



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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People from different indigenous groups staging a sit-in programme in front of BICC in Kathmandu on Thursday, urging the government to add 48 more nationalities on the current list which includes 59 indigenous groups.

India's duality?

BJP questions India's Nepal policy

■ nf correspondent

India's Nepal policy is more guided by the appeasement of Maoists at the cost of pro-democracy forces ignoring its implications on India's security, according to Bharatiya Janata Party leader and its Prime Ministerial candidate for the next general election, LK Advani.

Advani's categorical disapproval of the government of India's Nepal policy, comes in the background of interim parliament adopting the resolution declaring Nepal a Republic state, with the directive to the future constituent assembly to implement it. Advani said BJP was clearly in favour of preservation of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom with constitutional monarchy.

He said the genuine aspirations of the people of Nepal like its Hindu identity and constitutional monarchy were suppressed by the rise of Maoists. "Maoism and democracy are a contradiction in terms. The two cannot go together. It is unfortunate that they have gained ascendancy in the polity of Nepal," Advani said recently in a paper 'Democracy and Conflict Resolution in Asia' which he read out during a summit organised by Dainik Jagaran, a popular Hindi daily, last week.

Describing what has been happening in India's north as 'worrying developments in Nepal', Advani said what has been happening in Nepal have grave implications not only for Nepal, but also for India given the close nexus between Maoists on both sides of the border. "The Prime Minister (Man Mohan Singh) is right in characterising communist extremism or Naxalism as the biggest threat to India's internal

security. It is also a threat to our democracy."

"Why then has the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government remained a silent onlooker with communists in India playing the role of a colluder, when constitutional monarchy was disbanded recently under the pressure of Maoists? The monarchy in Nepal was a symbol of its unique national identity and a source of its identity," he continued.

This is first time that a major political party in India questions its own government's policy that has virtually abandoned the twin pillar theory, after it mediated a deal between Nepal's pro-democracy parties and the Maoists in November 2005. This also literally challenges the Indian government to clarify, if its approach on Nepali Maoists and the Indian Maoists are different. Singh had recently stated in the context of Naxalite problem that 'the virus of terrorism' needed to be eliminated for consolidation of democracy and developmental activities.

"Why did the Indian communists applaud when the identity of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom was erased even before the constituent assembly had discussed it? Would they demand that Pakistan or Bangladesh cease to be Islamic republics?" he asked. "The examples of Israel-Palestine, Afghanistan and Nepal raise two important questions: should India and other countries in Asia get entrapped in the western sponsored normative discourse on Asia's political evolution, or should we imbibe from our traditional values and norms? The former path is likely to ensure that we become the playthings of external powers seeking to shoot guns off our shoulders," said Advani. ■

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Coup galore

Maoists fear political assassination

■ nf correspondent

It was only last year that Maoist Chief Prachanda predicted a series of political assassinations that the palace and the Americans would be engineering in Nepal. But he maintained silence regarding the issue after the then American Ambassador, James Moriarty, publicly challenged him to provide any evidence to substantiate his allegations.

But with Moriarty gone and fresh election schedule announced, Prachanda is back with public reiteration of the fear. On January 18, he told media representatives in Kathmandu that Nepal could witness political upheavals, from political assassinations to army coup, in the coming three months. He however, chose not to say who would be engineering such activities.

The way Prachanda revealed the conspiracy theory based on information from his party channels, made it very clear that the assassination and the possible coup would be interlinked. He said that events similar to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto taking place here would not be far fetched. "Some groups might make attempts to murder senior leaders, both from Madhesh and the Maoist groups to create an atmosphere for a coup."

Prachanda further said that the future Nepal could see a mix of Bangladesh and Pakistan. "After some leaders are removed from the scene as in Pakistan, the Nepal Army might step up its activities to have a 'civilian government' in place in the name of protecting democracy, almost in a replica move of Bangladesh,"



Pix by newfront

he said.

Prachanda's revelation of his 'threat perception' followed two days after he chose to heap abuses on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Katawal at a public rally jointly organised by the ruling seven party alliance in Tundikhel. Prachanda was critical and abusive of Katawal for his public stance opposing integration of the Maoist combatants in the Nepal army. "Who is Katawal to oppose the move?" he said. His subsequent diatribes were full of personal remarks that even the seven party leaders did not feel comfortable about.

Prachanda however relented a bit when he announced that his party would return all the land and property seized by the party during the insurgency to the rightful owners, something he is obliged to do under the Comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) and the recently signed 23-point agreement as a pre-condition to election. He also said that his party would actively cooperate in rehabilitating those who were displaced during the insurgency. His party cadres have resisted the moves in the past to return the confiscated property.

Advising self-reliance

Give up your begging bowl: Nancy Powell

United States of America, Nepal's foremost development partner and donor, has given a piece of advice which others have refrained from giving so far. The prescription suggests that Nepal should not only reduce but must end its dependency on foreign assistance. And the key to it is striving for higher economic growth.

The suggestion was contained in a speech that US Ambassador Nancy Powell gave in a programme organised by the Chamber of Commerce, Pokhara recently. "Without economic growth, Nepal will continue to be dependent on the generosity of donor countries to meet its expenditures." She however made it clear that what she was stating was not an indicator of the likely curtailment in the existing level of assistance by the US.

"Over the past half a century, ever since the US first began its assistance program to Nepal, our principal aid agency, the US Agency for International Development, has granted nearly \$1 billion to this country. In 2007 alone, our total assistance program was in excess of \$70 million. We are committed to continuing our assistance going forward," she said. "However, it is my hope and my strong conviction that in the coming



decade, Nepal can end its dependency on foreign assistance. And the way to do this, we don't have to look beyond the beautiful, snow-capped mountains I saw on my flight to Pokhara."

Touching upon the prevailing political situation, Nancy said, the US supports the upcoming polls and is committed to doing its part to help it become a reality. "From our perspective, the election is a key step in the peace process, but the real work will begin after the election is over." She also expressed her frustration saying, "Many of the commitments made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the

other peace accords have yet to be implemented. True and lasting peace will require more than an election. It will require a national commitment to transform this country's government and its institutions into bodies that reflect and serve the needs and aspirations of all Nepalis, regardless of gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, or economic status."

Nancy added that as political parties set out for election campaign, their discussions should also focus on Nepal's economic challenges and the way to restore robust economic growth that is inclusive and equitable. "Peace will always be at risk as long as Nepal lacks a robust rate of economic growth." She said the experience of the last 40 years shows that the most successful nations in terms of economic development have been the ones in which the private sector has been the engine of growth.

The main challenge is to find ways to develop Nepal's immense hydropower potential in an environmentally and socially acceptable ways, which will provide affordable energy to the population and provide additional revenue through large scale export, said she.

Integration row

The claim, by Maoist Chief Prachanda and endorsed by Home Minister KP Sitaula, that Maoist combatants would soon be integrated in the Nepal Army, has now snowballed into a major controversy involving political parties across the party lines.

The first salvo against it was fired by Chief of the army staff, Gen Rookmangad Katawal who said, the inclusion of the cadres who were politically motivated and indoctrinated was not acceptable to the army. Katawal's assertion triggered a furious diatribe against him by Prachanda, but there is more pronounced opinion that goes against the Maoist chief.

In the meantime, senior army officials are likely to meet Prime Minister GP Koirala, asking him to restrain his alliance partners from making any 'derogatory and inflammatory' remarks against the Nepal Army or its chief.

"Nepal Army should not be politicised," said CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. His Deputy Khadga Oli has endorsed Nepal on the integration issue. And PM GP Koirala, who gave

interview to the media endorsing what Gen Katawal had to say on the issue, seemed to have backtracked when Maoist ministers cornered him regarding the issue.

Minister Deb Gurung quoted Koirala having told them that he was misquoted by the media. But Congress leader, Govinda Raj Joshi says that the integration of Maoist combatants in the army is not something that Gen Katawal or even the PM or Prachanda can do independently or on their own.

Speaking to party workers in Sunderjial on January 19, Joshi said the issue has to be settled after building a broader understanding at the national issue, but that should not bring army under the influence of any political groups.

