



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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Donors promised required support to carry out developmental works in Nepal but insisted that elections in a free and fair atmosphere alone would transform the country into a peaceful democratic country.



Half the population to boycott polls More uncertain

■ nf correspondent

If the country goes to the polls in April - a reiteration that the government has made time and again - at least half the population will be boycotting it. That this elections will be owned only by the 'other half' became clear after the United Madhesh Democratic front (UMDF), an umbrella platform of three Terai groups, declared, "we are out of the election process," after their talks with the government broke down.

Unfazed by the boycott, Koirala and the seven-party alliance that he leads, announced that elections to the constituent assembly will be held at any cost, and, "necessary force will be used to deal with those trying to obstruct it." But the 'boycott' has already brought in the debate, how acceptable will the poll outcome be. A prominent civil society leader even suggested that 'it is time that Nepal army came forward as a defender of democracy' and stopped the current 'misrule.'

In line with their declaration, the UMDF and its constituents skipped submitting the list of their candidates under the 'proportional representation system' on February 24, the extended deadline for the purpose. "We are not going to field any candidates for the first past the post system as well," said Upendra Yadav, leader of the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF).

Along with the UMDF, Rashtriya Janashakti Party (RJP), headed by former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, would be boycotting the polls. The RJP was firm that "there is no point in participating in the election if the issues raised by the UMDF and ethnic groups are not addressed properly." The election commission was cautiously watching the development and appeared to be in no position to 'guarantee' that it will hold the polls on schedule. As this paper goes to the press, the election commission is still waiting to see how smooth the filing of nomination of candidates in 240 constituencies under the first past the post system proceeds. "We are keeping our fingers crossed," a commissioner told Newsfront.

The extensive dialogues between the government and the UMDF following the one hosted by Indian ambassador, SS Mukherjee on February 20, broke down three days later after PM GP Koirala said, "I cannot accept the demand for one Madhesh, one Pradesh (province)."

"We are out of the electoral process," was the instant reaction from Yadav who along with his colleague JP Yadav, set out to Terai to accelerate the ongoing movement for more autonomy. Koirala had consulted Maoist Chief Prachanda and CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Nepal before he said 'no' to UMDF's six-point demands.

The boycott by Terai groups will directly affect the election in 125 out of 240 constituencies in the country. Together, these constituencies scattered across 22 districts along Nepal's border with India have more than 48 per cent of the total population. But PM Koirala is believed to have told his colleagues that a controversial lobbyist for government of India cum academic who was recently in Nepal has asked to him concede the demand for, "one Madhesh one Pradesh since the government of India wants that." ■

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Ticket row

PM - anti youth?

Prime Minister GP Koirala's agonies seem to have just begun. He stands accused of being anti-youth by his own colleagues and camp followers. According to the official assessment of the Nepali Congress which

Koirala heads, at least two third of the candidates have been decided by him, while Deuba who headed the Nepali Congress (D) until the two parties united last year, was allowed to finalise around 25 per cent of the names. Except for case of Dr. Minendra Rijal, Deuba was able to incorporate most of his followers.

Rijal's candidature from Morang was vetoed by Koirala who was determined to have Mahesh Acharya, his nephew from the place. Koirala however, was able to pacify Rijal that he would be accommodated under the Proportional Representation (PR) system. But this was only a minor issue compared to the swollen fury of the party youths who demonstrated outside the PM's Baluwatar residence on

Feb 23 and 24, demanding that the entire list be reviewed to give dignified representation to the youths under the first past the post system as well as the PR system.

The youths led and chanted the slogans of the mass movement of 2006. "Denying them space while deciding on the tickets was unfortunate," Gagan Thapa, former General Secretary of the Nepal Students Union, the student wing of Nepali Congress told newsfront. According to the party sources, Tika Choudhary, former Student Union President of the PK Campus is the only one who has been given ticket to contest the election to the constituent assembly, although at least 30 such names had been forwarded by the party's respective committees. Guru Ghimire, Vishwa Mohan Sharma, Umesh Rayamajhi, Nirmal Pokhrel besides Thapa were the names recommended by the respective parties.

Available data suggests that at least 9.2 million voters -

equivalent to 51 per cent of the total electorate constitutes the electoral list. By denying them adequate representation, Nepali Congress has projected an 'anti-youth face'. The protesting youths also accused the Congress leadership, mainly the PM and the Congress president - GP Koirala, of having flouted the party constitution since the parliamentary board that finalises the candidates has not been duly formed.

"It is only the central committee (CC) of the Congress party that can form such a board, and the CC's last official and formal meeting that was held on Ashoj 20 did not form such a body," a central committee member said. Other members of the party's central committee also alleged that money was being distributed from the PM's official residence to the candidates whose names have been finalised. "Each candidate was given Rs. One lakh each as the first installment of the undisclosed amount from there," the member said.

Embassy meeting

Diplomatic indecency - says civil society

Leaders from political parties and the civil society, both long time admirers of India, for its role in restoration of peace and democracy, have come out openly against the Southern neighbour after its embassy in Kathmandu hosted a meeting of leaders belonging to the United Madhesh Democratic Front (UMDF) and the Nepali Congress recently, ostensibly to find a solution to the Terai problem.

The meeting that was held at the initiative and hospitality of Ambassador Shiv Shanker Mukherjee on February 20 broke down since neither the UMDF leaders agreed to call off the agitation as suggested by him, nor the Congress leaders could spell out what they could offer to the UMDF. But the issue has now taken a new turn with the civil society leaders stating that the meeting was clearly directed against the acceptable diplomatic norms.

"It was uncharitable and an outright meddling into Nepal's affairs," said Devendra Raj Pandey, a prominent civil society leader who has been lying low for some time. But the harshest criticism bordering on sheer frustration came from Vishwanath Upadhyay who told some prominent leaders of the ruling party as well as the civil society that such behaviour was unacceptable. "If this is acceptable, then you must be ready to hand over Nepal to India," said the former chief justice of the Supreme Court.

The issue became a topic of discussion in the cabinet on February 21 when Maoists, Janamorcha and UML ministers all raised the issue in chorus and lodged their objection. "We will not be bound to the deals clinched in the embassy," said Information Minister and Maoist leader, Krishna Bahadur Mahara. But Prime Minister GP Koirala tried to outsmart them all by feigning ignorance about such a meeting having taken place.

Jaya Prakash Gupta, UMDF leader, said it was clearly at the behest of the PM, "that we went there." "We would not have gone there otherwise," he said. "This was done with two purposes and designs of the PM," one of the five UMDF participants told newsfront. "Firstly, Koirala wanted to show the country that UMDF was under effective control of the Indian embassy, and secondly, it was done to bolster the nationalist image of his daughter Sujata Koirala." "He wants to project her as someone who refuses to be dictated by Indian Embassy, and that is why he sent along with her other members or relatives of the Koirala family too," he added.

Amod Upadhyay, Shekhar Koirala and Mahesh Acharya had participated in the Mukherjee brokered attempt in the embassy. "No matter who went there, it was a disgrace to our sovereignty and nationalism," the prominent student leader, Gagan Thapa, said.

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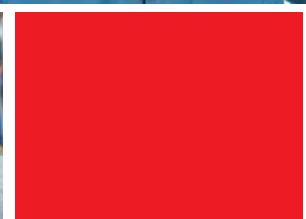
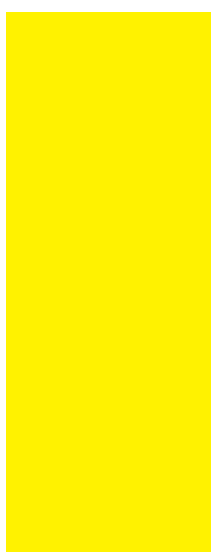
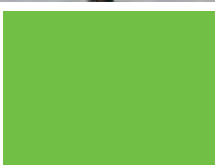
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Attacked

EC seems less confident

The election commission, a centre of hope to those who want a fair election in the country, is more vulnerable to attack by the anti-election forces, but the government seems poorly equipped to provide it with the necessary security. The poor security of Election Commission, and the recent attack on its helicopter in Rautahat seems to have dampened the spirit of the commission. Will it now be able to match the expectation of the people?

