commerce Ministry is awaiting approval of the Delhi government. According to reports, traders exporting agro-products like rice, wheat, sugar and pulses will be paid back the difference between their total costs and the final realized export price. Though aimed at improving the competitiveness of the Indian products vis-à-vis the American and European products, once approved, the decision could provide a heavy blow to the Nepali farmers. Indian farmers already enjoy the competitive



A rural woman

edge in terms of cost of production over the Nepali farmers. This is likely to aggravate the already worsening price situation for the Nepali farmers. Low priced agro-imports from India last year pulled down the prices of most of the domestic agro-products, making food grain production an unfeasible venture, the report said. *Compiled from reports June 22.*

All-Party Meet On Economy Demanded

One of the leaders of an apex business organization has called for an all-party meet to discuss the major economic issues the country is facing. First vice-president of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Ravi Bhakta Shrestha told the 10th annual general meeting of the Nepalgunj Chamber of Commerce and Industry Saturday that there was a need for an all-party meeting in the face of the crisis plaguing the country. The FNCCI will itself take the initiative if no one else is ready, he said. Shrestha further said, in view of growing sense of insecurity among the domestic as well as foreign investors, the government should pay serious attention to the security of industrial and business houses and their owners. *Compiled from reports June 24.*

'Security Regulations In Line With The Law'

Refuting allegations that the Public Security Regulations 2001 violated the fundamental rights of people and was against the spirit of the country's constitution, a top government official has claimed that the regulations are very much within the framework of the constitution. Addressing a 'face to face' program here Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel said the regulations had been introduced to limit the authority given to chief district officers by the law. Poudel, who also holds the home portfolio, claimed that the government did not have any intention to infringe upon fundamental rights of the people. The regulations lay down conditions for preventive detention which is widely practised even in democratic countries around the world.

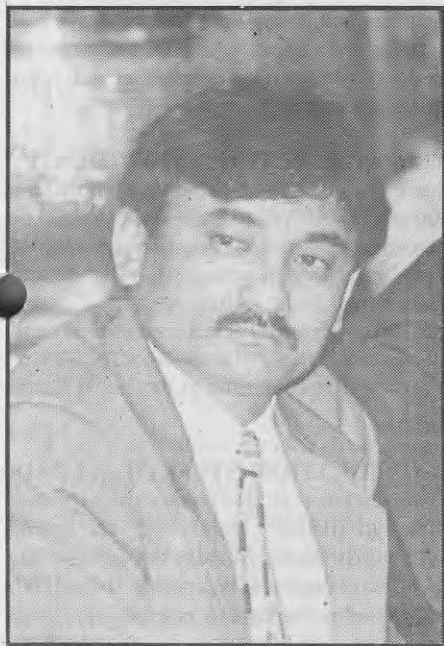


Poudel

said Poudel. He added that it was not aimed against Maoists or any other specific group. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has issued a show cause notice to concerned authorities in response to a writ petition demanding that the court declare null and void the regulations. Four advocates, including Mukunda Poudel, had filed the petition. Similarly, ANNFSU, the student organization of the CPN (ML), filed a petition at the apex court Thursday demanding annulment of the regulations. *Compiled from reports June 22.*

Business Community Welcomes Regulations

A group of 16 organizations related to industry, business and tourism have indirectly welcomed the Public Security Regu-



Shrestha

lations, 2001, saying that it could help in discouraging elements aimed at creating terror in the society. In a statement issued Thursday, the group, however, said the government should be cautious to see that the provisions in the regulations are not misused. President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Pradip Kumar Shrestha, said that there has been a very adverse impact on the economy by frequent 'bandhs,' chakka jams', and attacks against businesses. "Looking at incidents that are taking place in Biratnagar and other parts of the country, we feel that there was a need of some strong laws to prevent disruptive activities," he said. There have been reports of Maoist rebels targeting businesses in the eastern town over the last few days. *Compiled from reports June 22.*

100 Projects To Be Cut Down In The Budget

More than 100 development projects are likely to be cut down in the budget for fiscal year 2001/02, a daily newspaper

reported Sunday, quoting a highly placed source at the Ministry of Finance. Of nearly 700 projects currently being implemented, officials are planning to cut down those projects that have failed to give adequate return on investment. Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, too, confirmed that the government was going to cut down projects that could not be sustained and some of them would be integrated. He said the government was finding it quite hard to finance some of the road construction projects currently being implemented. A total of 172 road projects with the budget allocation of Rs 5.14 billion are being implemented in the current fiscal year. He said the demand for more budget for roads by the members of Parliament was growing. He, however, refused to give details, saying that it could result into a massive crowd at his Ministry. *Rajdhani daily reports June 25.*

Indo-Nepal Joint Venture Awarded Contract

The Nepal Telecommunications Au-

thority, a regulatory body, has awarded United Telecom Limited (UTL), a joint venture between Indian and Nepali investors, to provide telecom services based on Wireless Local Loop (WLL) technology. The UTL bagged the contract by offering to pay Rs 2.13 billion as various duties to the government. A consortium including Telecommunication Consultant India Ltd., Mahanagar Telecommunication Nigam Ltd, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd, all Indian companies, and Nepal Venture Pvt. Ltd forwarded the proposal. The new company is required to start its services within nine months of fulfilling all formalities and expand services to 10 major cities in the country, besides Kathmandu, within the next three years. Managing director of Nepal Venture, Ashok Agrawal, said the new company would distribute 25,000 telephone connections in Kathmandu in the first year of its operations. He said the charges offered by his company would not be higher than that being offered by the state-owned monopoly—Nepal Telecommunications Corporation. *Kantipur daily reports.*

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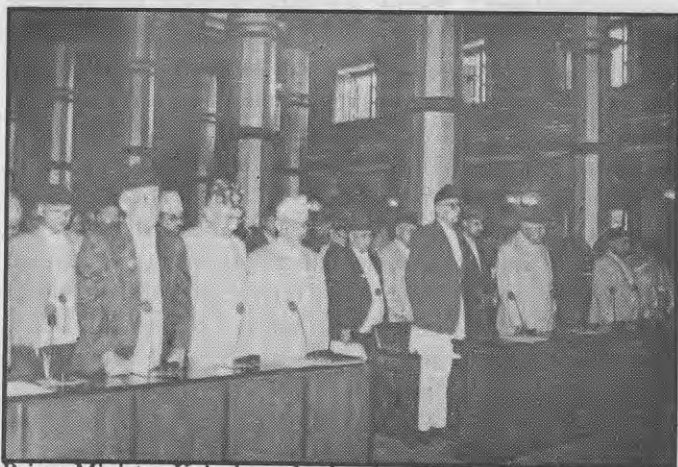
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Prime Minister Koirala and other leaders paying tribute to late King Birendra and members of the royal family in the Parliament Monday

KING GYANENDRA HAS EXTENDED SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS and best wishes to General Pervez Musharraf on his assumption of the office of President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In a message, His Majesty expressed confidence that the friendly relations subsisting between the two countries will be further strengthened in the days ahead. RSS news agency reported. General Musharraf sacked President Rafiq Tarar early this week and declared himself president weeks ahead of a bilateral summit with India. He is travelling to India for a summit meeting with Indian Premier A. B. Vajpayee at historic city of Agra between July 14-16.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF NEPAL (MARXIST-LENINIST) has demanded that the property of King Gyanendra and his family be made public and excess property be nationalized. 'Since the King as a Prince was involved in many industrial businesses it is necessary for the public to know exactly how much property he owns,' ML general secretary Bamdev Gautam told reporters Wednesday. The ML has also demanded nationalization of the properties belonging to late King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and other members of the royal family, mobilize them for social services and enlist the Narayanhiti palace as the museum.

THE REMOTE EDUCATION CENTER UNDER THE MINISTRY of Education and Sports has said it would expand its services so as to cover all 75 districts in the country from mid-September, this year, Nepal Samacharpatra daily reported. So far, such services are available in only 51 districts. Deputy director at the Center, Shyamji Atithi, said for this the Center has been engaged in producing radio cassettes based on revised scripts of remote education. Funded by different donor agencies including DANIDA, the World Bank, JICA and NORAD, the center has already trained nearly 20,000 primary school teachers all over the country over the last seven years.

NEPAL COTTAGE AND SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES (CIS) Development Bank Ltd., a private sector bank, has started its operations from Tuesday. Set up with an authorized capital of Rs 320 million and Rs 160 million as issued capital, the bank aims at reaching all 75 districts of the country within one decade, bank officials said. The bank will provide banking facilities, including infrastructure development, in-house feasibility study, underwriting new issues, working capital loans, project, venture capital and lease and real estate financing, among others. Chairman of the bank, Sitaram Prasad, said the bank was established with an objective of extending financial services to cottage

and small-scale industries in the country.

THE ASIAN REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE CANADIAN CENTER for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) is to be set up in Kathmandu, an announcement said. An agreement to this effect was signed here between the Nepalese government and CECI here Tuesday. The new office will coordinate the program activities of CECI in countries in the South East Asia and South Asia region. It will also provide greater coordination as well as management and technical assistance to the CECI country program for the benefit and well being of the poor people with special focus on women.

THE STATE-OWNED NEPAL ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY (NEA) has signed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Khudi hydropower Pvt. Ltd. to buy nearly 4 MW of power to be generated by the plant. The power plant is expected to start its commercial generation by December 2003. Under the PPA, NEA has agreed to pay Rs 3 per unit of electricity purchased from Khudi hydro during the normal period including monsoon months and Rs 4 per unit during the summer months. The price arrangement will increase at a rate of six percent for the next five years and the hike will thereafter connected to the Nepal Rastra bank index.

THE SALT TRADING CORPORATION (STC) LTD., A LEADING government-private sector venture, is all set to acquire management of the Butwal Spinning Mills Ltd. (BSML), reports said. The special general meeting of the BSML held in Butwal Monday has endorsed the proposal to hand over the Mill's management on contract to the STC. The Mills has been incurring losses for the last few years mainly due to lack of maintenance and modernization of equipment, among others. According to executive chairman of the Mills Dinesh Raj Pant, the STC would invest up to Rs 44.5 million and the term of the contract could be up to 10 years. The Mills, that has been producing up to 5 metric tones of threads per day, is expected to raise its production to 9 metric tones per day under the new management.

THE TENTH CENSUS, 2001, IS ON A FULL SWING ACROSS the country from June 15, reports said. The census, that had to start on June 10, was postponed in 40 out of 75 districts of the country due to national mourning after the royal palace killings. The census will be completed by June 26. Director-General at the Bureau of Statistics Keshav Raj Sharma said that some people tried to obstruct the enumerators in the Maoist insurgency affected district of Jajarkot but later allowed it to go on after they were explained of the significance of census. The CBS has been mobilizing about 27,000 employees including 5000 supervisors and some 20,000 enumerators. In the first phase, the task of enlisting all the households of the kingdom through supervisors has already been completed, Sharma said. The primary results of the National Census 2001, being carried out with the main theme, 'none be omitted nor repeated in the census,' are expected to be out by mid-August 2001.

A HAILSTORM THAT SWEEPED THROUGH THE MID-WESTERN district of Rukum recently has destroyed vegetable seeds being grown by local farmers worth Rs 15 million, Kantipur daily reported quoting officials. According to Agriculture Development Bank branch in the district, the hailstorm has caused great loss to the farmers in this Maoist insurgency-affected district. Chief of the Vegetable Seed Production Center in the district, Ram Prasad Gautam, said the hailstorm also destroyed nearly 70 percent of the seeds planted in 117 ropanis of the government-owned land. The local farmers were trained and supported to grow vegetable seeds during the nineties by a USAID-funded Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project.

“After the commitment from all political parties on these fundamental programs, the issue of who remains in the prime minister’s chair becomes immaterial.”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, addressing the House of Representatives.

* * *

“The first condition for any political consensus is the prime minister’s resignation.”