Maoist leader, Ram Bahadur Thapa alias Badal, has however said that the integration issue is not something that needs to be settled now. "It is something that will be taken up after the election," Badal said, during his brief chat with media representatives in Mahendra Nagar, in an apparent attempt to let the issue rest for the moment.

Fake currency

Were you or were you not in the counterfeit currency business?

■ nf correspondent

As Prime Minister GP Koirala gets embroiled in a major controversy, borne out of his heroic disclosure that might even cost him his chair, he has intensified a campaign of blaming the media for what he spoke, mainly revealing his involvement in counterfeiting Indian currency note while he was in political exile in the 70s. The desperate denial has come since counterfeiting currency notes constitutes an all time act of terrorism that no country will be able to condone.

Cleverly, Koirala instructed the council of ministers to deny something that he said in an interview to Kantipur Television. An official statement of the government said, "Nepal

Government refutes media reports that Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was involved in manufacturing counterfeit Indian currency notes when he was in political exile in India in the early 1970s."

The front page story titled "Three decades later, Koirala reveals: I manufactured fake Indian currency," that appeared in Indian Express, on January 17, said that the startling disclosure has been made by Koirala himself in an interview to Nepal based Kantipur TV channel. It further said that Koirala, in another interview, claimed that RN Kao, the then chief of India's external intelligence agency RAW, had given him the green signal to hijack a Nepal Airlines plane with the promise that nothing would be done to him.

Koirala led a team of Nepali Congress leaders who hijacked a Nepal Airlines flight from Biratnagar to Kathmandu in June 1973 and captured four million rupees meant for the Rashtra Bank. But after the TV interview, the bit about the RAW involvement was

withdrawn from the programme though this claim was made by Koirala himself, the Express report said.

But the denial issued by the office of PM Koirala and his council of the ministers on January 19 said that they are, "deeply saddened by such false news" and they "refute" the news. The PMO also said that a copy of the statement denying what he said publicly is being sent to the editor of Indian Express.

Koirala's retraction of his earlier statement, that the hijacking took place after RN Kao, gave an assurance that nothing would be done against him, followed after an official of the Indian embassy in Kathmandu reportedly requested him to do so.

Giving graphic descriptions of the currency counterfeit business, Koirala had claimed that he hired the experts in Bihar's Forbesganj, and once he was satisfied with their skills, he took them to Patna where they set-up the fake currency manufacturing unit at the garage of BP Koirala's long time friend, DP Singh, who was also a member of the Indian parliament's upper house, Rajya Sabha, from the Congress party. ■

Newsbrief

Mahato quits House membership

Rajendra Mahato, Chairman of the Sadhbhavana Party has resigned his parliament membership with immediate effect. Mahato who is associated with the United Madheshi Morcha is the sixth member from Terai to quit the House membership demanding that it be dissolved immediately.

Mahato announced his resignation at a public meeting in Siraha on January 19 asserting that he will devote his time for the movement for an autonomous Terai region. Mahato had quit Nepal Sadhbhavana Party led by Anandi Devi after she withdrew him from the GP Koirala led cabinet.

Those who have resigned from the interim parliament from Terai so far, include Mahanth Thakur, Ram Chandra Yadav, Hridayesh Tripathi, Mahendra Yadav and Jaya Prakash Gupta. Except Gupta all others have joined the newly formed Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party. Gupta, like Mahato is associated with the UMM led by Upendra Yadav.

Explosion

The explosion in a public transport bus, that resulted in the instant death of seven passengers leaving at least 22 wounded, eight of them seriously, on January 18 near Pasaha bridge along the high way in Bara district, still remains a mystery.



Police said the preliminary investigation suggested that the explosion was caused because the bus caught fire. "We are still investigating into it and hope to have a clearer picture later," said Yogeshwar Romkhwami. Two people have been detained in connection with the investigation of the case.

A terrorist outfit called Terai Army had owned the responsibility for the crime that has been widely denounced by many quarters including the office of the Human Rights Commissioner in Nepal (OHCHR). It has appealed to the government to bring all those responsible for the crime to justice.

Police said at least three deceased had been identified by January 19. They were Bhakti Bilash Lamichhane (23) from Sindhuli, Kumari Devi (45) from Sarlahi and Mukunda Khanal (60) from Mahottari. The five seriously wounded were brought to Kathmandu for treatment in an army helicopter while others are being treated in Birgunj.

Badal to help trace missing journo

The Maoist leadership has at last broken its silence on the disappearance of journalist, Prakash Singh Thakuri, almost six months ago, from his official premises in Mahendra Nagar. Thakuri's whereabouts are not known ever since he was abducted by local Maoist leaders in July.

Maoist leader, Ram Bahadur Thapa alias Badal said in Mahendra Nagar on January 19 that his party would provide all the support and assistance to trace Thakuri. Badal's assurance came when a group of right activists



and the local representatives of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) met him to lodge a protest over Thakuri's kidnapping by the Maoists. Badal said his party respected freedom of the press and that it would provide all assistance in tracing Thakuri.

Maoists had killed journalist Birendra Saha in Bara in October soon after his kidnapping by the local leaders. No action has been taken against the people involved in Saha's abduction and killing yet, although both the Maoists and the government had promised that the criminals would be brought to justice.

Sitaula grilled

Home Minister KP Sitaula is known to be a thick skinned politician, but he is finding it difficult to face his own supporters who are raising the question of law and order situation in the country.

Leaders of the Nepal Students Union (NSU), the student wing of the Nepali Congress party, warned him that they would be boycotting his programmes in future if he failed to reign in the Maoist activists and the Young communist league (YCL) cadres who have been targeting NSU activists in campuses and universities.

Sitaula who was in the tour of western Nepal's Butwal area on January 19 tried to sidestep the issue by appealing to the youths to ignore small things and concentrate more on the forthcoming polls to the constituent assembly. But they shouted at him saying, "Don't act like the stooge of the Maoists if you cannot act like a home minister."



देशको तात्कालीन
कार्यदिशाका बारेमा तपाईं
के सोच्दै हुनुहुन्छ ?



अनि राजनेताहरु के सोच्दै होलान् ?



शुभशंकर कँडेलको साथमा विशिष्ट व्यक्तित्वको दृष्टिकोण
कार्यक्रम

OUTLOOK

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हरेक शनिवार साँझ ८:१५ बजे
मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा



सगरमाथा

समाचारको शिखर नेपालको गौरव



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Point to Ponder

Greed is a fat demon with a small mouth and whatever you feed it is never enough. - Janwillem Ven De Wetering

Politics of chair

It was not very long ago that the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) and other constituents of the current ruling alliance vowed that they would establish a democracy that can never be snatched by anyone. But they gradually moved towards the politics of annihilating opposition. And democracy without opposition loses all its meaning. They appropriated and monopolised the entire political process. From Prachanda to Madhav Nepal, all agreed to make GP Koirala the prime minister as well as the head of the state by putting him above the law. Their movement for democracy only meant establishing a dictator.

Koirala has only moved a step forward from there. He has set up his own dynasty after he managed to prolong his rule without accountability. His daughter Sujata has been made a minister without even consulting the Nepali Congress or the ruling alliance, a practice that he had been following all through during the past 21 months of governance. He has taken the alliance partners' servility for granted this time as well.

Dynasty and democracy go together in South Asia. Nehrus in India and Bhuttos in Pakistan are just a few examples. But in each case, they have secured people's mandate to legitimise the succession and bowed out of office when people have willed that through election. If necessary, they have made the sacrifice in defense of their nationalism and democracy by laying down their lives.

But Sujata's elevation has come through a process that can be called anything but democracy. Democracy becomes richer and stronger if leaders give up their position and power for principles and conviction. Such instances abound.

Sujata Koirala has shown the guts to challenge the official line of the Nepali Congress on republic, stating publicly that monarchy should be retained in the country. So her being appointed a minister by her father appears more like a bribe to silence her. By accepting that, she has shown that she can barter her principles or political convictions for the chair.

Rightly, Nepali Congress leaders that include several parliamentarians have now begun challenging the PM after the change he affected in the cabinet recently in which the father and the daughter apparently struck a deal. The elder Koirala only behaved like an authoritarian ruler. The country cannot be held hostage by the lust for power of a blind father and his ruthlessly ambitious daughter. In fact, Sujata's challenge has increased manifold and she has only limited options. She can either turn down the ministerial berth and reach out to the people for their support for her political line, or run the risk of being branded as someone whose only aim in politics is the chair.

