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The National Newsmagazine

# SPOTLIGHT

Dec 07-13, 2007

## Petro Shortage Fuelling The Fire

Politics : Searching For Solution  
Viewpoint : Dr. R.P. Shrestha  
Face To Face : Johanna Mang

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# अब... १\* रु. १ मै बचत खाता



नेपाल इन्भेस्टमेन्ट बैंक बढी भन्दा बढी  
नागरिकहरुमा बैंकिङ्ग सेवाको पहिलो अनुभव  
हुने बानी बस्न सकोस भन्नाका लागि सजोरब  
प्रस्तुत गर्दछ... **मात्र रु.१ मा**  
**“ आफ्नै बचत खाता ”**  
सम्पूर्ण अन्तराष्ट्रिय स्तरको सेवा सुविधा सहित ।



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एनएचबी

# CONTENTS

SPOTLIGHT



**COVER STORY: Fuelling The Fire** Amid soaring global prices of petroleum products and sky-rocketing losses, the Nepal Oil Corporation is unable to supply the fuel in adequate quantity  
Page 12



**NEIGHBOURS:** As instability continues to mar Nepali politics, two big neighbours vie to outsmart each other  
Page 10



**FACE TO FACE:**  
**Madhav Kumar Nepal**  
UML General Secretary talks about his aim in politics  
Page 16

Madhav K. Rimal  
Chief Editor & Publisher

Page

LETTERS 3

NEWS NOTES 4

BRIEFS 6

QUOTE UNQUOTE/TRANSITION 7

OPINION : Laxmi Thapa 8

NATIONAL: Game Of Stalemate 15

ENCOUNTER: Johanna Mang 18

WOMEN: Participatory Peace 20

CHALLENGES OF HIV/AIDS: Dr. RP Shrestha 21

TOURISM: Rising Tone 24

**SPOTLIGHT**

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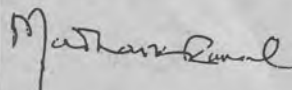
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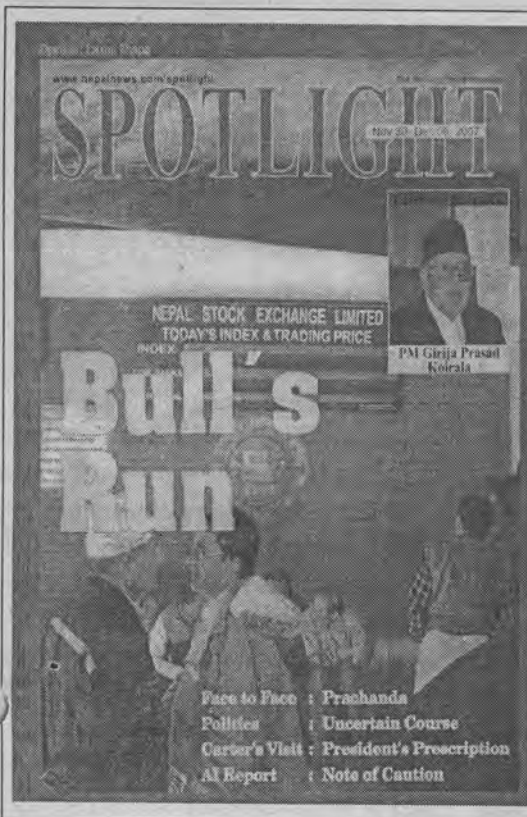
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“All thieves are cousins” is one old Indian proverb. The behavior of the SPAM ( Seven Party Alliance and Maoists) goes to prove the dictum almost literally. Twenty months have passed the country is being ruled by SPA+M. The Maoists have been in and out. Staying away, the Maoists are wielding even greater power. The home minister behaves like their hand-maiden and the Prime minister looks too feeble to stand up to them. He is more anxious to save his unique chair. As the rumor goes the prime minister, who is surviving on steroids, has become incapable of even taking decisions and is behaving like an H.M.V. record. What comes as a big surprise is that even the powerful Maoists have started blaming the big media for preventing them from joining the government. They also believe pen is mightier than sword or gun. But they still have not been able to realize that they are not loved, they are feared. Their bigger worries are their deserting cadres, who are getting disillusioned with their leaders. If this continues, they may be left without an army in the days to come. But since the SPA is willing to share the spoils with them, they don't mind. They are happy to play the drama of vicious bickering in public as long as the SPA can stay in power, which could be indefinite if Indian and Anglo- American bloc go on supporting them. Because neither the SPA nor the Maoists, the satellite authority at the moment, want the elections to the Constituent Assembly as they know they don't carry the voters. Except for their respective cadres which would be a few thousands, the overwhelming millions of Nepalis won't vote for them if the elections are ever held and are free and fair and conducted by a neutral government. The simple and poor Nepalis know their politicians well. They have seen them working for decades and are quite familiar with their character, their integrity, their love for the country and their solicitousness for their poor countrymen. What is puzzling them is the hypocritical behavior of the devotees of democracy and humanitarianism, who are unabashedly supporting the political thugs and unrepresentative rulers, who are taking the country towards total destruction. As such, it is time for all the millions of Nepalis, irrespective of their political ideologies, to come together and make concerted efforts to save the country. We do trust there would be some honest and patriotic men in Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and the Maoists and exhort them too to listen to the their own conscience. We do know we can depend upon our security forces to save us. A few days back our COAS said he would always carryout the will of the people. The people now are looking up to him. We would also want our good friends, the Anglo-Americans to become more sensitive to the miseries of the teeming millions of the poor Nepalis by bringing a drastic change in their looking at us through borrowed eyes. Lastly, we earnestly appeal to our dependable friend, the Chinese, to exert their influence to deliver us from the impending disaster.

  
**Madhav K. Rimal**  
Chief Editor & Publisher



## Interesting Read

The cover story Bull's Run (Spotlight November 30-December 6) was interesting to read. When the country's overall economic situation is not in good shape, I don't understand why Nepalese share market is rising in such a way. There is also rumor in the market that some middlemen are making a lot of money by monopolizing the share market. There is no economic justification to see more than four hundred percent jump in the share. The

government must form a high level committee to see whether there is any justification of such rise in stock price.

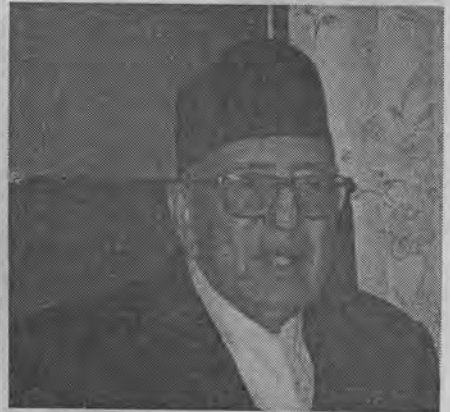
**Nirmal Shrestha**  
Samakhushi.

hydropower sector. For instance, Nepalese people have shown strong commitment to Chillime hydropower project whose share is rising very high. It indicates that Nepalese investors have shown they are ready to support genuine projects.

**Norbu Lama**  
Pokhara via-email

## Frustrating Viewpoint

It was very frustrating to read the interview of prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala who has shown no regrets for his historical blunder to push Nepal into



prolonged political instability. Although prime minister Koirala blamed former judge and chairman of interim constitution recommendation committee Laxman Aryal for the present political crisis, he failed to remember his own role in destabilizing Nepal's political and social system. Prime minister Koirala has violated all democratic principle, moral values and political ideology during the last two years. When Koirala announced parliamentary

proclamation in April 2006 in a manner of military dictator, Laxman Aryal was not there to advise him. He made similar constitutional blunders as an autocrat. After reading the interview, I have a pity for prime minister Koirala who has found former judge Laxman Aryal as a scapegoat to cover up his crime. Every Nepali knows that it is Koirala's lust for power which has pushed the country into a course of prolonged political instability.

**Bhim Bahadur Shrestha**  
Queensland, Australia via e-mail

## Run Of A Bull

I agree with your cover story Bull's Run (Spotlight November 30-December 6). It is absolutely correct that investors wanting to make quick returns have trained their focus on the stock market due to lack of opportunities of investment in other areas due to economic slowdown. But the increasingly speculative nature of the investment in shares is bound to create a problem. Here comes the role of the government and regulatory bodies. It is a fact that stock market is necessary for the economic development of the country. Due to lapses of strong regulatory mechanism, it will create problems as well.

Rising stock market is a sign of healthy economic growth for developed world but it is not true for developing countries like Nepal where there are many loopholes for manipulation.

**Bindu Lama**  
Boston, USA via-email

## Risks Involved

After reading the cover story in Spotlight, I came to know that there

involves huge risk in investing the money in stock exchange. I am very surprised to know the high share price of banks like Nepal Bangladesh Bank, which was recently declared bankrupt and Nepal's central bank intervened to protect public money. If the bank was in healthy condition, why would there have been the need for intervention by the central bank? Whatever one can say, the share price of the bank has also increased by double. There are so many similar cases. Nobody seems to have time to see that kind of situation. There is no doubt that the current bubble in stock market will collapse at any day. When it will collapse, it

is definite that thousands of Nepalese will lose their money.