Madhav Kumar Nepal, leader of the main opposition, replying to the prime minister’s address in the House of Representatives.

* * *

“The opposition leader has given a positive response to the prime minister’s proposal, creating a favorable environment for him to resign. Now the ball is in the PM’s court. He has to keep the promises he made before parliament.”

Subash Nemwang, MP and leader of the UML, in Kantipur.

* * *

“It is the personnel from the Royal Nepalese Army who are responsible for the security of the palace.”



Satchit SJB Rana, former chief of RNA, in Bimarsha.

* * *

“It was not the UML that obstructed the 19th session. Again, it is up to Prime

Minister Koirala how to conduct the 20th session.”

Jhal Nath Khanal, senior leader of UML, in Jana Bhawana.

* * *

“It is not bad to lift stories from elsewhere. What is important is you have to mould it in the Nepalese perspective.”

Prakash Thapa, senior director, defending the practice of lifting stories while making Nepalese films, in Gorkhapatra.

* * *

“There is no age bar for marriage. If things work, it can happen any time.”

Rajesh Hamal, popular actor, when asked why he has not married yet, in Ghatana Ra Bichar.

* * *



Changing Role

Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) president Surya Bahadur Thapa and CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal have struck a new alliance. The affection showered by communist leaders on Thapa has startled those who like to project the RPP leader as a liberal politician. After joining so-called hard-liners during the course of the national referendum and then launching a crusade against

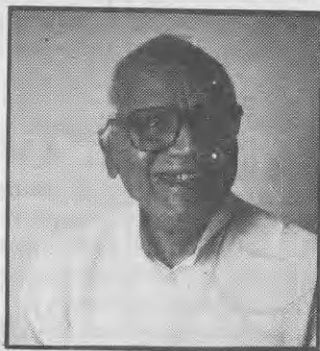


Acharya : Rich in vocabulary

new words in politics. After coming out with some controversial ideas in support of the elected prime minister, Acharya has now found another populist theme: bringing all security organs under the prime minister. As the head of government, the prime minister already holds all kinds of responsibility. Has his sense of loyalty to his leader prompted Acharya to bring in a new metaphor?

Humiliated Bhattarai

Senior Congress leader and former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has always been regarded in the public eye as a heavyweight in the party. In reality, evidence of that does not appear to be so strong. Bhattarai was humiliated when the Congress parliamentary party rejected his proposal to provide a National Council ticket to Dr. Narayan Khadka, his political adviser. Compared to the candidates that were nominated, Dr. Khadka credentials were not inferior in any



Bhattarai : Influence on the wane



Thapa : Growing camaraderie

what he described as a shadowy "underground gang", Thapa is now shaking hands with the leader of a former underground group. Thapa, who once demanded that B.P. Koirala be hanged, became prime minister with the support of Koirala's party. For his political rivals, Thapa's luck must be a source of envy.

Fertile Mind

Congress central committee member and party spokesman Narahari Acharya is known for his fertile mind, especially his ability to introduce

REVELIATION

'RPP Is Not a Party Of Individuals With Vested Interest'

— JOG MEHAR SHRESTHA

After filing his nomination for the National Assembly election, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) leader **JOG MEHAR SHRESTHA** has landed at the center of controversy. The RPP is reported to have expelled him for six years for having violated party discipline. Shrestha, who maintains he is an official candidate of his party, spoke to **SPOTLIGHT** on the issue. Excerpts:



It is said your party is going to expel you for violating party discipline. How do you look at this development?

Who said that? I am an official candidate and I have filed nomination papers after securing the permission of the party. In this situation, there is no question of expelling me for violating party discipline.

At a time when your party has nominated another candidate, how do you claim that you are the official nominee?

I have a legitimate letter written on behalf of the party. The RPP is not a party of individuals having vested interest. I do not understand this propaganda against my nomination.

Do you see any possibility of the RPP breaking up again after the National Council election?

I do not see any possibility of a split. The RPP has passed through many stages before arriving at this point in time. What we need now is to change the pattern of working.

If your party takes disciplinary action against you, what will be your response?

I do not think anybody would be foolish enough to act in such a manner. ■

way. But when people like former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba snubbed Bhattarai's candidate, one is bound to wonder whether Bhattarai's standing in the party is over-rated.

Ranabhat And Ratatat...

While making public the report on the mysterious June 1

killings at the royal palace, House of Representatives Speaker Taranath Ranabhat popularized a new expression: Ratatat, Ratatat, Ratatat. From cartoonist to journalists to lawyers, the speaker's words made for good sound bite and quotes. The speaker's words were notable not because they rhymed with his surname, but because of their power to humiliate in the guise of humor. ■

BUDGET 2001-02

A Balancing Act

'Cut your coat according to the cloth' is, perhaps, the best mantra for the Finance Minister

By BHAGIRATH YOGI

The most important person while formulating a budget is the Prime Minister," said P. Chidambaram, a former Indian Finance Minister. He should know the best. For Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, knowing the mind and winning the confidence of Premier Girija Prasad Koirala may not have been that difficult. But how well would he be able to perform acrobatics while formulating the annual budget for the year 2001/02 remains to be seen.

Preparing a budget in a resource-poor country like Nepal is a thankless job. With a widening gap between the regular and development expenditure and rising expenses for internal security, the need for high revenue mobilization emerges as a most challenging one. The whopping increase in salaries of the government employees—up to 100 percent for junior level—in this year's budget has also contributed to steep rise in the regular expenditure.

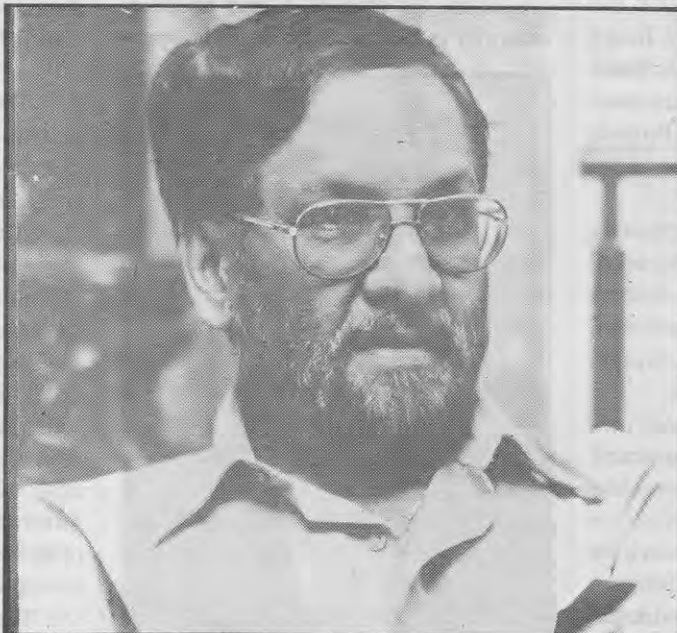
The government has plans to collect Rs 52.98 billion as revenue this year. But in the first ten months of this fiscal year, only Rs 37.32 billion has been collected. "The situation of the government budget is in the doldrums this year," said former finance minister and UML leader Bharat Mohan Adhikari. "If the present trend are any indication, the revenue shortfall may reach up to Rs five billion."

Officials too agree that there may be substantial revenue shortfall this year even if it is less than the Rs 5 billion mark. They point toward three-day general strike called by the main opposition, UML and national mourning in the aftermath of the Narayanhiy killings in the past month as

major obstacles in collecting revenue.

The main opposition party, in its turn, blames the policies adopted by the Nepali Congress government "for pushing the country's economy close to bankruptcy."

"The liberal, economic policies adopted by the Congress government are mainly responsible for putting the national economy in the doldrums. We are not dead against the policy of open market economy but such a policy should also take into



Dr. Mahat : Tight rope walking

account of poor, rural farmers and working class," said Adhikari. "The forthcoming annual budget should be realistic, announce massive reforms in the policy matters and implementation," he said. The main opposition party also demanded that subsidies in irrigation, fertilizer and loans should be continued. On the part of the government, cutting down unnecessary expenditure has come as the main challenge. According to reports, officials are mulling at cutting down more than 100 development projects in then next budget. Of nearly 700 projects

currently being implemented, officials are planning to cut down those projects that have failed to give adequate return on the investment.

"Though some new projects may also be announced in the budget, most of the existing development projects will be streamlined in the budget," said Dr. Shanker Sharma, member of the National Planning Commission. "Besides announcing new policies, the focus of the forthcoming budget would be in bringing out all targeted programs for poverty reduction under the same umbrella, sort out problems being faced by industry, businesses and tourism, continue to fiscal and financial reforms, promote capacity building up of decentralization program and delegate functions to local bodies, among others," he added.

While it is generally estimated that the size of the budget could touch the Rs 100 billion mark (up from Rs 91 billion-plus budget this year), experts say there is still room to check the deflation of the budget. "We are allocating considerable amounts of scarce resources on the projects largely motivated by political considerations without any economic justification," said Dr. Badri Prasad Shrestha, a senior economist and former Vice chairman of NPC. "Generally, one sees no correlation between the increased security expenditure and improvement in the law and order situation. It will be wise, therefore, to keep the budget for those heads at the current level, and rationalize it for more effective utilization of the allocated funds.

Though there have been seen some improvements in the problems like frequent transfer of project personnel over the past few years, judicious use of available resources is one of the most challenging area. As nearly two-thirds of the development budget has to be financed through foreign aid, mobilizing it in a proper way remains an equally important challenge for the Finance Ministry. Whether Finance Minister, with all his expertise and experiences, becomes able to give a new direction to the economy and kick start the second generation of reforms in the country remains to be seen. ■

CIAA Morality In Jeopardy

CIAA chief Surya Nath Upadhyaya appears before a government-appointed inquiry panel

By KESHAB POUDEL

When Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) chief Surya Nath Upadhyaya himself was summoned by an inquiry commission formed in accordance with the directives of the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Representatives to explain his role as chairman of the Mahakali Irrigation Development Board and secretary to the Ministry of Water Resources in alleged irregularities committed in the Mahakali Irrigation Project, the question of morality has come under jeopardy.

"I have not become a smaller man by going to the commission to give my opinion. My height has not shrunk. I don't think the height of those who summoned me has shrunk either," said Upadhyaya. (Kantipur, June 26)

Whatever Upadhyaya said about himself, the summons has raised questions about the credibility of institutions like the CIAA.

The PAC also issued a directive on the dispute pending before the International Court of Arbitration (ICA) and urged the government to take an appropriate decision keeping in view the national interest. In order to execute the directive issued by the PAC, the government decided to form a three-man commission under the chairmanship of former secretary Dr. Bholanath Chalise in accordance with Commission of Inquiry Act two months ago.

Even main opposition party leader Madhav Kumar Nepal described the commission's decision to summon Upadhyaya as part of political vendetta. Interestingly, the investigation commission was formed under the directive of the

PAC, whose chairman is the central committee member of the CPN-UML.

The commission can recommend departmental actions. The PAC sensed probable irregularities and corruption in the execution of the construction project and directed the government to further probe the issue.

After the PAC's probe and recommendation for further investigation on allegations of corruption and abuse of authority in the Lauda Air deal, the oppo-



Upadhyaya : Under scrutiny

sition demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

What will be the moral advice and lesson when an inquiry commission formed under similar circumstances summons the CIAA chief commissioner and commissioners?

Upadhyaya's defenders — and lawyers who vehemently opposed the attorney-general's functional immunity in the court battle two months ago — now claimed total immunity for CIAA chief



Chalise : Tough job

for acts of omission and commission done during his role and responsibility as secretary.

The Supreme Court in its recent decision on CIAA vs Attorney General stated that no one has legal immunity in corruption- and irregularities-related cases.

After completing the probe, the inquiry commission will present its report to the government. If there necessary, the government forward it to the CIAA for investigation and prosecution of alleged corruption and abuse of authority.