GP Koirala was given the leadership of the government nearly two years ago on an ad hoc basis with a limited responsibility to hold elections to the constituent assembly. He has already deceived the nation twice by failing to keep the promise. He is apparently using the resultant anarchy and lack of legitimacy of the system to promote his dynasty, something that the people of this country will not accept. Hopefully, the international community, which is here on a large scale, ostensibly to promote democracy in Nepal, understands this.



Letters

Revoke KMC's communal decision

I was shocked to read that Kathmandu Municipal Corporation (KMC) announced to give priority to people of Newar community for employment. I also belong to the same community but I oppose this move. I believe that this is aimed at dividing and segregating people of the same country in the name of community. The eventual result will be horrendous for the stability of this country.

Priority should be given to merit basis and if possible on economic basis to a certain degree. Giving opportunity to people who are less fortunate strictly on economic basis would help bridge the gap between the poor and the rich. This should be done irrespective of caste or community.

I also would like to emphasise that this is a sinister design aimed at quick electoral benefits. Thanks to the Maoist's absurd vision of 'New Nepal', we have already seen enough division among Nepalis in the name of caste, culture, creed and language. We can ill-afford any more moves at segregating this already divided nation. KMC should revoke this decision immediately!

Sanjay Tuladhar
Kathmandu



millions by that act. Sujata who will have now access to all the government files can do lot more hanky panky in a legitimate way. And she can do it freely now because the parliament, as this newspaper correctly raised, has become a rubber stamp and there is no hope of justice from the Supreme Court which is increasingly under the influence of the executive.

Sujata, who has been blessed by her all powerful father will now be able to loot the nation without any accountability. The way Koirala quietly nominated her as the cabinet rank minister resembles the manner King Gyanendra made his son, Paras, the crown prince.

Sudhir Aryal
Kathmandu

License to loot

It is a shame that Nepal's 'Loktrantrik' Prime Minister Girija, threw all the norms and decency that democracy demands and elevated his controversial daughter, Sujata Koirala, to the rank of a cabinet minister. Sujata's credentials as a member of the PM's household has been marred as she used her father's position to get Royal Nepal Airlines' General Sales Agency (GSA) for Europe, to her relatives, in 1992. Literally, she robbed the nation of

Readers, your reactions, criticisms, comments, suggestions are most welcome. Please address it to: newsfront@bhrikuti.com

Spiritual Corner

War is barbarity

Kunta-haji Kishiev was Chechen Muslim mystic, the founder of a Sufi branch named Zikrism, and an ideologue of nonviolence and passive resistance. He is often referred as the Chechen Mahatma Gandhi.

Kunta-haji Kishiev was born in a Chechen lowland village of Isti-Su. In his youth he was distinguished by his hard work and sharp mental senses. Kunta received a solid religious education and was a follower of shaykh Gezi-haji from the village of Zandak. He started practicing Loud Zikr: prayer with dancing, singing, rolling and recitation of divine names. He became a strong supporter of non-violence and peace. In the midst of the bloody

Caucasian war he wrote to Chechnya from Mekka:

War is a barbarity. Move away from anything that reminds you of war if the enemy does not attempt to take your belief and your honor. Your strength is your wisdom, patience and fairness. The enemy would not be able to crash that strength and eventually would be forced to recognise his defeat. Nobody would be able to defeat you and your rights if you would not move from your belief.



Defeat the evil man by your goodness and love Defeat the greedy with your generosity Defeat the treacherous with your sincerity Defeat the infidel with your fidelity

Despite the fact that Kunta-haji repeatedly rejected the title of imam he was seen as a threat to the Imerial authorities and the official version of Islam supported by Russian authorities. By the request of the Tsar's administration, official Islamic clerics organised public theological discussions with Kunta-haji trying to prove that his

teaching contradicted Islam. Still the influence of Kunta-haji only grew.

Considering Kunta-haji as a threat the Governor-General of Terek ordered his arrest. Kunta-haji and his brother, Movsar, were arrested and taken to Novocherkassk prison in January 1863. In 1928 documents were found confirming that Kunta-haji died in exile in the town of Ustyuzhna. The followers of Kunta-haji believe that their teacher is one of the 360 saints that keep the world alive and that he would return to Earth at a future time. The tomb of Kunta-haji's mother, Kheda, is considered sacred as the spring nearby that is believed to have been started by Kunta-haji pushing his stick into the earth.



Leaders of the Seven Party Alliance attending the first joint mass meeting to campaign for the CA elections, last week.



■ Alok K Bohara

Giving every incumbent Rs 1 million before the election violates the basic democratic principle of a free and fair election practice.

Without much fanfare, the current interim parliamentary body two weeks ago quietly decided to give its members Rs 1 million each as elections perk out of the government coffer. There was hardly any coverage of this news in the media. Demonstration of a collective greed by the people's representatives is nothing new in politics. But the nature of the intention and the timing should raise alarm among those who care about making the elections a clean and competitive process in Nepal. What happened last week in the interim parliamentary will set a bad precedent for our infant democracy.

We all have fresh memory of the famous Pajero and Jambo cabinet scandals, and who can forget the royal exploits of King Gyanendra. I am sure there are similar examples of duty free import privilege extracted by the Panchas. But this pre-election self-serving bonus is uniquely detrimental to our effort in creating small "ds" that are essential to establish the big "D" as in democracy. What is more puzzling is the lack of opposition to this act by the media.

In a free market society, price fixing through collusion is considered a crime. Consequently, anti-trust laws are put in place to bar companies from conspiring to manipulate prices to retain undue market advantage. British Airways had to pay a record £121.5 million fine for colluding with rival airline Virgin Atlantic on surcharges. South Korea's government too aggressively goes after companies found suspicious of colluding and working against the spirit of market competitiveness. Competitive environment and competition among the companies generally produce quality product, lower prices, and benefit the consumers. Free and competitive market welcomes new firms, fresh invest-

ments, and invigorates innovations and growth.

In politics too, we expect to have a level playing field so that the new candidates with fresh ideas stand a chance to challenge the incumbents. Many countries do have some forms of campaign financing laws to prevent undue influence of money and power in the election campaign. What happened last week in the interim parliament has serious unintended consequences.

A group of parties in the parliament coming together to pass a bill to give themselves Rs 400 million election perks is a form of election collusion. Giving every incumbent Rs 1 million before the election violates the basic democratic principle of a free and fair election practice. It inhibits independents from running for offices and thwarts healthy competition. In small villages, the sitting parliamentarians will have an undue monetary advantage of influencing the local politics.

This tendency of grabbing money from the incumbents by electorates will also erode democratic process at the local level. This happened in the local level election in 2001 in Tamil Nadu where the villagers voted for those contestants who donated 30 bags of cement for a temple construction.

Instead of fighting to restore democratic electoral mechanism to promote competitiveness, the current interim parliamentary body has promoted election collusion. It is simply a slap on the face of what we know as "liberal democracy". This pro-incumbent bill also falls flat in the face of those grass-roots young leaders who are demanding internal democracy within their own parties.

Then there are the new Madhesi parties ready to challenge the establishment. Do they qualify to receive some of these funds? What about those Dalits and women who may form a party to compete in the election? Will they also be compensated to offset the monetary edge of the established political machinery of the Seven Party Alliance (SPA)?

Acting as a political oligarchy, distributing governmental resources for the self-serving motivation of its members for the purpose of winning election may even be considered unconstitutional. After all, a constitution is supposed to guarantee competitive party polity and fair election. This act of the interim parliament does neither, and so there may be some ground to have it reversed by the Supreme Court.

In response to my concern, a veteran civil society leader responded as follows: "It seems now we have NGOs, civil society actors, the media who are all constrained by their own party affiliations and other interests. We have to do what we can within these constraints."

I hope that the fight for 'lokatantric' in the country is not just about personal and/or group convenience. It is indeed sad to see people's names being used to advance programs that are so anti-people and anti-lokatantric. This seriously raises question about the current parliament's fast-eroding legitimacy and its commitments towards the public goods. When companies collude for a collective greed, they can be punished in the court of law. But, who will punish the lawmakers for making the self-serving bad laws?

