

KARNALI CONFERENCE — KARNALI GIVES UP WAITING FOR KATHMANDU

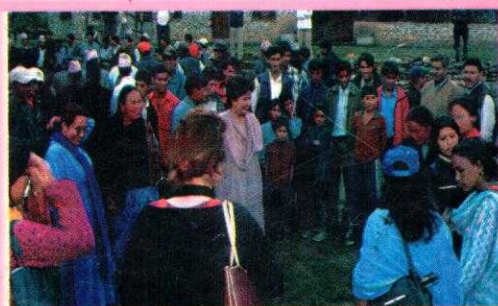
KARNALI

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KARNALI



DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



AUTONOMY

"Present conflict has opened-up eyes of the development agencies and government that if we do not work for the people of Karnali region, it would not be surprising to see another revolt from the people of Karnali"

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Nepal's five remote northwestern districts want to take destiny into their own hands.....10

THE MISERY OF FEMALE HEALTH*From South Asia to Karnali*.....12**BUDGET ADEQUATE FOR KARNALI**.....13**EDUCATION IN KARNALI***There is a clear need to make the existing rigorous examination system more liberal but it does not mean that those who fail exams badly or are irregular in classes are promoted. The Village Development Committees and the guardians should play decisive role to improve the standard of their schools and monitor them from time to time.*.....14**INTERVIEW WITH THE DEO OF JUMLA***What we often notice during the holiday or on the roadside is that these children pile up ice, form two groups, each group take position from the opposite side of the pile of ice and hit each other with ice trying to imitate how Maoist and army fought on the landscape.*17

WOES OF KARNALI: HOW LONG WILL IT GO?

The country is undergoing an immense political turmoil. The main political parties are launching an agitation unprecedented in Nepal's history, directing against the reigning monarch. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) are resuming their third round of dialogue with the government after their eight years of people's war. Taking stock of this development and perceiving a threat to the nation's peace, stability and emerging development challenges to Karnali zone, the Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC) ventured out to hold a unique event last month in Jumla to explore prospects for peace, human rights and development. The event entitled: "Karnali Conference" that made headlines in many newspapers in Kathmandu, was organized in Khalanga, Jumla's headquarters from June 24 - 25 with the theme "peace, human rights and development". This was hailed as the first historic 'Karnali Conference'. The KIRDARC had invited development experts, planners, ex- MPs, ex-DDC chairmen and local people in Jumla for the historical event. Experts, local people and their representative voiced out their opinion calling on the government to grant autonomy to the region. The KIRDARC also wanted to know what could be the best solution to the region's ageing problem of underdevelopment and vicious cycle of poverty. Experts from all walks of life, government men, and former MPs, representatives of the civil society and the hordes of rural folks gathered at the two-day Conference demanding autonomy for the zone and formation of a Karnali Development Commission (KDC). The Conference came out with a seven-point declaration entitled: "Karnali Declaration" and echoed a common voice for KDC. The Conference organised by KIRDARC vis-à-vis years of its advocacy finally seemed to have melted the heart of the government, which on record allocated Rs 6.46 billion budget for the Karnali zone. The amount allocated in the last fiscal year stood at Rs 800 million. The budget has increased by 85 percent over the previous year as per the news carried by media. But it is too early to jump to the conclusion since it sounds to be too far-fetched. ■

KARNALI CONFERENCE



People in far-flung districts demand autonomy and separate Karnali Development Commission

To figure out how remote and underdeveloped is Karnali Zone, one need not take pain to refer the UNDP's Human Development Indexes (HDI). One can simply go to Nepalgunj and ask anyone how to reach Karnali. They will show the way to Chisapani. It takes two hours to reach there by local bus. Then you have to pack firewood or kerosene stove, a jar of kerosene, pickle, dal and rice, sufficient enough to keep you alive for several days.

With this junk of load, you have to plan for walking on foot up the steep foothills and rocky passes from Chisapani. By the end of next day, you will have hardly travelled a quarter of the journey by foot but you will feel like crying out of pain and then you put on your bed at some caves or open meadow with sky as roof. If rain thunders down that night, then you should have a tent with you. But you should not forget that you have a junk of load at your back and you have miles to go. By the third day, you will be travelling what many people have not travelled on horse's back but you have hardly reached the Jungle.

By the fourth day, you will hardly arrive at Asara but you feel like quitting your destined journey. But your hungry children in hollow eyes back home remind you giving you little more courage to walk. Besides, your grandmother will be counting fingers and then wondering when you will be arriving so that she could add salt to the curry she cooks. All this gives you spirit to walk through thick and thin though in flesh you are completely worn down.

You cannot give up: Life has to go on and living has to be made in your hometown, which is still several miles away and where your children, wife, grad parents and lots more are eagerly

You will be literally dragging yourself along the rough pebbles and rocks on the last leg of your journey. By the time you will be able to hear Sheppard's singing at a faraway distance, you feel like the load on your head is crushing you beneath under its weight. Sometimes, you curse your own fate and at other times feel sorry to have belonged to this land full of misery but you have to struggle on before you reach your village.

By the fifth day, you will somehow be arriving at the Assam-Kalikot border. But if you are from Humla, it takes 15 days for you to reach your hometown from Chisapani. But this is not the end of your journey. You have many miles

They admitted that the planners have in the last decade failed to address the overwhelming concerns of the people in this region. The government seemed to have been baffled very much by the intensity of the problems grappling the region, which has no road to connect so far. The solution, then the experts and local people shared were granting an autonomous status to the region and formation of an independent Karnali Development Commission.

awaiting your arrival to put on their best attire, which comes once in five to six years. You got to send your kids to school. They are waiting you for warm clothes to ward off chilly mountain weather.

to go before you sleep and more obstacles to encounter. You have also to plough the field that is little fertile enough to grow potatoes. You have to sell them to buy salt and clothes somewhere between Nepalgunj and Chisapani so as to barter them with salt, kerosene and clothes.

Thus, the cycle of life revolves round the poor people of the most neglected districts. This is Karnali, which need no

mention how underdeveloped it is.

The government began the construction of the 220 kilometre-long Karnali Highway, connecting Surkhet with Jumla in 1991 but has not been completed it even after the lapse of 12 years.

The story of Mugu's Talcha Airport is nonetheless different. The construction of the airport began two decades ago but there has not been a single flight operating so far. Karnali is an exception to the immense prosperity, comfort and luxury brought about by the revolution in science and communication technology throughout the world.

The entire world is reverberating with the echo of Information Technology (IT) but this region with nearly 300,000 people have not a single telephone to connect their lives. Computers? It will take at least fifty years, not to mention the electric heater and other miracles of science, which are still distant dreams for the people of Karnali.

Nepal's latest conflict has further compounded the problems. The already slothful achievements in some areas have been pushed further to many years back. It will take hundreds of years and perhaps thousand to bring this region to the level of any developed countries, which are enjoying the untold prosperity and happiness brought about by industrial revolution and modern development.

Now the country is undergoing an immense political turmoil. The main political parties are launching an agitation unprecedented in Nepal's history, directing against the reigning monarch. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) are resuming their third round of dialogue with the government after their eight years of people's war.

Taking stock of this development and perceiving a threat to the nation's peace, stability and emerging development

challenges to Karnali zone, the Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC) ventured out to hold a unique event last month in Jumla. The event entitled: "Karnali Conference" that made headlines in many newspapers in Kathmandu, was organized in Khalanga, Jumla from June 25 - 26 with the theme "peace, human rights and development".

The conference drew participants ranging from a humble down-to-earth workingmen and women in Karnali to personalities like Dr Shankar Sharma and Dr Harka Gurung to explore prospects and potentials for peace, human rights and development in the Karnali zone.

They admitted that the planners have in the last decade failed to address the overwhelming concerns of the people in this region. The government seemed to have been baffled very much by the intensity of the problems grappling the region, which has no road to connect so far. The solution, then the experts and local people shared were granting an autonomous status to the region and formation of an independent Karnali Development Commission.