Many see the panel's decision to summon Upadhyaya, who practiced arbitration law after his retirement from the government, as an erosion the credibility of the institution whose role is to check corruption and irregularities.

The inquiry commission, which was constituted to investigate and report on the question of irregularities committed in the course of implementation of construction work of Mahakali Irrigation Project by an international contractor, leading to the claim of about Rs 150 million by the contractor, has summoned many officials and technical staff of the ministry.

The inquiry commission was constituted under the Commission of Inquiries Act having the same status as that of past Dhamija commission of inquiry which had summoned Koirala for acts committed during his first tenure as prime minister.

As per the mandate issued by the government, the committee is required to investigate into the question of irregularities, negligence, acts of omission and commission deliberately or negligently, if any, by any of the officials responsible for the execution and implementation of the construction agreement signed between Mahakali Irrigation Board and Koneco Pvt. Ltd.

The agreement was signed in July 1994 for an initial amount of Rs. 645,024,500. The work was completed in June 1998 but the contractor placed a claim for damage and compensation for a further amount of Rs. 150 million with the committee. When the committee failed to accept the contractor's claim, the contractor took recourse to the arbitration clause stipulated in the contract and filed a formal claim before the International Court of Arbitrators on April 13, 1999.

After the receipt from the ICA to the government for its reply and response, the government decided to settle the matter through negotiations rather than defending its position before the ICA. Both sides resorted to talks through their teams of negotiators and finally agreed to a settlement of an amount of Rs. 70.73 million.

When the government was about to release the money as negotiated between the parties last July, the PAC took up the matter for investigation. After a month's deliberation and inquiries, it decided to issue a directive, inter-alia, that the government should not pay the negotiated amount to the contractors and should withhold payment with immediate effect.

The PAC also sought to find out the circumstances that gave rise to such an unreasonable and illegal claim. It stressed that the official responsible by way of negligence, mala fide actions or irresponsible and irregular activities whatsoever, should be thoroughly investigated and held responsible for the loss.

Observers are of the view that if the loss resulting from the Lauda Air agreement could be considered corruption, then probably the negotiated amount paid to the contractor awarded by ICA could definitely be considered an act of corruption by the official responsible.

In the process, the commission exer-

cising the power conferred by the act summoned officials past and present responsible for the implementation of the agreement. Incidentally, the chief commissioners of the CIAA as secretary to the Ministry of Water Resources was chairman of the Mahakali Irrigation Committee during the initial period of the signing and implementation of the project.

"The matter was so obvious and he was not summoned as CIAA chief but

rather as former chairman of the Mahakali Irrigation Board. Therefore, the claim for immunity by him or on behalf of him is clearly misplaced and not supported by law and logic," said a legal expert.

The claim of immunity in this case relates to something done in the past in a different capacity by a civil servant. However, the question of immunity cannot be stretched to shield illegal acts like corruption. ■

TOURISM

Recovery Campaign

Tourism entrepreneurs are planning to develop a long-term program to attract visitors to Nepal

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when Nepal's tourism industry is battered by several rounds of political uncertainty and other forms of instability, tourism entrepreneurs have realized the need to step up efforts to improve the image of Nepal abroad.

Although the country's political parties are yet to accept the vital importance of the tourism industry in the national economy, the efforts of the entrepreneurs could bring some positive response.

Successive bandhs and general strikes called by various political parties have already damaged the image of Nepal as a peaceful destination. The coverage of mainstream national newspapers and international media have tarnished the country's reputation.

"We are going to launch a massive campaign to project Nepal as a safe and peaceful venue for tourists," said a hotel entrepreneur. "If political parties support us, we can recover the loss very soon."

Along with Nepal Tourism Board, hotel entrepreneurs, travel traders and airlines have acknowledged the need to launch an effective publicity campaign in major tourism markets abroad.

As the Chinese government has al-

ready included Nepal on its list of tourist destinations, the loss resulting from the decline in Indian tourists may be recovered.

Although normalcy is returning, bad publicity is still haunting Nepal's tourism market. Ever since the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight to New Delhi from Kathmandu in December 1999, key sections of the Indian media have continued to present Nepal in a negative light.

Despite the continual efforts of Nepal Tourism Board and tourism entrepreneurs to revive the industry, there have not been encouraging results so far. "We will assure foreign and Indian tourists that Nepal is safe to visit," said a senior official of the board.

As Indian news organizations were running short of ammunition to use against Nepal, the announcement of a Nepal bandh on July 12 has come as a bonanza to those wishing to tarnish the country's image.

"Any party has the right to call a general strike or Nepal bandh but the main question is, whose interest will be served by such activities?" asked a hotel entrepreneur.

Whatever campaigns and initiatives tourism entrepreneurs launch, they will not yield results until political parties begin to support them. ■



A Cricket Tournament : Game gaining popularity

ICC TROPHY Unsportive Snub

Even if the replacement players are given visas, the Nepalese team could be crippled without the original 11

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

In a strange twist of events, the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi threw cold water on the Nepalese cricket team's chances of showing their talent in the upcoming International Cricket Council (ICC) Trophy match in Toronto.

As the time of writing this article on Tuesday, June 26, there was still uncertainty over whether Nepal would get to play at the tournament at all.

By denying visas to four of the 14 selected players last week, the officials at the high commission raised many eyebrows in Kathmandu.

Following frantic correspondence between the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN), the ICC, the Royal Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi and the Canadian government, the high commission called for visa applications from alternative players.

As the match in Toronto was slated to start from June 28, Nepalese cricket

officials were racing against time. The replacement players finally got their visas stamped on Monday, June 25 after standing in the queue for the whole day (from 7 am till 4 pm).

But as the team is devoid of the four key players, including skipper Raju Khadka, the new 11 line-up may not be able to deliver the desired results. "Definitely, the team will be affected. But we are hopeful that our boys would do well in any circumstances," said Shashi Dutta Pandey, treasurer at the CAN. Pandey is also traveling with the team.

Already hit by a lack of adequate training after the nation was plunged into mourning following the tragedy at the royal palace, the Nepalese team is now psychologically hit by the snub from Canada.

In another development, the Canadian High Commission officials seemed reluctant extend the visa entry date (fixed at June 25) to 12 players and officials. The CAN held an emergency meeting on Tuesday afternoon to decide on the mat-

ter. The whole team is flying to New Delhi on June 26 hoping that the high commission would renew their visa and allow the team to travel to Toronto.

As the first match of Nepal will be held on June 28, any more delay could torpedo Nepal's chances for good. The CAN is bracing for a last-minute attempt on June 26 to travel to Toronto. "Our team is going to Delhi this afternoon at 3. If they allow, our team will fly to Toronto at midnight today," said Binaya Raj Pandey, general secretary at the CAN.

However, CAN officials are optimistic that Nepal would play the games. "As one of the participating countries, Italy, has withdrawn, we have asked the ICC to reschedule the matches concerning our group and give us more time to reach there," said the office secretary at the CAN.

Though it is the prerogative of the Canadian authorities to grant or reject the visa application, the manner in which the commission denied entry to four key players, including the skipper, and reducing the number of players who could travel — thereby effectively sealing off the country's chance of traveling to Toronto — smacked off ill intention. "Otherwise, why would they choose just



Skipper Khadka : Troubled by Toronto

four players. The intention was to bring down our number just below eleven so that we could not travel," said an official at the CAN.

According to Shree Harsha Koirala of CAN, apart from Nepal, the players from United Arab Emirates and Uganda, too, have been similarly denied visas.

"It seems that they do not want the Afro-Asian countries to participate. Maybe they think that if players from poor countries are allowed they would do something harm to their country," said Tarini Bikram Shah, vice president of the CAN. "But this brazen behavior would certainly affect Canada's chances to host international matches in the future. We have already complained to the ICC also." Although the high commission has not given specific reasons for denying the visa, it seems they fear the Nepalese players would "disappear" and "not return" once they land in Canadian soil.

"But such logic is unfounded. If they are so frightened then why should

they be hosting international tournaments. We are going there upon invitation from the ICC," said secretary Binaya Raj Pandey. "We have already complained the Canada's behavior to the ICC. In the worst-case scenario, we along with other countries from Asia and Africa will join hands to oppose Toronto's bid for 2008 Olympics."

Toronto is also one of the cities bidding to host the 2008 Olympics. The city is competing against Beijing, Paris, Istanbul and Athens to host the games.

"If they cannot handle this match of 24 countries, how can they host the Olympics match," wondered another CAN official aloud. The current ICC trophy features 24 countries and the top three countries would qualify for the 2003 World Cup Cricket in South Africa.

As the future of Nepal's participation in the Toronto games is uncertain, some serious questions have been raised against the intention of the Canadian government, which they need to clarify soon if they want to host international matches in the future. ■

Health Hazard

About 100 people have died of gastroenteritis in the last month alone in the hilly districts of the far western region of Nepal. The outlying parts of Doti and Bajhang districts are the most affected ones. In the absence of adequate health service facilities, the epidemic threatens to kill more lives. In the Bajhang district alone, 57 people have died of the disease. Poor sanitation and consumption of contaminated water are seen as the major reason for the spread of the disease. The various health posts and medical centers in the districts are distributing the medicines. According



A heap of garbage: Potential threat

to one health official, as the epidemic seems to be of a different kind of viral infection, the available medicine were of no help. The health workers are said to be concentrating just on oral rehydration treatment. Because of the geographical distance, information from the affected districts does not reach the capital. Likewise, apart from districts in the far west, nearby districts like Dolakha are also facing a similar spread of the gastroenteritis. This disease regularly crops up in epidemic proportions each year during the rainy season. Because the country lacks basic infrastructure like proper sanitation and clean water supply, people suffer from the outbreak. As the monsoon season of this year has just started, the authorities will have to brace for more such outbreaks in the days to come. ■

Those Who Were Denied Visas

1. Raju Khadka — Skipper. An all-rounder who can bat coolly at crucial moments as well as hit the ball hard during the slug overs. There is no alternative to Khadka in Nepalese team as far as throwing in-swingers is concerned.

2. Rajkumar Pradhan — Selected in the national team for the first-time. Was considered a trump card. A genuine leg-spinner.

3. Birendra Bikram Shah — An offensive batsman. A crucial member of the batting line-up.

4. Kush Gurung — Hails from Chitawan. Works in Indian Army. A prolific wicket-taker who is also considered an offensive batsman useful during middle-overs.

The Replacement Players

1. Pawan Agrawal — Former skipper. Played many times for the country. Tons of experience. A sound batsman.

2. Sandip Shrestha — Relatively new. But regarded as one of the best batsmen available in the country.

3. Navin Ghimire — Used to play for the youth Cricket Club, Biratnagar. Ghimire was the most productive batsman when the club recently visited Pakistan. He is regarded as a batsman who keeps his cool and doesn't throw away the wickets.