Multiple failure and delay in completing key election related works has caused further erosion in the spirit and confidence of the commission. Printing of ballot papers has not yet begun and is likely to get delayed as there are doubts if the process of filing nominations and withdrawal, as well as scrutiny will be on time. The commission reviewed the situation after the cabinet asked it to extend the date for receiving the 'closed list' of candidates under the proportional representation system, from Feb 20 to Feb 24.

The attack on its helicopter in Rautahat district on February 22 was taken by the commission as a serious flaw on the part of the

State to provide adequate security to the commission. The helicopter, that had gone there with some electoral officers and the equipment for necessary training, was attacked. But it managed to fly back in hurry without suffering any damage. "Nevertheless, we have taken into account the development that took place and we are going to take it up with the government," a senior official in the commission said.

"Most parts of the country, mainly Terai, are in flames and we have to transport election materials and officials by planes..... and the attack on the helicopter in Rautahat sends an ominous sign," the official said.

The commission is also worried about the huge expenditure it has met in transporting officials and materials already; since all that it spent the last time went a waste, after the government pulled off the elections slated for November 22.

"We spent Rs two lakhs in transporting materials and officials for the 240 constituencies under the first past the post system, and even this time, we have incurred huge expenditure without being certain if the election will take place," another official pleading anonymity, told newsfront.

■ nf correspondent

Ignoring threats of political isolation and ridicule, KP Bhattarai, the octogenarian leader of the Nepali Congress, does what he believes in. "This country as well as democracy will need a politics based on national reconciliation and any politics that does not recognise this fact will only be a temporary phenomenon," he told newsfront.

A look at his guest list when he turned 84 on February 20 simply proved he would do only what he believed in. King Gyanendra, accompanied by wife Komal, son Paras and daughter in law, Himani were his guests in Hotel Himalaya at Kopundol. Other faces in the same party included most of the former prime ministers - Kirti Nidhi Bista, Marichman Singh, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, besides all the former speakers as well as Subhash Nembwang - the one chairing the controversial interim parliament, in addition to UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and Minister Sahana Pradhan.

"I think this country needs constitutional monarchy for another 300 years," Bhattarai told media persons who asked for his comment and the reason he invited the King. Prime Minister GP Koirala and Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur



Deuba cancelled their visit to Hotel Himalaya once the news of the royal family's presence reached them. But both the leaders had visited Bhattarai's Bhainsepati residence a day earlier when an elaborate Pooja had been performed to mark the occasion.

"PL, I am fine if the country survives and democracy flourishes," King Gyanendra whispered in the ears of PL Singh, a former Mayor of Kathmandu and someone Bhattarai seems to have a great liking for.

Madhav Nepal said, "Maybe Bhattarai still has his 'old belief' that guides him politically, but the situation

has changed a lot now." Yet for many, Bhattarai's beliefs are not out of place.

Former Chief Justice and the key architect of the 1990 constitution was seething with anger over the news of Nepali leaders meeting inside the Indian embassy to find a solution to Terai problems. "Why can't you hand over the country to India so that you do not have to feel ashamed about incidents as these," Upadhyay asked the people around.

There were many diplomats present, including UNMIN's Ian Martin; but the Indian ambassador, Shiv Shanker Mukherjee was not present when Upadhyay made the loud comment. The only group that chose to turn down Bhattarai's invitation was the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists.

Bhattarai, seated in a wheel chair, however, seemed to be in a high-spirit. "This is a great country with tremendous strength and opportunities to tide over the crisis." And to achieve all that, his recommendation was but obvious - "We must follow the policy of national reconciliation propounded by BP and Ganeshmanji.....Constitutional monarchy and the democratic forces led by Nepali Congress should work together to save this country's independence, nationalism and democracy."

Newsbrief



Angry students vandalise a public transport on Sunday at Jamal, Kathmandu after they were denied concession in fare, as fuel runs short.

Nude protest

A court in Bihar recently awarded life sentence to India's don parliamentarian, Pappu Yadav, for killing Ajit Sarkar, a CPI-M member of the Bihar assembly more than decade ago. Sarkar, a popular multi-term legislator from Bihar's Purnea district had a funny habit

and still funnier explanation when the issue he raised in the issue would go un-noticed.

He used to just rush up to the well of the House, climb on the reporter's table there and strip off all his clothes, saying, "If this house does not take note of the plight of the ordinary people whom I represent, the only way I can attract the attention of the government is by standing naked in the House." And that quite often brought the desired results.

No one knows if this is what exactly what a Badi woman tried a few months ago while leading a protest demonstration outside Singha Durbar as their repeated attempt to attract government seriousness to their demands went unheard. But the trend seems to be catching up.

The latest to follow the Ajit Sarkar pattern in Nepal was Swami Bikashananda who runs a cult called 'Manokranti.' Angry that the media was not giving enough coverage to 'the great

things he had been doing for the country,' he got a group of his followers to parade naked in New Road recently. The police arrested them and is planning to lodge a case of 'obscenity and indecent behaviour in public,' but Bikashananda is not scared. He is apparently busy devising more innovative methods to raise his points. But will he be able to have media to follow him now?

Good-will

No matter what the standing of Prime Minister GP Koirala's is in his own country with his failing image, he has a reason to feel 'resourceful' in the friendly countries. And he makes it heard loudly and clearly in the early hours at his residence where the members of his 'coterie' have access to his bed room.

The message that these coterie members come out with is interesting, that it was at the behest of Koirala that his Indian counterpart, Man Mohan Singh chose to extend the tenure of SS Mukherjee until April in Nepal. Koirala, they assert, told Singh that it would be a proof of India's commitment to the polls if Mukherjee is allowed to stay here few more months.

Singh, whose posting to London as India's high Commissioner has already been notified, will have less time to spend there. While witnessing Nepal's transition into a republic from a monarchy here, he will have to present his credentials to Her Majesty there.

Exit RAW Chief?

There are intense speculations that India's external Intelligence Agency - Research and Analysis Wing, commonly known as RAW is up for a major shake-up that could see replacement of its current chief A K Chaturvedi, soon.

In a recent write up in the Middle East Times, its editor Claude Salhani said if that happened, this will be the first time that an incumbent chief would have been shown the door. The write-up gives details of Chaturvedi's personal mannerism as well as 'lack of knowledge on external affairs' that could be responsible for his likely exit before time.

Giving some details, it says Chaturvedi displayed a coarse and abrasive manner when he met with Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, during the latter's visit to India. "...Karzai even complained to Man Mohan Singh over the way he was spoken to by the RAW chief. According to Afghan sources, Chaturvedi treated Karzai like a servant rather than a Head of State and spoke to him while chewing and spitting out tobacco," Claude's write-up - 'India's Intel Chief lacking intelligence,' said.

The write up also attributes Nepali sources having claimed that Chaturvedi forced the interim government of Girija Prasad Koirala to award a contract to an Indian firm for a hydropower project. "Questions have been raised in India as to why the Head of an Indian intelligence agency was promoting a commercial company in Nepal," the article said. It has also been alleged that Chaturvedi may have financially benefited personally from the deal.

Politicians in Nepal are also extremely upset with Chaturvedi, who made a number of visits to the country last December which were all caustically detailed by the Nepali press. To humiliate Chaturvedi, the media even published the names of all the RAW officers stationed at the Kathmandu embassy.