**Sudhendra Shrestha**  
Baneshwor

## Stock Support

For the economic development, a strong stock market is necessary. Nepal, too, now has a very strong market which is supporting Nepal's economic development. I am very happy to see people are coming to invest in

## Special Security Teams For Valley And Terai

The Home Ministry has mobilized special security teams of police and armed police for strengthening security situation in the capital valley and eight districts of Terai. In each of the team,

around the country would stop works and might even resort to mass resignation if the government failed to heed their demands. President of the Center, Bhawani Prasad Ghimire, said the government failed to implement the 9-point understanding it had signed with the Center months earlier. As part



there will be 20 personnel of Nepal Police and 30 personnel of Armed Police Force. The team would be led by DSP of APF. Eight districts where such teams would be deployed include Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat, Bara, Siraha, Saptari, Sarlahi and Parsa. The team will control activities like extortion, abduction, possession of arms etc. *Leading dailies report*

## VDC Secretaries In Agitation Mood

The VDC secretaries have announced fresh protest programs stating that their demand for security in workplaces must be addressed by the government. At a press conference in the capital Sunday (Dec 02), the VDC Secretaries Rights Protection Center announced nationwide protests against growing attacks, extortion and abduction of secretaries. The Center also warned that the VDC secretaries

of their protest, the VDC secretaries will enforce strike on every Sunday, for one month, in local bodies beginning December 9 and will enforce an 8-day strike from January 6. After that, they will close down the local bodies indefinitely if the demands are not met, Ghimire.

*Compiled from reports*

## RPP To Remove Monarchy From Party Statute

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has joined the Nepali Congress (NC) and other democratic parties to formally delete the term "constitutional monarchy" from its party statute and all other party documents. The RPP will erase the term "constitutional monarchy" from its party statute to be endorsed by the national convention scheduled for December 9-11. "The central committee has erased the term constitutional monarchy from the party

constitution, but the national convention will take the final decision," Parsuram Khapung, Rastriya Prajatantra Party spokesman, said, adding: "The convention has the right to endorse or reject it." *Leading dailies report*

## Minister Vows To Ensure Fuel Supply

Amid continued shortage of petroleum products, a minister has vowed to ensure smooth supplies. Shyam Sundar Gupta, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, claimed that he will step down from his position if he fails to ensure fuel supply. Speaking at a program by western regional petroleum dealers in Butwal, Saturday (Dec 01), Gupta assured that the government will pay outstanding dues of Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC). Gupta said that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has agreed that the government should pay dues of NOC for once. According to him, the government will pay Rs 2.8 billion, which the NOC needs to pay to Indian Oil Corporation. Earlier, Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat had been saying that the government was in no position to pay back NOC's loans. Minister Gupta also promised to check corruption and leakage within NOC. *Leading dailies report*

## Winter Session Begins

The regular session of the parliament resumed on Thursday (Nov 29) amid continued political deadlock. The parliament passed 12<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Civil Code with strong provisions to deal with abductions and hostage. It carried 4 to 15 years of imprisonment for convicts of such crime. Meanwhile, women MPs demanded that the government introduce special and strong law to deal with violence against women. Speaker drew the attention of the government towards their demands.

The session will sit again on Sunday.

*Leading dailies report*

## Two Die Of Tb Every Three Hours In Nepal

Experts from the health sector on Wednesday said that there are around 90,000 patients infected with tuberculosis in Nepal and the number increases by 40,000 annually. In every three hours, two patients die of TB in Nepal. Globally, 1.6 million people die of TB every year. Experts revealed the data at a press conference organized by the Nepal Anti-Tuberculosis Association (NATA) to mark the 54th National Tuberculosis Control Day that is celebrated on Mangsir 13 every year. Madan Kaji Shrestha, the general secretary of the NATA, said the government has adopted a new technology DOTS (Direct Observation Treatment Service) Plus to cure Multi Drug Resistant (MDR) tuberculosis. He said, "Currently NATA is running 21 DOTS Plus clinics in five development regions, where 350 MDR patients have already been treated free of cost." He said, "The disease can not be controlled by the government efforts alone and it demands collective effort of all sectors." Dr Bhawana Shrestha said that MDR TB is a man-made error, which is caused due to the negligence on the part of patients and physicians while treating TB through DOTS. "Insufficient dose of medicine makes DOTS treatment insufficient. In such cases, the DOTS Plus treatment is applied." According to Dr Shrestha, 16 patients have already been cured with the new technology. She added that new patients with Extensively Drug Resistance (XDR) TB patients are being detected in the world. "Three XDR patients have been detected in Nepal. One has already died and two are undergoing treatment." It has been estimated that \$ 2.15 billion is needed

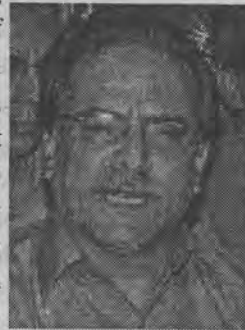
to combat drug-resistant TB globally. *The Himalayan Times daily reports*  
**Sood To Replace Mukherjee**

Rakesh Sood, a career diplomat, has been appointed as the new Indian ambassador to Nepal, according to reports by Indian Express daily. He will replace ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee. The daily reports that the Indian government has appointed Mukherjee as High Commissioner to United Kingdom in place of Kamallesh Sharma, who has been elected as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. Sood is currently serving as India's ambassador in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, The Himalayan Times daily has reported that the Indian government has accepted the agreement of Nepal's newly designated envoy to India, Shailaja Acharya. *Nepalnews.com reports*

## Issue Of Cabinet

### Reconstitution Crops Up

Maoist chairman Prachanda has revealed that the issue of reconstituting the cabinet was discussed at the meeting among top leaders of Maoists, Nepali Congress (NC), Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) and Unity Center, which was held at the Peace Ministry in the evening, Friday. "The first issue we discussed was about the implementation of proposals on republic and PR election system. The second issue was the one regarding the integration of two armies. And we also discussed about the reconstitution of cabinet," he said, without elaborating on the aspects of the discussion. The meeting, however, had ended without



reaching to any conclusion regarding the political deadlock. Earlier in the day, Prachanda had told reporters that they will raise the issue of changing the (government) leadership if their proposals on republic and PR system are not implemented. *Compiled from reports*

## US Officials Start

### Interviewing Refugees

International Organization for Migration (IOM) began interviewing the Bhutanese refugees opting for third country resettlement in the US in Damak on Tuesday (Nov 27). Three high-ranking officials of the Department of US Homeland Security — William Lowe, Keirn Van and David Radel — began interviewing the refugees on their intention and opinion on resettlement, said Laxman Kumar Hamal, assistant Chief District Officer and joint director of the Refugee Coordination Unit under the Home Ministry. He said the team will be in Damak till December 13. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has already submitted the applications of refugees having security concerns to the IOM. It is said that interview in Morang's Shanisshare and Damak's Beldangi camp has been completed in the first phase. However, the number of interviewees has not been revealed. Jas Bahadur Subba, a refugee living in the Shanisshare camp, said all the members of his family have been interviewed. Another refugee Homnath Baral said that he has been called for a health check up along with all family members by December. The UNHCR has been continuing to inquire about the refugees who have opted for third country resettlement. It is said that 50,000 refugees of 10,000 families have applied for third country resettlement; the IOM has not disclosed the number of applications it has received.

*Leading dailies report* ■



Differently-abled people at a rally to observe the World Disabled Day

*Annapurna Post*

**THE INDIAN EMBASSY HAS REFUTED** media reports that India has started construction of a major highway along the Nepal-India border. "The Embassy of India has noticed the plethora of media reports in Nepal about a highway allegedly being constructed by India close to and all along the India-Nepal border," an Embassy release stated, adding, "There is no such project that is being implemented, or even on the drawing board, on the Indian side." "Keeping in mind the developmental needs of India and its rapidly growing economy, and the need to enhance connectivity within India as well as with its neighbors, as and when a project such as this is considered for implementation, it will certainly be discussed with the Government of Nepal, wherever necessary," the Embassy further said. Saying that a number of agreements and institutionalized mechanisms for discussions exist for such a purpose, the Indian Embassy said the Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee had conveyed this to Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan during a meeting on November 27. Minister Pradhan had sought clarification from the Indian ambassador about the reports of an ambitious road project of India along the highway. The Indian Embassy also said the Indian government is going to construct more than 1500km roads in Nepal with an outlay of 12 billion rupees, as part of its assistance for Nepal's economic development, and that the detailed project report is in advanced stage.

**THE OWNERSHIP OF LAND BY WOMEN** has increased of late. The government policy to provide 20 percent tax relief on transfer of land ownership to female

individual, the growing positive attitude of society and to lessen the property dispute, the trend of transferring the ownership of land to women has increased. In the eleven months of last fiscal year, of the total land ownership transactions in 13 Land Revenue offices in the county, 25 percent involved transfer of ownership to women. Shatrughna Prasad Pudasaini, director of Land Reforms and Management Department, said, "The provision of tax discount has given good result." At present, government imposes 2 percent (of transaction value) tax in VDCs and 4 percent in municipalities.

**THE GOVERNMENT HAS SAID IT WILL INTRODUCE** a new law in the parliament to deal with the incidents of

forced 'disappearances.' Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula promised to introduce such law at the parliament within ten days. He said so following instructions by the Parliamentary Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. Earlier, the government had proposed amending the existing Civil Code to incorporate new law on disappearances. But the lawmakers, particularly those from the Maoists, had demanded that a special law should be introduced to deal with the matter.