4. Durga Sen — A young bowler from Rupandehi. Throws fast balls and can swing them both ways.

PARLIAMENT

Call For Consensus

By outlining his vision, Prime Minister Koirala has thrown the ball in the court of the opposition

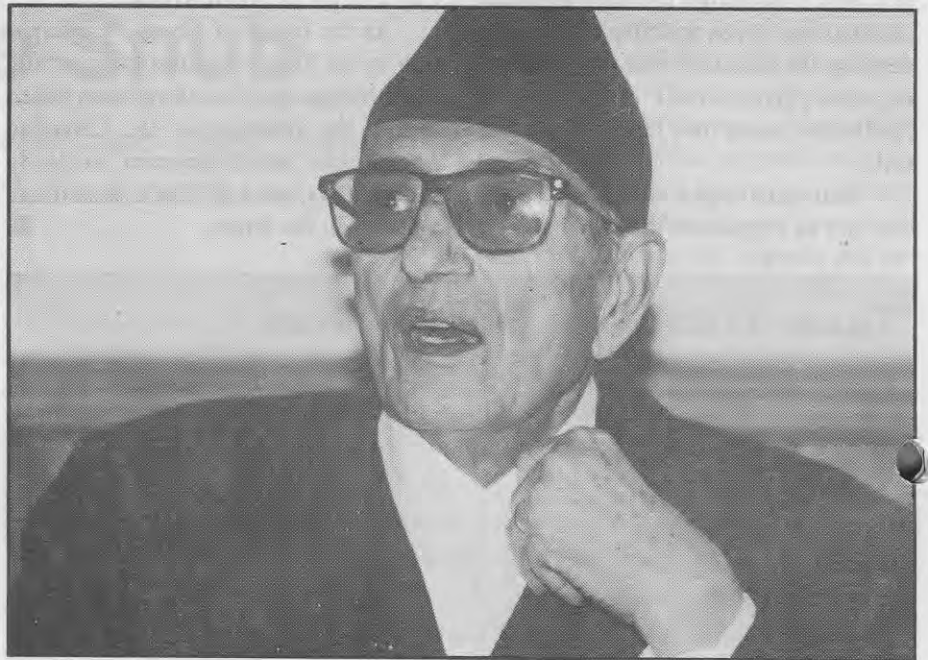
By BHAGIRATH YOGI

“As Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala stood to deliver his formal speech on the opening day of the 20th session of the parliament Monday, many thought it would be a customary speech. But right from the beginning, the septuagenarian chief executive tried to explain why he was made a target of attacks from within his own party and beyond. “It might have looked to many that I have been trying to stick to the post (of Prime Minister) but I am fighting to uphold the authority and dignity of the post of head of the government popularly elected by the Nepalese people,” said Koirala. Within few minutes, he was describing what he called as a ‘basic program for national consensus.’

In his 14-point agenda, the premier has touched upon issues ranging from electoral reforms to economic development, from controlling corruption to controlling violence (See: Box), but his main call has been for minimum national consensus with a clear cut vision where we want to take our country, say, in the next decade. “Let’s declare the next decade as a decade of national economic reconstruction. Let’s all agree to stop activities like strikes and ‘bandhs’ at least for the next one decade,” urged Koirala. “Whether to continue in the post of Prime Minister is a minor issue. What is important is national consensus. I am ready to make any kind of sacrifice (for this purpose),” he declared.

Despite his thought-provoking presentation, the opposition seemed least impressed. Addressing the House immediately after Koirala, leader of the main opposition, UML, Madhav Kumar

Nepal said, “the first condition for such a consensus would be Mr. Koirala’s resignation.” He, however, said he agreed with most of the points raised by the Prime Minister in his address. “We are ready to discuss issues including type of protest programs to be launched but the important thing is that there is no law and order in the country,” said Nepal.



Koirala: Selling propositions

He went on to allege that every institution in the country had been disintegrated and even the constitutional bodies had failed to play their role effectively. “In such a situation, the proposal of national consensus should not be an excuse to remain glued to the post of Prime Minister,” he warned

In the aftermath of the national tragedy in the form of royal palace killings, all wanted major political parties in the country to behave in a responsible and

accountable way. At a time when he is facing attacks from all sides, Premier Koirala seized the opportunity and presented his ‘vision document’ with a view to bring back the opposition in the parliamentary business and send the message to his critics that he meant business.

After boycotting the entire session of the parliament for nearly two months early this year demanding Koirala’s resignation, the opposition parties have not yet declared if they will follow suit. It is, however, obvious that they would continue to put up pressure against the Koirala government.

“Premier Koirala, who also holds the royal palace affairs portfolio, must take responsibility for the Narayanhiti

killings,” said Madhav Kumar Nepal. “Moreover, we will continue to raise the issue of corruption in the Lauda air deal and the Prime Minister’s (alleged) involvement in it.”

While some see the PM’s ‘blueprint’ as his attempt to buy time to remain in office, especially people from business community see his proposition ‘irresistible.’ “There has been very adverse impact on the economy of frequent ‘bandhs,’ chakka jams’, and at-

tacks against businesses. As such, we need national consensus and long-term vision for the economic development of the country," said Pradip Kumar Shrestha, President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

Added Narendra Bajracharya, President of Hotel Association Nepal (HAN), "A single day of 'bandh' (shutdown strike) causes a loss of an estimated Rs 50.5 million. This is having a very negative impact on the tourism sector."

Officials argue that an all-out economic development agenda based on political consensus could lead the country to an impressive growth rate. "By sustaining the present growth of tourism and export sector and raising the growth of agriculture sector by up to 1.5 percent per annum, we can achieve an annual growth rate of up to 7 percent per year," said Dr. Shanker Sharma, member of National Planning Commission. "By focusing on priority area and through good

governance we can reach the present level of development of the South East Asian countries within one decade."

Besides economic agenda, the Prime Minister has sought consensus with the opposition to resolve a vital issue like the Maoist insurgency. With more than 1,700 people killed, according to official figures, in the last five years, the insurgency has attained a proportion of a national crisis. "But the most satisfying aspect in the last 12 years is that the Nepalese people have rejected all forms of violence and extremism."

Despite popular apathy, hundreds of unemployed youth in the remote areas continue to lift arms in the name of 'revolution.' To disarm them, bring them back into mainstream, utilize them, as a productive force in the country is a Himalayan task. Only a committed and strong leadership, a stable government and a vigilant opposition could make it possible.

Unfortunately, crisis of confidence

is what marks the present-day politics in Nepal. But you can go nowhere out of mistrust, warn analysts. "There is ample space to discuss and debate upon the issues raised by the Prime Minister but it would be inappropriate to question on his motives," said Govinda Adhikary, a journalist and political commentator.

According to Adhikary, Koirala's proposition is not entirely new in their form. He and several other leaders have been raising these issues in different contexts. "But what is important is Mr. Koirala has prescribed the medicine for the present ills facing the country. Now, its up to the political parties to take them in the right dose or reject it at own risk."

More than a year after replacing his own colleague, K. P. Bhattarai, Premier Koirala has failed to deliver the goods he had promised. The Maoist rebels have declared 'people's government' in nearly half a dozen districts and even the 'Integrated Security and Development Program' has failed to give any tangible results. Perhaps at the lowest ebb of his popularity, Koirala needs to re-establish his legitimacy through his performance in the national polity.

For the opposition, throwing out Koirala is the first condition to enter into the seat of power. UML strategists tend to believe that once Koirala vacates the chair, Nepali Congress — a divided house — would collapse in no time leaving behind the main opposition party as the only viable alternative.

Incidentally, despite all-out efforts from several quarters to remove him from office, Koirala remains firmly in the centre stage of Nepali politics. By virtue of commanding majority in the parliament and within the ruling party, even his opponents know it very well that they can't make Koirala quit under pressure. "But he may quit if given an opportunity for a graceful exit," said an insider. "Whatever be the case, Koirala will remain a 'kingpin' whether you agree with him or not," said Adhikary. For the Nepali political parties, the cost of disagreement is likely to be much higher than they might have ever thought. ■

The 14-Point Agenda

—Legal and constitutional amendments be made in order to make clearer the right of the Prime Minister as enshrined in the constitution.

—An understanding be developed to make relations between the government and opposition transparent.

—Recommendations of an all-party committee regarding electoral reforms be implemented.

—A minimum policy level consensus be developed among all political parties and an all party consensus and commitment for the implementation of the Integrated Security and Development Program and control violence and terror.

—Activities like strikes and 'bandhs' be stopped at least for the next one decade.

—The next decade be declared as a "Decade of National Economic Reconstruction."

—Reforms in education sector be implemented.

—Land reforms be implemented.

—Necessary legal provisions for distribution of certificate of citizenship.

—Political intervention in the state-owned and semi-government enterprises be stopped and they be run in a professional way.

—The bill to curb corruption be passed from this session of the parliament.

—The bill to empower women be passed from the parliament.

—The bill to regulate the activities of the political parties be passed.

—Politicization of the bureaucracy be stopped.

PARLIAMENT Dissolve Defunct House

At a time when the main opposition CPN-UML and other communist parties are pressing ahead with their threat to disrupt the 20th session of parliament, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, isn't this the right time for Koirala to test the popularity of his Nepali Congress government by dissolving the House of Representatives? In view of the huge annual budget needed to retain an unpopular parliament, what hinders the ruling party from recommending the dissolution of the house? Why don't opposition members demand fresh elections when they are bitterly opposed to allowing the current house to run? A mid-term election would be cheaper than going through the prolonged phase of political instability the current non-functioning parliament appears to point to.

By KESHAB POUDEL

“As long as Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who is involved in many controversies including the Lauda Air corruption case, does not resign on moral grounds, I am not certain that parliament would be able to run smoothly,” said

CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal.

“Prime Minister Koirala is so unpopular that people turn off their TV sets when they see him in the news,” said K.P. Sharma Oli, another top leader of the UML. “We are giving a chance to Nepali Congress workers to remove him from the post. The parliamentary proceedings may be obstructed if Koirala does not comply with our demand,” said

Oli.

When communist opposition parties have joined hands with other opposition legislators in threatening to obstruct the proceedings of the 20th session of parliament, what option does Prime Minister Koirala, who is the leader of the parliament, have? The normal practice in other countries with a parliamentary form of government is that, whenever the parliament is paralyzed, the prime minister



House of Representatives : At the centre stage

recommends its dissolution and calls fresh elections.

One of the features of present system, which is described as a parliamentary or cabinet government, is that the prime minister enjoys certain prerogatives, including the right to dissolve the house. As the dispute in the parliament cannot be settled through fruitful discussions between the ruling and opposition benches, it is the people who should be given the chance to settle matters.

This is a political culture — the values, beliefs and emotions that give meaning to political behavior — which should be followed to run the parliamentary form of government. Interestingly, neither the ruling Nepali Congress nor the main opposition UML has shown any inclination to follow the cardinal rules of parliamentary practice. Instead of pressing for a dissolution of the house, the opposition parties are indulging in a mission to prolong the country's political

instability.

After the mysterious killing of 10 members of the royal family, including King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, at Narayanhity Royal Palace on June 1, Nepal has been passing through a very difficult time in its modern history. At a time when there is a need for consensus to lead the nation through a peaceful transition, opposition parties, including the UML, are making every effort to drag the country towards further instability. As opposition parties are yet to take a final decision on their stand, the future of 20th session of parliament remains uncertain.

"If the main opposition party believes that the ruling party is unpopular and is defeated in the court of public opinion, its duty is to force the government to seek a fresh mandate from the people," said a political analyst. "In this kind of situation, a responsible opposition has no alternative but to try to replace the ruling party through fresh elections."

Unfortunately, opposition parties are demanding the removal of prime minister without even trying to project the possibility of an alternative government under their leadership. "One cannot say the Nepali Congress is good and its leader is bad," said a political analyst. "If the Nepali Congress is bad, the prime minister cannot be good."

The UML, which is equally unpopular among the people, does not want to lose the privileges it currently enjoys. "We know that our party will defeat the Nepali Congress in a mid-term election,

but we are giving the party a chance to complete its five-year term by replacing its leader," said Oli, whose party's involvement in the tainted China South West Air deal has pushed it on the defensive.

Dissident members within the Nepali Congress are providing sufficient ammunition to the UML in its tirade against Koirala.

The 19th session of parliament was prorogued earlier this year without having conducted any business for 56 days. If the latest opinions of the opposition leaders are any indication, it seems the deadlock will continue in the current session as well.

"It is up to the Nepali Congress to decide whether it wants to see parliament function smoothly. As long as corrupt Prime Minister Koirala is in power, I don't see the possibility of a smooth session," UML general secretary Nepal told reporters.

Asked whether he was in favor of fresh elections, Nepal skirted the issue. "We have been demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Koirala, not the Nepali Congress. We don't have any objection to a Congress government led by anybody other than Koirala."

As Koirala is in no mood to resign under pressure from the opposition parties, the disruption of parliament seems to be inevitable. "Prime Minister Koirala will not resign under pressure from the opposition communist parties," said Sunil Bhandari, an invitee member of the Nepali Congress Central Committee.