The conference was highly extolled as 'historic event' and came out with seven-point declaration entitled: "Jumla Declaration".

The declaration that came at the end of the two days event, called on the concerned stakeholders to help support the people's endeavours to establish peace, human rights and development in the region. The Conference has called upon the government to establish a separate Karnali Development Commission to kick-start the development programmes for the region.

Karnali is the only development zone in Nepal with marked disparity in the distribution of services and development works. It ranks among the least developed zones in the list of

Human Development Indexes (HDI). The recent conflict has deeply upset the region. People overwhelmingly express their concerns to come out of this bleak scenario and transform the five districts into an economically prosperous zone. It was this overwhelming concern that had driven KIRDARC to organise the conference to gather suggestions from the people to resolve the problems bedevilling the lives of the people.

Though the conference visualised the prospects and problems of development in a region, its resolutions are nonetheless significant for issues surrounding the national interest. The conference had drawn attention of the government on the need to make special intervention in gearing up development works for Karnali region.

The Conference has underlined the importance of linkages between peace, human rights and development. It tried to communicate a clear message to the central government that unless special efforts are made, development cannot be possible as desired by the people and that the conflict will continue.

The deliberation and the resolution passed by the conference could be a food for thought for the government, which is very much baffled by the problems of tackling poverty and conflict.

OBJECTIVES

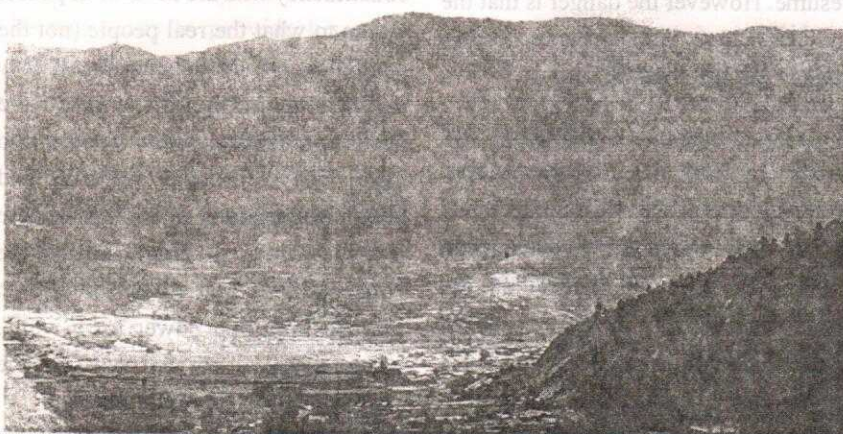
Identifying main problems in Karnali zone.

To exert pressure on the government to address the core issues of Karnali in the talks scheduled with concerned parties. Setting a trend for regional-level discussion and discourse among the government officials, political parties, donor communities and the civil society. Gathering voices of the local people with reference to the on-going peace talks. Framing a common strategic work plan. Declaring the outcomes of the conference and calling upon the stakeholders to put a practical effort for Karnali's development.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The seriousness shown by participants and the unexpectedly larger participation in the Conference itself is one of the achievements.

What was interesting to note was that it was for the first time that locals of such remote and far-flung districts, development planners from Kathmandu, politicians and donor representatives gathered in a commonplace in a region so underdeveloped and remote, to discuss and share among themselves the way out of present misery facing the region.



Second most important achievement was drawing up a common agenda for the development of the Karnali zone, which came in the form of Jumla Declaration. All participants from various walks of life by and large agreed on autonomous status for the region as suggested by resource persons and experts such as Dr Harka Gurung and Dr Mohan Man Sainju.

The third important achievement of the Conference was conceptualising a long-term strategic direction for Karnali's development.

The participants shared common

concerns and resolved to build pressure on the government to move ahead with special strategy and appropriate mechanism to intensify its efforts to develop the Karnali zone. They also voiced out their strong desire to end the Maoist problems and other political problems at the national level and urged the concerned parties in conflict to adopt practical and sincere efforts in resolving their differences at the earliest possible.

JUMLA DECLARATION

1. The seven-point Jumla Declaration calls for the transformation of cease-fire into permanent peace and sustainable development.

2. The declaration has taken note of the violation of the Code of Conduct and had urged both the parties to strictly implement it.

3. It called on the government to start reconstruction and rehabilitation of the conflict-hit areas and provide adequate compensation to the victims of war.

4. It called upon the government to form an independent Karnali Development Commission to bring about sustainable development.

5. It called on the government to focus on the preservation and promotion of herbal plants, speedify the construction of roads, installation of electricity, health services, and education and tourism.

6. It urges both the government and the NGOs to mobilize local people for the development works and deliver services to the target groups justly.

7. Since democracy and human rights form first priority for the sustainable development and permanent peace, it called on the government to conduct local as well as general elections at the earliest possible.

CONCLUSION

Karnali Conference concluded with Jumla Declaration, which called on the government to constitute Karnali Development Commission. Various media carried the outcomes of the two-day Conference with priority. The deliberations have the relevance even at the national level. The Conference has been hoped to act as a catalyst to speed up the slothful pace of development in Karnali. The Jumla Declaration and the common strategic work plan make this point clear

The Conference is largely successful in so far as its objectives and works are concerned. However, certain technical difficulties surfaced in the event. Most importantly, the inability of the organisers to distribute the papers presented by experts to the participants. Nevertheless, the Conference was a big success for which the experts and participants deserve the credit.

The programme was inaugurated by Dr Shankar Sharma, vice chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC). ■

"PRESENT CONFLICT HAS OPENED-UP EYES OF THE DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES..."

Thakur Nath Dhakal, National Program Manager at the Support for Peace and Development Initiatives in Kathmandu spoke to Karnali after his visit to Karnali last month. Following is an excerpt of the interview with Dhakal.



Q: What is your opinion about the present cease-fire between the government and the Maoist? Will it last any longer?

A: Cease-fire itself is a beginning of the peace process and certainly a positive step towards peace. It gives a humanitarian space to push forward the peace process. It is the situation where civil society and other actors can influence the conflicting parties and mobilize people for peace. I believe that present ceasefire has created corridor for peace. However we have to admit that we have not been able to capitalize the ceasefire opportunity as much as we could. The role of civil society and other political parties in peace process could not be very effective.

Many incidents show that the code of conduct has not been fully respected by both of the conflicting parties. Cases of human rights violation still continue. The conflicting parties have not accepted the human rights accord proposed by the National Human Rights Commission. Observing the process of strengthening the military situation of conflicting parties and their participation in the peace process, it seems to me that the cease-fire is a temporary politico discursive strategy of the conflicting parties. There are many positive developments in the past from both sides. One such

development was that the government had agreed to honor the agreements reached between the previous government and the Maoist. It has also said in public that they are ready to discuss directly on the core agenda of the politics. These days, the government is trying to build public confidence that the peace process will resume. However the danger is that the military part is drawing more debates rather than the political scores.

Recent commitment and flexibility shown by both the government and Maoist for the peace talk is appreciable. People are watching the development with a new hope and expectation that the problem will be resolved in a peaceful way. No one at this moment can predict the longevity of peace process.

Present conflict has opened-up eyes of the development agencies and government that if we do not work for the people of Karnali region, it would not be surprising to see another revolt from the people of Karnali.

It purely depends on attitude, behavior and the context. If both parties claim that they are responsible to the people, they have to come to the table and begin peace process. Personally, I do not believe that they can ignore the voice of people by entering again into the dark and uncertain cycle of violence.

Q: In order to make peace talks between the government and the Maoist decisive and fruitful, what should be the priority of both the government and the Maoist?

A: The first priority for both Maoist and government is to listen to the people and respect the wider peace constituency who are in favor of peace. Listen to what the real people (not the people surrounding them) say. If they can hear them, they must honor the needs and demands of the people who have been victimized, suffering and breathing the smoke of bomb. I am sure if both of them are able to realize the consequences and forget their own ego, position and power for a while, both of them will not step back from the peace process. Secondly, respect

the peace process itself and follow the words and promises that they have committed. They must assure the people that the

peace talks will never again be stalled. At least if they can promise to people that they will not attack first, that can also support trust building process. Thirdly, both the government and the Maoist should sign the "Human Rights Accord".