**NEPAL HAS MOVED TWO RANKS AHEAD** and has been placed at 142<sup>nd</sup> rank in the Human Development Index (HDI) prepared by UNDP on the basis of life expectancy, education and standard of living. Out of 177 nations, Nepal is in 142<sup>nd</sup> rank – up from 144<sup>th</sup> rank last year. Although Nepal improved in all three fronts, it is still in the last position among SAARC nations. As per the HDI report, the life expectancy at birth has increased from 62.1 years to 62.6 years in the past one year. Likewise, net enrolment rate in primary, secondary and higher education level has increased from 56.1 to 58.1 percent. Adult literacy rate for people above 15 years has remained unchanged at 48.6 percent. The purchasing power parity has increased by \$10 to reach \$1550. In terms of Gender Development Index, Nepal is placed at 134<sup>th</sup> rank. Nepal's HDI is 0.534, which is much below the regional average of 0.611. In South Asia, India is placed at 128<sup>th</sup> rank, Sri Lanka at 99<sup>th</sup> rank, Maldives at 100<sup>th</sup> rank, Bhutan at 133<sup>rd</sup> rank, Pakistan at 136<sup>th</sup> rank, Bangladesh at 140<sup>th</sup> rank and Nepal at 142<sup>nd</sup> rank. ■



“The first issue we discussed was about the implementation of proposals on republic and PR election system. The second issue was the one regarding the integration of two armies. And we also discussed about the reconstitution of cabinet.”

*Prachanda, Maoist chairman, elaborating the expanding agenda of discussion among political parties.*

“The Nepali Congress must show flexibility to break the deadlock.”

*Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of Unified Marxist Leninist (UML).*

“The central committee has erased the term constitutional monarchy from the party constitution, but the national convention will take the final decision. The convention has the right to endorse or reject it.”

*Parsuram Khapung, spokesperson of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), in The Himalayan Times.*

“I will step down if I fail to ensure smooth supplies of fuel.”

*Shyam Sundar Gupta, newly appointed Minister for Industry,*



*Commerce and Supplies, in Butawal.*

“We are only demanding our security at the workplaces.”

*Bhawani Prasad Ghimire, president of VDC Secretaries Rights Protection Center, which has announced fresh stir demanding security.*

“Keeping in mind the developmental needs of India and its rapidly growing

economy, and the need to enhance connectivity within India as well as with its neighbors, as and when a project such as this is considered for implementation, it will certainly be discussed with the Government of Nepal, wherever necessary.”

*A statement by the Embassy of India, refuting reports in media about Indian plans of constructing roads near the border.*

## TRANSITION

**APPOINTED:** Gauri Pradhan, as a spokesperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

**RETURNED:** The high-level Chinese delegation, after completing five-day official visit. The seven-member delegation was led by Chinese Minister for International Department of Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Wang Jiarui.



**RETURNED:** Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel, after

completing his visit to Norway where he inspected political and election system.

**BEREAVED:** Ramesh Tiwari, Managing Editor of Gorkhapatra, of his father and a former judge Yagyanidhi Tiwari, who passed away.

**LEFT:** A five member team led by Tirthaman Shakya, chairman of Public Service Commission, to New Delhi, India to pay official visit.

**ARRIVED:** An EU troika delegation on a four day visit to Nepal on December 3. The high-level delegation consisted of officials from Portugal, the current EU Presidency, Slovenia, the forthcoming EU Presidency, the European Commission and the European Council. The members of the delegation

include dPedro Moitinho de Almeida, Special Representative of the EU Presidency for Political Dialogues with 3rd Countries; Gabriela Soares de Albergaria, Director for Asia and Oceania; Portuguese MFA; Miklav Borštnik, Charge d’ Affairs, Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in New Delhi; Jean-Christian Remond, Head of Unit for Nepal, Bhutan and India, European Commission; Rensje Teerink, Desk Officer for Nepal, Bhutan and India, European Commission; and Michael Swann, Desk Officer South Asia, European Council Secretariat.

**AWARDED:** Senior politician Shree Bhadra Sharma, with Chandradhan Award, for his translated book on Bhagwad Gita

# FROM LONDON TO KATHMANDU VIA DELHI

• *By Laxmi Thapa*

**A**fter being seen off on a October evening of this year at the terminal three of the London's Heathrow Airport, we two passed through the immigration to board a Jet Airways plane bound for New Delhi.

The terminal three building like other terminals of the Heathrow Airport is very large. I virtually had to run behind my husband along the long corridors with no end anywhere near to board the plane. I was gasping for breath though I carried only a very light handbag. At last we arrived at the right gate where few passengers were still in a queue to board the Jet Airways plane bound for New Delhi.

Jet Airways is a new India based airline. We boarded a brand new Airbus plane. Crews onboard provided excellent service to passengers. We were served delicious food and beverage. After an eight hour flight we landed on the following day morning at the Indira Gandhi International

Airport in New Delhi. We had planned to spend three days in Delhi. We wanted to do some sightseeing. We were equally interested to acquaint ourselves with the people of Delhi who in many ways so closely resemble people of our own country.

## **Delhi in the Past**

The capital of India, Delhi, has a history that spans over several millennia. Indraprastha, the capital of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata epic is believed to be on the site where stands the Purana Quila meaning "old fort" which is now a ruin. This place is adjacent to Yamuna River near India Gate. The walled city of Old Delhi was at one time Shahjahanabad the capital of the Mughals. New Delhi built recently in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century based on Lutyen's architecture is a testimony to the great might of the British Empire. Now Delhi is the heart of world's second most populous country.

## **Hotels in Delhi's Carol Bagh**

After getting few necessary information from the tourist bureau office we left the airport in a car to downtown area. It was fine late morning hour. The road to town circumvents the airport's runaway areas before crossing a forested zone. There were not many cars on the road. Soon we were in Carol Bagh street. We can draw a parallel between Carol Bagh and Thamel tole of Kathmandu. Carol Bagh, like Thamel tole, is extremely popular among foreign tourists visiting Delhi. There are many low cost tourist hotels in Carol

Bagh. This area is not far from the Connaught place which is considered to be the heart of the New Delhi's commerce.

We checked at a reasonably priced hotel in Carol Bagh. Our hotel was very close to a metro station. Delhi is covered by a network of surface train lines known as Metro. We left our hotel to take a metro train to go to Connaught place for sightseeing and also to drop into a MacDonald shop where light refreshments are served. MacDonald has started its operation in India only a few years back.

## **Delhi's Metro**

We had to climb up to get to the metro station platform. It surprised us to find that the Delhi metro, unlike the Paris metro or Moscow metro, is in reality a sky train. Railway lines laid above the winding streets rest on vertical piers.

So the railway lines too have many sharp bends. It is natural that the trains have to negotiate such sharp curves. We felt some degree of discomfort while the metro train, like roller-coaster, rocked from side to side. However, the travel in an air-conditioned metro train is a great relief for those commuters who had to travel before the commencement of the metro service in burning heat during Delhi's midday sunshine hours.

## **Streets of Connaught Place**

Anybody coming to visit Delhi at once finds that the Connaught Place has been planned in a magnificent way. Large open space at the centre is surrounded by two circular rows of whitewashed buildings that house shops, restaurants, offices, banks etc. Apart from three rows of circular streets there are several radial roads that connect the Connaught Place with other parts of the city. The open space at the centre of the Connaught Place has recently been turned into a big market where cheap imported as well as locally produced textiles, electronic goods etc are sold. This market is called Palikha bazaar.

## **Mahatma Gandhi and Birla Mandir**

The following day we left our hotel in the morning to visit Birla Mandir, which is a Laxminarayan temple at a very nice location in the central section of New Delhi. It was not too far from our hotel. The weather was very clear without a trace of cloud in the sky. So we preferred to take a cycle rickshaw instead of an auto rickshaw to go to the Birla Mandir though it was almost twice more expensive. Cycle rickshaw is the most convenient mode of transportation to do sightseeing. We were able to see everything on our way to the Birla Mandir.

We approached a saffron coloured temple complex by the side of the road. It was Birla Mandir. There were tourist buses parked in front of the temple. Foreign tourists were busy taking photograph of the Mandir. It is forbidden to take cameras inside the temple perhaps due to security reasons.

Birla Mandir is a relatively modern temple built in 1938. It is a richly decorated temple. Entrance to the temple is free for all. There are large idols of Laxmi and Narayan. Devotees as well as tourists from all over the world visit this temple. Mahatma Gandhi, who preached nonviolence throughout the world, was one of the frequent visitors.

Unfortunately, Birla Mandir became the scene of the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. Mahatma Gandhi who preached non violence throughout his life became himself a victim of violence.

### Nepalese Embassy in Delhi

From Birla Mandir we drove in an auto rickshaw to Jet Airways office located in Barakhamba Road to reconfirm our air ticket. Barakhamba road has become a new commercial center of New Delhi. In recent years many new high rise buildings and skyscrapers have sprung up in Barakhamba Road. Our embassy is also located in Barakhamba Road.

We reconfirmed our return ticket. From Barakhamba Road we drove to core area of India's capital New Delhi where the official residence of the president, central secretariat, parliament and other vital institutions are located. We were very much impressed by the majestic panoramic view of the Rastrapati Bhavan area.

### New Delhi and Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens

India's capital city, New Delhi is on the Yamuna River. New Delhi was built between 1912 and 1929 on a site adjacent to Old Delhi, which had been chosen to replace Calcutta (now Kolkata) as the capital of India in 1911.

