

South Asia

People

Gentlemen, game's up!



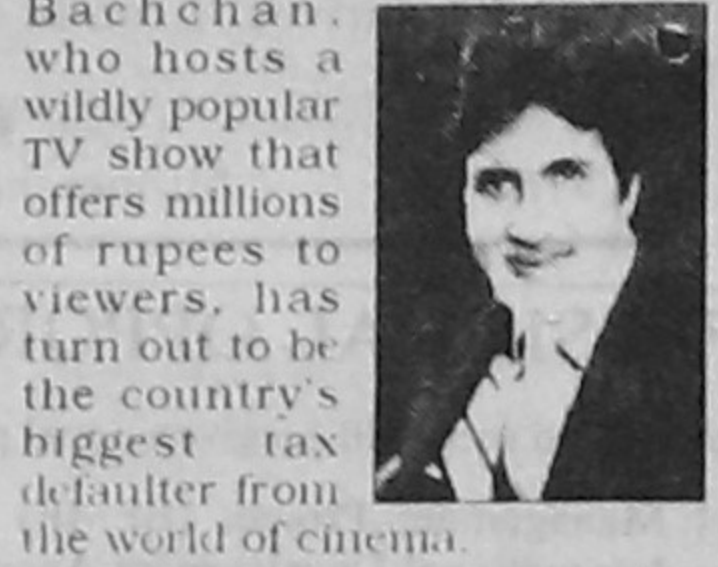
law "to end the tension of uncertainty". He told the police he would meet them in the court even before the chargesheet was readied. The police then asked him to come to the Mayor's official bungalow to avoid the throng of the Sena cadre and formally arrested him. But when Thackeray was produced before a magistrate, the case under Section 153(A) of the Indian Penal Code for inflammatory writings in 1993 was dismissed because of the six-year delay. Manohar Joshi, Balasaheb Vikil Patel and Suresh Prabhu resigned on July 18 from the Union cabinet to protest Thackeray's possible arrest. Atal Behari Vajpayee refused on July 19 to accept resignation offers of three Shiv Sena ministers.

Sharing the Nobel

A former Philippine town mayor, a Chinese environmentalist, two Indian activists and an Indonesian journalist will share this year's Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia's version of the Nobel prizes. The awards are named after former Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay who died in a plane crash in 1957. Magsaysay was revered for his commitment to democracy and improving life for ordinary people.

Tax dodger crorepati

Indian film icon Amitabh Bachchan, who hosts a wildly popular TV show that offers millions of rupees to viewers, has turned out to be the country's biggest tax defaulter from the world of cinema.



Books

In Another Country

The Construction of Diaspora: South Asians Living in Japan. (Dhaka, UPL, pp. 129).

Imtiaz Ahmed

MOVEMENT of population has historically been among factors of lasting influence upon the process of civilisation, economic development and social change. Many nations and countries — some of which are among the richest in the world today — have experienced population movement as a vital element in one or other phase of their history. Others actively promoted such movement and/or benefited from it. The impact of migration, however, is economic, political, cultural, religious, language and so on.

Like most other regions of the world, South Asia has always been at both receiving and producing ends of population movement. In more recent times, however, movement out of this region to various destinations far and near has become the more common practice than the other way round.

South Asians are migrating in ever increasing numbers adding regularly to the South Asian diaspora in various parts of the world, and the common-place wisdom is that they migrate mainly in search of economic opportunities, sometimes also to escape political oppression. However, a systematic study exists to facilitate

chapter on work shows how the kind of work the South Asians are engaged in are contributing to their diasporic identity. Similarly, by analyzing what the South Asians eat and drink, the author explains how they remain distanced from the Japanese society. In the next chapter on gender and sexuality, the author shows that nuances in man-woman relationship are also critical in the organization and reproduction of diaspora. Nature and evolution of gender relationships are bound to be influenced by cultural backdrop and identity of people. Accordingly, when it comes to migrant communities, such relationships may become interesting areas of tensions and uncertainties, contributing to the way in which the diasporic persona is created. Examining the similarities and dissimilarities in man-woman relations in Japan with that in South Asia, Prof. Ahmed organizes and reconstructs of South Asian diaspora.