School vandalised

Vicki Subirana, the Founder Director of VEDFON, Spain, who has been providing quality education to poor children of Nepal for

the past 18 years reported that one of the two schools she has been helping run - at Daleki School in Samakhusi - was broken into and robbed of the jewellery the approximate cost of which is 1000 Euros, on 18 Feb. The jewellery project was in place to support the school activities.

Soon after, on Feb 21, the school was vandalised. A case has been lodged with Maharajganj police station. Police said they will look into the case. The case lodged with the police alleged Tashi Dolma Sherpa (the principal of Daleki School and Chairman of VEDFON), and her husband Nawa Raj Regmi (accountant in the administration office of the school project) for vandalising the school. The school administration has also asked the police not let the accused leave the country. The allegations are made on the basis of evidence provided by four witnesses.

Ms Subirana said she has also apprised the social welfare board about the incident seeking the board's intervention in the matter.

YCL's safety

Despite Maoist party's commitment to face the electorate, it does not seem fully convinced that the election will take place. It has asked its Young Communist League (YCL) cadres not to live in big groups but rather split into smaller units.

The verbal directive to the YCL from its leaders follows Baburam Bhattarai's moving away to a new residence from Naya Bazar where he was living with Prachanda. After all, YCL activists are the most 'precious' muscles that Maoist leaders will need during the election, if at all they take place.

The party has already decided to post at least 200 YCL activists in each of the 16,000 plus booths across the country. The recent instruction of the party also follows recent raids by the government in five houses in the capital which are under occupation of the YCL.



Editor & Publisher : Yubaraj Ghimire
 Executive Editor : Sushma Amatya
 News Coordinator : Manoj Dahal
 Design : Sunil Khadgi, Kishor Raj Panta & Ramkrishna Rana
 Address : PO Box: 8830, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal
 Tel : 4443888, Fax : 4421147 (Edt.), 4411912 (Mkt.)
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Point to Ponder

He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual.

- Thomas Jefferson

Private affair

By all indications, the GP Koirala led government is all set to hold elections to the constituent assembly in April. It is likely to happen not because a conducive atmosphere prevails for it, but because the power-thirsty politician, at 84, knows he can at least prolong his days in power by a couple of months more, if election of any type and at any cost is held.

Donors are skeptical about the legitimacy or acceptability of the outcome as they have clearly stated that law and order situation needs to be improved for free and fair polls.

The government which has lost its constitutional legitimacy by all account is running the country on its whims. It is a government of, by and for three parties, with citizens having no stake in it. It is not at all answerable to any institution for whatever decision it takes.

Such irresponsible decisions credited to the present government abound. The latest in the series is, forcing Election Commission (EC) to extend its deadline to accept the 'list' of candidates for the political parties under the proportional representation system from February 20 to 24. An Election Commission that simply follows dictates from the executive is worthless; and in absence of freedom, character and courage to act independent from the executive, the commission can play havoc in the name of election and democracy.

The EC's claim that it has done all that to assist in the peace process simply sounds hollow. It has only acted as a pliable tool in the hand of the government which looks like

a privately run institution where just three individuals, GP Koirala, Madhav Nepal and Prachanda seem to matter.

It all might have been done under a good faith to facilitate the Madheshi group to submit the list of their candidates, as no one in the right senses could imagine an election to the constituent assembly without Madhesh, home of 48 per cent of the total population, participating in it. But it will simply be an insult to Madhesh and entire Nepal to foist an executive decision over the Election Commission by herding Madhesh leaders and three relatives of the Prime Minister, all belonging to the Nepali Congress, allegedly after they were asked to come to an understanding by a friendly country in its embassy premises.

The EC needs to derive its strength through constitution. The manner it has acted is unconstitutional, and smacks of servility. Madhesh needs to be incorporated actively in the election process. Nor can Janajatis and other marginalised groups can be left out from the process. The political parties need to arrive at an understanding on the basis of defining decentralised administrative system and for that a well thought out machinery needs to be formed. Koirala does not want to go into the substance of the issues, and wants Madhesh and every other group to join election process on his term. Such an election will just be a farce and that will not be representing people's will in anyway.



Letters

PM and India

How dare our current PM Girija Prasad try to sell the sovereignty of Nepal to India? Just to remain in power and to perpetuate his dynasty? What else does the involvement of Indian current and former ambassadors in resolving our internal problems, signify?

Nepali people should call for his resignation. It seems that Madhav Nepal and Prachandha are also no different from Koirala. Otherwise how could they shamelessly remain quiet while Girija's henchmen sit together with the Indian government agents and decide to effectively ruin us Nepalis? Has anybody seen examples from contemporary history when an 18 day or 20 day movement leads to the leader of the country voluntarily agreeing to disintegration of the country?

■ **Avantika Regmi**
Kathmandu

Dictator Koirala

GP Koirala has proved that he will go to any extent to stick to the chair; and for us to believe that elections will be free and fair under him, is foolish. He chose not to address any of the issues that are related with defining the model of decentralisation or federalism. He

simply tried to show that he is the only one capable of solving all the problems of this country, and any group, be it Madheshi or Janajatis or any other, should come to him.

He, like newsfront said in its latest issue, is a megalomaniac and in recent days, he is behaving like an absolute dictator. He is doing everything to ensure that his daughter inherits the post of PM from him. These are not things someone believing in democracy or fair election would want to do. That only proves that Koirala is not at all keen to hold a free

and fair election.

■ **Mohan K C**
Chabahil

Is this true?

Being avid readers of your paper, we are wondering if you could verify this information we came across - that during his tenure as Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba had signed an agreement with IOC (Indian Oil Corporation) which said that Nepal will buy petroleum products only from IOC and from no other party. In the light of the present crisis, perhaps the government needs to clarify the whole issue.

■ **Ashok and Shreya**
Sherchan

Budanilkantha
(Newsfront: As per the information we received from government sources, there is no such treaty that exists.)

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

newsfront@bhrikuti.com



Spiritual Corner

No separation exists

Muso Soseki (1275-1351) was an abbot of a Zen monastery, an advisor to shoguns and emperors and a garden designer. He and the first Ashikaga shogun, Takauji, established Zen as the dominate Buddhist sect in Japan and had Zen temples built in all 66 provinces. Soseki taught a large number of students, wrote an enormous amount of poetry, and became the most renowned Zen master of his time. He was given the title of a national teacher.

Muso Soseki's poetry:

Green mountains have turned yellow so many times
 The troubles and worries of the world of things

no longer bother me. One grain of dust in the eye will render the three worlds too small to see. When the mind is still the floor where I sit is endless space.

A virtuous man when alone loves the quiet of the mountains.

A wise man in nature enjoys the purity of water.

One must not be suspicious of the folks



who take pleasure in mountains and streams, But rather measure how well he sharpens his spirits by them.

The mountain range the stones in the water all are strange and rare. The beautiful landscape, as we know belongs to those who are like it.