In 1912, Lutyens was selected to advise on the planning of the new Indian capital at Delhi. His plan was: a garden-city pattern, based on a series of hexagons separated by broad avenues with double lines of trees. In his single most important building, the Viceroy's House ( now residence of president), he combined aspects of classical architecture with features of Indian decoration. Lutyens was knighted in 1918. New Delhi was inaugurated as the new capital in 1931.

### Kutub Minar

After visiting Rastrapati Bhavan area we drove south to see Kutub Minar. It was quite a long drive. Finally we were in Kutub Minar area. The place was crowded with foreign tourists and Indian visitors. We had to pay a nominal fee to enter into the compound. We could see at the centre of the compound the Kutub Minar tower soaring into blue sky. Attention of all those visiting this place is instantaneously drawn towards to this beautiful tower. It is reported that the

Kutub Minar tower was built in 1193 AD by Kutub-ud-din to mark the first Muslim dynasty in India. He was first of the Slave kings, who were so called because most of them were, like Kutub, slaves in their youth. After Kutub's death there were eight Slave kings and one queen, who ruled for eighty-two years. Housed next to the Kutub Minar tower is a splendid mosque. According to some history books the mosque had been built with the stones of 25 Hindu temples.

### Old Delhi

Old Delhi is situated on the Yamuna River and is bordered on the south by New Delhi, the national capital. Delhi is surrounded by a high stone wall, erected in 1638, and is approached through seven arched gateways, including the Delhi Gate in the south, the Ajmer Gate in the east, and the Kashmir Gate in the north. Within the walls is a maze of

congested narrow streets, alleys, busy bazaars, and some of the nation's most spectacular architectural features. Along the Chandni Chowk (Silver Street), once considered the most lavish street in the world, is a major commercial area of the city.

On the third day morning we left our hotel for sightseeing of the Old Delhi. Our real destination was the famous Red Fort. The historical fort in Old Delhi is a colossal structure of red sandstone, which was built by Mogul Emperor Shah Jehan in 1638. We also visited the bustling Chandni Chowk market.

### Inside Red Fort

As soon as we entered into the fort we realized that the Red Fort covers a very large area. The first building in front of us was a museum where we could see the weaponry used in India in the past. In the museum we were very much astonished to meet few soldiers of Gorkha Regiment serving in the Indian army.

After leaving behind the weaponry museum we had to cross a large grassed courtyard to arrive at the Diwan-e-Aam or public audience hall of the emperor. The next building further inside the fort is the Diwan-e-Khas or private hall. The audience halls in those days housed the diamond and ruby studded Peacock Throne. We found the Rang Mahal (queen's palace) and Moti Mahal extremely impressive.

We were requested to visit India's independence movement museum which is located inside the Red Ford. The museum was opened only a few years back. The displays shown in the museum cover the period until the independence in 1947.

### Goodbye Delhi

The following day morning we left our hotel to go to the airport to catch the flight to Kathmandu. There were not many passengers when we arrived at the airport. Slowly the airport terminal became crowded. On that day there were perhaps three or four flights to Kathmandu. Our plane took off from the Delhi airport on time. Thus ended our three day visit to Delhi.

(Thapa writes on history)



PM Koirala with Chinese delegation leader Wang Jiarui meeting : Neighbourly concern

## NEIGHBOURS

# Games They Play

*As instability continues to mar Nepali politics, two big neighbours vie to outsmart each other*

By SUSHIL SHARMA

**Y**et another senior Chinese delegation. Yet another round of parley with key political actors of Nepal. Emphasis one more time on the long-standing hands-off policy.

That is how one would sum up the recent visit of the Wang Jiarui-led Chinese team. On the surface of it, of course.

But analysts believe that there is much more than meets the eye.

The senior official of the international department of the Chinese communist party does not hold a position in the government.

But holding a ministerial rank, he wields considerable influence in the policy and decision making in Beijing.

He came less than three months after the visit of another influential leader, the vice chairman of the people's political consultative conference, Wang Zhongue.

There had been a number of other senior level visits over the past year from across the Himalayas.

This has coincided with the raging flame of disturbances across Nepal's southern plains which, according to a Chinese Nepal expert, "is unnatural and unusual".

Analysts say, it is this "unnatural and unusual" development in the Nepal Terai that has begun to ring the alarm bells across the Himalayas to the Tibetan plateau and even far beyond to Beijing.

As the Terai situation and its resultant impact on the peace process and the

proposed constituent assembly elections are being viewed with serious concern, "the Chinese appeared to be re-asserting their presence here," said a political commentator in reference to the latest visit of a top level Chinese delegation.

It was clear that the boss of the Chinese communist party's international department wanted to take the first hand assessment of the situation.

But in meetings with the Nepalese leaders, he did not talk much, preferring, instead, to listen.

As one Nepalese official present in one of such meetings said, "the Chinese leader said he is here to listen."

A UML leader echoed: "Wang seemed more interested in listening than talking with us."

While preferring to listen in meetings with key political actors, the Chinese dignitary was in full flow — by Chinese standards, of course — in interaction with the media.

The message he was trying to give was loud and clear: "we are very much here, keeping our eyes and ears open".

Unlike many leaders and officials from other countries, he did not volunteer to offer advice on ways to resolve what is developing as a political stalemate of potentially explosive consequences for the whole region.

But Wang was unequivocal in reemphasising on reconciliation which has remained elusive so far — for reasons best known to the Nepalese political actors only.

A reconciliation on an entirely different front is however in the making.

That at least is the indication one can get from the impending visit of the chief of the Nepali army, Rukmangd Katuwal, to India.

The strained relations between the armies of the two countries over the royal coup in Nepal three years ago are clearly on the mend.

Katuwal is due to leave for India next Sunday, as the chief of the only institution that has remained stable and united despite recent upheavals that even shook the foundation of the two-centuries old monarchy.

He is said to have been initially invited to attend a programme of



COAS General Katuwal: First visit

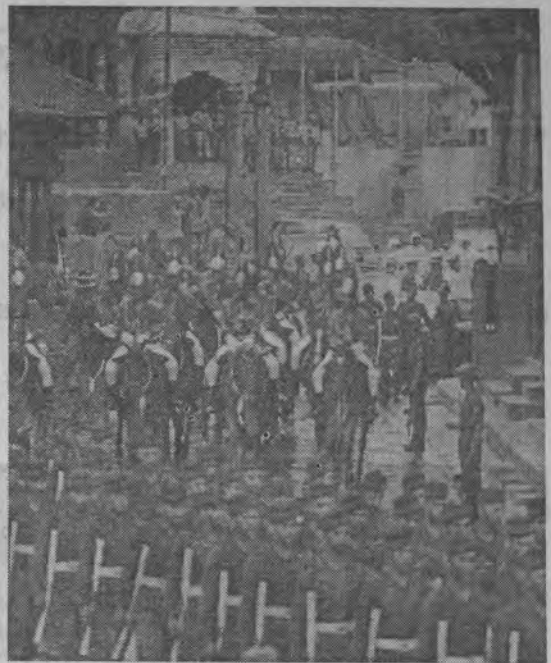
ceremonial nature at the Indian military academy in Deharadun.

Having refused it and insisted on treatment on par with his Indian counterpart, Katuwal had finally his say.

The first commoner chief of the Nepali army will now be on an official visit in Delhi, where he will attend the investiture ceremony with his Indian

counterpart and personal friend Deepak Kapur.

"Given the deep influence the non-political Indian military establishment holds over the political and security policies and decisions in Delhi, the gesture to the chief of the equally non-political Nepali army at this crucial juncture of Nepali politics can not be without serious political overtones," said an old India hand. ■



Nepal Army : Stable institution

POLITICS

# New Equation?

*As differences in the seven-party alliance widen, major parties apparently seek to woo the discredited royalists*

By NARAYAN KARKI CHHETRI

Prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala's "admission" of mistakes last week in replacing the 1990 constitution with the current interim constitution has created ripples.

One of the basic principles of the 1990 constitution was the multi party parliamentary democracy in a constitutional monarchy.

Koirala's remarks came at a time when few dared to challenge the republican bandwagon which has bulldozed the other voice over the past two years.

Less than a week after Koirala made the remarks in an exclusive interview to SPOTLIGHT, the Maoist chief Prachanda, seemed to echo, albeit on a different tone.

Prachanda referred to nationalist



PM Koirala : Searching a new alliance

elements within the royal fold. He said that such elements, the parliamentary parties and the Maoists must unite.

Another top leader, the UML boss, Madhav Kumar Nepal, has also been quick to give a clean chit to the king in the alleged conspiracy to repeatedly put the constituent assembly elections on hold.

The parties have continued to differ on moves to declare a republic through the interim parliament, but none has advocated against a monarchy-less polity.

But it appears that the wind is slowly blowing in an unexpected direction.

Reviving the 1990 constitution may be out of question at this time. Keeping the present unpopular king in the throne also looks an equally impossible task.

But as the mainstream parties fight a never ending war for a bigger space in the Nepalese political spectrum, it is the 240-year-old institution that they have turned to, to gain an edge.