(The writer is Professor of Economics, University of New Mexico)

Nepal is a delicate flower that is about to die.

All history is politically mo

Ted Riccardi, born in Philadelphia in 1937, has a BA from Harvard and MA and Ph.D in Oriental Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. He also studied at the School of Oriental and African studies in London, and the University of Rome, Italy. He taught at Columbia University from 1968 to 1999 where he was Professor of Indian and Himalayan Studies. At Columbia he served as Director of the Southern Asian Institute and Chairman of the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures Department. From 1980-82 he served as Counselor for Cultural Affairs, United States Embassy, New Delhi.

In 1999 he took early retirement to pursue further research and the writing of fiction. His most recent works are "The Oriental Casebook of Sherlock Holmes" (Random House: 2004) and, with Mohan Prasad Khanal, "Archaeological Excavations in the Kathmandu Valley" (Harvard Oriental Series). He lives with his wife and two younger children in Kathmandu. Excerpts from the conversation he had with **Sushma Amatya**:

When did you first come to Nepal and what keeps you here?

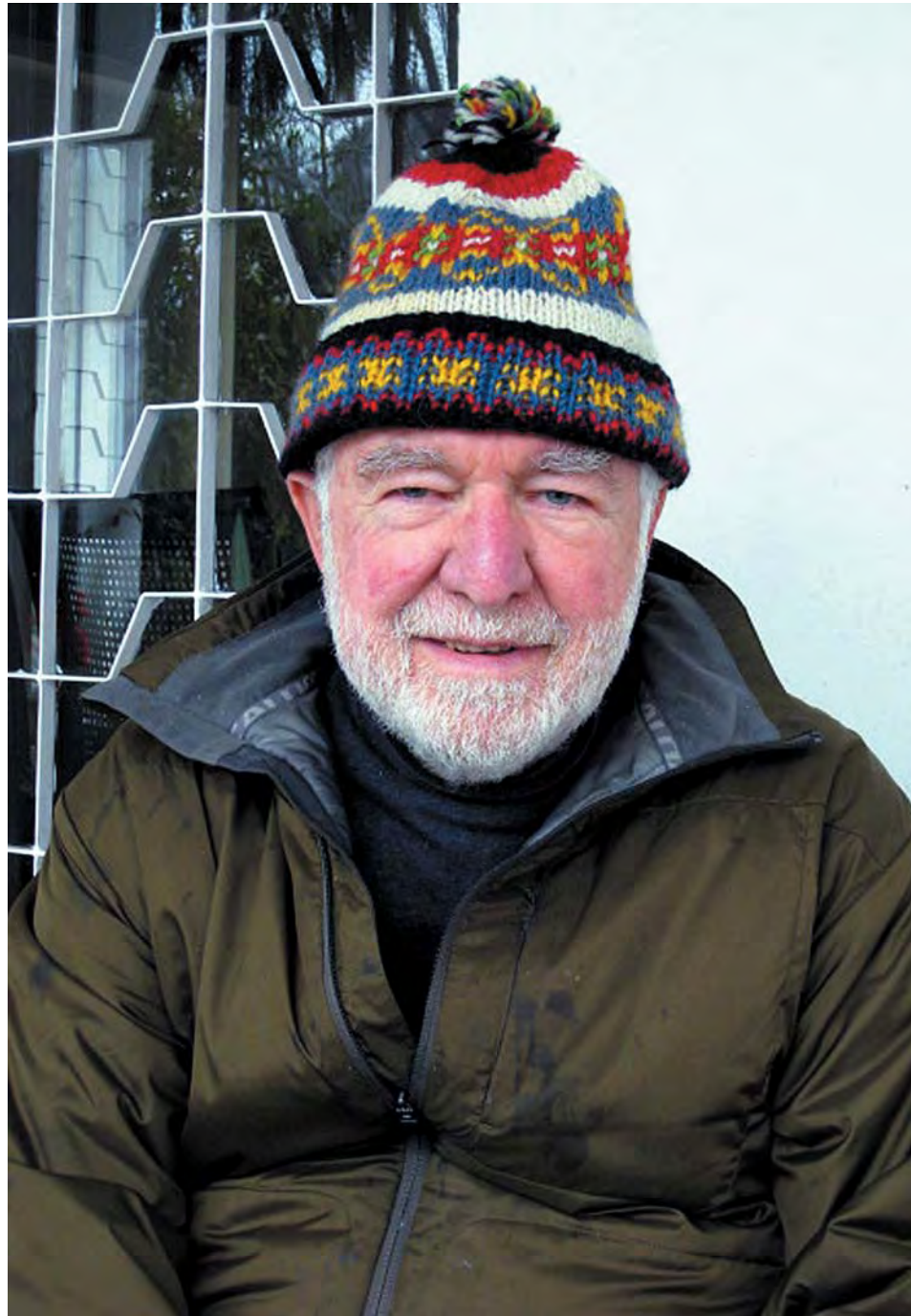
I first came to Nepal in 1965 as a university student and came back often, since I developed more and more research interests here in history and culture of the country, and I started to publish more on Nepal. I think I fell in love with Nepal. When I first saw it, I found Nepal hypnotising. Coming from an industrialised world, I had never seen a country operating on such very different principles. I found most Nepalis very attractive, intelligent and also what they produced very attractive, and how they produced in the context of nature without destroying everything around it.

You are working on an edition of Newari dictionary?

A dictionary that was compiled in 1792 AD by an Italian priest, one of the catholic fathers sent here to try to convert the people to Christianity. It's a dictionary that I first photographed in 1973 and never got around to working on it. Now I am working to prepare an edition of the dictionary, which is in Newari and Italian, and probably the longest and the oldest dictionary of Newari language with around 10,000 entries. It will be of value to scholars to see how the language developed.

Your understanding of Nepali history and how politically motivated it was?

I think all histories are politically motivated or motivated by a view of the world. History is formed by that. In Nepal there are two things that I noticed: one is that if you strip Nepali history down to its bare elements, you have a skeleton of verified facts. The rest of it is fat added to it. A lot of history here is mostly legends and written from a particular point of view. To give you a case in point, there are in Nepal Bansavalis – chronicle or list of kings mostly written in the 19th century - some written by Newar Pundits and some by Brahmins. They



all point to their own view of how history started. But people don't know this. They have a feeling that history is somewhat skewed but they don't know why or how.

What could be done would be to have more seminars indicating what the sources of Nepali history are and their nature. You have a whole list of kings some of them reigning for a hundred years – very difficult to believe that anybody lived so long then. If you start with 3102 BC, the beginning of Kali Yuga, you have 5000 years to fill. It's a small point but it does indicate the fact that the chroniclers had to become very inventive.

Most of the students I know here of any age don't really have any idea of Nepali history. I think that is one of the things that education is not doing properly. There should be more of it, it should be scholarly informed by new discoveries, by the kinds of theories that teaches students to question, to explore and not just accept what is handed down to them.

To cite another problem, some historians say

that first came the Gopals, then the Kiratas, Licchavis, Mallas and then the Shahs. As you move forward in time, it is clear that we know more about the Shahs, almost nothing about the Gopals or Kiratas. There is little in the way of historical records concerning these last two. And who are the Kiratas? Kirata is a difficult word to interpret. It refers to a group of people but it is an epithet of Shiva as well. If we find it in an ancient inscription, how do we interpret it, how do we assign a meaning to it?

Why is history important?

History may not be important; but to me it is the grounding of where you are. It gives you a foundation, a point of view to look at the world from. A history is not a science, in the sense that you can corroborate everything. It involves a certain amount of speculation but to me it is the narrative we each form in one way or another during our lives. We can't avoid history, what happened yesterday, or ten years ago. And therefore you better have the best version of it that's possible, and you better know that

history can be used for different people's ends. It's a fact that history can be twisted, can be given different interpretations for the same thing. It is a battle for the truth and you have to contend with it. People are going to write history no matter what and it better be good history if you want a population that understands what it is.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the present political situation in Nepal in general is due to the lack of the understanding of history; but on the other hand it would be better it seems to me, if the leaders of this country had an idea of what that history is, what it is for, and acted accordingly.

How do you think they can be educated better?