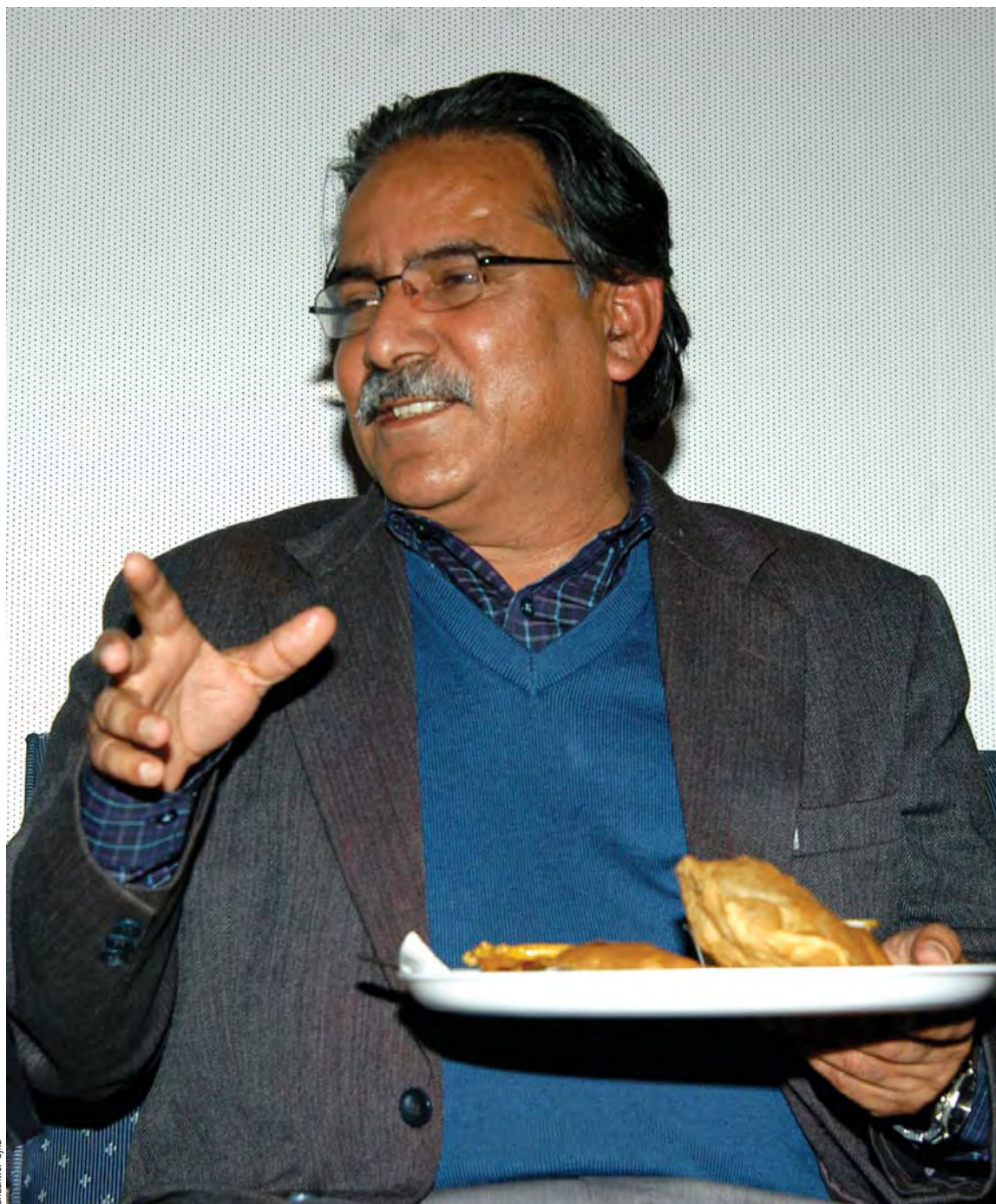
The upper worlds, the lower worlds originally is one thing
 There is not a bit of dust
 there is only this still and full

perfect enlightenment

A runaway son, will never come, into his own
 My treasure is the cloud on the peak
 the moon over the valley
 Traveling east or west, light and free, on the one road
 I don't know whether I'm on the way or at home

In the real world, the pure world, no separation exists
 why wait for another time and another meeting
 the teaching on Vulture Peak is here today
 who else are you looking for to preserve the way?

What else to expect when, for almost two decades now, the right of the Nepali people to a proper education has been substituted by NGOs and INGOs doing 'capacity building'? Had the money poured into these elite groups been spent from the onset of foreign aid in this country on education, we wouldn't be at the impasse we are now at.



Bhaskar Chha

The last argument is that the economic situation and the continuing conflict mean the situation is not right for liberal democratic ideas. But we'll never have healthy commerce and growth unless there is transparency and that means democracy. Totalitarian states have never been transparent, not over the last couple of millennia of recorded history anyway.

What has 'D' got to do with literacy?

What have all these foreign correspondents been looking at?

■ The wanderer

What is it about our politicians that makes it seemingly impossible for them to follow democratic norms? For well over a decade we, the people, the demes of the D word, have watched while time after time all opposition has been on the streets. We have watched the capture of foreign media and foreign organisations by elite who claim to speak 'for the people.' The other day an old ex-pat colleague, returning here after a couple of years, told me: "It's unbelievable. Outside people are given to believe that all's alright in Nepal now that the Maoists have come into the government. But it's on the brink of civil war it seems. What have all these foreign correspondents been looking at?"

Well, it might be peaceful if folks are prepared to pay up to the YCL and give in to their threats: "Vote for our party or we'll take care of you afterwards," or if politicians from other parties could get to their constituencies without being hounded out by the Maoists. Mr. Dahal will no doubt say this didn't happen, but it is happening and none of it is democratic. If he's

truly serious, he should address that to the satisfaction of the silent majority.

So what are all these parties serious about from Koirala, to Lotus Blossom, to MKN, to UNMIN, to the Terai separatists? Well, it certainly isn't democracy and they've left us all wide open to disintegration and civil war. It rather makes one suspect that they, our foreign friends, don't democratize their sources of information, but restrict themselves to selected elite intellectuals who pontificate from their armchairs and posh living rooms.

What else to expect when, for almost two decades now, the right of the Nepali people to a proper education has been substituted by NGOs and INGOs doing 'capacity building'? Had the money poured into these elite groups been spent from the onset of foreign aid in this country on education, we wouldn't be at the impasse we are now at. But education doesn't channel money back to the source, nor information, nor does it massage the egos of a 'driven' elite who don't know what it's like not to have a meal every day. Now, with the Terai burning, they might get a chance to

find out!

So now is the time for the democracy detractors. The stock arguments, beginning as always with the premise: "Democracy doesn't work in Nepal. People don't understand it and they're illiterate."

To refute this argument is easy. What has literacy to do with intelligence quotient? Someone somewhere is probably herding buffalo, and unfortunately he or she is illiterate, but would perhaps do a better job of governing this country than the current leadership incarnations.

The second argument is always about Asian values. Democracy is not fit for our soil. Please read Amartya Sen a little more closely and you will see that he writes of many democratic forms of governance way back in history that took root in Asia and Africa. Without liberal democratic norms, how do you expect respect for other people's cultures and traditions? The first thing fascist totalitarian regimes do is impose a monoculture to which everyone has to adhere. What is a one-party state but a monoculture? George Orwell's '1984' describes such a state perfectly.

When liberal democratic ideas do embrace the community, when people have inalienable rights, they are more willing to include others in these rights. Except that we are not. We don't do this, we somehow can't do this.

Democracy isn't a single system, like a chameleon it adapts to cultures and individuals: it takes on forms that are compassionate and committed. It is government by the people, not by an interim government or constituent assembly that has already decided how things are going to be! That is certainly not democracy. It is nascent fascism. Unless the Alliance respects the right of the people to be free of control and vote according to conscience without fear or force, any hopes this nation had of democracy will be crushed.

The last argument is that the economic situation and the continuing conflict mean the situation is not right for liberal democratic ideas. But we'll never have healthy commerce and growth unless there is transparency and that means democracy. Totalitarian states have never been transparent, not over the last couple of millennia of recorded history anyway.

We don't have clearly defined

rights, there's one law for political sycophants and another for those who are not. Our laws are out there on the streets burning tires. Observing that the interim government made a number of illegal decisions, it was logical of Terai politicians to think they could push for another illegal one. The Alliance has only itself to blame for the current impasse.

Democracy is clear about a couple of points: rule of law and all are equal before the law. We have never been able to do this.