Whether this makes the future politics even messier or rosier is too premature to predict ■

## PETROLEUM SHORTAGE

## Fuelling

## The Fire

The serpentine queues at petrol stations in the capital valley have not shortened since a long time. People are spending hours to fill up their vehicles with the fuel. The state-owned sole supplier Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) is bleeding due to escalating prices in the international market. A month after it hiked the price of fuel, the unprecedented acceleration in the international oil market has rendered the NOC breathless. When the NOC hiked the price of petroleum products on October 25, 2007, the international price of crude oil stood at US\$ 82 per barrel. In a matter of one month, this price increased to over US\$ 94 per barrel. International analysts have predicted that this price could soon cross US\$ 100 per barrel. Amid soaring losses and growing demand, the NOC is unable to buy as much fuel as required from its sole supplier Indian Oil Corporation (IOC)

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

*It is a sordid saga of misplaced politics fuelling the fire of disenchantment and frustration of the people.*

*As political parties dither from making economically practical decision and continue to engage in fruitless parleys over protracted political deadlock, the crisis of oil is beginning to explode.*

As one economist put it, the problem

of fuel shortage could soon overtake the political crisis. "We do not want to know what the Finance Minister or the Supplies Minister thinks. We want to know what the seven parties want to do about this problem, which will become a bigger crisis than the political one if not resolved soon," warned economist Dr. Raghav Dhoj Pant.

Dr. Pant believes that since the people have been paying tax, the

government must ensure smooth supplies. "People have paid Rs 8 to 9 billion tax last year (on fuel alone). And they are still forced to stand in long queues to get petrol," Dr. Pant said.

#### **NOC's Inability**

The state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) officials have said that they will not be able to ensure smooth supplies of petroleum products unless the market price is increased again

at par with the rise in international market.

According to NOC spokesperson Ichha Bikram Thapa, when the NOC made the recent price hike decision on October 24, the international market price of crude oil had stood at US\$ 82 per barrel (159 liters) of crude oil. This price, he said, has already increased and is reaching near \$100 per barrel in recent days. He said that in the last one month, the NOC's monthly losses have increased from Rs 70 million to Rs 370 million due to rise of price in international market. In fact, latest data have shown that December's international price will push its monthly loss to beyond Rs 600 million.

"As our import price with the Indian Oil Corporation has increased, we are in difficult position and compelled to hike price again," said Thapa.

Till November end, the NOC's total outstanding dues to IOC stood at Rs 2.6 billion. That apart, the NOC also had huge liabilities owing to its loans from various institutions. As of November 23, the NOC's total liability stood at Rs 9.65 billion – Rs 3 billion as loan from the government; Rs 8.2 million as loan from Finance Minister as part of Financial Diagnosis; Rs 2.53 billion as loans from Employees Provident Fund and Citizen Investment Fund; Rs 1.5 billion as loans from various commercial banks; and Rs 2.61 billion as outstanding dues to IOC. In 2063/64, the estimated cumulative loss of NOC had stood at Rs 2.5 billion.

As per its agreement with IOC on March 30, 2007, the NOC needs to pay Rs 240 million as monthly installment to clear past dues. Besides, the IOC will only supply that amount of fuel, which can be bought by the amount of money NOC pays. Since NOC is in big loss, it has been unable to pay adequate amount to buy adequate volume of oil – hence the prolonged shortage.

The NOC's statement on November 23 had shown that in petrol it is incurring loss of Rs 5.19 per liter. Similarly, it is incurring loss of Rs 9.6 per liter in diesel; Rs 3.87 per liter in kerosene; and Rs 148.33 per cylinder in cooking gas. It earned Rs 15.73 profit per liter in



A vehicle at a petrol station: Getting fuel is a big struggle

aviation fuel, though. These losses have further increased in recent days.

### Long Term Solution

The NOC, in its current financial state, cannot be expected to ensure

smooth supplies unless the government employs exercises to attain long term solution to this problem.

The NOC officials say that putting in place a properly regulated pricing



NOC's Storage Tank : Decreasing stock

mechanism, which automatically adjusts the domestic price with international price fluctuation will be the first step in this direction.

But to take this first step, the politics must be extricated away from oil. The populist and revolutionary politics do not mix well with the oil and this fact has to be understood by the seven parties and their student wings together, said an economist.

In the rush for populism, the parties claim that they are working in favor of poor people by not allowing the NOC to adjust fuel price – but, in fact, they are subsidizing the relatively well-off people at the cost of millions of people who live in abject poverty. Nepal's economic survey says that of the total energy consumption of 8478 tons of oil equivalent in 2062/63; the overwhelming portion – 85.85 percent – is occupied by traditional sources such as fuelwood, biomass etc. Only 13.45 percent is

fulfilled by commercial sources such as petroleum products and electricity. While 0.61 percent is fulfilled by renewable sources such as solar power, biogas etc. This energy consumption outlay gives one indication about who will benefit from subsidizing petroleum products.

Likewise, as NOC spokesperson Ichha Bikram Thapa said, in order to resolve the fuel crisis once and for all, the government should also explore the option of involving private sector in the sales and distribution of petroleum products. This issue of privatization has not been seriously debated till now.

Another solution pointed out by the NOC officials could be short-term tax discounts. The NOC had paid Rs 8 billion as revenue to the government in the fiscal year 2063/64. At the current market price, the NOC pays Rs 26.9 as various taxes on per liter of petrol; Rs 11.23 on diesel; Rs 2.5 on kerosene; Rs 11.35 on aviation fuel; and Rs 196/

cylinder on cooking gas. The taxes include custom duties, which is charged flat on the basis of volume of import; Value Added Tax (except on kerosene); local development tax and road maintenance charges.

The government says that revenue collected from petroleum products are being used in social sectors like education and health and cannot be done away with for the time being.

“We cannot do this tax away at the current moment as it will affect budget allocation on social sectors,” said Dr. Pushpa Raj Rajkarnicar, a member of National Planning Commission (NPC).

Unless one or the combination of these long-term solution suggestions are not implemented soon enough, economists have warned that the problem could soon spiral out of control. The anger building up among the people standing in the queue of petrol stations can give enough indication for that. ■



## POLITICS

# Game Of Stalemate

Recent remarks made by leaders of various political parties indicate that Nepalese will have to wait a long time to see the elected government

By KESHAB POUDEL

**A**s holding the election for Constituent Assembly is no more a priority for the political parties, it is almost certain that the country will be governed by one or other brands of politicians with no popular mandate.

At a time when an unseen power is not feeling comfortable to deal with popularly, elected government, there is no immediate sign to fulfill wishes of Nepalese people to choose their representatives. Even western countries and United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), who have already spent millions of dollars in the preparations for election, are helpless in the complex geo-strategic position of Nepal where unseen power count much more than seen power.

With no popular support back home, the unelected government is always unpopular and easy to maneuver. This is a repeat of a situation in Nepal during Panchayat system. For thirty years, Nepal went through an unaccountable system which was very weak whenever there was an issue of accountability.

Despite adjournment of winter session of parliament several times to find settlement, the leaders of major political parties, who have already held two party, three party and seven party meetings, are yet to agree on fixing the new date for Constituent Assembly election. It is almost certain that they will continue to have political stalemate.

Although Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have shown some flexibility on the issues like republic and proportional representative system, Maoists have hardened their position by forwarding other new demands.

"Peace process is more important than the election process. How can our party participate in the election without

addressing the issue of adjustment of People's Liberation Army into the national force and democratization of Nepal Army, compensation for the families of our workers who became martyrs for the cause of people's war and disclosure of disappeared people" said Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda. "Along with agreeing to declare Nepal as a republic and accepting proportional representative system, there is a need to address issues of comprehensive peace agreement."

Even if seven parties agree to fix the date for Constituent Assembly, it is

the electorate. Though their demands for fully proportional polls and a republic have been met, they are unlikely to go to the polls," Dr. Koirala told The Himalayan Times.

Since there are disorder and chaos everywhere, not only Maoists but any unknown group may emerge to challenge the government. If the recent emerging political trend is any indication, a regional based political force is on the rise to challenge the supremacy of seven parties.

Some members from southern Terai have already declared that there will be no election without addressing their demands. "As long as seven parties do not address Terai's problems, we will not allow holding the election," said Hridayesh Tripathy, leader of terai-based Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandadevi) - one of the parties of seven party alliance. "If demands of Madhes are not fulfilled, people will declare it a separate state," threatened Tripathy at the Parliament.

In all public meetings, political parties, civil society members, regional based groups, ethnic communities,



Political Leaders : No solution in sight

almost certain, if not Maoists then other regional or ethnic groups will muster strength to try and obstruct the process.

Nepali Congress leader and nephew of prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala Dr. Shekhar Koirala, who is said to have inside knowledge regarding Maoists and seven party alliance, too, has become suspicious about the intention of Maoists. "The Maoists are demanding a special poll package because they are afraid of

project themselves as champions of election for CA. However, they have their own stands and demands which are enough to disturb the election.

Along with an unseen power- which has vital security stake and influence in Nepal - election of Constituent Assembly is not the priority for Nepal's major political parties at all. In fact, the subject of election for constituent assembly is gradually turning into a mirage. ■

# “Madhav Nepal’s Aim Is Not A Prime Minister”

- Madhav Kumar Nepal

Since the postponement of the last general election in 2002, leaders like UML general secretary MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL have never had to face the people in public programs. Last week, in a direct interaction with the members of the public, Nepal faced public queries at the “Sajha Sawal” program organized by BBC Nepali Service and BBC World Trust Service in Dhulikhel. Excerpts of Nepal’s interaction with the audience- which was aired by BBC Nepali Service:

**The election was postponed in June at the request of Nepali Congress and prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala. The elections were postponed second time at the request of CPN-Maoist leader Prachanda. Both of them are responsible. In fact, both the decisions were wrong.**

As overwhelming number of people present in this program have said that involvement of foreigners has complicated the situation, how do you look at it?