Q: You are working under the United Nations (UN). How can the role of UN be strengthened and made effective in converting the present cease-fire into durable peace in Nepal?

A: First of all I am not the right person to speak on behalf of UN. As I know the UN has played a significant role in peace making and peace building in different parts of the world. But role of the UN totally depends on the request from the conflicting parties. If Nepal government wants the UN to play an active role in peace process, she has to formally request the UN to do so. As we all know that UN Secretary General had already announced that he was ready to provide his good offices, if government wants the UN to be involved in peace process of Nepal. At this moment, as I understand, UN is a well-wisher and a silent observer of the peace process in Nepal.

The UNDP, an agency of the UN system committed to sustainable and people- centered development has certainly been contributing in the process of peace and development in Nepal. It is using conflict sensitive development approach in designing and implementing developmental projects. Moreover the UNDP has created a Trust Fund for Peace and Development to contribute in the peace process of Nepal. The Support for Peace and Development Initiatives (SPDI) is a program that contributes to sustainable peace building in Nepal, promoting social justice, respect for human rights and a culture of peace. Specifically, the SPDI supports the Nepalese civil society groups/actors to participate in the process of peace building in Nepal.

Q: You have been supporting various activities and advocacy for the establishment of peace and development in Karnali zone. You have also participated at the just concluded historic Karnali Conference. How do you evaluate the present situation in Karnali?

A: We all admit that one of the major causes of conflict is social exclusion. Karnali, despite naturally rich zone, has been ignored and excluded from the mainstream of development in the past. Present conflict has opened-up eyes of the development agencies and government that if we do not work for the people of Karnali region, it would not be surprising to see another revolt from the people of Karnali.

As one of the participants of the KARNALI Conference, what I realized is that the government as well as donors have already started to increase development budget for Karnali zone. However, my worry is that whether the budget and plans are as per the demand of Karnali or not it is yet to be known. One of the significant problems that I saw is utilization of available resources. Last year, the budget allocated for roads and bridges and other development projects could not be utilized due to the conflict. Therefore, to me it seems that NGOs and CBOs working there should work in creating humanitarian space through dialogue and negotiation with conflicting parties to create an environment where development process can go smoothly. As you mentioned, we are supporting different activities mainly targeted to create environment for development and peace in the region.

Q: What should be the role of civil society in Karnali?

A: The role of civil society in development process is highly important. Triangular force—government, market and civil society dominate today's world/development politics. However, in our context both market and civil society are not well developed. Therefore, both civil society and market are not being able to play their role in the development process as expected in Nepal. The civil society is in transition from the traditional welfare notion to modern governance. Therefore, the civil society should be empowered and their role and capacity as a partner of governance should be strengthened. In case of Karnali it is more urgent to support and empower the role of civil society. They should be trained in peace and development, encouraged to analyze local problems and explore their own way of addressing problems. At present we all know the presence of government is limited to certain area and no development activities are properly being carried out. In this context it is only the civil society groups that can take the role and support people in their development.

Q: Have you any suggestions or feedbacks?

A: I appreciate the commendable job done by KIRDARC and KDJF (Karnali Development Joint Forum). They have been able to draw the attention of policy makers and development agencies towards Karnali. Advocacy is important tool but not sufficient at a situation where people are suffering from hunger and fear. They expect something—immediate relief and program that have immediate impact. Therefore, I think two ways balanced program that support in bringing real change in the lives of common people is essential. Advocacy should be continued to organize and raise the voices of Karnali region. ■

SEARCHING FOR VOICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

—Manju Tuladhar

A visitor to the small town of Jumla is greeted with desolate and topless structures. They are burnt and disgraced in the cover of one sleepy night. Today, they are the sad reminder of the incident that took place in this remote and forlorn headquarters of Nepal's poorest mid-western region.

What goes on in the minds of those who continue to live here just next doors to the ghostly reminders of the violent night? What memories haunt them and what psychology influence their minds? Are their minds too blown off like those structures? Are they only the physical bodies that continue to live here? What do they think and articulate? With all these questions in my mind, I continued to climb the hill. On the way, I was accompanied by people who narrated straightforwardly the daily struggles that come along in this part of the Nepali world.

The impact of disease, hunger, staticness, isolation and desolation of the place is so strong that one has to continuously make an effort to look into the powers of the mind that come out in the form of human voice. I got to hear that voice in the Karnali Conference to be organized by KIRDARC so that I could grab much of the problems bedeviling the lives of these poor people. With this I struggled up the hills to listen to the stories of the people.

As an outsider visiting Jumla for the first time, I started looking for signs of those insensitive tales and anecdotes that one mostly heard from Karnali trotters and storytellers in Kathmandu. I continued to erase my impressions: How glad I am that I make this step towards the hills of Jumla. Isolation and static life was visible all around. But what do they think? It was hard for me

to imagine. And several days later, I tried to recall those bygone days in Jumla and the precious moments I have had spent out there but once again sight of those topless structure come flooding back to my mind.

The impact of disease, hunger, staticness, isolation and desolation of the place is so strong that one has to continuously make an effort to look into the powers of the mind that come out in the form of human voice. I got to hear that voice in the Karnali Conference to be organized by KIRDARC so that I could grab much of the problems bedeviling the lives of these poor people. With this I struggled up the hills to listen to the stories of the people.

The first day of the conference was full of voice that thundered and echoed in the bellies and minds of people that had gathered for the historic conference. The voice had a pattern: frustrated, tense,

that nature gave us.

The body with the spirit. But who should deliver them their souls?

Certainly, the centre that is Kathmandu cannot instill this spirit. Instead of a blame or a begging, it would benefit the Karnalibasi to sport a stronger and self confident attitude. Such a poetic outburst seen minus the partisan colour that tragically divides the Nepali opinion, justifies establishment of some strong linkages between public accountability and the local citizen voice. At a minimum, the citizens have a right to information about the development in their district if not the whole country. The presence of organisations like KIRDARC can do more meaningful work by helping to build opinion of local citizens and creating spaces for channeling the voices into the ears of the public servants that concentrate around the airport, ready to dodge for the plane to Nepalgunj. If local citizens are enabled to demand their rights and voice their concerns some pressure will be certainly exerted towards performance and accountability of the masters that rule the district centres. Local citizens must be able to demand responsible conducts on the part of government and non-government officials alike. NGOs like KIRDARC must set an example in their accountability towards the people of Karnali, then the hurdles ahead seem less complex. ■

(Manju Tuladhar is National Program Coordinator of Swiss Development Cooperation)



ONE COUNTRY TWO SYSTEMS

-Mohan Mainali from Jumla, Kalikot and Dolpa

Near Jumla, farmers use the ceasefire to ready terraces for paddy. It's not that the Maoists are everywhere, it's just the government is nowhere to be seen.

Except for the district headquarters of these three roadless mid-western districts, there are no police posts, no post offices—no presence at all of the Nepali state. And everywhere there is evidence of one country and two systems: people pay two taxes, there are two kinds of courts, two permits for everything, two armies, two governments.

To be sure, the ceasefire has eased the lives of most people somewhat. Many from the outlying villages can now travel relatively unhindered to the main bazar towns to collect subsidised rice.

Some farmers have returned to their home villages to plant paddy. There are instances of cooperation: the CDO in Jumla walks down to Tatopani to talk to local Maoists to ease restrictions on villagers. The Maoists recently requested a government health team to conduct a vasectomy camp in their village.

"It is better. We don't have to worry anymore about the possibility of getting killed while gathering fodder, or fetching water," says one of the villagers in Dolpa. "We're just afraid the war may start again." It is an indication of the fear still stalking the land that he doesn't want to be named or photographed.