The fourth factor that the author examines is leisure. For most South Asian migrants living in Japan, leisure is a luxury they can hardly afford. Even when they have possibilities of enjoying some kind of leisure, the options available in the host country and in given cultural context would be quite different from what they would have liked to.

Among some interesting and instructive findings and conclusions of the book is the proposition that diasporas can be creative as well as uncreative. They may contribute to all spheres of life in the host country while they can also be a source of conflict. Depending on the context and content of interaction with the host community the same diasporic community can be both creative and uncreative. As the author suggests, "creative or uncreative element is as much the result of the construction of diaspora as it is (quite logically) the result

Reviewed by Iftekharuzzaman

a comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences of the migrants in the destination states. In particular, hardly any literature is available revealing the process through which cases of migration transform into diaspora. Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed of the Department of International Relations of University of Dhaka has produced a book on *The Construction of Diaspora: South Asians Living in Japan* that attempts to understand the life and living of the South Asian migrants in Japan, particularly in the manner in which they gradually transform into a diaspora, a persona that remains distinct from the local Japanese.

The study is about the "actual migrant life". Accordingly the author sets out arguing that the simple fact of migration does not itself create diasporas. One can, he suggests, migrate but remain non-diasporic. The crucial factor is the failure, particularly lack of creativity of the civil and political societies of the host nation, in this respect the choice of location of the South Asian diaspora for the study is interesting because Japan is a nation of distinctive ethnic and socio-cultural identity, known for a striking social and structural resistance to permit *gaijin* or foreigners to influence the values, traditions and life-styles of the *nihonjin* or Japanese.

The study takes into view four main variables to analyze the process that cement the relationship between the South Asians living in Japan, who in most cases never knew each other, and who represent widely varied backgrounds back home. These variables — work, food, leisure and leisure — are discussed in four separate chapters on the basis of a sample survey that the author conducted among South Asians living in Japan.

Each chapter is an enlightening account of construction process of the diaspora. The

of the host community's interaction with the diaspora.

Prof. Ahmed's book is well-researched, specially with respect to the identified four factors affecting life and living of the South Asian diaspora. The book doesn't address many other issues that may come to mind when one considers South Asian or Bangladeshi diaspora in a place like Japan or other destinations. The book does not, for instance, deal with population movement as a factor in international relations — in terms of political, diplomatic and economic linkages of South Asian countries with the host country. It doesn't cover social, economic and cultural impact of such migration back home. It does not bring out much about the diaspora's possible role in shaping or influencing the host authorities' perspectives and policies vis-à-vis South Asia, or particular countries thereof. It doesn't also examine if and to what extent the growing inflow of South Asians into Japan may affect Japanese policy with respect to diaspora itself, particularly their legal status and related matters.

Considering that the author recommends change on the part of Japan, it would be interesting to look more closely into the Japanese mindset, their social and institutional traditions, values and structures that determine the current level of resistance to *gaijin* influence, and from there on to examine the possibilities of such change. It can be expected that further work on this subject will take into view such vital issues. Be that as it may, the book remains a very important addition to the literature, and fulfills a long-felt gap. The University Press Ltd deserves to be commended for publishing it.

The author is Executive Director of Bangladesh Freedom Foundation.

Pakistan

Now What? Another Political Chic?

By Navine Murshid



THE accountability court in Pakistan sentenced deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif to 14-year rigorous imprisonment and disqualified him from holding public office for 21 years on corruption charge. The court ruled that Nawaz Sharif had failed to justify the expenses made on the purchase, maintenance and operation of MI-8 helicopter, and fined him Rs20 million. Nawaz Sharif will undergo three-year imprisonment more if he fails to make the payment.

Judge Farrukh Latif observed that holders of public office and leaders were expected to be honest and above board. "Nation expects that its leaders should be beyond suspicions. Corruption is undesirable but when it is committed by a person who has held public office, it is much more undesirable as it has far-reaching effects on the society."

Kulsoom Nawaz and other family members of both Nawaz Sharif and Saifur Rahman, head of the anti-corruption bureau, who was charged as secondary offender, were present in the jam-packed courtroom when the judgement was announced.