Looking back it was a mistake not to call a general election. This CA election will be a farce without the Terai. Terai leaders should also reflect on their demand to separate. True they can cripple the valley and the hills, but there are dangers in this kind of game. The hills may well be forced to seek trade and supply routes north at great expense just to survive (our neighbor to the south may have to grin and bear that), but our Himalayas are the source of Asian water towers. Should the other half of this nation decide to 'undemocratically' control or delay this source, where will it leave the plains? Just think about that! ■

Rulers need to change

In practice, the 'Shree Panch' autocracy is replaced by the 'Shree Seven' autocracy. This is a sad reality.



■ Uday Pariyar

Replicating the seven parties, many groups have now come up claiming to fight on behalf of their people. They also claim that they have the “mandates” of their people to do as they wish. They have also begun to take law into their own hands. As a result, the ruling parties are now greeted with strong opposition, mainly in Terai areas.

One evening I was watching a TV talk show with one of the key party leaders. He claimed repeatedly that his party was the ultimate saviour of this country. If his party performed poorly in elections, the nation was bound to meet with unexpected disasters. All hopes of the people for peace and development would be dashed. New found Loktantra would be lost. The 'enemies' of the people would raise their ugly heads once again. So, it was important that his party get the majority in the April polls. Failure of his party would mean failure of Nepal.

Sadly, he had no convincing facts or evidence to back his claims. He had no policies and programmes upon which people could take a decision on whether or not to vote for his party. It was certainly not a clever way of asking people for their support. Probably, his party does not yet have an election manifesto. The interviewer carried a satirical smile on his face, clearly indicating he hardly believed anything the leader was saying. It was great fun to watch the show.

I noticed one interesting character of his statements. He defined all his arguments and claims as “people's mandates” or “people's directives” or “people's desires and aspirations.” I literally counted the number of times he quoted “people” – more than 100 times in about 30 minute show. Almost all the sentences he spoke

began by stating that people of Nepal had wanted his party to do this and not that. Then suddenly, lights went off – the beginning of a four hour rolling blackout. I wondered if people of Nepal wanted this as well.

In fact, this is the common attitude of the current ruling elite. They claim that they have the ‘people's mandate’ to do whatever they like. They were not elected to power but they believe they have more powers than elected officials. Often they think of themselves above the law of the land. They often do not follow the agreements they signed and the laws they enforced. For instance, the nominated interim parliament i.e. ruling parties made many landmark decisions including the republic.

They did not think it necessary to take public opinion on this and other critical issues through elections or a referendum. People were deliberately and consistently prevented from decision-making. It has been quite long since the people of Nepal were barred from making their own choice on their future and the future of the country. Sometimes the King did things as he liked in the name of untested people's mandates and now the ruling parties are doing what they like on behalf of the people. In practice, the ‘Shree Paanch’ autocracy is replaced by the ‘Shree Seven’ autocracy. This is a sad reality.

Such a serious lack of accountabil-

ity on the part of the government and the ruling parties has created the ground for similar attitude and activities by other individuals and groups. This is one of the fundamental underlying reasons behind the mushrooming violent and non-violent groups in Terai and other parts of the country. If one does not follow any rules of the game, why would the others bother to follow them?

Replicating the seven parties, many groups have now come up claiming to fight on behalf of their people. They also claim that they have the “mandates” of their people to do as they wish. They have also begun to take law into their own hands. As a result, the ruling parties are now greeted with strong opposition, mainly in Terai areas. The anti-SPA movement picked up so quickly following the Jana Andolan II. Do the parties in power realise that their own actions were also contributing to the problems? If they do not realise their mistakes and weaknesses in good time, things will become worse.

Of course, it is important to hold elections at the earliest. The elections must be free and fair. Otherwise, Nepal could be in a situation where Kenya is now. Credible elections will create a common platform, hopefully, for everyone to raise and discuss their concerns. But which party gets the majority is not and should not be the priority for now because it is meant to be a one-off elected body to

formulate the new constitution and draw up new structures for the country. It is not meant to act as a parliament and form the government.

The constituent assembly is most likely to be dominated by the ruling parties, which means the current top party leaders are highly likely to control the assembly. They will control the assembly, even if they are not in the assembly, as party whips. Therefore, what will be achieved from the coveted body will be determined by the positions and activities of the current rulers.

So, it is important that they change their attitude and behaviour now. That change should be seen in their actions right from now. If they continue with the same attitude, the elected body might not be able to satisfy and engage all forces. Looking at the current practice, there is no guarantee that the parties will honour the spirit of the new statute. In that case, the country could face bigger problems. The people's aims for peace, democracy and development might not be fulfilled, once again.

However, our experience is that creating a wonderful constitution alone is not a guarantee for the better future. The best safeguard to a peaceful, prosperous and new Nepal is not election per se, but the attitude and behaviour of those in power.
(ud.pariyar@gmail.com)

KP Bhattarai's birthday wishes

It does not help to simply brush off his comment saying that he holds an old mindset and his thoughts are outdated.



■ Binod P. Bista

KP Bhattarai or Kishunjee (to those who know him well), one of the key founder members of the Nepali Congress, and its long time president has faced many upheavals, including excitement and misery, in the 84 years that he lived in Nepal. He has the single most distinction of a Nepali political leader who preferred to fight for democracy and peoples' right from within the country rather than taking refuge in a foreign land.

His commitment and dedication to democratic ideals is unquestionable. His distinguished career as the prime minister of a democratic Nepal came to an abrupt end at the hands of his close confidants and party leaders. He left the party that he helped to establish and develop in the difficult years in Nepali politics after grand standing a comeback for the reunification of the two factions of the Nepali Congress on the eve of the earlier planned constituent assembly elections.

One of the major reasons for his retirement from politics for good was attributed to the decision of the Nepali Congress to deviate from its core principle, worked out by none other than the late BP Koirala, perhaps the only Nepali leader who had all the qualities of a statesman. That principle called for Nepali Congress, to work in close cooperation with Nepal's founder institution, the institution of monarchy, for steering Nepal, a country of diverse ethnic



groups and religions into a stable, democratic state.

After having suffered twice in the hands of Nepal's ambitious monarchs, the latest being as recent as 2005, the Nepali Congress decided to drop the two pillar theory (also espoused strongly by India until the king took power) and declared that the institution of monarchy did not help the party in anyway. In fact, some of its younger leaders saw that the institution was an obstacle rather than a support in the development of Nepal.

KP Bhattarai openly opposed the decision of his party and appealed its leaders to reconsider the decision. At every available opportunity he has been making a case for the institution of monarchy that he believes is necessary for the survival of Nepal. A staunch nationalist, he might have got the biggest jolt of his life last week when his former party, the leader of the seven party coalition government as well as the legislative parliament, not only called Nepal's close friend of the South, India, to help Nepal resolve the Terai problem, but also agreed to be mediated by an Indian national within the Indian Embassy compound in the capital of Nepal.

Just a few days ago, the prime minister of Nepal, belonging to Nepali Congress, is reported to have informed an Indian delegation led by

the ruling Congress party that he would accept everything in the Terai conflict except intervention by the UN or matters regarding Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

During his 84th birthday reception at Hotel Himalaya in Kathmandu, KP stated in no uncertain terms that as he expects to live for full 100 years and he also believes that the institution of monarchy should remain for another 300 years in Nepal. Have these expressions come out from an exasperated man? Has he lost his sanity or, are these simply his birthday wishes?

KP Bhattarai's track record in Nepali politics shines brightly. It was he who first negotiated and coordinated an agreeable compact between the people of Nepal and the king in 1990 after peoples' movement known as Jana Andolan I. It is worth noting that the 1990 constitution of Nepal was possible, and also agreeable to all parties including the yet to be born insurgents, which gave full sovereignty to the Nepali people.