Political analysts do not see any justification in the UML's demand for the prime minister's resignation. "It is the privilege of the main opposition party to seek the resignation of the prime minister, but they cannot force the prime minister to resign by obstructing the house," said Dr. Lok Raj Baral, a political scientist.

Deadlock in Parliament

Nepal has held three parliamentary elections in the last 12 years. This is the first time parliament has failed to function in accordance with the norms and values that underpin a parliamentary system of government. Prime Minister

Koirala dissolved the House of Representatives in 1994 when differences with the Nepali Congress triggered a legislative deadlock.

The Supreme Court in 1995 interpreted the prerogatives of the prime minister and limited the right of the head of the government to dissolve the house. Since then, the lower house has almost turned into fixed-term chamber. Had the prime minister's right to recommend the dissolution of House of Representatives remained undiluted, the country would not have had to suffer frequent political instability.

"When the parliament is non-functional, there is no use to retain it by misusing taxpayers' money," said senior advocate Mukunda Regmi. "The opposition parties should pave the way to run parliament smoothly."

The opinions expressed by the leaders of major political parties indicate that they do not want to force the prime minister to dissolve the house. Their quest to retain facilities and other benefits for a full term cannot ensure high quality of debate in parliament.

Role of Responsible Government

As a responsible government, the government should be responsive to public opinion in exercising its rights. Since the government is collectively respon-

sible to parliament in the conduct of its business, it must decide whether to continue the current house or dissolve it. If the cabinet loses majority support of parliament, it is expected either to resign or dissolve the lower house.

As the ruling party still holds a majority in the House of Representatives, no one is in a position to replace the prime minister. However, the ruling and opposition parties have not found a meeting point to end the deadlock.

"The ruling and main opposition parties need to develop certain consensus to find an amicable solution to their problems," said former minister Nilamber Acharya. "The ruling and opposition parties should follow the constitutional process."

A parliamentary form of government also requires a responsible opposition that must abide by the norms and values of the system. In a country where the opposition interprets any effort to test the public mood as a conspiracy against democracy, nothing can change. Along with the ruling party, the main opposition party — which is called the shadow government — needs to be responsible to the people.

"It is up to the prime minister to decide whether or not to resign," said Purna Man Shakya, acting president of



PM Koirala : Will he step down ?

the Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercises. "Prime Minister Koirala, however, can resign on moral grounds to end the deadlock."

It seems the CPN-UML is not sincere and committed to the present political system. Their activities show that they want to dismantle the parliamentary system to establish their own version of so-called 'people's democracy'.

Facilities for Members

Keeping in view the fact that monetary and other facilities are essential to raise the quality of parliamentary debates, the government has increased benefits for MPs by several folds over the last 12 years.

However, added incentives seem to have the opposite effect. As the quality of the debate in parliament depends on the decision of political leaders, monetary and other benefits cannot stabilize the legislature. In other organizations, if employees don't work, they get automatic dismissal. Why not apply the same no-work-no pay principle in the case of our MPs?

If attractive facilities and financial incentives were adequate to enhance the quality of parliamentary proceedings, Nepalese MPs should have been able to set a global record.



UML MPs demanding PM's resignation : Sticking to their guns

According to the Remuneration Regulation for MPs, a member of parliament receives Rs15,200 a month in salary, along with Rs 1,248 for electricity and water bills, Rs 2,000 for telephone, Rs 6,500 for house rent, Rs 1,000 for stationery, Rs 300 for newspapers, and Rs 7,500 for a gazetted-level personal secretary. An MP also receives Rs 200 in meeting allowance and Rs 150 for transportation each day parliament sits. An MP gets Rs 15,000 as accommodation and an additional month's salary to visit his or her constituency.

According to the study conducted by Kanoon monthly magazine, MPs are also given airfare to participate in the session. An MP receives Rs 33,748 a month, excluding meeting allowances and other facilities.

When parliament is in session, an MP receives more than Rs 45,000 a month. The parliament secretariat even provides meeting allowances and transports allowances to boycott and disrupt the house.

The salary and facilities of the leader of main opposition party, chief whips, whips of ruling and opposition parties and chairmen of committees of the House of Representatives and National Assembly are different. According to Members and Officials of Parliament Remuneration and Facilities Act, the leader of the main opposition party receives a Rs 17,000 monthly salary, Rs 2000 for telephone, Rs 23,500 as house rent, 230 litres of petrol and Rs 27,500 for his personal staff. In total, the leader of main opposition party collects Rs 85,298 a month.

The leaders of the ruling party and main opposition in the upper house also receives all the facilities the main opposition party leader gets, except housing.

Whips of the ruling and opposition parties and chairmen of the committee of the house receive Rs. 55,698 a month as salary, housing rent, petrol, secretaries, telephone bills, drivers and other facilities. In the last decade, the facilities given to the MPs has increased several times, but the quality of parliamentary exercise is gradually eroding. MPs representing the ruling and opposition parties who are

demanding a clean government are themselves misusing taxpayers' money.

The country has held three general elections for the House of Representatives along with 19 sessions of parliament. The experience of parliamentary activities of the last decade reveal that financial incentives and other facilities alone cannot improve the efficiency of

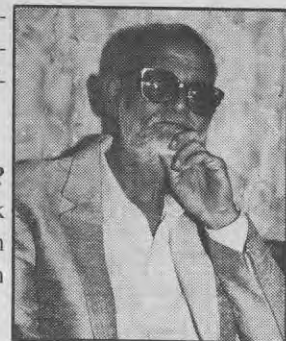
MPs. Legislators belonging to the opposition are neither able press the government through constitutional and parliamentary procedures, nor have been able to present alternative policies and programmes.

In such situation, what is the use of retaining a non-functional parliament and pampering good-for-nothing politicians?

'PM's Resignation Won't Solve The Country's Problems'

— SUSHIL KOIRALA

SUSHIL KOIRALA, general secretary of Nepali Congress, stresses the need to evolve a consensus in parliament amid the present crisis. Koirala spoke to SPOTLIGHT on various issues:



Do you see any possibility of ending the deadlock?

Yes, there are many possibilities to end the deadlock in parliament. We have already approached the main opposition party for talks. In these talks, we will find an amicable solution.

Is your party ready for talks?

We are ready to talk on national issues with all opposition parties, including the main opposition party. Our party has already activated the negotiation team for talks. We have already completed the first round of talks.

Has there been any progress in the talks?

I have seen a positive response from the main opposition party. I am optimistic that our talks would yield positive results in strengthening multiparty democracy. As you know, the country is in the grip of a major crisis following the killings at the royal palace. The country's major parties need to hold candid and honest negotiations to find a way out of this crisis.

But the main opposition party has already said it would not allow parliament to run as long as Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala remains in office. How do you look at their posture?

There is no question of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala resigning. At this crucial juncture, his resignation cannot solve the country's problems.

If Prime Minister Koirala will not resign, how can you bring the main opposition party into the mainstream?

The colleagues in the opposition also know the situation of the country very well. I am confident that they will come to a settlement.

Even a section of the Nepali Congress is said to be demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Koirala. How do you see this demand?

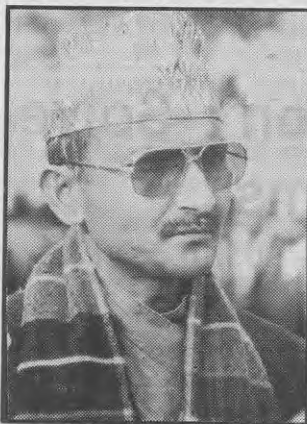
In times of crisis, there is tendency in the Nepali Congress to unite. Nepali Congress leaders are well aware about the current situation.

How do you see the future of democracy?

If we don't act responsibly, there will be a threat to democracy. It took us nearly three decades to restore democracy and we must continue to play our respective roles to stabilize it. ■

'We Are Giving Congress A Chance To Complete Its Full Term'

—KHADGA PRASAD OLI



Deputy leader of the CPN-UML parliamentary party KHADGA PRASAD OLI holds the view that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has no alternative to stepping down. Oli urges the Nepali Congress to change its leader and complete its full term in office. Excerpts from Radio Sagarmatha's talk with Oli.

Do you see any possibility of parliament running smoothly?

I don't see such a possibility. As long as Girija Prasad Koirala remains prime minister, parliament will continue to be disrupted.

Nepali Congress leaders are saying that your party has begun talks with them. Has there been any progress?

Actually, there has been no formal meeting between the leaders of our party and the Nepali Congress. After the killings in the royal palace, our party suspended its demand and opened room for dialogue.

You mean your party has not held any meetings with leaders of the ruling party?

There is no question of spending time on unnecessary issues.

Does this mean you are sticking with your demand?

We want the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who has been tainted in the Lauda Air deal and other controversies. That is our one-point demand.

If prime minister refuses to resign, what steps will your party take?

We will take a final decision after consultations with other opposition parties.

Your party is saying that the Nepali Congress government led by Prime Minister Koirala is unpopular. Why are you not demanding fresh elections?

We are giving a chance to the Nepali Congress to complete its full five-year term. If Congress changes its leader, we will cooperate with them in running parliament. They need a leader who is popular. Koirala is not in a position to go to the people. He is very unpopular. He does not have any choice but to resign. He is inefficient and has failed on all fronts. ■

How long will the people tolerate such a gross misuse of public funds by MPs? Along with the regular facilities, members of the lower house also receive Rs 1 million each as a fund for local development. They are currently demanding an increase in funding under this heading.

"How can an MP demand fresh elections when he or she is not sure of re-election?" asks a political analyst. "Imagine the huge monthly resources and other facilities — all from the taxpayers money — they would risk losing. Even the leader

of the main opposition does not want elections and is demanding the resignation of the prime minister only."

The first session of the parliament, which ran for 102 days and convened 93 days with 95 times. It spent 501 hours and 37 minutes passing 24 bills. Although no member had any experience of running the parliament, the first session was full of debate, using all kinds of parliamentary exercises. Along with the bills, the first parliament saw written questions, issues of public importance,

oral question, public concern and others. The second session of parliament ran for only 24 days but it passed 20 bills. The third session of parliament passed 40 bills, making it the busiest session yet.

The second parliament, despite its hung nature, was also successful, as it had only a couple of record of disruptions. After the third elections to the House of Representatives — in which the Nepali Congress secured an absolute majority and the main opposition party maintained a strong presence — the situation to a turn for the worse. The very first session of the house in its 98 days passed only four bills and there was virtually no proposal of public concern. The 17th session ran for 36 days and passed three bills.

The 19th session of parliament ran for 57 days but was prorogued after continued obstruction from the main opposition party. Despite the disruption, the session cost the treasury the same amount of money previous sessions did.

According to the red book, a compilation of annual budget allocations, parliament spent Rs 97.613 million in 1996\97, Rs 115.081 million in 1997\98, Rs 125.293 million in 1998\99, Rs 125.935 million in 1999\00 and Rs 150.548 million in 2000\01. In terms of total expenditure, Rs 6.5 million was spent on foreign trips by MPs in the first three years and Rs 8.5 million for the following three years.

In last year's budget, the government sanctioned Rs 150.548, including Rs 8.5 million for foreign visits. Nobody is certain whether the current session of parliament will be able to proceed without disruptions.

In a parliamentary form of government, the legislature forms and ousts governments in accordance with clearly specified constitutional provisions. Nepal's parliament appears to be an exception to this norm. If there is no utility of the existing house, why have our leaders chosen to retain it? Prime Minister Koirala can recommend the dissolution of house and seek a fresh mandate. But as long as he believes his hands are tied, Nepalis will be forced to live with a house that is, for all intents and purposes, defunct. ■

TAXI DRIVERS

The Mean Streets

The number of taxis in the city has grown and so have the problems of cab drivers

By AKSHAY SHARMA

Kathmandu's traffic jams are getting longer — both in terms of time and space — and the influx of politically driven cabs is only a part of the problem. The increase in the number of taxis of all colors and sizes, while making life easier for passengers, has contributed to a clogging of the streets.