The Maoists and security forces are still eyeball to eyeball, and things could flare up any moment. Indeed, there have been several brief firefights this week in Dang and Jajarkot. There have also been instances of resistance: some refugee families in Kalikot who were prevented from going back to their villages pelted

Maoists with stones at a recent rally. Paru Thapa in Jumla summarises it all: "We obeyed the Ranas and during the Panchayat we did what we were told. Democracy came and we followed. Tomorrow there may be another system and we will have to listen to them too. We can never say we won't obey."

Kotbara village is four hours from Manma, and is still the frontline in the Maoist war. More than a year after the massacre there of 35 people in an army raid, the villagers still appear shell-shocked (Nepali Times, #106). Of the dead, 17 were young men from a single village in Dhading and seven others—all construction workers at Kotbara airfield. Eleven locals were also killed.

Kotbara residents are still afraid to talk, and it is still not easy to piece together what happened here in the morning of 24 February 2002. It was three days after the Mangalsen and Sanfebagar attacks where the Maoists killed 137 soldiers and policemen. The army launched a helicopter-borne counter-offensive northwards.

A woman Maoist fired her rifle at a helicopter as it approached Kotbara. The soldiers arrived soon after. They shot dead a villager who was walking to his house and wounded a health assistant. The army's intelligence about Maoist presence in Kotbara was accurate, but the militia were hiding at the other end of the town. The wounded health worker warned the Maoists that the army had come, and they escaped into the forests.

One eye-witness said some workers were sitting outside the house playing bag chal, all were reportedly lined up and shot. Among the dead was the sub-contractor, Kumar Thapa whose brother, by coincidence, was in the army's attack unit. A local woman took him to the bodies, and he recognised his brother among the dead. He paid villagers Rs 300 to bury him along the retaining wall of the runway that his own workers had

built. "I think it was because he saw his brother that the rest of us were saved," said Man Bahadur Bista, a local colleague of the dead workers.

So their workers were buried along the perimeter of the airport, and local Maoists prevent us from taking pictures of the village and the airport. The villagers told us the army came back the next day, exhumed the bodies, put some guns next to them and took pictures. They then ordered the bodies to be reburied. Afterwards, the Maoists came and ordered the bodies to be exhumed again. One Maoist militiaman later admits to us that his group took the bodies out, draped them in red flags and also took pictures.

The villager who told us this shook her head, and said: "Men who never carried weapons were made to do so after they died. Men who were never in politics were covered in flags after death. Neither the army or the Maoists thought it was necessary to treat the bodies with dignity, tell the relatives of the dead what happened, or take care of their widows and orphans."

The airfield at Kotbara was nearly finished when the incident took place, but no one has dared to go back to complete the job. A technical team was there last month, but hasn't made a report yet.

The army is digging the road linking Kalikot to Dailekh, and once it is completed, it will make things easier here in these blood-soaked hills that everyone has forsaken. That is, if the peace holds. ■

(This article was published in Nepali Times)

QUESTION OF KARNALI'S TRANSFORMATION

— Narayan Wagle

There are two distinct bundles of load at Jumla's Airport. Nearby, people are busy unloading the herbal plants saplings from a cargo plane. These herbal plants are imported from Morocco.

Padamchal (Rheum Australe in Latin) and tiny sapling of *Akarkara* are being unloaded at one end of the airport. Both these herbal plants are important indicator of Karnali's future and economy.

Local people have not lost their confidence to convert their village into a 'village of apple'. At one point of time, local people of Karnali imported apple sapling from India's Dharampur. Even this day, people of this region are striving forward with a dream to make Karnali one of the most outstanding zones in Nepal. Local people here often say they only want self-respect and self-confidence.

While heading towards Sijha, one is greeted by the images of burnt government buildings. Piles of rocks and broken beams lay scattered here and there in the zonal headquarters. They are the sad reminders of the incident on which the Maoist rebel raided on Jumla eight months back. But with the cease-fire, men and women are seen at work, giving a face-lift to the demolished and charred structures.

Women folks laugh merrily as they see stranger passing by them. Their faces are smeared in white mud as they labour on to paint the charred buildings. They want to reform their region, which was devastated by war and famine.

As we mounted up the terrain landscape on foot for about an hour from Khalanga, the district headquarters of Jumla, we could vividly

see the cluster of clean buildings. They belong to Karnali Technical School. Just as we arrived at the threshold of the technical school, a local woman looked smilingly at the advancing crowd. She filled her thermos with herbal tea and spread few glasses around in her private tea stall.

Not far from her tea-stall, representatives from five districts of this region have gathered for the historic Karnali Conference. Addressing the Conference, Tula Raj Bista, former vice-chairman of the District Development Committee of Kalikot spoke: "This region, which was once the birthplace of Nepali language, culture and civilization, is facing critical situation of poverty and remains neglected in the 21st century."

Bista was abducted by the Maoist while he was returning home after attending the Karnali Conference. He was released three weeks later.

The state continues to funnel in half-a-million rupees every year towards the administrative expenses of this region but still not a single government official remains in the district. Development budget is smaller than the administrative budget.

During the inaugural of the Conference, Min Bahadur Shahi, chairperson of KIRDARC had suggested that there was a need to re-examine the development efforts for Karnali. He was saying this citing new prospects for Karnali zone's development.

Addressing the gathering, Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, ex-chairman of Humla District Development Committee said, "It is not the disease and hunger by which Karnali should be recognized. It

should be recognized as the region with opportunities."

"Nepali language, culture and civilization originated here. But why have the people today forgotten that it was their

ancestral place?" Dilli Bahadur Mahat, former parliamentarian of Jumla asked.

Karnali occupies 15 percent of the total land in the country but has only 1.5 percent of the total population. It is the only region devoid of any motorable road, isolating the region from rest of the country. People's representatives of this zone have, however, not lost their self-confidence. They talk proudly about their past though they continue to blame the state for the neglect of their region. They admit that the state has blocked their path of self-reliance while encouraging the people in the region to rely on grants.

"Educated youth while away their time by roaming about the market places," Kul Bahadur Khatri, a local resident of Parkha says.

"Previously we were self-reliant now we have become dependents," he says.

Last summer, Krishna Shyam Budathoki, CDO of Jumla prayed the goddess of rain at the famous Chandanath Temple seeking for more rain in Karnali. When CDO chanted hymns: "Hara Hara

"Mahadev, give us rain", It was like a miracle, the rain fell and thundered down the streets of Khalanga on the same day when CDO Budathoki sat for his prayer. It set the monsoon in the region," recalls Khatri.

"When it does not rain, locals scold the CDO," said a government official. "That's why the CDO performs religious ceremony in Chandannath Temple once a year. It has become a tradition now."

Poverty-stricken Karnali zone has serious food shortage. Farmers, who sowed their rice seedlings in the month of May, are still clearing the weeds from their paddy plantation. Paddy is grown only in lowlands and near the rivers. But it is not sufficient to feed the families throughout the year. The government sells rice to 22 remote districts, including this remotest region, through a subsidized price but how long should this continue?

Diseases have also plagued Karnali, which is widely called as the food-deficit region. People here say that the government has been treating them as 'parasite'.

"The government should fix the deadline up to how long it can supply food to this region. If we are still unprepared to tackle this crises or seek alternative by that deadline, only then the government can call us parasite," Gorakh Bahadur Bogati, an ex-MP from Humla says.

People in this region no longer want food supply but call for an alternative arrangement. "We want iodine not salt. We want water not rice," says Shahi of Humla.

Now the people of Karnali are wanting to know what kept them poor so long and what are their main challenges.

While Dr Shankar Sharma, vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission says the greatest challenge lies in bringing the region

to the national mainstream of development, ex-vice chairmen of the National Planning Commission, Dr Harka Gurung and Dr Mohan Man Sainju suggest that Karnali must strive itself for transformation.

Karnali Highway—Surket-Jumla road is the topmost priority before the government for this region's development. The construction of the 250km road, which began nearly three decades ago, has not been completed yet. Aside this, another option for Karnali's development is "sound decentralization", which is expected to help the region identify the paths for its own development. Besides road and decentralization, Dr Gurung and Dr Sainju point out one more strategy: removal of social inequalities. Social inequalities and superstition is firmly rooted in Karnali.