Till today, Nepal’s internal problems have been solved not by outsiders but by ourselves. We were even able to bring the Maoists from war to peace. Loktantric movement was launched by Nepalese. However, foreigners supported it. The comments of foreigners are alright as long as they are in line with the wishes of Nepali people. We have to reject if foreigners try to dictate us to do this or to do that by ignoring the wishes of people.

You have said that Nepal’s future will be doomed in case the election is not be held by mid-April or the last of Chaitra month of Nepali Calendar. What kind of disaster are you talking about? Are you indicating there will be army take over; or will Maoists capture power; or will the foreign troops march here?

I don’t think foreign troops will march in Nepal. It will not be tolerated by Nepalese people. So far as army take over is concerned, suspicion is there. The King may not remain silent In this case; there is possibility of involvement of regressive forces. One cannot deny the fact that the situation may turn like the one in Bangladesh or Pakistan.

That means you do not see the possibility of foreign interference or activities?

Foreign interference and army march are two different issues. I cannot see any possibility of foreign army march but interest of foreign countries will grow. More the country becomes weaker, more will be the interference of foreigners. Even now foreigners are active in many areas despite our dislike.

Whose activities are you indicating?

Why should we name now?

Again, you have not shown your guts to name it?

In such matters, when we speak we have to keep in the mind certain diplomatic norms. If we do not respect such norms, people may charge us of being immature. That is why we have to be careful before making any comments on such matter. We need to take support and advice from foreigners in accordance to our requirement.

You have said there is a need to keep certain things in mind. But you might as well disclose what kind of unfortunate situation the country will have to face in case of not holding the election till second week of April?

I have not said that the country will vanish or be destroyed. What I have said is that the country will be trapped in a vicious circle of misfortune.

Tell us when you will fix the date for the CA elections?

December 15, 2007 is the final deadline to decide all the issues and debates related with CA election.

Who do you blame for the postponement of elections?

The election was postponed in June at the request of Nepali Congress and prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala. The elections were postponed second time at the request of CPN-Maoist leader Prachanda. Both of them are responsible. In fact, both the decisions were wrong.

What about the demand for republic and proportional representative system?

So far as republic is concerned, there is a virtual consensus as there is no alternative to republic. It is almost certain that the time of monarchy has come to an end. This is not a time to express concern about the monarchy. UML wants to hold the election and it is our priority. On the issue of proportional representative system, we can find a middle way. There is a solution. What is required is that Nepali Congress should correct its mistakes and Maoists should give up rigidity.

It is said that UML always stands on the fence and the party swings like a pendulum. How do you look at it?

There is misunderstanding about our role. UML always has clear cut stand. For example when

we wrote 27-point note of dissent opinion on 1990 constitution, people accused us that we half-heartedly supported the constitution. Our dissension was accepted in May 18, 2006 by the revived House of Representative through its proclamation. We went to Delhi, Lucknow and Rolpa to solve national problem. All these were absolutely right steps.

After the death of Madan Bhandary, you became general secretary of UML. But, many say that you are a leader without any political stand or a leader with weak knees. Do you know that?

I don't think people say that. What people say is that I am a leader who honestly does not budge from his stand. People see me as a leader who is not afraid of anyone and he who speaks what he sees. If you show me any incident where I have gave up my stand, I am ready to bow down in front of you.

For instance, you disassociated from high level committee formed to inquire Royal Palace Massacre at the last minute. Although you were nominated as a member on your consent, you pulled out your name at the last minute. When your party leader Ishwor Pokharel was the Minister for Supplies, you gave consent to increase the price of petroleum products. However, later you changed your stand saying that you did not know about it? What more proofs do you need?

So far as withdrawing from high level committee is concerned, I had not accepted that proposal. I recommended Bharat Mohan Adhikary's name from our party. I objected it immediately after the announcement of my name. On the issue of raising the price of petroleum products, I complained that we were not well briefed regarding the reason to increase the price.

You are projected as a second leader to be prime minister after Girija Prasad Koirala. Will you hold the election for Constituent Assembly by addressing Maoists' demands if you are chosen as prime minister?

It is a very difficult question to reply. Certainly, if UML is given the responsibility before December 15, we will hold the election within three months. I am confident that we can settle all the problems related to terai and other criminal activities. We can take the country united towards the election.

It means you should be appointed as a prime minister?

I said UML, not myself.

And within December 15?

If you want to hold the election before April 12.



General secretary Nepal, it seems to be your very old dream to be a prime minister. It is washed out by storm again and again?

Madhav Nepal's aim is not a prime minister. Nobody needs to harbor any confusion about it. There are some persons who are afraid of Madhav Nepal and believe that I may snatch the chair. Nobody needs to be afraid of me. Madhav Nepal will be happy when the country's face is smiling. I don't want prime minister's position. Gandhiji died with name and fame without being prime minister. Ganeshmanji has his own prestige without being prime minister. Thus, it is not my aim to become a prime minister. Even some came to me with prime minister's chair. King Gyanendra sent me his secretary with an offer for prime minister, which I declined. Even now I am not in a position to enter from back door. I don't want to be a prime minister on the basis of conspiracy. I will be prime minister by contesting the election and by getting people's mandate. I would be prime minister through the mandate of parliament and election. In Madhav Nepal's focal point, there is Nepali people and Nepal.

Have the Maoists dangled the chair of prime minister to you?

Those who aspire for prime minister's chair may believe that Nepal has the lust for the proposal by Maobadi and Prachanda. Nobody who knows Madhav Nepal will believe it.

Is it true that the Maoists have dangled that offer?

The post of prime minister is not inside anybody's pocket. We can run the country in a better way as UML has already shown in its nine month rule. If we are given five years' mandate, we will change the face of Nepal. If we fail to do that, we are ready to face any kind of punishment given by the people. ■

*Madhav Nepal will be happy when the country's face is smiling. I don't want prime minister's position. Gandhiji died with name and fame without being prime minister. Ganeshmanji has his own prestige without being prime minister.*

# “We Will Continue To Support The Projects In Nepal”

- Johanna Mang

*JOHANNA MANG, head of unit, NGO Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Austrian Development Agency the Operation Unit of the Austrian Development Cooperation, recently visited Nepal to oversee ongoing projects in Nepal. Mang Spoke to KESHAB POUDEL on various issues regarding the Austrian cooperation to Nepal. Excerpts:*

**What is your impression about Nepal?**

Nepal is a beautiful country and people are very friendly. Its beautiful mountain peaks and nice people always give good impression to the people. Despite difficulties and hardships, Nepalese people look happy. When I recently visited some projects in Nepal including up to Himal and lower to eastern town Biratnagar and nearby villages, I have seen tremendous passion and good behavior of Nepalese people. They are always smiling.

**How do you see the current situation of Nepal?**

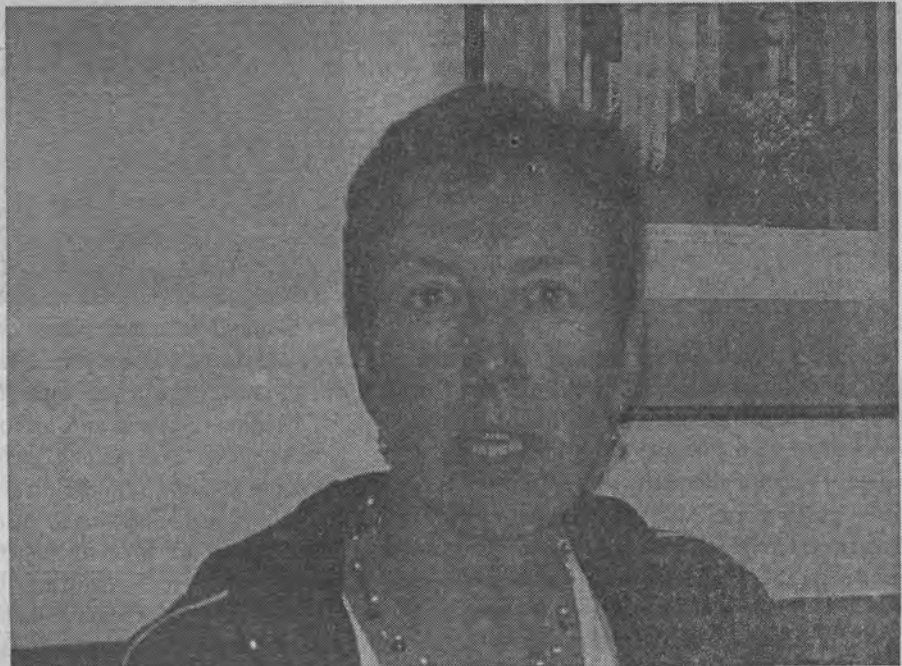
Situation of Nepal is improving.

**Will the Austrian Development Cooperation continue its projects in Nepal?**

Of course, we will continue to support the projects in Nepal like in the past. We are also supporting projects for socially and economically marginalized groups.

**What is going to be your new priority sector?**

Our priority will be in poverty alleviation and bio-diversity conservation. We have also supported 620 kW Thame-Namche Bazar hydropower plant, drinking water and sewage project. We have also supported



the project on advanced mountaineering and female leadership training and integrated village and rural development in Thame and Arun Valley project and Khotang. There are many other smaller projects running now.