I think they have to create active groups of people like Babu Ram Acharya, Surya Bikram Gyawali, Mahesh Chandra Regmi. etc.. These people wrote history and they know a lot. Replacing them are a very few. I think you have to build up scholarly cadres of people, some of whom will be historians who can help lead the country.

Is it true that history is mostly written by the winners?

Hitler may have said that and many believe it. In the long run, I don't think it's true. And besides we don't want that kind of history.

One of the things that have been happening in America, particularly in regard to the history of the subcontinent in general – is what has been called a subaltern movement, the history of the poor class, the disenfranchised, those who cannot represent themselves. We don't want to know only about the history of kings. The great historian here, who did not worry about the history of the kings very much was Mahesh Chandra Regmi, considered by many to be Nepal's most brilliant economic historian. He knew what it meant to write history which was unaffected by fashion or politics. He had a point of view.

About your other works?

The first thing that I did was the study of the King and the Corpse – a celebrated Sanskrit work which has been translated into Nepali. That was the work I did for my Ph.D. I've written many articles: one a commentary and translation of a portion of Sylvain Levi's *Le Nepal*, an article on the royal edicts of Ram Shah of Gorkha. I also investigated the story of those Nepalis who left their homes here in the valley, forced out by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769, because they had been converted to Christianity. They wound up in a small village in Bihar called Chuhadi. In 1978, I went there to see who of these Nepali converts remained. Only two descendants of the original group were still alive. Eleazar and his wife Susannah. About 200 people in all had come to Bihar for refuge and intermingled with the local population. This man I met was the last man who spoke Newari.

The winner will always be there. Power will always be a part of knowledge and knowledge is at least partially relative to time and society. Otherwise you will end up with nothing worth having. That has not been done. You have to create it in younger people. You have to go

Well, that flower is dying if not already dead.

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One of the problems of Nepal is what do we choose from the outside world and how long do we take to make those changes and how much will it cost?

About the changes you have seen in Nepal?

One of the problems of Nepal is what do we choose from the outside world and how long do we take to make those changes and how much will it cost? These questions were never really answered well it seems to me. Nepal plunged headlong into development. Nepalis wanted changed, they sloughed off the old culture. They threw much of it out. One of the reasons why many artifacts land up outside it because the Nepalis said - I don't want it, take it. I want the world of pollution, factories, airplanes. I want dirty air and streets clogged with traffic.

I don't think anybody could have changed that. It is a very natural thing for people to want different things they have not had before. On the other hand, had the changes been slower, more methodical, more aligned to the needs of the people rather than the selfish view, it would have been a lot better. Right now you have chaos, a slow stagnant chaos but chaos nevertheless, and no sign of this chaos abating. It seems a permanent feature.

Development here has been something rather international rather than from within the country with your own resources. When you have a dependency, when you let people tell you what to do, you make mistakes and this is a big mistake. From a Nepal that had nothing 50 years ago to a Nepal in which you can find everything, but in total disorder and disarray, shoddily done, you have the changes but not very desirable ones.

It is a big question all over the world: How do you direct this desire legitimately and rightly motivated into a better world, a better society? In Nepal, there is a lot more food in the market etc, and more of everything. But even after years of international development you still can't turn on the tap and get a glass of clean water. If Nepal had gone for more for the basics, it would have been better off. I don't think foreigners should come in Nepal and tell them what to do. This goes for myself and other foreigners. You are the ones responsible for the adaptation of what's coming into the country.

One of the great losses of this country was the early death, disablement and impeachment of best leaders like BP Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Man Mohan Adhikari, etc. Nepal would have been better off if it had fallen straight into a democratic society of 1951 on; instead of swinging back and forth. Panchayati system was a thirty year calamity.

The present leaders have not been able to pull Nepal in a direction more rational than its present course. Anybody walking down the street in Nepal with half a brain would know what needs to be done. But the cost is going to be very very high because they were allowed to reach a point they should not have. There will come a time when this valley will be completely covered in cement, cars, and pollution. It may very well be the end. A demographer, Kingsley Davis said that Nepal is a delicate flower that is about to die. Well, that flower is dying if not

already dead. Nepal is no longer an isolated country. It is a middle sized country in the world system, trying to fit itself into a not so attractive world system.

Even Dor Bahadur Bista said when I showed him the grey layer in the sky, "I don't care. We want progress." He saw progress in the sky and I saw pollution, I don't see how these two views can reconcile. It is quite shocking for me when I hear some Nepalis say that they want big industries. Where are they going to put it? There should have been a lot more thinking, discussion about such things, instead of seeing economic development in a simplistic way.

Was it not a desperate attempt to move away from dire poverty?

Yes, but only partially. The conditions here should not have been allowed to exist. Where were the Ranas and the Shahs when the lepers were walking down the road? What were they doing? Well, we know what they were doing. You had a ruthless aristocracy ruling a docile, injured, fearful population.

How much does history shape your psyche?

When I meet young people and try and see what they know about their own country, I sense a very distorted picture, I see laziness, not enough reading, not enough thought. They obviously know a lot about jobs, computers, so many other things are vying for their attention. This psyche has no shape but that of modernity. So why should they spend time reading about king Manadeva or Amshuvarman; or learning what a critical point of view is relative to history, how it was made and how you fit into it? Because it protects you from evil. It is a funny thing to say but truth, whether it is in historical form, whether in religious form or artistic form is one.

The winner will always be there. Power will always be a part of knowledge and knowledge is at least partially relative to time and society. With your own history, you have to put your psyche, mind, brain into it. Otherwise you will end up with nothing worth having. That has not been done. You have to create it in younger people. You have to get them to ask why do I have to know about the Buddha for example? Because you have to know the truth. It is not something you carry around in your pocket. It is an effort to learn something and see it deeply.

What did Nepal teach you?

I learned a lot about myself, about the world by living here. It is not a one way street. The biggest thing I've learned is how important the social fabric of your society is, how strong it should be. This country has a very strong sense of itself, of community and of relations between people. This gives one hope.

Is not the fabric weakening?

Very much so. Because people tend to take

short cuts and because social fabric all over the world are getting weaker and getting replaced by the consumer society and it is probably the way the whole world is going to go down, a darkening of the world. We have to accept a radically different Nepal 50 years from now, just as we must accept a radically different world.

How does one find a balance?

I think you need a group of people at the top, experienced people who know the world, between age 40 and 60, who on one side are technocrats and on the other are brilliant politicians. The balance has to come from such leaders who can engage the society in a broad dialogue. The present leadership talks only to itself. Leading a rebellion and running a government are very different things. We are now close to total failure in running a government.

Your comment on rising communal feelings here?

You see this everywhere. I think this is inevitable. It is the result of the homogenisation of so much of our lives. It is a natural instinct to cordon oneself off but it does not do anything. In Nepal, the feelings are less venomous than elsewhere, and one can only hope that this too shall pass.

Do you think Nepali history should be re-written?

Yes, a lot of ideas that Nepalis have about themselves came through foreign eyes. That dependency has to be broken. And historical and social clarity needs a moratorium on insulting other people needlessly.

We are fond of saying that Nepal is a tiny country. Nepal is not a tiny country. Maldives may be a tiny country but not Nepal with 27 million people! Think that is tiny? That would be my way of teaching history. I would begin by examining the clichés of Nepali history and start to bring down the heroism of great kings, legends and look at them very clearly and continue to chop the attitude that are no longer useful.

In Jaisideval, there are two inscriptions from a much earlier century. Everyday they deteriorate further, threatened by drums of kerosene that hide them. Where else in the world can you find ancient inscriptions of such antiquity unattended? These are not just antique texts, but statements from another world, gifts that also tell us something about that world and our predecessors. If that is not valuable to you, I can't persuade you. Ultimately we need history, if only to form a convincing narrative about ourselves. ■



With your own history, you have to put your psyche, mind, brain into them to ask why do I have to know about the Buddha for example?

Down with male dominated politics

The challenge for Terai politics is to honestly create an equal political space for women.

■ Sabita Gyawali



Terai has recently entered a new political space. It has been

able to challenge the state, government, its' ruling mechanism, mainstream political parties and their attitudes. This movement has been able to create an important political space for Terai in Nepali politics.