The state continues to funnel in half-a-million rupees every year towards the administrative expenses of this region but still not a single government official remains in the district. Development budget is smaller than the administrative budget.

The region, which could become the exemplary wildlife reserve, has enormous markets for apple, potatoes, beans and expensive medicinal herbs.

This region could be transformed into a hottest tourist destination. People longed to connecting Rara Lake with Fuksondo. Tourists can go for trek via Monohar from one end to the other, which requires 10 days walk through the breathe-taking scenes of the Himalayas.

Dr Gurung suggests that all the 383 mountain peaks, which rise above 5,000 meters, must be opened to the tourists.

Dabur India Company has established a research firm here and is studying the herbal plants. Research is being underway here on numerous locally available herbal plants and on Akarkara,

a herbal plant imported from Morocco. "Local people keep visiting here almost on daily basis and watch the work being carried out," says Dhal Prasad Chaulagain, a field officer in the firm.

The on-going research is showing strong evidence that those herbs can be grown commercially in Karnali.

Mohan Baniya, ex-MP of Mugu says Ranas used to import red rice from here for their diet in Kathmandu. "We can develop Karnali as a herbal-food region."

In the words of Dr Gurung, Mugu and Dolpa can open the alternative road to south Tibet just like what Humla and Mustang did.

"We cannot rely on the centre government. For instance, the construction of Mugu's Talcha airport has taken almost 24 years," says Baniya. "The district hospital of Kalikot has been converted into a cowshed."

What then the Karnali wants? Dr Gurung, who visited this region 37 years ago, suggests: "autonomy".

An ex-MP warns: "Maoist-conflict may end but the problem of Karnali zone will remain as it is now, creating further conflict, if the problems are not addressed by now."

Dr Sainju, another planner suggests the formation of a fully recognized independent development commission for Karnali zone.

The government has increased the allocation of budget in Karnali for the fiscal year 2003/2004. But there is widespread scepticism about the implementation of the government's hyperbolic plans and commitment.

Development expert Dr Hikmat Bista says Karnali wants autonomy, and administrative capacity. His argument is that Karnalis need authority over the use of economic resources and access to markets. ■

KARNALI GIVES UP WAITING FOR KATHMANDU

Nepal's five remote northwestern districts want to take destiny into their own hands

—HEMLATA RAI in JUMLA

It has been 40 years since the government in Kathmandu launched a special development package for the remote Karnali region of northwestern Nepal. The idea was to stop the influence of Maoists in China, and there was ready financial and technical help from India and the United States.

Today, the tables are turned. The Maoists are on the Nepali side. And northwest Nepal is an underdeveloped and more dependent on the outside than ever before.

The original idea in setting up the Remote Area Development Committee was recognition of the Karnali's remoteness, and the catching up it needed to do with the rest of Nepal. The infant mortality rate in Mugu, Humla, Jumla is almost double the national average, only three out of a 100 women are illiterate, and life expectancy at birth is only 40 years. Poverty is higher here than anywhere else, with per capita income only two-thirds of Nepalis in other parts of the country earn.

Geographer and former minister Harka Gurung remembers visiting the districts of the Karnali basin nearly 40 years ago when he was vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC). "The only achievement has been that now the people of the Karnali know what needs to be done, and are willing to get it done," he says. But they need help from the centre.

Development experts who have gathered in Jumla two weeks ago for a seminar on the development of the Karnali say it is the historical lack of representation from the region that

resulted in Kathmandu's chronic neglected of the region. "Stronger political lobbying and more focused development targets only can make the region more visible in the country's development map," says Shankar Sharma, the current vice-chairman of NPC.

Mohan Baniya, the DDC chairman of Mugu agrees that the government in faraway Kathmandu has ignored the feeble voice of this remote district for too long. "People's desire for change is our biggest resource," Baniya told us.

It is not only physically that Karnali is removed from Kathmandu. There is a psychological distance as well. It costs more to fly to Jumla from Kathmandu than to fly to New Delhi. Kathmandu's attention also seems to be more focused on what happens to Bhutani Nepalis than Nepalis of the Karnali. For decades people here have been resigned to this apathy, and got used to not expect anything from the centre.

This void has been exacerbated by the Maoist insurgency which has further isolated the five Karnali districts from the rest of the country. Telephone and postal services destroyed during the insurgency have still not been rebuilt. Airports, the only way in and out, have

been destroyed and airlines are refusing to fly until security is guaranteed. Jumlis who want to fly down to Nepalgunj have to call relatives in Kathmandu through VSAT phones to book them a seat. In many other districts, Royal Nepal Airlines flights sell tickets after the flight takes off, like in a bus, because the airlines doesn't have an office.

Those who have never been able to afford fly are also hampered. They have to pass a gauntlet of hostile Maoist and security forces checkpoints with permits required to travel anywhere. Three of the mule trail bridges joining Humla and Mugu to the south have been destroyed by Maoist, and this requires detours sometimes lasting five days. It is a two-day walk from Kalikot and eight-day walk from Humla for anyone to needing to attend the zonal appellate court in Jumla. "This region has been doubly victimised, by the state that ignored our development needs and recently by an insurgency that destroyed whatever little infrastructure we had," says Tula Ram Bista of Kalikot DDC.

Now, political and development leaders here believe the solutions can come from the people of the Karnali themselves. At the Karnali Conference in khalanga they demanded autonomy to decide their own development priorities and how they want to spend their budget.

It is not only physically that Karnali is removed from Kathmandu. There is a psychological distance as well. It costs more to fly to Jumla from Kathmandu than to fly to New Delhi. Kathmandu's attention also seems to be more focused on what happens to Bhutani Nepalis than Nepalis of the Karnali. For decades people here have been resigned to this apathy, and got used to not expect anything from the centre.

Former NPC head, Mohan Man Sainju, even proposed at the seminar that an autonomous planning commission be created for the region. Kathmandu doesn't seem to know, or care, about the realities on the ground here. The system of budget allocation and the delineation of fiscal years, for example, contradicts the seasonal variations here, when winter closes up the high passes with snow and the monsoons are late and erratic. The fiscal year that starts in July allows only limited to carry out development activities, and most of the money has to be sent back to Kathmandu unspent. Since the National budget is allocated on the basis of population and constituencies, Karnali gets too little to carry out development activities in the large areas it covers. The five districts of Jumla, Humla, Kalikot, Mugu and Dolpha cover almost 15 percent of Nepal's soil, but is home for only 1.3 percent of the population. Population density here is only 14 people per sq km against

157 per sq km national average.

"Budget allocation should be based on remoteness and geographical area than based on constituency like at present," says Dilli Bahadur Mahat former parliamentarian from Jumla.

The political leadership here is particularly unhappy about misplaced priorities and scattered budgets. The central government has been providing food subsidies to Karnali for the past 30 years without ever considering alternatives like investments in local agriculture. The Talcha airfield in Mugu was prioritised as a life line for the district, but it took 20 years for it to be completed and even now there have only been test flights.