With the turn of events, Kulsoom is big news today. She has emerged as a potential leader of

the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), with Nawaz Sharif banned from politics for 21 years. The irony is that only months ago she had declared that her place was in the kitchen, and she knew nothing of politics.

So, what made her a public figure within a matter of days? Besides being the former PM's wife, it is arguably her actions and her anti-military stance. The incidents early this month whereby she 'played tag' with the police officers who tried to arrest her for organising an anti-government public rally and got 165 PML leaders arrested, made her hold on the PML stronger. She was actually being taken seriously. However, Pakistan's Information minister Javed Jabbar said the incident was the latest in a long line of theatrics staged by the family of Nawaz Sharif. He said the government had no choice but to enforce its ban on public rallies and demonstrations. But he said Mrs Sharif was being treated with all courtesy. The public profile of Nawaz Sharif's wife has grown since he was toppled in the October military coup and subsequently jailed for terrorism and hijacking. In May, she led a motorcade to celebrate the second anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests. Her outspoken criticism of the military authorities has drawn angry attacks from the government and alienated some sections of the PML.

Signs of differences within the PML began emerging immediately after Nawaz Sharif was

thrown out of power by a military coup last October. A vocal group of senior party members began to blame their leader for the crisis, and during Sharif's trial on charges of hijacking and terrorism, demands were raised to nominate an acting president. Until two months ago, this demand was rejected by the party's central executive committee. However, splits within the party have continued and in the last few weeks the gulf between those groups supporting and opposing Sharif's leadership has widened.

Those who want Sharif to remain as the party president are rallying behind his wife, Kulsoom Nawaz, who has perhaps been the only outspoken critic of the present military administration. The anti-Sharif camp is being led by senior party members like Fakhr Inam and Mian Azhar, who want the party to elect a new leader. And in between these two groups is the third, and perhaps largest, group which is headed by former minister Raja Zafarul Haq. This group still regards Sharif as their leader but also believes in negotiating with the military authorities. Last week, Zafarul Haq held a meeting with the military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, which angered those party members in the pro-Sharif camp. Haq denied he had betrayed the party chief. Instead, he went to see Sharif — during his current corruption trial at the Attock Fort — to explain his



Hi! I just started ...

point of view. But this seems to have done little to satisfy Kulsoom Nawaz, who has continued with her protest campaign. Zafarul Haq and his colleagues still maintain the best way to save the party, and its leader, is by trying to work out a negotiated settlement with the military government. But in the present situation this would mean a Muslim League without Nawaz Sharif — something that is not

acceptable to Sharif's wife and the rest of their family. So far all the groups within the party have avoided a situation where it may formally split. But many analysts believe this situation cannot be sustained for long. With Nawaz Sharif declared guilty, and without a great deal of support for his wife's group, there is every possibility of a formal split in the party in the weeks to come.

Split or not, Kulsoom's involvement in politics is apparent. In a way, it is not surprising either. After all, most of the female leaders in South Asia got involved in politics either through their husbands or their fathers — be it Benazir Bhutto, Sonia Gandhi, Sheikh Hasina or Khaleida Zia. They are here because of family ties. Kulsoom is only living up to tradition and the norm in this region. However, how she will fare out of the kitchen is yet to be seen.

India

That Man, Thackeray!

Sakyasen Mittra in Calcutta



WILL the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's arrest lead to a repercussion all over the country? In one word the answer is, no. Thackeray's rise to fame has been through his fanatical promotion of Hinduism and communalism. A process that really does not draw support from the other political leaders in the country.

As far as West Bengal is concerned, the leaders here have been least bothered about what is happening in far-off Mumbai. However, secretly they have been pleased at the way the Shiv Sena supremo has been cornered. Thackeray, have always been the main brain behind the prosecution of the Bengalis (This includes Bangalis from West Bengal and Bangladeshis in Mumbai). CPIM leaders in West Bengal, had in the past, lodged vehement protests at the way, the Shiv Sena Government had kicked a large number of Bengalis from Mumbai. Naturally, now they are very pleased at the turn of events.