Considering the fact that the kings of Nepal had been ruling over the kingdom for almost 30 years in a party less format, it was no easy task to transfer power from an absolute monarch to the people in a poor country. KP performed a near miracle by succeeding in this endeavor with hardly any bloodshed and major problems at the time.

It does not help to simply brush off his comment saying that he holds an old mindset and his thoughts are outdated. In fact, the Nepalis would be insulting the intelligence and contribution made by one of their own. For all the sacrifices and contributions that he made for Nepal, KP deserves to be heard at the minimum. For the sake of a new Nepal, and for a better understanding of the issues at hand, he must elaborate on his stand. The least the people of Nepal could do to this grand old young bachelor would be to listen to him patiently. ■

KP Bhattarai openly opposed the decision of his party and appealed its leaders to reconsider the decision. At every available opportunity he has been making a case for the institution of monarchy that he believes is necessary for the survival of Nepal.

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Prakash Bom

The current democratic process is about to slip away with the extremist demands of the Madheshi movement. The demand at this climax is not the one as originally sought for an autonomous Terai state with the right to self-governance and right to self-determination under the federal system structures. It is the demand that has been convoluted wishfully beyond the norms of federalism that can violate the national integrity.

The demand for an 'autonomous Madheshi region' literally schemes to separate itself from entire nation. None of the other 41 ethnic groups including dominant 'Khash-Pahadi' communities must back-up from defending their existence before it makes way by dismantling Nepal's historical nationhood.

Nepali nationhood is composed of different groups of people who have shared common history of an independent sovereign nation with multi ethnicity, language and culture. That is the spirit of Nepali solidarity despite the feudal oligarchic regime that kept repressing people in the name of Hindu religion and its Hindu institution of the monarchy.

It does not mean that a secular state with the federal democratic republic establishment won't be able to defend its nationhood. Nepalis' nationhood does not just boil down to the heritage of feudal Hindu institution of the monarchy, but it reaches out to the tools of neolithic Kathmandu, to the teachings of Buddha, to Licchivian Buddhist culture and to the pagoda-style monastery of Amiko.

The word 'Nepal' does not derive from 'Khash-Pahadis' but from 'Newari' or 'Nepal Bhasa', one of the indigenous linguistic groups of Nepal. Therefore, to despise the word 'Nepal' or its nationhood with the odium of Khash-Pahadis, who are represented partially by feudal oligarchic establishment, (by Madheshis movements – evidences are flying literally all over - online, news media and on the streets of Nepal) – demonstrates no respect to Nepal's historical nationhood.

Again Madheshis demand for an independent Madheshi statehood with regional autonomy literally meant to dismantle national solidarity that has been sustained with the mutual care of all people of Nepal if not in perfection with the teachings of Buddha – 'Learn to live together, love each other and help one another.' Defend Nepal therefore on these facts of its nationhood from being crossed into pieces at this critical juncture.

All ethnic demand for the constitutional provisions, which guarantee the establishment of federal democratic republic, full proportional representation electoral system for CA elections based on population, and federal republican state on the basis of regional and historical background of ethnicity and linguistics with the right to self-determination, must be fulfilled as long as within all federal states the local government units are formed with the right to self-determination of resident electorates of the constituencies that make a unit

Rajendra Mahato & Upendra Yadav



Consensus of all people of Nepal must be sought

Nepal must VOW to defend its nationhood

of a local government without central or state supremacy.

These demands are legitimate and fully comply with the norms and principle of federalism. Federalism is not end to separate states from a sovereign nation but is the means to sustainability and method for better functionality of governmental responsibility. Madheshi movements have wishfully convoluted the aspect of federalism by demanding 'an autonomous Terai state with the regional autonomy.

What may come, SPA (Seven Party Alliance) leaderships must defend Nepal and its historic nationhood even at the cost of elections that may be accomplished phase wise if it is not viable in the most violent and anti-nationhood districts of Terai. The Prime Minister's stand on Madheshi demand for 'an autonomous Terai state with the regional autonomy' that cannot be decided prior to elections is the most sincere, democratic and respectful remark to Nepal's nationhood that has become so fragile and anguish

by the Madheshi movements and regressive elements.

Madheshi movements' way is not the way to establish the federal democratic republic of Nepal. Consensus of all people of Nepal must be sought if the demand of such as of Madheshi for 'an autonomous

There is no question about the other demands of Madheshi such as proportional representation of ethnic and indigenous groups.

Terai with regional autonomy' is going to be established either prior or after elections. Under Madheshi intimidations if SPA leaderships make such a decision then political instability is unavoidable in defense of national integrity.

In my opinion, Madheshi movements have really punctured the prospect of federalism for Nepal. It has tried to suck all at once with the self-contradictory proposals against the norms of federalism and the dignity of Nepali nationhood. For example, the demand of the full proportional representation electoral system if approved its electoral system will make 100% representation of all ethnic groups of people who are the resident of an autonomous Terai state.

If in a local unit of Terai state there are 90% Madheshi and 10% Dalit under proportional representation electoral system 10% Dalit are also represented both in local unit or state governments. Unless Madheshi have planned to create a homogenous Terai state, there are also residencies in Terai of other ethnic groups

either recently migrated or aboriginal.

The red shading in the map of Nepal is an ambitiously targeted Madheshi state 'autonomous Terai with the regional autonomy.' The map is all over the internet posted by the Madheshi movements. The question here is about the 'red shading' that targets non-Madheshi districts such as Kanchanpur and Kailali, which have settlements, dominated by aboriginal Tharus and migrated Khas-Pahadis. By long shot Khas-Pahadis settlements are more in percent in entire Terai than Madheshi in these two districts.

Every thoughtful Nepali individual has supported Madheshi movement from its beginning. However, at this point with such an extremist demand for 'an autonomous Terai state with the regional autonomy' under the pressures and agitations against the national integrity has set the red alert in the hearts and minds of every Nepali who has respect for their nationhood.

There is no question about the other demands of Madheshi such as proportional representation of ethnic and indigenous groups. However, to implement these demands nation needs a new system of governance. Thus the demand of federal system of government has become a necessity. Nevertheless, this does not mean to intimidate nation for disintegration, by taking advantage of the situation.

Without people's electoral right to self-governance to form their own local government units these demands can never be implement with proportional opportunities for all to serve the nation. Anti-Nepali nationhood agitations, anti people's right to vote political tactics present no solution. Ultimately, it becomes anti-democratic and encourages regressive elements to take the unnecessary advantage of the situation against elections, which is, people's right to vote for establishing essential institutions of democracy. ■

Hill parties rally behind GJM

Almost all political parties in the Hills have expressed solidarity with the people's movement, spearheaded by the pro-Gorkhaland Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) against Subash Ghisingh and his Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). At the moment, the Hills are reeling under an indefinite strike called by GJM since February 20.

On Saturday, BJP convened an all-party meeting at the Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan Hall to discuss the political situation in the region. Representatives of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL), the Communist Party Of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM), the Congress, the Gorkha Rashtriya Congress, the Trinamool Congress, the GJM and the Bharatiya Gorkha Parisangh (BGP) were present. CPM and GNLF stayed away from the meet.

The meet adopted a resolution asking the state to drop the Sixth Schedule proposal and remove Ghisingh as caretaker administrator of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). It condemned municipal affairs minister Asok Bhattacharya's alleged communal remarks on the GJM agitation.

"We want the state government to dismiss Ghisingh and not wait for his

term to expire. This is because he is solely responsible for all the trouble in the Hills," said G S Yonzon, chief of the BJP (hill unit). The demand was made after the state government decided that Ghisingh would not be removed before his term expired on March 24. AIGL attended the meeting though it had skipped such gatherings called by GJM earlier. "It is a jan andolan and we will support it wholeheartedly," AIGL president Madan Tamang said.