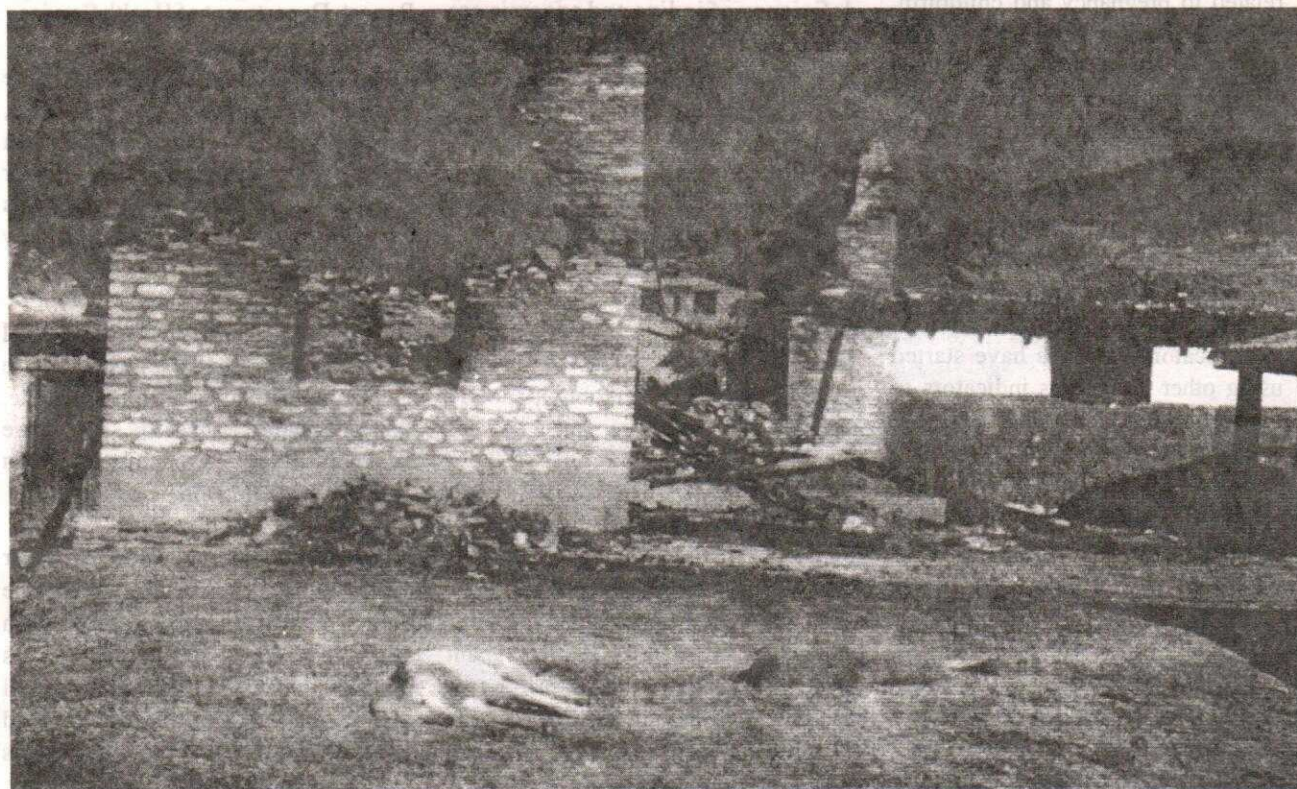
Kathmandu-centric development plans are also the reason why the Karnali is still Nepal's only roadless region. It has been easier to build a road to connect Simikot to the Tibet border than get a road to Jumla from the south.

Kathmandu has always taken it as a given that the hill districts should be linked to markets in the tarai, ignoring the proximity and the markets in China.

The inaccessibility affects every facet of life: healthcare, education, social welfare, tourism and development plans. Jumla health posts didn't get their quota of medicines last year. Despite the complete disinterest shown by tourism promoters in Kathmandu, locals got together to hold the Rara festival two years ago, and private companies are taking trekkers and pilgrims to Mansarovar through Simikot. Karnali's potential for fruits, nuts, herbs all lie wasted.

"We have been wrongly portrayed as failed communities, and this had given us an inferiority complex in the past," says Jivan Bahadur Shahi, the charismatic leader of the Humla DDC. "No more. Now we are going to take our destiny in our own hands."

(From NEPALI TIMES, 11 - 17 July 2003)



THE MISERY OF FEMALE HEALTH

From South Asia to Karnali

—Brish Bahadur Shahi

“Several years ago in Mynmar, the graveyards in villages and small towns used to have many cradles scattered around the ground some partially buried and some broken. These cradles were sad reminders of the death of mothers either during the pregnancy, at the time of delivery or after.” -WHO



Karnali's history is nonetheless distressing as it was in Myanmar some decades ago. If the Human Development Report (HDR 2001) is anything to go by, maternal mortality is four to ten times higher in most countries of South East Asia region than what it is in global's average. Nepal stands highest in South East Asia in terms of maternal death rate (540 per hundred thousand). Nepal ranks highest among the countries with female life expectancy rate lower than male.

The main health hazard of women is related to pregnancy and childbirth. Maternal death is death of a woman during pregnancy or within 42 days of termination of her pregnancy or from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy. In practice, it is extremely difficult to measure maternal mortality especially in countries where the system of recording vital events such as death is incomplete. In addition to using maternal death as an indicator, countries have started using other process as indicators to monitor and evaluate health system. Some of the common indicators include:

- Proportion of pregnant women receiving antenatal care at least once by skilled health personnel
- Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
- Proportion of women receiving postpartum care by skilled health personnel
- Proportion of women or pregnant

women immunised with tetanus toxoid.

In Karnali's context, very few women receive antenatal care and trained health personnel to attend them during pregnancy as compared to Nepal's national average. Besides, traditional practices are rampant, which add misery to the already worsening health scenario.

Marked gender-discrimination has direct or indirect impact on women's health here as compared to rest of the country. Aside this, the prevalence of malnutrition, deficiency of iodine and anaemia are some of the significant causes of poor health among the women in the Karnali zone.

There is a growing evidence of strong relationship between the level of maternal mortality and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel.

Nepal has only 9 % of births attended by skilled health personnel, mostly auxiliary mid-wifery personnel and has the maternal mortality ratio of 830 per 100,000 live births. Sri Lanka has lowest maternal mortality rate of 60 per 100,000 in SAARC nations with 94 % of births attended by skilled health personnel. At present, Nepal has only 15 % of birth attendance rate and 42 % of pregnant women receive antenatal care, according to the annual report of the Department of Health Service, published in 2002.

Both the indicators - antenatal service and birth attendance rate show a rise by more than one-third as compared to 1995 and maternal mortality ratio also decreased by nearly half of 1995 level. But in the context of Karnali, both birth attendance rate and antenatal care service stand seven times lower than the national average and ten times lower than in eastern Nepal. Birth attendance rate in Kalikot is 2.4 % while the antenatal care service accounts for just 8 %. It is 2.8 % and 16.6 % for Mugu, 7.0 and 26 % for Humla, and 9.7 and 44.4 for Jumla. In Dolpa, it is 11.9 and 34.2 %, according to the figures published in the Annual Report, Department of Health Service.

The obstetric care is nowhere available to deal with emergency situation. Thus, we can conclude that the maternal death in these districts is up to 7 times higher than the national average. And this figure remains constant without any signs of improvement.

Doctors say that nearly 61 % of maternal death can be prevented if postnatal care i.e., health care after birth is available. Postnatal care services in Karnali are very poor with 2 % for Humla and Mugu as compared to national average 13%.

People's belief in untouchability further exacerbates the problem. During the monthly discharge and delivery, women are sent to caves and cowshed. This practice of seclusion has detrimental effect on women physically and psychologically. It ultimately affects their health leading to high mortality. Discrimination against women is not

new in Karnali. It continues from time immemorial in some distant past. Discrimination against women begins right at childhood. Lack of improper diet to a girl child, more workload and step-motherly treatment to an adolescent daughter or an in-law all contribute to poor physique of women, who survive for short span of time. If one becomes pregnant, the probability of her death is further heightened due to the rigid social set-up and unhealthy practice.

pregnant before attaining their physical and psychological maturity. This has also great impact on health and maternal mortality.

The other factor working as a catalyst for high mortality rate of women is the intake of extremely poor food and malnutrition. This is due to the deficiency of iodine. Anaemia is another common problem among the women.

It is, therefore, no harm in concluding

of the entire nation.

What needs to be done?