One has to go a couple of years back in history, to trace the development of events. Initially, the Shiv Sena and the CPIM were close enough. Simply because both had a common enemy in the Congress. However, in 1996 and 1997, there was a huge exodus of Bengali speaking inhabitants from Mumbai. Most of them had a tale of horror to tell once they reached their destinations in West Bengal. Stories of how, the women were raped by the law, of male members being sodomised and beaten up by the police and of looting and arsoning. That as the time when relations between Thackeray and West Bengal deteriorated. That is why at present, none of the leaders here have opened their mouth against the arrest of Thackeray.

The CPIM have adopted a policy of wait and watch as far as this issue is concerned. However, if information from within the party is to be believed the CPIM, supports this move by the Centre and the Government of Maharashtra.

The idea is quite simple. This man Thackeray needs to be taught a lesson. He has blackmailed a whole lot of leaders by his autocratic ways.

Law Minister Axed

By Mansoor Mamoon



IN a dramatic move, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has sacked his Law Minister Ram Jethmalani. The forced resignation came in the wake of Ram Jethmalani's war of words with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court A S Anand and Attorney General Soli J Sorabji. The sacked Law Minister accused the Attorney General for masterminding his ouster from the union cabinet as well as for distancing him from the Prime Minister.

Ram Jethmalani, himself a top constitutional expert, was not feeling comfortable due to his open hatred of Sorabji. "Right from the day I became Law Minister, he started giving me pin pricks," alleged Ram. In reply the powerful Attorney General quipped, "the former Law Minister did not require my help for his exit. He had an inexhaustible store of pinpricks."

The recent example of which was his intemperate criticism of the Chief Justice of India and the Supreme Court. The drop scene on Jethmalani's sacking came when he was in Mumbai, holding talks with the Shiv Sena Supremo Bal Thakrey. The Prime Minister's office contacted him over telephone and informed him of Vajpayee's desire that he should tender his resignation. On reaching Pune he obliged the Prime Minister by faxing his letter of resignation which was subsequently sent to President K R Narayanan. The President accepted the resignation of the Law Minister on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

The PMO claimed that the former Law Minister was unnecessarily encroaching on the constitutional bodies like the Supreme Court and the office of the Attorney General. Previously the Prime Minister asked him to exercise restraint and not to confront the Judiciary. Earlier he had angered the legal practitioners leading to abstention

causing piling up of cases much to the chagrin of the litigants.

Recently he criticised the Chief Justice for the Supreme Court's observation on the implementation aspect of the Shri Krishna Commission Report. He also strongly advocated for the centre's intervention to prevent the Congress and the National Congress combine government from arresting Bal Thakrey for inciting communal violence in Mumbai in the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992. Thakrey was briefly arrested and then exonerated from the charges by the court for delay in filing the chargesheet.

In anticipation of the arrest of the Shiv Sena Chief Mumbai remained tense and flare up of communal violence was apprehended. Thakrey himself threatened that in the event of his arrest the whole of India would burn. The court order, however, diffused high tension that was prevailing in the port city and was a political blow to the government. Thakrey's image has rather bolstered among his admirers who are fanatically communal.

Clearly, if no one else, at least Ram Jethmalani can be said to be a casualty of the Bal Thakrey melodrama after the court verdict the former Law Minister felt complacent that the verdict showed that the stand he took was all through right.

Jethmalani claimed that he was sent to Mumbai by the Prime Minister to prevent the arrest of Bal Thakrey and when he was holding talks with the latter in a bid to mellow him and to abide by the law of the land rather than threatening for reprisals the Prime Minister plotted for his ignominious exit along with his Attorney General whom he described as pliant.

The former Law Minister said the Prime Minister was wearing a crown of thorns and he obliged him as he did not want to increase the number of thorns in the already thorny cap. On this count Jethmalani was perfectly right. As the monsoon session of Parliament met this week the opposition is firing salvos against the government. Though the Bal Thakrey

crisis could be averted (when three ministers belonging to Shiv Sena tendered their resignation though it was not accepted and the resigning ministers have since started attending their offices apart from possible communal violence along with its backlash), other issues like the autonomy move for Jammu and Kashmir state by Farouk Abdullah, whose National Conference, is a coalition partner has generated nationwide debate. Vajpayee is indeed walking on a tight rope.