**How do you evaluate the performance of development projects launched under Austrian Development Cooperation?**

Well, I had the opportunity to see the projects up in Namche and Thame. It is amazing that the people have been working so hard to earn the livelihood with the support of Austrian government. Our aid helps to improve the conditions of the people living in remote parts of Nepal. It helps to improve the income as well as environment. It is fantastic to see how hydro-electricity power plants work. It has been there for last 12 years. I am

very happy to see that it is maintained so well.

**Austria has specialized in sustainable management of Alps and Nepal has so many mountain peaks. How can Nepalese learn from experiences in the context of global warming?**

One difference is, of course, your mountains are different than the mountains in my country. Your mountains are higher than ours. What you can learn from us is the sustainable use of mountain. Under the Austrian Development Cooperation, Eco-Himal has been working in Nepal in this regard.

**What does tourism bring?**

Tourism brings a lot of income which is very important for local economy and provides job opportunities for many people. But it can also have some down side. It ends up making a lot of wastes up in the mountains. There will

be water shortages. If you send a lot of people up in the Himalayas, people want a lot of water and other consumption materials. More the people go there, more electricity people require - that is a problem. Having tourism as a major component of our economy, Austria developed the way for its sustainable management.

**What urgent steps does Nepal need to take then?**

We must tell tourists who come to visit high Himalayas about the need to conserve the environment by reducing all their luxurious requirements like using of hot water, towels and other such things. Avoid can beer and cold rinks. You don't need five star hotels up there. That is the lesson Nepal as well as Austria needs to learn.

**In how many districts are you working now?**

We have been supporting projects in eight districts of Nepal and most of the districts are in the high Himalayas including Solukhumbu, Dolakha, Sankhuwasabha and Mustang. We have also some projects in plain areas.

**How big is your support?**

Austrian Development Cooperation Agency launched its program with the support from local non-governmental organizations. Eco-Himal, an Austria based international non-governmental organization is one of the main partners, which has been launching the projects in the Himalayan region with an aim to promote tourism through sustainable manner.

**How about Rolwaling Eco-tourism project?**

We have supported Eco-Himal to launch this project. The project has been promoting the development of environmentally friendly tourism in the Gauri Shanker region. The project is successful to bring tangible change in the local life.

**Which are the areas Austrian Development Cooperation is focusing now?**

We are now focusing on the areas of poverty alleviation, in particular, supporting the projects aimed at generating income and bringing long-term benefits to the lives of the local

people. We also support the small hydro and promotion of solar energy, poverty alleviation and bio-diversity conservation, sustainable tourism and manpower development. Besides, we have also supported the cultural cooperation and heritage conservation projects - Patan Durbar Square conservation and Keshar Mahal Conservation of Garden of Dreams projects are some of the important projects.

**What plan do you have in future for Thame?**

We want to support an eco-friendly tourism sector in Thame. The construction for Multi Purpose Training Center with international standard has already begun. The center includes training center for green house, mountaineering training, skill training to local population and service related things. The center will also provide training for maintenance electronic equipment. The training center will have capacity to train more than 50 people at a time. There will be six buildings and a guest house for trainees. The cost of project will be around Rs 30 million ■

## Nepal's Shock Exit

The impressive streak of Nepali cricketers ended in a disappointment and ignominy when the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) disqualified Nepal and seven other teams from the ongoing ACC Under-15 cricket tournament after their players were found to be over aged.

Of the ten participating teams, the remaining two teams — Singapore and Kuwait — contested in final on Monday.

"All countries were asked to provide the appropriate medical data before the tournament. They did not comply. Following bone-age examinations of all players in Kathmandu, a number of players from all the teams — Nepal, Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Thailand — were found to be over the age-limit criteria," said the ACC. According to the ACC, countries having more than two over-age players in the squad have been penalized.



Singapore Team : Winner

THT

"Following the completion of the group stage on November 30, the two teams with less than three over-aged

players were Kuwait and Singapore. In some instances, participating squads have had seven, eight and nine over-aged

players," the release added. "With the tournament having passed the group-stages, that leaves only Kuwait and Singapore eligible for further competition. It is they who will contest the final on Monday," the ACC further added.

According to the ACC, 140 radiology examinations were conducted in Nepal. Before the ACC rulings, Nepal was set to play Singapore while Hong Kong was up against Afghanistan in Sunday's semi-finals. Kuwait was already eliminated from the group stages.

Meanwhile, a day after the shocking disqualification of Nepal, the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN), on Sunday, promised not to repeat the mistake in future. CAN president Binay Raj Pandey told Kantipur that parents have the major role in establishing the actual age of the players. ■



Rural Women: Unheard voices

## WOMEN

# Participatory Peace

Women demand meaningful participation in every step of peace process

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

**E**ven though the political leaders promised to ensure inclusive peace process, women of Nepal have had a bitter experience in the last one and a half years of restoration of 'Loktantra' and initiation of peace process.

"Right from the constitution of interim constitution drafting committee and committee formed to monitor the code of conduct, women have been left out," said Bandana Rana, a noted women rights activist and vice president of Saathi.

Rana points out at the need to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – which calls

for meaningful participation of women in every step and every aspect of peace process and reconstruction.

Women activists were shocked when despite emphatic commitment, political parties failed to include even a single woman representative at the constitution drafting committee initially. It was only after their raised their protests that the parties took on board few women members.

"The commitment for 33 percent women's participation, too, has not been met fully yet," said Babita Basnet, president of Sancharika Samuha.

As the women of Nepal observed

the 16 days of activism against the Violence Against Women, they have been raising the issue of political violence. The issue of meaningful women's participation as per the Security Council Resolution 1325 has also been linked with this activism, which starts from November 25 – the International Day Against Violence Against Women – till December 10 – the International Human Rights Day.

Meanwhile, the UNMIN chief and Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in Nepal, Ian Martin, last week addressed a gathering of women human rights defenders and said that they were force for peaceful change in Nepali society.

In a press statement he issued, Martin said that women have key roles to play in ensuring the success of the peace process. Expressing belief that the challenges that currently face Nepal's political leadership are serious but not insurmountable, and with continued commitment to the peace process these challenges can be worked through dialogue – among the seven parties, and with other political parties and civil society, including traditionally marginalized groups, Martin said, "This dialogue must include women, within and beyond the political parties."

Martin added that evaluation of the enforcement of the Parliamentary declaration guaranteeing 33 percent of all political and civil service appointments to women should be included while reviewing the peace process and implementation of agreements.

Martin clarified that the women roles include women's active political participation as well the pursuit of gender equality. He said commitments for ensuring women's meaningful participation can be translated into reality if Nepal had a wider strategic, national framework for achieving the equality of women and girls. ■

# Facing the challenges of HIV epidemic

- Dr. RP Shrestha

Every year since year 1988, world has been commemorating the World AIDS day on 1<sup>st</sup> of December so as to campaign and consolidate opinion and voice for fight against the global epidemic of HIV and AIDS. The day is celebrated with various issue based theme. This year it is focused on "LEADERSHIP". This theme has been selected further building on last year's theme on "ACCOUNTABILITY". This theme is set as a continuum under the five year slogan of "STOP AIDS, KEEP PROMISES".

Though the disease was identified in 1981, the HIV virus, as a ethiological microorganism, was first isolated in the year 1984 and was nomenclatured as 'HIV' only in the year 1986. Since then it has been recognized as a silent weapon for mass destruction. Since then it has infected 65 million people and killed 25 million and not a single country is spared from its attack.

This year UNAIDS and WHO has reported the prevalence estimation of about 33.2 million people living with HIV worldwide. It is less by 16 percent than the last year which estimated 39.5 million. Number of newly infected cases this year is 2.5 million. It is less by 50% in comparison to the last year. Thus some reduction has been seen in the Global epidemic. Such reduction is believed to be largely due to actual decline in incidences in some hard hit Sub-Saharan African countries like, Nigeria, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Angola and also in some of the Asian countries like Thailand, Cambodia and some parts of India.

The reduction has also contributed to recently conducted revision of the estimations based upon larger population based survey. The estimated figure in India alone has shown that the prevalence is now 2.47 million, less than half of the previous official estimates which was 5.7 million. India was thought to have the world's biggest HIV-positive caseload but the new estimate puts it



below South Africa and Nigeria. The prevalence level of the infection is now estimated to be around 0.36 percent of more than 1.1 billion population. Earlier the prevalence was 0.9 percent. Hence in the context of India, in particular, and Asia, in general, there is some degree of satisfaction. However, the Health Minister of India himself in this regard, has said that "in terms of human lives affected, the number is still large, in fact very large. This is very worrying for us."

The death toll caused by AIDS related illness is also declining. Last year it was about 3 million, whereas this year it was 2.1 million.

Such reduction in global epidemiological scenario is believed to be due to:

- Impact of increasing antiretroviral treatment provision, now about 2 million PLHA are provided with this treatment
- Increased level of global campaign on raising awareness and
- Better funding provision
- More scientifically based revision of estimation,
- Increase of average survival time for PLHAs. Data shows that people can live for an average of 11 years with the diagnosis of HIV +ve instead of prior assumption of 9 years.

- Sustained leadership and accountability in the countries.

Thus should we now believe that some progress is visible towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal to halt the epidemic by 2015 and then reversing it?

Yes, there is an optimism in believing so, provided continuum of sustained and increased commitment along with the strong leadership are available at all levels and at all times.

## Where do we stand?

We stand at the crossroad of challenges and opportunity and at the crossroad of successes and failures. We need to further consolidate our efforts in united way with strong and committed leadership at all levels among important 4 pillars of stakeholders, which are,

- Government sectors,
- Non-governmental and community based sectors,
- Community of infected and affected and the
- Donor Communities.