The parties felt that Bhattacharya's recent press statement was aimed at inciting the plains people against the hill people.

"How can a political leader give a communal colour to a people's agitation? We demand that he apologize or resign," said K S Ramudamu, GJM vice-president.

"His speech is most unconstitutional. If the state government really believes in democracy, it should remove Bhattacharya and Ghisingh immediately."

"People here are against the Sixth Schedule. Yet, the state government is bent on implementing it. If it is forced on the people, then the state government should be ready to face resistance worse than the one in



Nandigram," warned BGP president C K Shrestha.

He added that his party would sit on dharna in New Delhi on February 28 along with the supporters demanding the formation of Telengana and Bundelkhand states.

Though the meeting did not announce any agitation programme, it has decided to send a delegation to West Bengal and New Delhi shortly and is also likely to approach the Sikkim government for support.

(Times of India)

Sri Lankan rebel violence intensifies

A Tamil Tiger rebel camp was targeted by the Sri Lankan military Saturday, resulting in 51 deaths, as violence in the Asian country intensified.



The Defense Ministry said Saturday's assault in the northeastern portion of the country included both aerial and ground military forces and left 42 Tamil Tigers dead, the Colombo Page Web site reported. The death toll brought the total number of rebels killed since Friday to 51, Colombo Page said.

While government-led forces targeted Tamil Tiger strongholds, the rebel group was suspected of bombing a bus Saturday outside Colombo, leaving 18 people injured, the Sri Lankan newspaper reported.

(UPI)

Pakistan-Post-Election Scenario

US frustration will benefit extremists

■ Muhammad Amir Rana

A clear verdict from Pakistani voters against pro-Musharraf political parties has stunned policymakers in Washington. The Bush administration has built its anti-terror strategy in the region around a single person i.e., President Pervez Musharraf. In return, he has extended unprecedented military cooperation to the United States. Now, after the election defeat, Washington sees its favourite ally losing ground without an alternative to fall back on.

The American concern is obvious: who will pursue its policies if President Musharraf is either not in power or no longer in a position to do so? Will the new government be able to advance U.S. policies, especially in the war on terror? Will there be a paradigm shift in the Pak-US relations, or a deal with the new government can be made to maintain the status-quo? How will the electoral mandate of the people translate into government policies: more cooperation with Washington or a change in the terms of alliance? Much was invested in Banazir Bhutto by the Bush administration as a post-Musharraf political ally. But, after her tragic assassination last year, it seems to have no option but to continue backing Musharraf.

Diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad are closely monitoring post-election development and encouraging a deal between Musharraf and opposition parties, mainly the Pakistan People's Party

(PPP). So far, the PPP seems more inclined to form a coalition with the Pakistan Muslim League (N) with which Washington does not feel at ease because of its political plank of Islamic nationalism. There are similar concerns about the Awami National Party (ANP), which is likely to form provincial government in the troubled North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and may enter into an alliance with the PPP at the centre as well. A secular, leftwing Pashtun nationalist party that advocates non-violence, the ANP has always condemned the U.S. hegemony in the region. Now, the party will have to address the terrorism issue, especially in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, and it is likely to stress on a political solution which would put a lot of American interests at stake. Until now, the U.S. policy for Pakistani tribal areas is focused on containing al-Qaeda in this region and minimizing its global operations capabilities.

If al-Qaeda and the Taliban are driven out or if there is somehow peace in the tribal areas, they could shift their centres into Afghanistan, where NATO troops are already struggling, and can scatter into other parts of the world posing a bigger security threat for the United States. So, the main objective of Washington's counterterrorism strategy in Pakistan has been to restrict and eliminate al-Qaeda's epicentre by building cooperation with Pakistan for intelligence sharing and

military operations. It is understandable that after many years of concerted efforts and having spent billions of dollars in pursuit of this military option, Washington wants to see continuity in Islamabad's policy. President Musharraf is the best bet to ensure that. At the same time, however, anti-Musharraf emotions are very high in the country and no political party can ignore the public's sentiment.

In the election year, the Bush administration has already been facing criticism from the U.S. media and Democrats over its unrelenting support to Musharraf. If the new parliament seems less responsive to the demands from Washington, it would create more trouble for the Republicans in the November elections. By giving a verdict against extremism, the Pakistani voters have sent a clear message to the international community that the fears of fundamentalists taking over Pakistan are exaggerated. It should also reduce the anxiety in the West about Pakistani nukes as the new government will in likelihood be made up of moderate and secular political forces. What is worrisome is that the US anxiety over Musharraf may lead to instability in Pakistan. If an unnatural alliance between Musharraf and democratic political parties is imposed, or if the United States tries to build pressure on the new Pakistani government on this issue, it would not only create political instability but would also prepare



Asif Ali Zardari(L), widow of slain former Pakistani premier and presidential candidate Benazir Bhutto shakes hands with former premier Nawaz Sharif after their meeting at his residence in Islamabad.

ground for extremists.

Apart from a rise in acts of terrorism, the Taliban and their chief mentors in Pakistan may once again be able to stir up anti-US sentiments for political gains. In such circumstances, the ability of the new government to settle and govern will be severely undermined. Pakistan will still be an ally of the United States in its struggle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. But the goals this policy can be better achieved if democracy is allowed to flourish. The problem of terrorism needs to be addressed more broadly and strategically than the military-only tactics employed by the United States and Pakistan. While the use of force to counter

terrorism is essential, it cannot be resolved only through military means. It is in the best interest of Pakistan and the United States that the democratic process should remain on track. Pakistan's new government will have to take up the fight against terrorism as its own war. Terrorism is as much a threat to Pakistan as to the world.

The country needs economic and military assistance as well as political backing from the international community to counter extremism. But international collaboration and cooperation should be based on the basic principle of mutuality of interests.

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

MARSHLAND FLOWERS

The Four Noble Truths which is the very foundation of Buddhism and its practice and in itself is the whole teaching of the Buddha in a nutshell.

Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche



Vipassana is to see or gain insight into the fact that all Sanskrita Dharma (conditioned phenomena) are constantly changing and are therefore impermanent (Anitya/ Anicca in Pali); and because they are Anitya they are Dukha (sorrowful or sorrow producing or better still unsatisfactory) and because they are impermanent and unsatisfactory (Anitya – Dukha) they are neither me nor mine (Anaatma – Anaatmiya).

Kaya (the body), Vedana (the feeling sensation), Chitta (the mental continuum) and the Chaitta – dharma which are the four used in the

Smrityupasthaan Sutra as Alambana (objects of meditation to gain insight (Vipassana) into the way phenomena (dharmas) exist). It is only such an insight that can liberate and no other methods of meditation can liberate.

We shall go into greater details about Vipassana and the difference between Shamatha type meditation and Vipassana type meditation, later

when the time comes. But Purvanivasanusmriti also helps in the realisation of the Four Noble Truth (Chatwari Arya Satyani), which is the very foundation of Buddhism and its practice and in itself is the whole teaching of the Buddha in a nutshell.

The Four Noble Truths was the first teaching the Shasta (master/ teacher) gave and it was in Samath

However there are still two more stations or degrees of emancipation called Sakridaagaami and Anaagaami before Arhathood is attained.

Degrees of emancipation

to the five who had abandoned him in the middle of his endeavours because he started eating. When a person moving on the Sraavakayana path has his first glimpse of enlightenment, he experiences in his own mental streams the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths.

This is the first glimpse of enlightenments according to the Sraavakayana system like Theravada. If one properly practices the Vipassana of the Theravada system, this is what he will experience. He will not experience the Atma – gyana of the Hindus or Jains nor god – realisation of some Hindus or Christians. An understanding of this is very crucial to the correct understanding of Buddhism.