Human memory is very thin. Incidents, like communal riots and the persons who incited them are easily forgotten. Bal Thakrey's case may be just another addition to such a list.

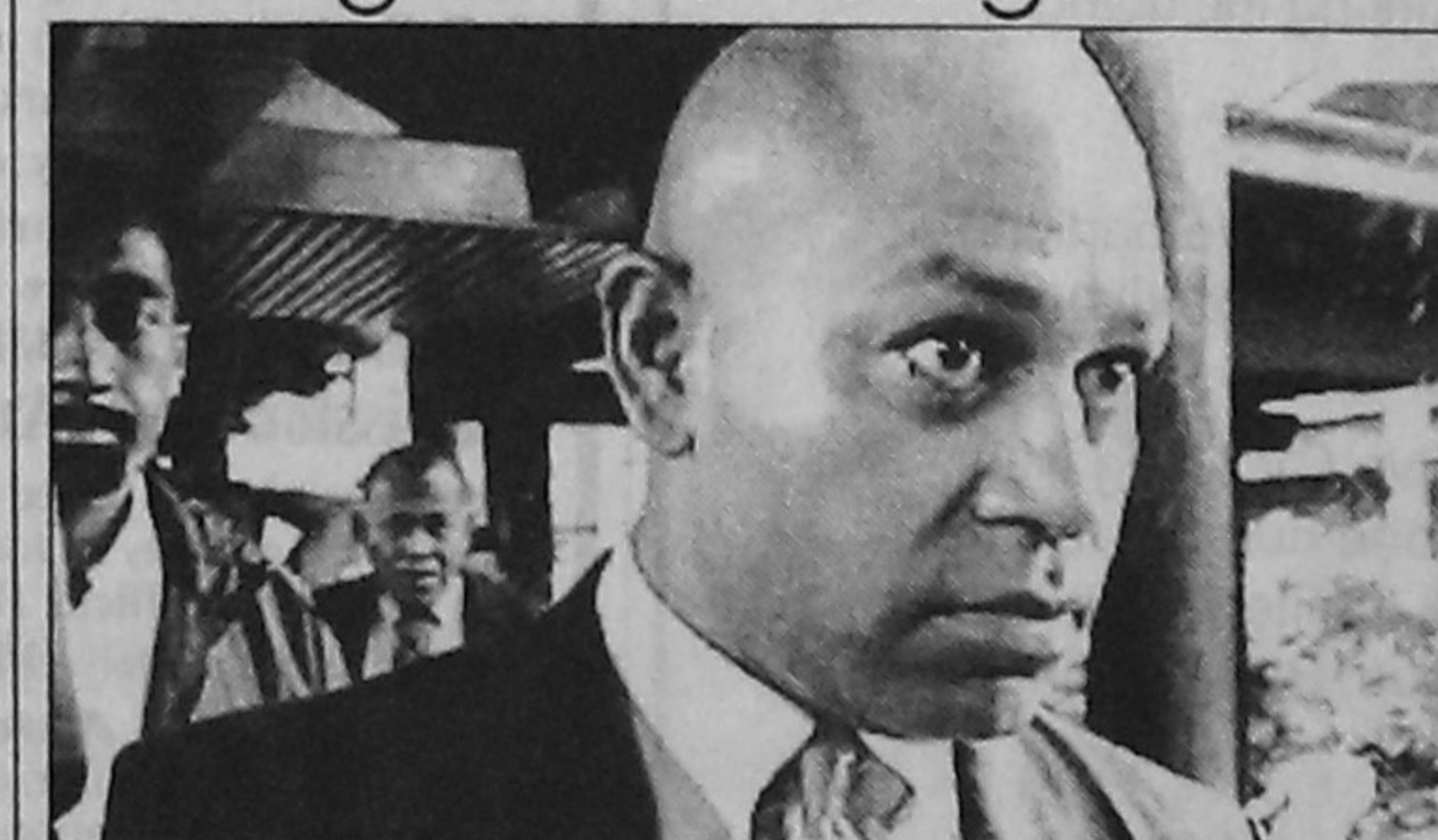
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The man behind the resignation ...