Taxi drivers have to worry about more than just changing gears every few seconds at key intersections. "Sometimes youths stop my taxi and when I let them off to their destination, instead of paying me, they beat me up and vandalize my vehicle," Pravin Khatri says. "Sometimes traffic police officers just get inside my taxi and demand a free ride. I can't afford not to oblige because they'll confiscate my driving license."

Pravin supports his wife, two daughters and three sons along with his parents in Taplejung by earning what he can by driving through what he calls the "mean streets" of Kathmandu. He says he normally earns an average of Rs 1,200 per day. "However, the incidents that happened this month and successive Nepal bandhs have hit us hard. In recent days, our earnings have trickled down to Rs 500 a day." Pravin has to pay Rs 600 a day to his owner and bear fuel costs.

Compared to a decade ago, there has been a 10-fold increase in the number of taxis. The taxis imported then were 70s-model Toyota Corollas, which you can still manage to run into. Newer models of Maruti and Daewoo have come out in the streets in throngs.

Passengers are obviously relieved. "Earlier, it was difficult to get a taxi after 10pm," says Manish Sapkota. "Now you can pick the color of the taxi you want at three in the morning."

Some drivers say increased security in recent days has created new problems.

"After the recent turn of events, police have started searching every part of my vehicle every few kilometers," says Bishwa Gharti of Pokhara. "They have the right to do that, but the language they use is sometimes unbearable."

Police officers say they are just doing their job. "We have our orders and have to act according to them," one officer told SPOTLIGHT.

taxi, suddenly there were a volley of stones that smashed my windscreen from the side that the youths had attacked," he said. "Scared as I was, the youths demanded that they be taken to Tripureswor. They just ran away without paying the fare, and the last I saw of them was getting into another taxi."

Pravin says such nasty experiences are fairly common. "There are so many cases where sometimes a single youth or a couple have stopped my taxi. They name their destination and say different things like 'We have a friend and would you mind waiting while we call them', and they leave never to return. I have waited for hours expecting them to return."

Rameswor Thapa Magar, 36, of Chitlang, says he drives taxis to support his two sons. "My eldest son is 14 and he's in



Cabs in Waiting : Silent woes

Drivers have scary tales to tell. "A month ago, I was stopped by a few teenagers who said they wanted to go to Jawalakhel," says Kabindra Hoju, who lives in Bhaktapur. "I was looking at my rear-view mirror and saw that these youth were armed with khukris. I was scared that I just sped toward Jawalakhel. One of the youths stayed inside the taxi as the others got out and started slashing another group of youths with their khukris. The guy inside of my taxi warned me not to run away."

"As the gang of youths got into my

the 10th grade. It's hard to survive on the little land we own in Chitlang. We men are quite lazy and it is hard for us to work in the fields of our villages," he says.

"I've driven taxis in Kathmandu for six years now to ensure a better future for my children," Rameswor says. "I get to keep between Rs 300 and Rs 400 a day after paying the owner and deducting fuel costs."

Asked about reports of vandalism and violent behavior of some youths, he says, "I haven't seen much of that. Maybe it's because I don't drive at night." ■

'British Support To Ex-Gurkha Soldiers Is Unequivocal'

—COLONEL MARK DOWDLE

COLONEL MARK DOWDLE, is defense attaché at the British Embassy in Nepal. Colonel Dowdle, who has been in Nepal for the last two years, spoke to SPOTLIGHT on various issues relating to the British Gurkhas. Excerpts:

What do you think of current events in Nepal?

I express our deepest regret and sympathy over the tragic events concerning your highly respected and admired royal family. There have been many messages of condolences sent to the people of Nepal, particularly from Her Majesty the Queen of England, the Prince of Wales, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Geoff Hoon, our Secretary of State for Defence, and others. Could I take this opportunity to add those of the British military and civilian community as well as our serving and retired Gurkha soldiers and civilian staff here in Nepal. We have long and close ties between our two countries and share your grief. Our most sincere condolences go to all Nepalis.

How do you see the situation after the introduction of the revised pension rate in April 2000?

I see the revised pension rate, which reflects the British government's ongoing commitment to British Gurkhas, as very good and positive news. The examination of British Gurkha Death in Service Gratuities and Pensions in 1999, by John Spellar, Minister for the Armed Forces, was extremely detailed, and was endorsed by His Majesty's Government of Nepal. The examination resulted in equal death in service payments for British and Gurkha soldiers. Pension increases were between 107 and 185 percent, with older pensioners and widows particularly benefiting. The Minister for the Armed Forces, in the light of these generous awards, made it perfectly clear that the British government's position was that this award would not be subject to further negotiation. However, he did say that pensions would be reviewed each year to compensate for inflation. Consequently, independent teams from the United Kingdom have visited Nepal over the last two years to carry out this review. The recommended increases, of 11.9 percent last year and 10.9 percent this year, were met in full and backdated to April 1, 2000 and April 1, 2001. But you asked me how I see the situation now. Clearly, all this has meant big rises for British Gurkha pensioners. Let me give some examples: A Lance Corporal with 15 years' service has received a 191.82 percent increase in pension (as at January 30, 2000 NCRs 2995.20 per month rising to NCRs 8740.83 as at June 1, 2001); a Warrant Officer with 20 years service some 235.54 percent (as at January 30, 2000 NCRs 4065.60 to NCRs 13641.90 per month as

at June 1, 2001). So, I think that this has been a great deal for our 26,000 pensioners. So let's look at this in the round: Number one: Nepalese Gurkha soldiers have the same take-home salary, in their pockets, as their British equivalents. Number Two: they receive identical death in service benefits. And Number Three: we have recently awarded very significant increases in pensions. This seems to me to be a first class and equitable arrangement.

Some British Gurkhas seem unhappy with the new pension rate, saying it should be the same as British soldiers. How do you look at it?

I don't think that most of our pensioners, who are now benefiting from these excellent new pension rates, oppose them. Certainly many pensioners to whom I have spoken have been genuinely delighted with the generous and equitable increase. The 'opposition' comes from a dubious and unrepresentative organisation. British Army pensions are complicated and, for very good reasons, reflect two different systems. One is for Gurkha soldiers and one for British soldiers.

Why do you have different systems?

Gurkhas serve normally for a minimum of 15 years and attract an immediate and index linked pension (reflecting the tenets of the Tri-Partite Agreement). British soldiers, to get the same deal, have to serve for 22 years after which they get an immediate pension upon retirement. A Gurkha pension is indexed linked from the 15-year point, a British pension is not indexed until the age of 55 (or 60 for a deferred pension). So, on average, a Gurkha pension is paid seven years earlier than that of an equivalent British serviceman's. But then we discover a surprising fact. The vast majority of British servicemen are compulsorily discharged at the nine or 12 year point and are not allowed to serve beyond the 12-year point unless they are promoted. As a result, over 90 percent of British soldiers leave (or are discharged) from the army well before the 22 year pensionable point. This means that they only attract a deferred pension, reflecting their actual years of service, at the age of 60.

Do you mean this is a misunderstanding?

But the most important point, which follows from this — which I think needs to be understood — is that if British pension rules were applied to Gurkhas, then about 90 percent of those Gurkha soldiers who go on pension would have to wait some 25 years before they receive a pension at the age of 60. And I do not think, for most, this would be welcomed. Need is more immediate in Nepal.

What other benefits are retired Gurkha soldiers getting?

"The 'opposition' comes from a dubious and unrepresentative organisation. British Army pensions are complicated and, for very good reasons, reflect two different systems."

Other benefits, very rightly a great deal, which include a superb resettlement package in the United Kingdom (exactly the same as for British servicemen) to prepare and in some cases qualify them for a second career in civilian life. These qualifications are recognised by many NGOs and overseas agencies and this gives our ex-servicemen a head start in the job market. In addition, just before they retire, they attend a further week's orientation course, to up-date them on Nepal, with excellent presentations from the Nepal government on banking, the law, and job opportunities to name but a few topics. Within Nepal we have established a reputable re-employment agency, 'Coutts Re-employment Organisation', collocated with British Gurkhas Nepal. Coutts has extensive contacts with British overseas firms and agencies and, for example, found 150 ex-servicemen employment over the last three months. And, of course, British Gurkhas Nepal and the Gurkha Welfare Scheme employ many ex-servicemen. Our UK resettlement package, Nepal Re-orientation Course and Coutts Re-employment Organisation give our Gurkha ex-servicemen the best start for a second career. This gives our ex-servicemen a great advantage in the job market.

But what about the Gurkha Welfare Scheme?

The jewel in our crown remains the Gurkha Welfare Scheme. All our 43,000 ex-servicemen and their estimated 129,000 dependants derive enormous benefit from this. Let me give you a flavour of how our Gurkha Welfare Scheme £6.3 million budget is to be spent this year, starting with Individual Aid: which covers a significant 52.26 percent of our planned expenditure. It includes: Welfare pensions, NCR 273,932,000 on 11,400 welfare pensions, Hardship grants NCR 10,358,900 for some 4,500 pensioners (for example to replace houses destroyed by fire and flood). These are last year's figures, but each year they broadly the same. Education bursaries: NCR 8,594,115 for over 1,400 students this year. Employment and Vocational Training: NCR 5,075,000 estimated to benefit some 200 students. Medical aid: NCR 48,484,986 budgeted for this year. Over 81,000 individuals benefited last year. It also include treatment like free front line primary medical care at our 24 Area Welfare Centres to include free doctor clinics and free medicine. A secondary medical and key hospital scheme — unsurpassed here — which, within Nepal, provides excellent hospital treatment at the best hospitals. Our 26,000 service pensioners pay a small sliding scale for initial treatment and then they get a 75 percent refund of all treatment and operation costs. Our remaining welfare pensioners get this free. Four eye clinics are run each year (in conjunction with the Lions Club) for people in remote areas. Last year 2,769 people have benefited.

Is aid given to the community?

Yes, very much so. Community Aid is viewed as vital and this year our budget expenditure is planned for: Drinking Water Projects, NCR 71,485,822 for 54 projects. School construction: NCR 26,200,000 for



eight major schools, two repairs and 100 minor school projects. Bridge construction: NCR 47,483,716 for 22 bridges. Miscellaneous Projects: NCR 61,918,803. And, within the Gurkha Welfare Scheme, specialist projects are adopted. An example is the Drug Rehabilitation Centre, which is being built in Dharan at a cost of NCR 2,481,953.

What else is done?

Additionally Headquarters British Gurkhas Nepal, this year alone, is spending over NCR 2,310,000 on a variety of projects for ex-servicemen and their communities. These range from road construction and sports facilities for ex-servicemen communities to the repair of hospital equipment and assistance to orphanages. For example, we are particularly interested in continuing to help Maiti Nepal, who do an outstanding job.

How do you see continued opposition from an organization like GAESO?

We have just been discussing the excellent work done by the Gurkha Welfare Scheme and I am disappointed to report that GAESO's actions, for a long time, have been impacting upon the GWS operation. You will understand that I will not accept the outstanding work being done by the Gurkha Welfare Scheme being politicised and degraded by a dubious group whose motivation remains self-interest. Reluctantly, but I am sure people will understand why my actions have been necessary, I have had to ban GAESO activists from our Area Welfare Centres, removing the privilege of them collecting their pension money there and instead paying their money into a bank. We have even opened the bank accounts for them. The reaction of the ordinary Nepalese ex-Gurkhas speaks for itself. GAESO has less and less support. And ex-servicemen are asking more and more questions of GAESO, particularly about how it is spending its money. The pensioners' concerns, in my view, speak for themselves.

What programs do you have for the future?