However the challenge for Terai politics is to honestly create an equal political space for women. Within the changed political context still patriarchy is dominant and

political parties, their leaders, their new political dynamics have definitely tried to create new political ground for identity politics but the male domination within these changed political contexts clearly manifest the exclusive politics of patriarchy.

Under the identity politics of Terai and its people, identity of Terai women, their representation, and their acknowledgement as the equal rights holders have been grossly neglected even in the present scenario.

Terai has not been able to nurture women representatives who can lead Terai and strongly raise its issues. There

Terai should be able to create political space to raise voices for those women who have been the victims of patriarchy, who are raped, who are burnt due to dowry issues, and who are dominated simply because they are Dalits and women.

Most often, leaders of Terai make a good political excuse when the issues of women come and that is by saying: "As the entire Terai is going through domination, so first it is important to fight for the right of Terai as a whole and when we achieve this goal then automatically the situation of women and Dalits will be improved."



there is continuous trend of domination and suppression of women. Unfortunately Terai has not been able to create political space for women even within the ongoing movement of identity and transformation; and the politics of patriarchy is still dominant.

Patriarchy is a system where male are considered to be superior, they are the heads of the family and outside of family. Thus family, society, rules and regulations all are guided by the males and their wishes. Males are considered superior to women as they have access to power and they become influential in social, political and cultural system.

As a result, there is very systematic domination of women. Women are forced to accept the notions of patriarchy that are very systematically introduced to them and there is no alternative. Terai politics still lies inside the vicious circle of patriarchy. So called new

are few established symbolic names of women representatives like Chitra Lekha Yadav (Nepali Congress), Renu Yadav (RPP), Anadi Devi of Rastriya Sadbhawana party and Sarita Giri, in Terai politics. Their representation is significant within the broader political contexts and this has played an important role to inspire other women as well. But their symbolic representation in some places does not represent overall women of Terai and their situation.

The situation of Dalit women and many other such marginalised groups of women is even deplorable. Terai is going through the burden imposed by Pahadi politics; and within Terai, the marginalised section is going through hard times imposed by the upper class. Women at all levels face layers of dominations.

The time has come to question all these power structures. The leaders of

This is again a dangerous patriarchal politics that always thinks of freedom from male perspective. It should be clear that freedom is always equal to every human being and every human being wants freedom.

Leaders of Terai should now be clear that Terai does not belong only to males and feudal Madhesis. It belongs to all. Likewise in democracy each and every sector of people should have equal opportunity to lead a dignified life and access to their rights.

Patriarchy exists both in Terai and Pahad; but at a time when Terai is going through the identity crisis and creating a new political environment in the country, it is extremely important to create a political space for women as well. In this sense Terai has a historical opportunity to recognise women leadership and give priority to women's issues, which could be a lesson for the entire national politics. ■



A Madhesi Minister speaking in a mass meeting

Elections are impossible without solving the Terai problem.

Electoral facade

■ Siddhartha Thapa



With less than three months left for elections, recent political developments suggest it is becoming increasingly apparent that

elections are so far only a distant mirage. There are two critical points of analysis that is being repeatedly ignored and those are directly correlated with the prospects of timely elections happening: the Terai problem and the intent of the Maoist leadership.

The Maoists through the effective usage of Home Minister KP Sitaula have ambushed the Nepali Congress (NC) into a state of paralysis. After the agitation in the Terai early last year, a majority of the political parties lost their base there temporarily. The Indians ever since then had been cajoling the prime minister to move the NC in Terai and fill in the political vacuum created. As a result of continued ignorance demonstrated by the NC, the Indians were forced to glue together a group of moderate Terai leaders to fulfill two purposes - neutralise the radicalisation of Terai and to fill in the political vacuum.

Credible information suggests that Maoists are left with only about ten functioning district committees. An influential Terai leader confided that Swiss diplomat Gunther had been approaching various Terai factions repeatedly to work out a possible alliance between the Maoists and the Madhesi groups. However, Gunther's initiatives were rejected outright by the agitating Terai groups because they sensed his initiative as a ploy that was ultimately aimed at aiding the Maoists to regain the lost ground in the Terai. Gunther's term was over without his being able to have his initiative materialised.

But Maoists also independently pursued the move. Maoist Foreign Affairs Chief CP Gajurel met a senior leader of the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Goit) last summer when Goit was critically ill. However, Gajurel failed to work out an alliance between the Maoists and the Goit group. Nonetheless, due to the fluidity of the situation in the Terai, the Maoists are now in their last phase of preparation to reenter Terai and regain the lost ground. This is because almost 50 percent of the electoral constituencies are in the Terai and it is pivotal for any party who wishes to win a majority in the elections to win a substantive number of seats there.

But elections are impossible without solving the Terai problem. What we have to understand is that if the elections are held without solving the problem; the people of the Terai would have lost an opportunity

forever. And it is very unlikely that the Terai leaders would kow-tow to the threat posed by the SPA and participate in the elections.

India who is a large stakeholder in the Terai affairs would also prefer that the Terai fiasco be solved before the elections. And the Indians know it very well that if the problem is not solved before the elections, it will never be solved after the elections. But the interest of the major three parties in Terai clashes. None of them would want to go to the poll if their position is not better than the other's. Moreover, they have avoided taking a clear stand on the issues since that may weaken their electoral prospects. That means the big three - Maoists, NC and the UML are in no mood to solve the problem.

It is also equally important to scrutinise the intent of the Maoist leadership. On the 1st of January, Prachanda released a statement demanding that the PLA should be ready to use their weapons impromptu in the immediate future. Due to continued absence of government authority at all levels; the Maoists are consistently seeking avenues to overwhelm the state. Therefore, it is but natural for them to make the inevitable u-turn and shy away from elections yet again.

The intelligence apparatus of the Nepal Police that has presided by no other person than Sitaula fears that Maoists may be deploying the Young Communist League (YCL) cadre in rural areas and the villages to capture voting booths at the 11th hour, so that; the international community and the Nepal Army will be in no position to thwart their booth capturing designs.

If the Maoist leadership comes to a conclusion that the election option is not worth the risk, the Maoists will start galvanising the issue of PLA-NA integration as the primary issue to scuttle the polls. And succeed they will because, the NC and the UML owe their accession to power to the Maoists. Any fracture in the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) alliance would threaten GP Koirala's position as the PM and the Maoists will exploit his weakness for power to fulfill their objectives.

Although nobody has claimed the responsibility of the bomb blast after the SPA meeting in Khulamanch the other day, all fingers point at the Maoists. This is because the intelligence agencies and the security agencies have received reports confirming that the Maoists in their last CWC have devised two strategies. First, posture as if the party is ready to go to the polls. Second, make all necessary measures to scuttle the polls and galvanise the situation to the party's favour and portray the Maoist party as the alternate to the Koirala government. ■

CIA names Bhutto 'killers'



Asif Ali Zardari, husband of Pakistan's slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, addresses the media at a news conference in Karachi, Pakistan, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008.

leaving a rally in Rawalpindi.

Baitullah Mehsud has denied involvement. The Pakistani government says it intercepted a phone conversation proving that he was behind the attack.

'Organised campaign'

CIA Director Michael Hayden is now backing the Pakistani government's view.

"This was done by that network around Baitullah Mehsud. We have no reason to question that," Mr Hayden told the Washington Post.

He said the murder was "part of an organised campaign" that has included suicide bombings and other attacks on Pakistani leaders.

Mr Hayden said that the same forces were responsible for a new outbreak of violence sweeping across Pakistan which was undermining the stability of President Pervez Musharraf's government.

"You've got this nexus now that probably was always there in latency but is now active: a nexus between al-Qaeda and various extremist and separatist groups," Mr Hayden said.

"It is clear that their intention is to continue to try to do harm to the Pakistani state as it currently exists."

Forces belonging to Baitullah Mehsud have also been blamed by the government for seizing a fort from the military in the troubled region of South Waziristan on Wednesday.

(BBC online)

Britain: 'World's eyes on Sri Lanka'

Britain has exhorted the Sri Lankan government to push for peace, as violence threatened to worsen in the government's campaign against terror.

The British government's warning Friday followed Sri Lankan Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickramanayaka's announcement that the country's armed forces had a free hand to carry out efforts to wipe out terrorism without interference from politicians.