- Equitable geographic distribution of institutions providing emergency obstetric and maternal care
 - Equitable distributions of resources among institutions
 - Collective action for all concerned
 - Universal coverage on antenatal care
 - Ensuring skilled attendance at birth which needs in-service training for the available manpower
 - Strengthening supervision and evaluation
 - Improving infrastructure
- Kerala, India and Sri Lanka have progressed in reducing maternal health burden by implementing these programmes effectively. It may also be possible in Karnali with a firm commitment on the part of the planners and the health workers. ■

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More than 40 % of women in Karnali are married off before they attain their marriageable age, which is legally 18 years. Many young girls become

that female mortality rate is highest in Karnali than anywhere else in the world. This is affecting the overall health status of not only the Karnali region but also

(Mr Shahi is studying Master in Public Health (MPH) at the Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University)

"ADEQUATE BUDGET FOR KARNALI". DR. SHANKAR SHARMA

Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Center (KIRDARC) organised a one-day seminar with the theme: "Future action plan on development of Karnali" in Kathmandu. During the occasion, Dr Shankar Sharma, chief guest and the vice chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC) said that the government has generously allocated budget for the Karnali zone. He said that foremost in the priority was the construction of the road for which there would be no dearth of funds.

Dr Sharma made particular reference to the demand for Karnali Development Commission, which was raised by the Karnali Conference and said it not necessary. "This could be done by decentralising power to the grassroots," he said suggesting an alternative to the

demand for separate development commission.

Dr Mohan Man Sainju, former vice chairman of the NPC, Our challenge is how to go to the region. Now there is a very good environment created in the region. "We must capitalize this opportunity."

The government for the first time is very sensitive to the problems of remote areas such as the Karnali zone. The budget 2060/61 for Karnali is one example how the government is sensitized by the issue.

Earlier, Dr Harka Gurung, ex-chairman of NPC while presenting the slide show depicting scenes of Karnali zone of the past, cracked a joke: "Future of Karnali is with Dr Shankar Sharma."

The slide show was enthralling the audience, half of whom were foreigners.

Dr Gurung was shown in the slide travelling through rugged mountains and crossing over the snow-clad mountains during his 86-days-long tour to Karnali.

As the picture showed, things have changed very little. The dress, the house, the technology, agricultural tool are still the same.

"They have not yet invented the metal tips for ploughs," said Dr Gurung.

During the occasion, Min Bahadur Shahi, chairman of KIRDARC, Dr Hikmat Bista, ex-MPS, Devi Lal Thapa and Chandra Bahadur Shahi of Karnali and senior officials from the donor agencies including Jan De Witte, director at the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV/NEPAL), Jorg Frieden, country director of Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) were also present.

Education in Karnali at a glance

— Ashok Nath Yogi

Is anyone interested to know about education in Karnali? Here are some of the interesting instances of how education is being addressed in the region.

Bishnu Nepali, a 12-year-old student from Jufal VDC in Dolpa district, does not know her school's name. She works in Dolpa's airport partly and attends her schools rarely. She is already a seventh grader but she does not remember the name of her school.

In the last few years, pass rate in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations in Karanali has declined dramatically. In the year 2000, a total of 1,357 students sat for their SLC exams and 502 have got through their 'iron-gate'. In 2001, from the total of 890 students, who appeared in the SLC exams, 106 have passed. In 2002, from a total of 886 students, who appeared in their SLC exams, only 78 have managed to pull through the 'iron-gate'.

There has been a sharp decline in pass rate in SLC exams since the last ten years if we analyse the figures provided by the Controller's Office.

If we compare and contrast the national literacy figures, Karnali lags behind many districts in terms of literacy. While the national literacy rate is 54 percent, literacy in Karnali zone stands at a dismal 19.4 percent, which means that more than 80 percent of the people in Karnali do not have basic tools of literacy.

Five districts, which house 3,09,084 people, have only one college, 548 primary schools and 61 high schools.

Karnali's SLC performance is declining every year due to incomplete school hours and lack of teaching-learning environment.

Kailash Rokaya, headmaster at the Siddhartha Lower Secondary School, Burausa in Humla, says the shortage of teachers in his school has forced a Nepali language teacher to teach English.

"This is due to acute shortage of teachers in the district," he says. This school has no teachers to teach at the nursery level.

"At the moment, we have not been able to run nursery classes due to teachers' shortage," said Rokaya.

Dr. Shah Dev Bhatta, Controller of Examinations, Sanathimi, Bhaktapur in an interview with Karnali, said schools in Karnali zone have not been able to meet the required standards.

This is compounded by the fact that there are limited teachers in schools though there is an influx of students every year. For instance, teachers who have hardly received any training in teaching English or have attained any proficiency in teaching methodology are teaching English.

In the last few years, pass rate in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations in Karanali has declined dramatically. In the year 2000, a total of 1,357 students sat for their SLC exams and 502 have got through their 'iron-gate'. In 2001, from the total of 890 students, who appeared in the SLC exams, 106 have passed. In 2002, from a total of 886 students, who appeared in their SLC exams, only 78 have managed to pull through the 'iron-gate'.

"This is due to shortage of teachers," said Dr Bhatta. "Students hunger to learn but the teachers cannot teach," he said.

The courses, then taught by such teachers can hardly be completed before the exams.

Aside those problems, a significant number of schools promote students to

next grade though they fail the exams. School custodians are forced to promote the children to higher grades irrespective of their marks since the local guardians put heavy pressure on them.



But they have overlooked the fact that this would ultimately lead to dismal pass rate in SLC exams.

There is a clear need to make the existing rigorous examination system more liberal but it does not mean that those who fail exams badly or are irregular in classes are promoted. The Village Development Committees and the guardians should play decisive role to improve the standard of their schools and monitor them from time to time.

Education is one of the most important indicators of development. The formal as well as informal education provides knowledge and skills necessary for development.

Education is a window from where we can easily view the world. Despite the revolution in science and technology all over the world, remote areas of

Nepal like Karnali is still under the blanket of darkness and ignorance. Most people who are deprived of their basic tools of literacy are those who live below the poverty line. They lead a miserable life. They have no money, no descent food to eat at home.

Balmandir Primary School, Kalikot District Headquarters in Manma



Children receiving education in the open air



Willing to study

Humla has fared worst in literacy rate with just 25 percent people literate. The District Education Officer (DEO) in Humla cites 'remoteness' as one of the throttling obstacles to progress in education. The district has 9 secondary schools, 13 lower secondary and 91 primary schools.

Education material, curriculum, textbooks and SLC question papers must be relevant to the needs of the local population, according to DEO Dina Bandhu Jha.

Under its tenth plan, the government plans to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals and hand over the management of public school to communities. The Local Self Governance Act similarly provides an avenue for decentralizing primary education to the Village Development Committee (VDC). The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) similarly suggested the transfer of eight thousand schools to communities by mid 2007.

But will the education institutions in Nepal be able to produce productive, capable and qualified manpower with all these promises? This is the question that often comes to the mind after analysing the trend of SLC results in Karnali.

Educational Institutions in Karnali

| District | Primary Schools | Lower Secondary Schools | Secondary Schools | Higher Secondary Schools | Campus | Private Schools | Technical Schools |
|----------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Humla | 91 | 10 | 10 | 1 | 0 | - | 0 |
| Dolpha | 99 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Mugu | 96 | 10 | 13 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Jumla | 126 | 32 | 11 | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Kalikot | 136 | 41 | 21 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 548 | 102 | 61 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 1 |

SLC Exams 2000

| District | Appeared | | | Passed | | |
|----------|----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Kalikot | 389 | 56 | 445 | 178 | 25 | 203 |
| Mugu | 171 | 25 | 196 | 53 | 16 | 69 |
| Humla | 161 | 23 | 184 | 58 | 9 | 67 |
| Dolpha | 19 | 38 | 157 | 63 | 19 | 82 |
| Jumla | 309 | 66 | 375 | 64 | 17 | 81 |
| Total | 1149 | 208 | 1357 | 416 | 86 | 502 |

SLC Exams 2001

| District | Appeared | | | Passed | | |
|----------|----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Kalikot | 237 | 39 | 276 | 40 | 13 | 53 |
| Mugu | 58 | 11 | 69 | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Humla | 135 | 14 | 149 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Dolpha | 72 | 29 | 101 | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Jumla | 251 | 44 | 295 | 20 | 7 | 27 |
| Total | 753 | 137 | 890 | 82 | 24 | 106 |

SLC Exams 2002

| District | Appeared | | | Passed | | |
|----------|----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Kalikot | 203 | 46 | 265 | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| Mugu | 155 | 14 | 169 | 23 | 5 | 28 |
| Humla | 94 | 15 | 109 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Dolpha | 70 | 14 | 84 | 13 | 2 | 15 |
| Jumla | 213 | 46 | 259 | 18 | 6 | 24 |
| Total | 745 | 135 | 886 | 62 | 16 | 78 |

Source: Controller of Examinations, Sanathimi, Bhaktapur

We can compare above figures to conclude that SLC results of Karnali has continuously declined over the last ten years. For instance, in the district of Kalikot, out of the total of 445 students, who appeared in their SLC exams in 2000/2001, only 203 students (178 male and 25 female) have passed. Similarly, from Humla, out of the total of 184 students, 58 male and 9 female have passed in the same year. In 2001 in Humla, only three male students passed out of the total of 135 students.