Neighbour

Going Gets Tough



FIJI's military is examining whether rebel leader George Speight should face charges of treason linked to alleged threats made against President Ratu Josefa Iloilo. The coup leader and three of his aides were detained late on Wednesday night near the rebel base of Kolabu on suspicion of carrying weapons illegally and making the threats against the president.

The Region This Week

In bandit country

JOURNALISTS in Bangladesh are in shock after the gangland-style murder of one of their most respected colleagues a few days ago. Tributes have been pouring in for Shamsur Rahman, a seasoned reporter who campaigned against corruption and political violence in a particularly troubled part of this turbulent country. The south-west of Bangladesh is bandit country — a difficult beat for a journalist.

Militants offer ceasefire

A leading Kashmiri militant group has announced a unilateral ceasefire and said it is willing to enter into negotiations with the Indian authorities. The operational chief of the Hizbul Mujahideen, Abdul Majid Dar, told journalists in Srinagar in Indian-administered Kashmir, that the ceasefire would last three months.

Living dead on the streets

ANGLADESHI sex workers have been protesting in Dhaka on the anniversary of their eviction from two brothels a year ago. Human rights organisations say the government has failed to rehabilitate these women as it had promised. Many of them are now said to be living on the streets in extremely inhuman conditions.

Police on strike

THOUSANDS of junior police officers in India's violence-plagued state of Bihar have started a week-long strike in protest over conditions. The strike action is being led by the Bihar Police Association which says it has more than 18,000 members — although it is not clear exactly how many are taking part.

Net users set to soar

THE number of people using the Internet in India is expected to rise to 23 million by 2003. At present, it is estimated that about four million people use the Internet in India. The figures were released by the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) which carried out a survey.

Seven die in bus blast

AT least seven people have been killed in a powerful bomb blast in the northern Indian state of Punjab. Police said the explosion took place in a passenger bus near Jalandhar, 325 km north of the capital, Delhi. The bus was on its way to Jalandhar from Pathankot, a town close to the border of Jammu and Kashmir.

Kashmiri leader killed

THOUSANDS of people in Indian-administered Kashmir have attended the funeral of the separatist leader, Ghulam Jeelani, who was shot dead on Monday morning in the state's Baramulla district. Jeelani was a leader of the Democratic Freedom Party and also a prominent lawyer. He was shot dead on his way to court by two unidentified gunmen.

Clueless in Kabul

TWO bombs have exploded in the Afghan capital, Kabul — making a total of five in the past two weeks. The latest bombs exploded within a few hours of each other in a drainage ditch near a hotel. There were no casualties, and only minor damage. On Sunday, a man was killed when a bomb went off in a row of bookstalls.

Disarray over ceasefire offer

THE Pakistan-based commander of a Kashmiri militant group has endorsed a ceasefire offer to facilitate talks with India. Syed Salahuddin, supreme commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen, said the offer was a tactical move and that India must now respond positively. But the offer has been rejected by other Pakistani-based militant groups and the signs point to a rift between the groups.

Floods kill 40

FORTY people have been killed and thousands been made homeless by floods in the past month, caused by torrential rains. Officials say more than 10,000 mud houses have been damaged and some communication links have been disrupted. The army is helping with rescue operations but officials say the situation is now under control as the flood waters have started receding.

Priest dies in Tripura

A Catholic priest was killed and two others were seriously injured when unidentified gunmen opened fire on their vehicle early on Tuesday. The Inspector-General of Tripura police, K Salim Ali, told the press that a jeep carrying the priests was heading for the remote village of Kanham, on Tripura's border with the Mizoram state, when it came under heavy fire on Tuesday.

Koirala's leaves Kathmandu

PRIME Minister of Nepal Girija Prasad Koirala is leaving Kathmandu for New Delhi on July 31 on a week-long official visit to India at the invitation of Atal Behari Vajpayee. Prime Minister of India. Koirala will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on Aug. 1. After the ceremonial welcome, he will lay a wreath at the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi at Raighat. Prime Minister Koirala will call on K. R. Narayanan, President of India and later attend a luncheon to be hosted by the President in his honour.

--Compiled by Ekram Kabir