This glimpse is technically called Srotapatti and the person is thence forth a Srotappanna. Srota means the stream, i.e. the stream that leads

to final emancipation (Mukti/ Mokchhya) and Apatti is falling into or entering. So it literally means entering into the stream that leads to or flows towards Arhathood which is the final emancipation (Mukti/Mokchhya).

However there are still two more stations or degrees of emancipation called Sakridaagaami and Anaagaami before Arhathood is attained. Sakridaagaami means once returner. The person will return once more to the human realm before he attains the Anaagaami or the higher Arhat stage. The Anaagaami is the non – returner. He will not come back to the human realm anymore but until he becomes an Arhat he may be reborn in the Deva or Brahma realms and go on to attain Arhathood. But if he attains Arhathood here he has no more birth. This becomes his last birth. (To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

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FIREFRONT

The return of the hearth

■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma



The return of the hearth - smoke plumes, firewood, charcoal, soot, and the livid flames singing in kitchens; this is what happens in Kathmandu, the moment someone - a political party or some natural disaster snoozes the neck of the road that only a few decades ago linked the valley to the world outside. The valley turns into a ghost town, reminding me of the past more vigorously.

Walking in the legendary squares of Kathmandu under the dark silhouettes of the pagoda mansions and temples, sauntering in dusk in the spacious squares lit by lamps, one gets the feel of the a nation that Nepal has been for centuries without

any invasion of the concrete, without much aid, assistance or intervention.

As you walk down the lanes of history, it looks like a magical trick that the government could use to lure more tourists. Not only is the valley an ideal location for the Hollywood producers, you must visit Katmandu now to get a glimpse of what the past was like. I still sometimes find solace in the memories of Kathmandu I saw two decades ago when in small wooden shops people huddled together.

There were wooden houses in Baneshwor and some parts of the valley smelled of the countryside. That smell of burnt wood and farm life has lived on in my memories. Also the cups of tea the pretty Sahunis made and family feel these shops had, unlike the dance bars and smart shops that have taken over the

Positive sides of state sponsored darkness...

humility of wooden shacks. Also I seek bliss sometimes in the empty streets free of traffic pollution and traffic congestion.

An ardent optimist, I see bliss in all these times of turbulence. In these difficult times you can go home and find your children waiting for you. I find them at ease to discuss their life and dreams with me. There's nothing to distract them from you. In the darkness, we meet, close to one another. The television is silent like a silent monster, waiting to wake up, conserving energy. I try to dig deeper into my children's worlds. I wouldn't have known them as well as I do now in this state-sponsor darkness, I believe.

They passionately discuss poetry with me for the first time. They want to know where my poetry quest would lead me. In the dim candle or emergency lights, they talk to me more intimately sharing the secrets of their lives. In the two decades of my conjugal life, I have never been as happy as on the nights of total darkness fuelled by state-bestowed load-shedding distributed so dramatically.

(writer@yuyutu.de)

“Are Women Human?”

They may not leap off the shelves into the best-seller category, but the books shortlisted for the oddest book title prize certainly grab the attention.

“I was Tortured by the Pygmy Love Queen” recounts the tale of a fictional U.S. World War Two fighter pilot who is captured by jungle pygmies led by a sadistic woman.

Its sequel, which is not on the shortlist released by trade publication The Bookseller Friday, needs no explanation: “Go Ahead, Woman, Do Your Worst.”

“How to Write a How to Write Book” and “Cheese Problems Solved” are likewise self-explanatory as is the equally eclectic niche tome “People who Mattered in Southend and Beyond: From King Canute to Dr. Feelgood” that strives to put the English east coast resort on the map.

While none of the above may challenge the sensibilities too

much, others are likely to prove more divisive. Try “If You Want Closure in Your Relationship, Start With Your Legs” or “Are Women Human? And other International Dialogues.”

“I confess: I have been anxious that as publishing becomes ever more corporate, the trade's quirky charms are being squeezed out,” said Horace Bent, The Bookseller diarist and custodian of the prize.

“But happily my fears have been proved unfounded: oddity lives on. Drawing up the six-strong shortlist was a fraught and wildly controversial process.”

Bent paid tribute to those books that failed to make the list, including titles such as “Drawing and Painting the Undead” and “Glory Remembered: Wooden Headgear of Alaska Sea Hunters,” wishing them better luck next year.

Literary enthusiasts wishing to cast a vote can visit the Web site. The winner will be announced on March 28.

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Helping buds to blossom

Unearthing, understanding and healing the stress and trauma of children through therapy.



Better education requires better infrastructure, good facilities, good and motivating teachers. But even in the best of conditions, some children do not do so well in their education since they live with problems concealed deeply within which impacts on their growth and education negatively. Only by exploring children's psyche and healing it at an early stage can they be helped to develop into well adjusted, happy adults.



We need to respect the privacy of the children as well as their families.

Sajani Amatya

Friends of Needy Children (FNC), and its new endeavour, Ankur, has made an effort to optimise the potential of children by providing much needed counseling to groups as well as on a case to case basis. The project was named Ankur, meaning a bud, signifying its intention to create the right conditions for a bud to blossom into a flower.

"Friends of needy children was a mission that we in the Nepalis Youth Opportunity Forum (NYOF) conceived of together, solely to work for children, most of them with their missed childhood and it did wonders within a very short span of time," said Sajani Amatya, President of the NFC.

The forum referred most of its problem cases to NFC to provide psycho-social counseling that motivated them to get deeper into the subject. A detailed study of the cases referred to the NFC showed that there were children who had topped in their classes, but they were under tremendous stress, an aspect altogether ignored by teachers and guardians.

The FNC's Ankur programme at the moment works with three counselors, Anita Shrestha, Chhori Maharjan and Anubha, with Anita as its coordinator. It has in a short span of time

encouraged more parents to bring their children for counseling with the realisation that; it is urgent to get children to ventilate or share their problems, and that concealing their problems would have far more disastrous consequences, both for the children as well as for the family.

"They reveal and share more once trust is established between the victim and the counselor," Anita told newsfront. In the children's home that the FNC runs at Ekantakuna, normally children above three and below six years in age are admitted. The 'sand-play therapy' has been found to be the most effective to understand their problems. The small children who cannot articulate their feelings well, tell a lot through pictures and miniature they draw on the sand.

In the past two years of its existence, the FNC has attracted nearly 850 cases. Each case requires first four to five sessions for initial understanding, and the number of sessions might be more depending on the case. Through orientation, children are also helped to adjust. "According to the interest of each child, and on the basis of our evaluation and assessment, dance, art and plays are recommended to various children," said Shrestha, adding, "observing children, understanding their behavior and identifying problems are the key to remedy such problems."

Having teachers and parents understand children's needs and problems is equally

observing children, understanding their behavior and identifying problems are the key to remedy such problems.



Anita Shrestha

important so that the children get these facilities; since counselors and counseling facilities are too inadequate in number. FNC has involved the principal and vice principal of Ullens Schools in Satdobato, as both share the same value in

education and have similar approaches on children's growth besides having a common network. "But we want to extend such interaction and enlarge the involvement," Sajani said.

The causes behind stress and trauma of children differ and challenges lie in helping them identify the causes and to overcome the stress. "We need to respect the privacy of the children as well as their families but some of the cases have really motivated us a lot," Sajani added. She narrated a case of a girl who spent her days begging around the Pashupatinath area

and was brought to the centre. The girl despite a tragedy in her family now displays tremendous social responsibility towards other children like her. Children from her kind of background also get informal schooling.

The centre has also begun taking in some children who are HIV positive if they are under ten years of age. All these services are free of cost but the dearth of counselors is the major handicap in coping with the growing number of such children in distress.

■ nf correspondent

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