The prime minister said Thursday evening the government had "given full freedom to the armed forces to conduct the war," Lanka Page reported.

"Let the armed forces heads to handle the war, as politicians were not experts in that field," he said.

But the British government told Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse "the world is watching and waiting" for the island nation to take steps toward peace, The Times of India reported.

The Sri Lankan government formally ended its 2002 cease-fire



with the Tamil Tigers rebel group this week, triggering an eruption of violence that has left dozens dead.

British Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells called for a new cease-fire. Howells said the president's refusal to bring Tamil representatives into the All Party Representative Committee was "a big mistake."

(UPI)

The CIA has added its support to the view that a Pakistani militant, Baitullah Mehsud, and al-Qaeda organised Benazir Bhutto's killing.

CIA Director Michael Hayden told the Washington Post that the former Pakistani prime minister was killed by fighters allied to Baitullah Mehsud.

The Pakistani government accused Mehsud of the attack shortly after Ms Bhutto's death in Rawalpindi on 27

December.

Mr Hayden did not reveal the sources for his claim.

Correspondents say that Mr Hayden's comments are the most comprehensive public assessment by US intelligence of Ms Bhutto's death.

Controversy still surrounds the circumstances of the killing.

One or more attackers shot at her and detonated a bomb as she was

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A paradigm shift

Everything arises through causes and conditions.

Marshland Flowers

Many people get confused because many systems of meditation also use the word non-dual like Buddhism and thus come to the conclusion that the final point 'non-dual' is the same. But this is merely a confusion that arose due to the use of similar words.

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

We do not need a being of any kind to create gravity. It is the law of nature that whenever there is some mass there is gravity. This is what Niyaam means in Buddhism. Everything arises through causes and conditions; and those causes and conditions themselves arise through other causes and conditions. Because of this there can be no beginning. Therefore there can be no creation 'in the beginning'. About this there are no two minds within any form of Buddhism. Any system that believes in a beginning (and thus a creator) cannot subscribe to the principle that all things arise from causes and conditions. And without that, that system of thought does not and cannot fall within the paradigm of Buddhism.

Many people get confused because many systems of meditation also use the word non-dual like Buddhism and thus come to the conclusion that the final point 'non-dual' is the same. But this is merely a confusion that arose due to the use of similar words. Actually the Sanskrit word used in Buddhism is Advaya while in monotheistic system, it is Advaita (Hinduism to be more specific); but when translated



into English both are called non-dual. This is a complex topic we shall deal with later.

Let it be said that whereas most other religious systems are theistic (Taoism being the only exception).

Buddhism is non-theistic. Here, non-theistic does not mean not believing in gods and goddesses and other realms of existence where they exist. That would be atheistic. Non-theistic here means, not believing in a single creator or any creator as such for

that matter. In Sanskrit, we use the word Unishwarvadin. Iswhar meaning the creator – God. However, Buddhism is not 'Nastik'/non-believer as some misled or illiterate Hindus would like to believe.

Astik comes from the word 'Asta' which means belief. So Astik would mean 'believer' as opposed to 'Nastik' which would mean 'non believer'. While Buddhism does not accept the Vedas or any other scriptures and whatever comes within their paradigm, it does believe that man can be free from suffering and thus attain Mokchhya or Mukti. It does believe in karma and the cycle of existence, it does believe in other realms of existence; it does believe that man can attain enlightenment. Thus it is an 'Astik' system. In a sense, all systems believe their own tenets and thus are 'Astik'.

But Buddhism is a paradigm shift from all other theistic systems, be they monotheistic or polytheistic. With this background now let us take up what the Abhidharma has to say about the psi phenomena.

(To be continued)
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

Indo-Nepal economic relations

Nepal's prestige and honor is sinking rapidly.



■ Binod P. Bista

It is common knowledge that the trade balance between Nepal and India is tipped highly in favor of the latter. Despite several rounds of discussions and dialogue, the situation remains far from satisfactory.

Nepal is said to be a land of the blessed, but it seems to have its share of curse as well. The recent stress between Indo-Nepal relations came from nowhere. At a time when the entire nation, supported by the friendly countries, mostly the neighbors, is trying to gear up for the constituent assembly elections, anti-Indian remarks on the ongoing issues come as a surprise to everyone.

As if it were not enough, the all powerful legislature parliament, by passing a directive to the government to refrain from the usage of certain words, and the concerned minister showing more concern on Nepal's neighbor's anticipated reaction than dealing with the issue, have made fun of themselves at the cost of the nation. Nepal's prestige and honor is sinking rapidly.

It is common knowledge that the trade balance between Nepal and India is tipped highly in favor of the latter. Despite several rounds of discussions and dialogue, the situation remains far from satisfactory. Urgent measures are required to correct this situation if the two countries are serious about furthering their relations in a healthy and happy manner.

In a recently concluded seminar on 'Nepal-India trade and economic



relations' in the Nepali capital, the finance minister of Nepal could not refrain from mentioning the bulging trade deficit that Nepal faced against India. He was of the view that the same could be addressed by developing hydropower projects and exporting electricity to India. The finance minister blamed the 'lackadaisical attitude in policy making and implementing levels' of Nepal for the lack of progress in the hydro-power sector.

Unless the Maoists are assured of their full power after the CA elections, obstruction to ongoing national level projects is not helpful in anyway. Present load shedding, now running into two full days' time worth, has impacted almost all productive

sectors and households. While the entire nation was brooding on this issue, a senior Maoist leader came up with a pleasant surprise in a meeting hosted by a business community recently.

Stating that the Maoists want to strengthen 'capitalist industrial development', he said that his party has adopted the policy of promoting private-public partnership to build an industrially strong Nepal. He further went on to add that the Maoists believed that domestic capital should be used in small and medium hydropower projects while foreign capital would be necessary for mega hydro projects.

This is a sensible strategy for

Nepal's hydropower development, and it is different from the earlier stances of doing everything through domestic mobilisation of capital. Now, the question that remains to be answered by the Maoist leadership is what should the Nepali and the outside investors understand of this and several other mutually contradictory statements coming from the senior Maoist leaders.

It is worthwhile to ponder on the statement of the Indian envoy to Nepal who believes that the slowing down of Indian investment to Nepal was not caused by the security situation but by lack of clarity on 'investment incentives, regulatory environment, stability of policy' and such other matters. With a strong influence on the government and legislature, the Maoists are at the centre of all activities in Nepal today. Nepalis as well as the foreign investors have been focusing on the policy priorities of the Maoists, which are still unclear to most in spite of them enjoying power without accountability for the past two years now.

Any discussion on Nepal's economic development, particularly in hydropower, would not be complete without considering India as the market. As the two nations are closely bonded by geography in such a way, given the will, they can make the best out of the situation.

Freezing street children

There are more than 500 organisations working for children in Kathmandu.

■ Akanchha Karki

High after sniffing on a dendrite tube, 12 year old Ramu Thapa of Butwal fumbled to speak not just because he was drowsy, but because his thin torn cotton vest was not enough to fight the freezing January cold.

Like Ramu, there are more than 500 street children sauntering in the streets of Kathmandu. They have their own reasons for leaving home. According to a recent study by Sahara group, a majority of these children follow their friends and relatives who ran away from their homes. They suffer from the misconception that life is better out on the streets, because they think they get to be free there. They also run away due to socio-economic problems. 13-year-old Pradip Khatri said he left home because his stepmother used to beat him up.

After coming to Kathmandu, very few return back home. They somehow manage to adjust in the busy streets of Kathmandu. According to the study, one fourth of these children have been associated with shelters, but they have problems adjusting there and flee. Though the purpose of these homes for children is to give them opportunities for socialisation and accommodation, the children prefer staying in the streets on their own. Some feel their peers and staff members in the shelters mistreat them.

I expected a different answer when I asked them what the most difficult part about living on streets was and the reply was, 'Jaado Mahina' (winter season). Cops, thieves and 'junkies' and bullies scared them but the cold weather clearly was their toughest enemy. They own just one set of clothes, which most of them found in garbage. To protect themselves from cold, they cuddle with their friends and sometimes



Bhaskar Ojha

with dogs. Another street child, Bhanu Basnyat, said, "We cannot sleep the entire night because of the cold."