Perhaps I could just emphasise that our commitment to help our ex-servicemen and their families, suffering hardship or distress, is constant; if they need help they should personally contact their nearest Area Welfare Officer who will ensure their case is investigated promptly. Our support to our ex-servicemen is unequivocal and will remain so. ■

“The jewel in our crown remains the Gurkha Welfare Scheme. All our 43,000 ex-servicemen and their estimated 129,000 dependants derive enormous benefit from this.”

'The Parliament Is Not Going To Run Smoothly'

—MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL

Leader of the main opposition and UML general secretary, **MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL**, addressed reporters at the Press Chautari on the eve of the 20th session of the Parliament and also responded to their questions. Follows excerpts of the press meet:

What would be the role of your party in the upcoming House session?

The present session of the parliament too is not likely to run smoothly. I can't say right now if we would be disrupting the proceedings of the House as in the 19th session. We are discussing the issue within our own party as well as with other opposition parties. We also want to consult the people. Right now, we have a Prime Minister, which is quite unpopular and has lost people's faith. (So). The Prime Minister has no way out than to resign from his post. We will present ourselves in a strong, effective, aggressive and rational way in the parliament. We will play our role to remove this incompetent, inefficient and corrupt government as desired by the people.

What will be the main issues that your party will be raising?

Nobody has taken up responsibility for the Narayanhiti killings on June 1st. As the Prime Minister in charge of royal palace portfolio also, Mr. Koirala must take responsibility for it and quit the post. This will be a major issue in the forthcoming session. Similarly, we will raise the issue of autocratic nature of the government. We will continue to raise the issue of corruption in Lauda Air deal as we did in the 19th session.

How do you see the recently enacted Public Security Regulations?

The government is gradually losing the capability to tolerate criticism. The Public Security Regulations, 2001 is an outcome of such state of affairs. The government has also taken into custody to take revenge. This Regulations has



"Nobody has taken up responsibility for the Narayanhiti killings on June 1st. As the Prime Minister in charge of royal palace portfolio also, Mr. Koirala must take responsibility for it and quit the post"

been enforced with a view to oppress the opposition. This is a step toward regression.

How do you see the attempt to implicate CIAA chief in a corruption case?

The attempt to implicate chief of the Commission for Investigation on Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Surya Nath Upadhyay, is a move to harass him. How can one expect this corrupt government to work on weeding out corruption?

Is your party going to register a no-trust motion in the parliament?

First go and ask (senior Nepali Congress leaders and former Prime Ministers) KP Bhattarai and Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Why did your party dishonor the parliamentary committee's decision on China South West Deal?

We always respect and honor the decisions made by parliamentary committees and constitutional bodies. But it should not mean that all these decisions are mandatory and everybody should respect them. Regarding the Public Accounts Committee's decision on the China South West Airlines deal, we have been saying that the decision failed to take into account all the aspects of the deal. So, there is no question of disregarding the parliamentary committee.

How do you evaluate the new monarch?

It's not appropriate to raise doubts about King Gyanendra's commitment to nationality and democracy. I am quite impressed from the openness exhibited by King Gyanendra while constituting a probe committee to investigate into the royal palace murders. There had been some 'communication gap' leading to my withdrawal from the high-level committee as decided by our party. But we had offered to fully cooperate the probe committee. I haven't felt any kind of misunderstanding with the new King. ■

MONSOON

The Gathering Storm

In a country where 90 percent of the population depends on agriculture, the monsoon is one of the most eagerly awaited seasons

By AKSHAY SHARMA

The monsoon this year has come earlier than expected, according to reports. The storm clouds that have gathered on the horizon promise both good and bad news. While farmers look forward to a good harvest, many people also find themselves bracing for the natural calamities that accompany the season.

"The farmers are so busy that they don't have time to shave," Kumar, of Palubari, which lies to the south-east of the capital, told SPOTLIGHT.

Rajan Subedi, another resident of Palubari says: "Most of the people in the village are busy planting maize and wheat. This is one of the most important seasons for us. All the income we expect from our crops is dependent on the water the monsoon provides. Newspapers, on the other hand, have already begun reporting on landslide-triggered deaths and destruction in different parts of the country. Growing deforestation has made the hills more susceptible to landslides. With the early arrival of the monsoon, the risk of flash floods compounding the problems created by landslides has become greater.

"The downpour is sometimes too big to contain. Some of my sons probably will get sick working in the fields," says Subedi. Kumar says he already is worried by the problems that might accompany the rains.

Narendra Khanal, a geography expert at Tribhuvan Univer-

sity, gave an account of the calamities caused in the Chure region of south-western Nepal in a recent article in Himal Khabarpartika. An aerial photograph taken in 1974/75 suggested that 14 percent of the land was being used for agriculture and 76 percent was covered with forests.

"The maps suggest that 31 percent of the land can be used for agricultural purposes, with 21 percent of the land being plains. The report suggests that

only 14 percent of the land was used for agricultural purposes. Statistics suggest that most of the land used for agriculture was a result of deforestation," Khanal said.

Reports suggest that deforestation in the area has been going on at an annual rate of 1.47 percent. "The rainfall in Chure is less compared to that of the rest of the mountains in Nepal. But the mud, stones and gradients are washed further south, which results in the swelling of many streams, rivulets and rivers. According to a report conducted in 1994, the rivers have been rising 5.5 centimeters annually. About 3,380 tons per square kilometer of mud is washed away each year," Khanal wrote. "Eighty percent of the wood is brought by the people from Chure from 14 km west of the region."

The Chure range is considered the youngest and the shortest mountains in the country. It reaches from 800 to 1,800 meters above sea level. There are more than 10 valleys in the region. The misery that accompanies the monsoon will certainly rise in the years ahead. If the government has made any special plans to deal with the situation, the people haven't heard of them.

"The forests are so beautiful and are so near to my heart. The trees and shrubs are full of fruits. The chirping of the birds, water, field and the green hills make the environment here so pleasant. I am very happy to be where I am so far away from the pollution in Kathmandu," Kumar says.

The key to the government's disaster management effort may lie with this kind of affinity with nature. In other words, preserving forests and the general ecosystem may be the best way of avoiding nature's wrath that comes in the form of flash floods, landslides and other calamities. ■



Walking in the rain : Trying times

BOOK

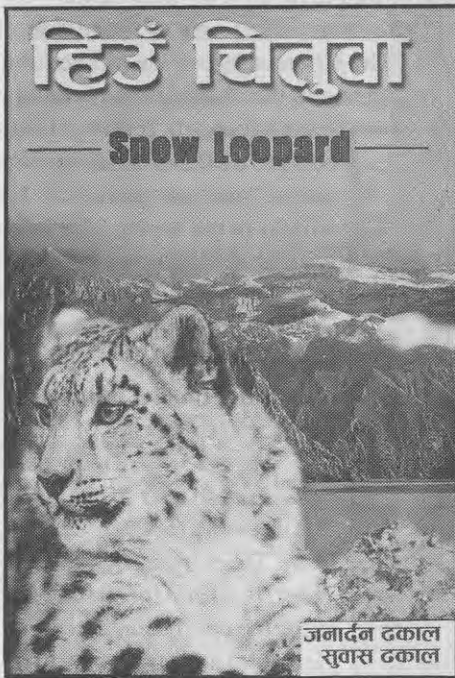
Himalayan Prowlers

Students and researchers can benefit from a book on Nepal's snow leopards

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

They are one of the most graceful of big cats. The sharp ears, piercing eyes, white marshmallowy fur with black spots, short muzzle, big forehead and thick claw give them a look that is both intimidating as well as elegant.

An adult snow leopard measures 60 cm in height and 100-230 cm in length and is



found at high altitudes (3,000 m-plus) and denuded mountain ranges where the temperature dips below zero most of the time.

The snow leopards are the prized prowlers of the Himalayas. Their light grey to white fur provides perfect camouflage in the snow-capped mountains. The lightning speed and ferocious nature make them the most invincible of highland hunters.

A protected but endangered species, these *Uncia uncia* (scientific name) are facing a grave danger to their existence of late because of a variety of reasons, ranging from poaching to depletion of prey species.

In order to highlight the conservation of

this unique species, two conservationists, Janardan Dhakal and Subas Dhakal, both associated with the Wildlife and Environment Nepal, have recently come out with a book cataloguing their habitat, present status, the need for their conservation and so on.

“Snow leopards are the pride of the Himalayan region. Their conservation would lead to sustainable development of our Himalayan region. We have tried to explain the problems, solutions and possibilities regarding the complex nature of snow leopard-human community relationship,” say the authors. Snow leopards are mostly found in Central Asia. Apart from Nepal, they have been noticed in India, China, Mongolia, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. They are found in altitudes ranging from 3,000 m to 5,400 m. Their total number in the world is estimated at between 5,500 and 6,000.

In Nepal, a 30,000 sq km area between 3,000 m to 5,400 m altitude is deemed a proper habitat for these white cats. They are mostly found in the eight protected areas and in the vicinity. Some 300-500 snow leopards are expected to prowl in our Himalayas. The districts where they are found include Dolpa, Humla, Mugu, Manang, Mustang and Myagdi.

“We traveled to Manang district for nearly dozen times to research their behavior and habitat,” said Subas Dhakal.

The population of the snow leopards is most dense in area in and around Shey-Phoksundo National Park — 10-20 in every 100 sq km area. The Annapurna Conservation Area is another place where



they are found in plenty.

These white hunters are facing a crisis of existence because of many reasons like poaching. Poachers hunt them for their bones and other body parts, which are used to make traditional Chinese medicines and fetch high prices in the international market.

The gradual depletion of prey species like wild sheep following the turning of jungles into pasture lands and the retaliatory killings of snow leopards that are forced to attack cattle in search of prey, by human community and the gradual habitat destruction have all combined to haunt the Himalayan hunters. Being a significant member of the food chain of the Himalayan ecosystem, any negative impact on snow leopard existence is bound to invite a cascading effect on the whole system. Therefore, the need for their existence cannot be over-emphasized. Steps for habitat conservation, anti-poaching activities, illegal trade control, conservation of prey species, improvement in the snow leopard-human relationship and awareness program is essential.

The book highlights these facts and urges the concerned authorities to take necessary steps. As the volume consists of vital information regarding the species, it could prove beneficial to students, naturalists, conservationists, tourists and researchers who are interested in the study of the Himalayan ecosystem. ■

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By M.S.KHOKNA



TRANSITION

NOMINATED: **Narad Prasad Poudel**, the president of the employees association at the Mahendra Sanskrit University (MSU), as the member of the university senate, by **His Majesty King Gyanendra**, in his capacity as the Chancellor of the MSU and in accordance with the MSU Act.

CHOSEN : **Dr. Hemang**

Dixit, vice-president of the SOS Balgram Nepal, as the acting president of the organization unanimously.

RECONSTITUTED : The foreign relation committee of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, under the convenorship of **Sarita Giri**, by party president Gajendra Narayan Singh.

LEFT : **Prabhakar SJB Rana**, joint chairman of the Joint Economic Council (JEC)

Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), leading an eight-member delegation of FNCCI, for New Delhi, to take part in the meeting of JEC.

Udaya Nepali Shrestha, Secretary at the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, leading a two-member delegation, for New Delhi, to take part in the 40th assembly

of Afro-Asian Law Consultant Committee.

Shri Ram Singh Basnet, chief reporter at the National News Agency, for Moscow, Russia, to participate in an international seminar on information and communication, at the invitation of ITAR-TASS.

PASSED AWAY : **Ananda Bahadur Shrestha**, social activist, at the age of 89. ■

MUSIC

Metallic Appeal

The first death metal band to perform in Kathmandu has come out with its debut album

By AKSHAY SHARMA

“Watch out parents and guardians, our music might give the wrong message and spoil your kids,” chuckles Sunil Dev Panta of the band Ugra Karma, which came out with its debut album on May 13.

Asked whether the 13th had anything

played guitars in many bands in school and college. Prashant also played for a few bands.”