In Kalikot, one girl and six boys had passed out of the total of 265 students last year in the SLC exams. In the same year, only four students (2 boys and 2 girls) had passed their SLC from Humla. ■

"WHAT WE OFTEN NOTICE DURING THE HOLIDAY OR ON THE ROAD SIDE IS THAT THESE CHILDREN PILE UP ICE, FORM TWO GROUPS, EACH GROUP TAKE POSITION FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE PILE OF ICE AND HIT EACH OTHER WITH ICE TRYING TO IMITATE HOW THE MAOIST AND THE ARMY FOUGHT ON THE LANDSCAPE"

There are 11 secondary schools, 32 lower secondary and 126 primary schools in Jumla. The entire district has one college up to the certificate level and one B.Ed campus run privately.

The number of students and schools continue to increase in the recent years and the awareness on education has increased manifold. But still, a majority of Jumlis has no formal education. Many children are still deprived of their right to free and compulsory primary education as guaranteed by the state.

Poverty, lack of awareness, lack of qualified and trained teachers, underdeveloped physical infrastructure are some of the major factors responsible for the dismal literacy in Jumla, particularly, at the school level, according to Jaya Prasad Acharya, District Education Officer (DEO) of Jumla. Acharya is a local resident of Jumla and has been serving as DEO for the last eight months. Acharya spoke to Karnali in an interview on the latest educational situation in Jumla. Following is an excerpt of the interview with Acharya:

Q: What is the latest educational scenario in Jumla?

A: Still many school-aged children are outside school. We have not been able to bring all to school. School's physical facilities are in a critical state. They are very poor and underdeveloped. There is the shortage of teachers and those who are already there are little competent to teach since they have no training. Next, awareness among parents about the need to educate their

children is very low.

Q: Why are many students still outside school?

A: There are various reasons for this. Lack of awareness on the importance of education and poverty back home has forced thousands of parents to keep their wards for the household chores. Many parents still do not know the importance of education and keep children at works. Some send their kids to look after cattle; some keep them at home to look after the young ones as elders go away to the field for works.

Multiple professions are common in Karnali, where people work in more than one area to earn their hard livelihood in this far-flung district. People in Karnali cannot survive by only one profession. They have to choose between two to three works at a time. This and many other factors such as poverty and lack of awareness have kept significant number of school-aged children outside school.

Due to poverty, parents cannot afford to purchase school uniform, textbooks, notepad, pen and pencils. Some children have to walk a long way to reach their schools in the village, which discourage a pupil from going to school. And there is no proper environment in schools to attract children. To sum up, these are some of the chief reasons how learning has been affected in Karnali.

Q: As a government official responsible for the improvement of educational standards in the district, are you satisfied with the quality of education in Jumla? SLC results?

— Jaya Prasad Acharya, DEO, JUMLA

A: I am not satisfied but there are enough avenues to reform some of the areas. The word "quality" itself is

a big confusion nowadays. But we can still deduct from the current curriculum prescribed by the government that it is the measure of students' achievement, which is reflected in SLC exams. But this is only one aspect. SLC alone is not a total measure of educational achievement. We are now pressing for the all round development of students by saying quality of education.

There are reasons why SLC result is worsening every year. To be able to obtain a good pass percentage in secondary, one has to be very good in primary and lower secondary. And since learning in primary and lower secondary is very poor, how can we expect good performance at the end of the tunnel—SLC?

Quality of teachers, their training, physical facilities in schools and the availability of latest teaching aid determines the quality of learning.

Teaching is still traditional and little oriented towards the skills development of children. It depends on how mathematics, science and English are taught. These are the vital subjects. Local level cannot provide qualified teachers to teach those subjects. The government has limited quota for teachers' recruitment. The lesson then taught by untrained and limited teachers, hired at the local level could hardly bring any better results.

Q: Is it due to the traditional and outmoded teaching-learning practices? What is the government doing to rectify this?

A: How can a teacher without a graduation teach? Present syllabus and curriculum are such that teachers without training and graduation background cannot teach. But a trained and experienced teacher can teach. Local teachers, training, strengthening of the supervision and monitoring mechanism are essential.

objective of improving the efficiency of school's management and planning. So far the center directly provided grants to the districts' schools and formulated plans. This has now undergone a major shift. The previous SMC, which was ineffective, has been changed and the new one has been formed. It does not rely on DEO or central government. The previous SMC was not accountable to anyone but this SMC is. In a majority of schools in Karnali, teachers-guardians associations have already been formed.

Children have begun imitating the Maoist and the army.

What they do is they divide among themselves into groups—one representing army/police and the other Maoists—and fight, though without hurting each other. At the end, the one that wins the game, shout slogans and march forward waiving hands. What we often notice during the holiday or on the roadside is that these children pile up ice, form two groups, each group take position from the opposite side of the pile of ice and hit each other with ice trying to imitate how Maoist and army fought on the landscape.

Our district's schools have almost completed their School Improvement Plan (SIP). We are involving community to make educational management efficient and responsive to the changing needs. We are handing over the management of public schools to the School Management Committee (SMC) to rectify the error.

Q: How do you see the triangular relation between SMC, DEO and schools in the changed government policy on education? The government has recently decided the hand-over of the management of public schools to the community, is it feasible for a district like Karnali?

A: SMC has been formed with a basic

They frequently organize seminar and meetings and discuss ways and means to improve learning in schools. The resolutions then they arrive at the end of the discussion is put to implementation without any hurdles. This is how the role of SMC and guardians and teachers has changed under the new policy—devolution of the management of public schools to the communities. Besides, the government has only handed-over the management of schools and will continue to provide regular grants. We hope that the transfer of schools' management to local communities would bring about the improvement of quality of school education and make teachers and communities accountable towards their schools in villages. But how to take ownership of community schools is a great question, which has often puzzled us.

Q: How severe is the impact of conflict on children in Jumla?

A: I cannot forget an incident that took place in Jumla recently. After the incident, most children have learnt to imitate the army and the Maoists. They have begun imitating the Maoist and the army as they play games. What they do is they divide among themselves into groups—one representing army/police and the other Maoists and fight, though without hurting each other. At the end, the one that wins the game, shout slogans and march forward waiving hands. What we often notice during the holiday or on the roadside is that these children pile up ice, form two groups, each group take position from the opposite side of the pile of ice and hit each other with ice trying to imitate how Maoist and army fought on the landscape. This is therefore, very clear how conflict has affected the children emotionally and psychologically. Children keep visiting party's meeting and take part in the rally. Action taken against teachers by the Maoists has also affected learning in schools. But not all schools are affected adversely and not many are closed as it is often reported.

Q: Do you have anything to say about KARNALI?

A: If we could move forward with NGOs like your's, we can do a lot in the field of education. We can organize weekly, monthly or fortnightly seminar. We can run educational awareness program jointly. We can discuss jointly with the communities and discuss how we can take education program for the district. If you come with educational programme, we are there to assist you. ■