As it is, these children are at high risk of many diseases, and coupled with malnutrition, the winter decreases their immunity sharply. Pneumonia is the biggest enemy of these children. Ramu recalls his friends who died because of the exposure. Toughened and bitter, these children have learned to accept harshness that comes with their insecure lives.

Various organisations have made efforts to help these children by providing them food, shelter, opportunity to education and reintegration; but with increasing poverty and especially because of the past decade of conflict, there has been a huge rise in the number of street children.

On 2005, CWIN-Nepal inaugurated a two month long winter camp for street children in order to protect them from cold and to enhance their social abilities. Many children benefited from this camp. CWIN believes that these kinds of camps not only protect the children from winter, but also reintegrates them socially. However, a majority of the street children say that they have not received help from anyone. They do not want to be sheltered or study in a school, because their experiences with it earlier have not been good, according to them. Pradip Khatri says, "We do not want to study in school. We like here on the streets. But, it is hard during winters." 12-year-old Bhanu adds, "People should give us blankets, warm clothes and food."

There are more than 500 organisations working for children in Kathmandu. If only one organisation took care of one street child and put in their best efforts into helping the child, the problem of street children would not be there anymore.

Nepali carpet has more potential

...More than 1.4 million sq. metres of carpet was exported last year.

Carpet export from Nepal has been playing an important role in balancing the trade deficit in Nepal. It is estimated that the industry has been providing around 150,000 jobs to people in Nepal. Carpet making is a tradition in Nepal especially in the Himalayan and hilly regions.

■ Pramesh Pradhan



Domotex, the world's biggest trade fair for carpet and flooring, was held in Hannover, Germany. This year's edition, a four-day event from 12th to 15th January had 1442 exhibitors from 80 countries; exhibiting their products and services, latest trends and developments of carpet and flooring, spread over around 100,000 sq. metres. The fair annually attracts over 44,000 visitors of which 60% are trade visitors. The exhibition ground of Hannover is the biggest in the world with around five million sq. metres of covered state-of-art halls.

Nepal evening was a special event in Domotex. It was an interaction programme between major importers of different nations, Nepali carpet community and the government. On 14th January 2008, top three importers from Germany and one each from US, UK and Turkey were awarded 'Export Award' by Nepali Ambassador to Germany - Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai. The importers expressed their concerns regarding the political situation and deteriorating economic climate in Nepal,

and delay in Kathmandu airport, among other things.

Carpet is the number one export product in Nepal. It constitutes 30.8% of our total national export amounting to more than Rs. 5.3 billion, in the last fiscal year. According to the statistics, more than 1.4 million sq. metres of carpet was exported last year. The major market for Nepali carpet is Germany, USA, UK, Turkey, Switzerland, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Italy and Canada.

Carpet export from Nepal has been playing an important role in balancing the trade deficit in Nepal. It is estimated that the industry has been providing around 150,000 jobs to people in Nepal. Carpet making is a tradition in Nepal especially in the Himalayan and hilly regions. The influx of Tibetan refugees in Nepal played an instrumental role in intensifying the carpet trade and thus the export.

In Domotex, Nepal's exhibition was held on only 20 sq. metres of space. Two private carpet companies from Nepal along with carpet associations under the banner of Trade and Export Promotion Centre participated in the event. Nepal has been participating in the Domotex for the last

seven years continuously. Though several important governmental officials including ministers have been participating for years in the fair, the governmental role played by TEPC in planning and coordinating the fair appeared poor. Nepali embassy in Germany has to play a better role in supporting Nepali exhibitors in their pursuit of market promotion.

Associations representing carpet communities in Nepal unfortunately seem not united, resulting in some important issues not being addressed. There is a need to sort out the differences and work together. Carpet exporters and manufacturers need to bridge the gaps and create a bigger platform; if possible create a federation of carpet producers in Nepal. Nepalese carpet community and stakeholder institutions have to learn to work together.

In order to benefit from this world's most important carpet platform, Nepali government needs to focus on market development programmes and emphasise on stronger governmental and private partnership. Trainings for carpet manpower, organising a national carpet mart, more organised participation with bigger exhibiting

space in Domotex fair and organisation of national design competition would be beneficial for Nepal.

Nepali private business community also need to learn to work together. They are at times, accused of being silent at needed hours and not joining hands together for overall national export of carpet. Nepali private carpet community needs to explore newer markets, take a lead role in establishing special carpet zone equipped with required infrastructure, enhance design development and organise promotional campaigns in potential markets. Making a brand name for Nepali carpet, create our own labelling, product promotion in potential markets and product diversification are the key challenges the industry faces.

It also faces a number of daunting problems like politicisation of labour and frequent strikes, disability in timely delivery due to unrests, increase in labour wages, devaluation of US dollar and lack of quality monitoring for the carpet exported. More assistance from Nepali government is needed and the private carpet community in Nepal should get engaged more responsibly for a meaningful Domotex participation in future.





Every year
around 10,000
travelers from
Britain go all
over the world
to raft.

Rafting, kayaking in Nepal

■ Raman Grandon



Long trips, huge sandy beaches, friendly people and warm whitewater are the unique features of rafting and kayaking in Nepal's rivers; which Rob Hind, a Briton has fallen in love with. Rob has been coming to Nepal for kayaking on a regular basis since 1991. He comes here at least once a year, particularly during autumn season when the rivers are swelling and rapids are in full swing.

In the early days, Rob read a lot about adventures of people in rivers. "Mike Jones, 'Canoeing down Everest' and Hillary's historic raft down from Brahmaputra to the Ganges were some of the best accounts of rafting adventure circulated around. It didn't take much time to realise that I had developed an inner instinct and knack for kayaking and rafting," says he.

During his first trip Rob stayed two and a half months rafting in Sunkoshi and Tamba Koshi wrapping up with a weeklong sightseeing in Kathmandu. Even in the midst of Maoist insurgency when many tourists cancelled their trips to Nepal Rob continued to come back. However, he believes, only 40 % of adventurers took the risk of coming back.

He recalls, "We stopped doing Karnali completely between 2002 and 2006 as the extortion drive by Maoists in the area increased rapidly. In 2002, a very bitter incident happened when Maoists took away cameras of some of our guests. Even before that we used to donate large sums of money for the rafting trips." The last time he remembers paying donation was in October of 2006, a month before the peace agreement.

According to Rob, except for very few kayak magazines and local travel agents there is not much effort to promote Nepal rafting. He deems it quite necessary for Nepali government to regularly give coverage and publicise rafting activities in Europe and America. "I think Nepali tourism industry should focus on improving the

conditions of road and operating more motels and restaurants in and around the destination. There is also a good prospect of opening up more rivers for rafting in Nepal. We can also run cross border trips from Nepal to India particularly from far western region of Nepal. For example, Kali River in Mahendranagar could provide the longest and smoothest ride possible, ending at the Indian side."

There is no denying that Nepal has become one of the cheapest yet best places for novice kayakers and rafters from all over the world to learn and experience rafting skills. For instance, Kayak clinics run by local agencies in Sunkoshi and Seti Rivers are a class apart.

Rob says, "Back in 1994 there were hardly any kayakers in Nepal. Over the years the number of Nepali talents has increased. Now you can easily see Nepali rafters getting employed in places like Japan, America and Europe. They are really good."

Every year around 10,000 travelers from Britain go all over the world to raft. Although Scotland and Nottingham have famous rafting places, Britons regularly go to France in Europe and other hot spots like Nepal, India, Bhutan, Pakistan, Tibet, America and Australia. They also travel to Turkey in May, Zimbabwe in September, come to Nepal in October-November and then head over to Chile during Jan-Feb.

The biggest threat as of now to all the rivers across the world is obviously the unplanned construction of huge and environmentally sensitive hydroelectric dams. Rob agrees that Nepal has not been able to remain far from this reality. "Before, we used to run five day long trips in Kali Gandaki from Baglung to Ramdi. But with the installment of a dam across the upper section, the duration has sadly been reduced to three days." Similar encroachment in Marshyangdi has also affected the rafting trips. A prime tourist attraction and an important source of revenue in the country, this sport needs to be promoted better. ■

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