There is a warning on the Rs 150 album label that bars sale to minors. “This is the first time anybody has taken the initiative to do something like this. We have heard and read about the campaign launched by Tipper Gore [wife of former



Music : Metallic appeal

to do with the band’s brand of music, Sunil said: “The date of the 13th we chose to launch the album was pure coincidence. Imam Bikram Shah was a big help to us. He understood our music and backed us in this endeavor.”

“Ugra Karma was formed late last year, although the members were previously associated with other bands. I used to play the guitar and growled for a band at Kathmandu University,” Sunil told SPOTLIGHT. “Aayush was the bass player for Yasht. He quit the band because of differences with the other members. Subash

US vice-president Al Gore] to place such warnings on album labels. However, there has not been any such movement here. Moreover, I don’t believe our music shops will prevent minors from getting their hands on the album,” says Kushal Timilshina.

“Our old bass player Roshan also used to play with Subash in their college band. Our first line-up was supposed to be me on vocals/drums, Aayush on bass and Subash on guitars. Later, we decided to switch parts. The new line-up was, I on vocals/guitars, Aayush on drums, Subash on lead guitars and we had Roshan on bass. With

this set-up, we performed our first concert at Kathmandu Utah 2000,” Sunil told us.

“We even bagged the award for best rhythm guitarist of the year. There we played a cover version of the band Gates of Istar and our own song, ‘Bhandarkhal Parba’. Then we took some time off. We again started practicing for the Shikhar Beat Contest. But this time, we changed our bass player and recruited Prashant who had come all the way from Hong Kong just to play with us in the contest,” he says.

“This is our debut and the cover is in black and white because we couldn’t afford to print the cover in color,” Sunil added. “Besides, only 50,000 copies of this kind of music would sell. Not many people would like to listen to what we play. We played cover versions of bands like Children Doom, Sepultura and Dark Funeral. We have performed ‘Impaled Nazarine’ and one of our own songs,” he adds.

“Ugra Karma is a Sanskrit term. Since our music/lyrics (our Karma) is Ugra, we thought this would be a perfect name for a Nepali death metal band.” Mani Karki, a fan, agrees. “I bought the album and the vocals and the music was good.”

Adds another fan, Bishal Thakali: “There have been bands before them but this is different. I bought a copy and I felt like I was listening to western death metal bands.”

“Ugra Karma has been a three-piece death metal band since mid 2000,” says the review on the website www.ugrakarma.net. “They are the first band to play death metal in Kathmandu.”

“We were asked to record our song ‘Bhandarkhal’ that bagged the prize at the Shikhar Beat contest,” Sunil says. “But the events that happened at the Royal Palace have been likened to the Kot-Parva (The massacre that saw Jung Bahadur’s rise to power). We thought it might give wrong vibes.”

What are the plans of the band? “I think Ayush will be going abroad for his studies,” Sunil says. “But Pratik and I will definitely continue. Ugra Karma has started the first chapter in what may be called The Book Of Nepali Death Metal. And we hope our endeavors here shall encourage more Nepali death metal bands to add more chapters.”

Now In Town

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

Video (English)

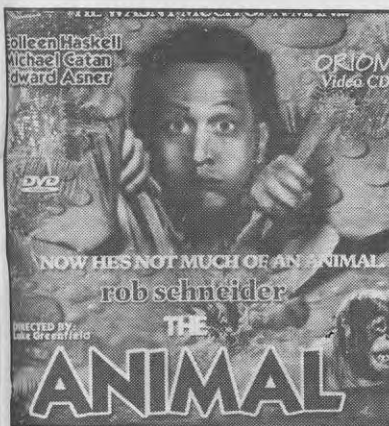
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- Sword Ash
- Evolution
- I Spit On Your Grave
- Mimic II
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- Only The Strong
- Shrek



Hindi

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- Pagalpan
- Albela
- Avgat
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(Source : Super Star Video, New Road)



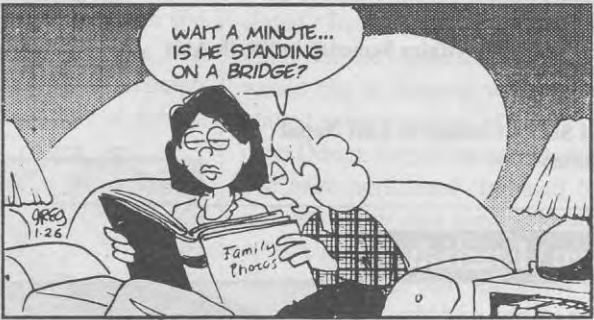
"Do not yearn for physical joy and, by so doing, discard the more permanent joy of inner calm and contentment."

- SATHYA SAI BABA

FRED BASSET



LUANN



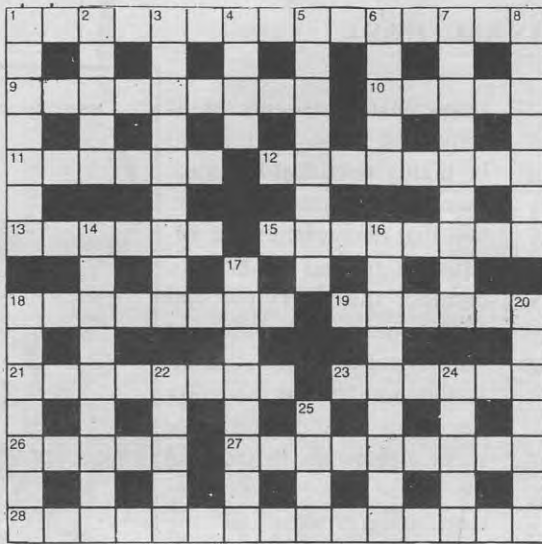
APARTMENT 3-G



OVERBOARD



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Senior politician in torment if seat is unsafe (8,2,5)
9. Butter and milk producer (5,4)
10. Shop's agent or customer (5)
11. A real sport (6)
12. NATO ordered to abandon proletarians out for revenge (8)
13. Kick, taking fresh wind into account? (6)
15. Cause of winter ailments ñ needing little sleep (4,4)
18. Theatre attendant (8)
- Chinese criminals organized raid in back-street (6)
21. As retired Thespians, they're very demanding (8)
23. Means business (6)
26. Bury having match with Italian team (5)
27. Sprinkle liberally over one topping for a pizza (9)
28. Our main trading organization (8,7)

DOWN

1. Keep track of warship (7)
2. Silky fabric woven in one piece (5)
3. Sport made of people falling down before opening time? (9)
4. Dress up as an Archbishop (4)
5. How bounders are caught unawares? (2,3,3)
6. So a judge is supposed to appear in special robes (5)
7. Land hold in one? Amazing start! (9)
8. One coming down on the side of a deerstalker (7)
14. Type a letter (9)
16. in French, having to observe strict etiquette (2,7)
17. Ground suiting soft aquatic creature (8)
18. Extra cash needed for cover charge (7)
20. Like New York's irregular silhouette —(7)
22. — such as the superstructure of the Statue of Liberty? (5)
24. She's brought up one complaint (5)
25. Work in the music business (4)

SOLUTION

Across : 1. Minister of state 9. Nannng goat 10. Buyer 11. Tennis 12. Retrisal 13. Recoil 15. Cold snap 18. Playgoer 19. Triads 21. Exactors 23. Agency 26. Inter 27. Pepperoni 28. Merchant service

Down : 1. Monitor 2. Ninon 3. Skydiving 4. Bbor 5. On the rop 6. Sober 7. Abyssiria 8. Earslap 14. Character 16. De rigueur 17 Terrapin 18. Premjum 20. Skyline 22. Torch 24. Naomi 25. Opus

BRIDGE

		NORTH	3-19
		♠ 10 6	
		♥ 10 7 6 4 2	
		♦ K J 8 7	
		♣ A 8	
WEST:		EAST	
♠ 7 4 3		♠ K 8 5 2	
♥ A 5		♥ 3	
♦ 10 6 4		♦ Q 5 3 2	
♣ J 9 6 3 2		♣ K 7 5 4	
		SOUTH	
		♠ A Q J 9	
		♥ K Q J 9 8	
		♦ A 9	
		♣ Q 10	
Vulnerable: Both			
Dealer: South			
The bidding:			
South	West	North	East
1 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
6 ♥	All pass		
Opening lead: Club trey			

“Of all the griefs that harass the distressed, Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest.”

— SAMUEL JONSHON

In golf, players often take a practice swing to “get the feel” and to relax their muscles. In bridge, a practice finesse is a derisive term describing a finesse that serves no constructive purpose. Oswald Jacoby, renowned expert of yesteryear, once described it as a finesse intended only to predict how one’s finesses were going to behave on a given day.

A secretive soul, South jumped directly to slam after North’s distributional raise to game. He rejected the scientific approach and revealed nothing, hoping to create problems for the defense.

West led from his longest suit, and South ducked in dummy, finessing against a possible king with West. East won his club king, and the slam was doomed. Even though the spade finesse was on-side, South couldn’t shut out the trump ace and went one down.

“The odds favored West’s holding the club king,” offered South after he had lost the slam.

“You took a practice finesse,” needed North. “Even if you could have won the first trick with your queen or 10, the need for a spade finesse remained.”

North was right, of course. South should win dummy’s club ace at trick one and run dummy’s spade 10. When it wins, he repeats the finesse and discards dummy’s last club on his spade ace. Now it’s safe to lead trumps, and the defenders get only the trump ace.

Census 2001: Quality Of Data

By DR. SHYAM THAPA

Data from censuses (or surveys) are known to be susceptible to errors of various kinds and degrees. The conventional and uneven manners of recording dates of birth, death or similar events of life in Nepali sociocultural milieu make it extremely difficult to collect accurate and reliable information. Many respondents simply do not maintain any record of, or cannot recall, the dates of events like birth or death. This presents a major challenge to the enumerators, of census or survey, in performing their job, while weakening the accuracy level of census data.

Not surprisingly, the census data of Nepal are found to suffer from various levels of underreporting or misreporting, most of which is probably unintentional. Some families or individuals might be completely left out due to logistical or other problems or by their own choice. Even among those counted and included in the census, many may underreport or misreport, or fail to report, the number of children ever born or that of dead persons, particularly infants or young children. Because of this, the Nepalese census-based aggregate estimates of population growth and fertility and mortality often need adjustments, and such adjustments are made as necessary in estimating levels and trends using the census data. However, no adjustments are made to data pertaining to self-reported individual characteristics, such as caste or ethnicity, religion or educational attainment.

The inherent weaknesses or limitations of censuses or surveys, however, do not mean that census should not be conducted, that they are not useful or that the resulting data should not be utilized. It simply means that we have to be cautious in interpreting the data. Data need to be supplemented and verified, whenever feasible, through other sources. In this context, it will serve us well to remember that data should be presumed guilty until found innocent.

The current debate on the 2001 census of Nepal, in my view, is an essentially healthy exercise. It is likely to promote awareness of some of the census issues among the populace, while helping people to see the importance of being counted correctly and accurately. Although the ongoing debate in the media centers on data pertaining to ethnicity, religion and language, other types of information including age, births, deaths, migration, educational attainment are no less important. Quality of data pertaining to these and other areas depends primarily on accurate reporting and recording of information and the level of participation by the population.

I believe that most census respondents do not deliberately misreport their caste, ethnicity, language or religion. However, if a respondent chooses to misrepresent or incorrectly identify himself or herself, for whatever reason, then this cannot be helped; nor can the enumerator be held responsible or accountable for it. On the enumerator's part, there is hardly any reason or motivation for deliberately misinterpreting or misreporting

respondents' self-reported information. Moreover, it would be highly unethical to do so. Finally, it is extremely important that enumerators are adequately trained on how to conduct the interview and record information in a consistent and accurate manner. At the same time, it is equally important to adopt effective ways and means to increase the rate at which the population participates in the census. ■



(Dr. Thapa is a senior scientist with Family Health International, Kathmandu. He specializes in demographic and reproductive health research and evaluation).

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