Recently some evidences of commendable collaborative and participatory approaches among the stakeholders have been demonstrated in many program implementations and also in developing three important national guiding documents in HIV/AIDS control

program. Those documents were officially disseminated on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007.

They are,

- The second National HIV/AIDS Strategy (2006-2011),
- Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for HIV and AIDS in Nepal, and
- Announcement of HIV/AIDS and STD Control Development Board as a semi-autonomous entity.

All the documents are very important ones in order to achieve effective and efficient use of resources and to ensure rapid action and result based management. The *strategy plan* is one agreed national action frame work which provides the basis for coordinating the work of all partners at all levels. The national level *Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines* provides the tool for monitoring the action plan implementation and assess the efficacy of the work accomplished at various levels. Announcing the establishment of a *semi-autonomous HIV/AIDS and STD Control entity* provides the platform as one National coordinating authority with broad-based multisectoral mandate.

Now the 'Three Aces' are there in our hands and all the players and stakeholders should be able to play the game with fullest confidence and diligence to control the epidemic of HIV and AIDS in the country which as of now is still far from satisfactory.

In Nepal, the HIV case was first detected in year 1988. As it was then seen among the expatriates we got disillusioned that such infection probably may not spread in our society due. But it is now proved to be quite far from reality. The estimated HIV infection has reached about 70,000 whereas the total cumulative detection is only 10,260 (as of October 2007, NCASC). It means we have been able to detect only about 14% of total infected. It also means that around 86% of infected ones are unaware of their status and hence they are potential threat for infecting the non-infected ones. There is a challenge to bring them forward in order to control the epidemic. As of now the epidemic status in Nepal is categorized as the 'Concentrated' one, that means it is confined to some vulnerable and at risk sub-population

like sex workers, intravenous drug users, homosexuals etc.

But in the recent years migrant workers have become another emerging vulnerable sub-population. A study by NCASC/FHI has revealed that about 10 % of returnee migrants from India are infected with the HIV and hence they are potential threat for infecting their spouse back home through unprotected sex behavior.

Another study report conducted among migrant population in western Nepal says that about 50% do have the extra/premarital sex relation during the migration period and about 70 % do not have knowledge about AIDS and about 80% do not have knowledge about condom use for safety against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV infection (Suvedi et al).

Sex trafficking of girls and women is a widespread phenomenon across South Asia. It is a migration driven by multiple social and developmental factors. It is

***We need to wage war against stigma and discrimination as our literacy rate, especially in the rural population, is rather low. Unawareness is ignorance and ignorance makes them scared and scare gives way to stigma and discrimination is rooted further.***

an ongoing menace in the context of Nepal, too. A recent study published by Harvard School of Public Health, Boston reveals that among repatriated Nepalese sex-trafficked girls and women, 38.0% were tested positive for HIV. It is an alarming scenario as they may pose potential threat for spreading HIV in the society.

Another fact is that in Kathmandu 52% of the client of Sex Workers are married ones, 32% of Female Sex Workers are married, 35% of IDUs are married and at the same time 13% of them do visit female sex workers (NSASC, FHI, New Era). Hence in absence of proper knowledge based safe behavior change, there is a strong threat that soon the epidemic could spread further and status be transformed into the generalized one.

Yet another data analysis for

consecutive years between 2003 to 2005 demonstrates that out of total reported infected women about 60% are house wives but this has increased in the year 2006 to around 80%. It is an alarming figure and requires detail analysis regarding source of their infection. But it is true that now we need to focus our attention more towards the rural areas which is the major source of migrant workers. We need to make them more aware about the HIV infection, equip them with the knowledge based behavior change intervention skill. We need also to focus on spouse of the migrant workers for enhancing their knowledge on prevention of HIV.

Prevailing Stigma and Discrimination in the community against the HIV infected is a great constraint in fighting against the menace. We need to wage war against stigma and discrimination as our literacy rate, especially in the rural population, is rather low. Unawareness is ignorance and ignorance makes them scared and scare gives way to stigma and discrimination is rooted further.

With the newer and increased funding support from various agencies like the Global Fund, USAID, DFID, World Bank etc we should be able to translate the challenges into successes through consolidated and collaborative efforts. We need to further scale up the provision of Care, Support and Treatment for infected and affected ones. The ART provision which was initiated in a modest scale on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004 is now expanded to 16 sites. The provision of PMTCT has also been expanded to 11 sites. It was initiated on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003. Such expansion was possible only through collaborative approach of all stakeholders including the community of infected and affected ones. However, so as to achieve the desirable impact we need to scale it up further by providing them through community based approach

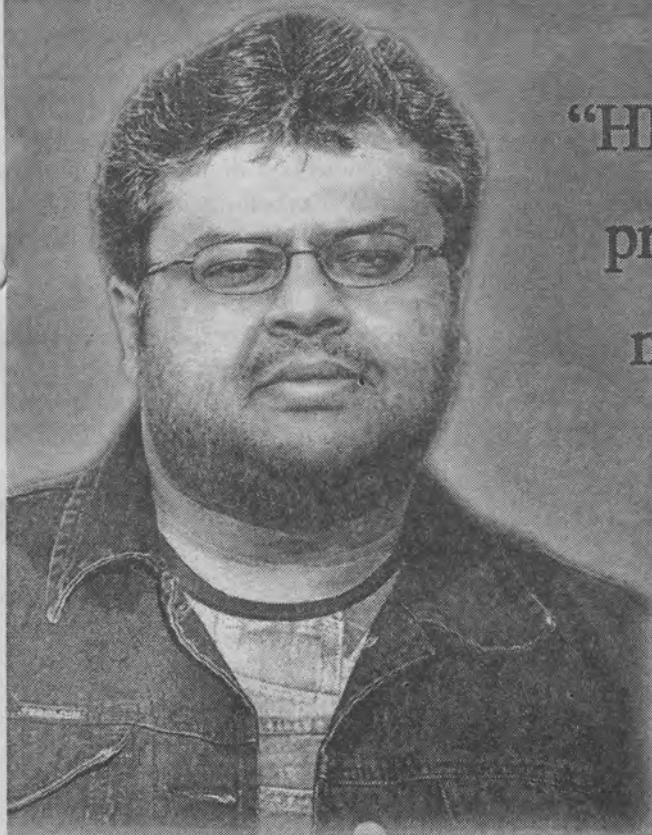
Let us believe that Nepal will also head towards achieving the MDG in controlling the epidemic through dedicated leadership and commitments translated into action by all the stakeholders.

*(Dr. R. P. Shrestha, MD is a former director of National Center for AIDS and STD Control and a free lance consultant for HIV and AIDS program. He can be reached at rpsdr@wlink.com.np)*



# Take the lead

*STOP AIDS keep the promise*



“HIV/AIDS is a real social problem which has to be managed before it gets chronic in Nepal and we the youth must take lead.”

## WORLD AIDS DAY 2007





Thamel: Witnessing tourism boom

## TOURISM

# Rising Tone

Number of tourist arrival increases drastically

By A CORRESPONDENT

**L**odges and small hotel owners in Thamel have reason to rejoice this year. After the country is gradually returning to normalcy, the number of tourist arrival has increased drastically.

"I am investing money to renovate my restaurants," said Ramesh Shrestha, a restaurant owner in Thamel. "This year's income helped to pay back interest to the bank that I had not paid for the last couple of years. If the situation continues like this, the healthy growth in tourist arrival will revitalize tourism industry in Nepal."

Discouraged by low number of tourists, many small restaurants and

lodges were shut down in Thamel in the past few years. This year's high growth of tourists have again lured the entrepreneurs to tourism sector.

Recently published data reveal that tourist arrival in Nepal continue to go up. According to Nepal Tourism Board, the arrival of tourist in the month of November witnessed the growth of 17.6 percent compared to the same period last year.

If the present trend continues to go like this, there will be record increase in the tourist arrival in Nepal in the year 2007. After Tourism Year in 1998 and 1999, this is for the first time when

the number of tourist arrival is nearing half a million.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation reveals that the total number of tourists arrivals in November by air touched 34,580 - an increment of 17.6 percent from 29,407 visitors last year.

Although the arrival of Indian tourists posted a negative growth, the third country arrivals registered a healthy growth of 28.7 percent. A total number of 29,129 tourists from different countries came to the country during the month, while the Indian arrivals dropped to 5,451. Last year, the Indian arrivals were 6,768.

There is a double digit growth from all the countries of Europe. Other Asian markets like China, South Korea, and Singapore have shown robust growth of 85.7 percent, 52 percent and 73.7 percent respectively. However, the arrivals of one of the major markets Japan dropped by 11.7 percent as only 2878 Japanese tourists came to Nepal.

The US, Canada and Australian markets also recorded strong growth of 25.7 percent, 32 percent and 44.4 percent respectively with a total of 4372 tourists arrival from these countries.

The figures of first 11 months this year showed the arrivals grew on an average of 28.6 percent to 330,455 visitors compared to 267,084 arrivals during the same period in 2006. After direct flight from South Korea and increasing flights from China, the arrival of tourist from both the countries have grown up by more than double compared to the same period previous year.

From small hotels and lodges in Thamel to star hotels in Kathmandu, all are doing good business. Even the number of tourists going to trekking areas has increased by many folds.

The past one year's experiences have shown that Nepal only needs to have peace and tranquility to revive the growth of tourist. ■

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