



Courage &amp; Conviction

# newsfront

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## Backing out? Maoists' conspiracy theory

■ Yubaraj Ghimire

In what appears like a prelude to withdrawal from the election yet another time, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has decided not to send its chief Prachanda to campaign anywhere in the country as the crucial poll to the constituent assembly is less than two weeks away.

Prachanda cancelled his scheduled visit to Chitwan and Butwal on March 29, and all other future campaign programmes. The party sources cited lack of security as the sole reason for this. "Security situation is not good and we do not want him to risk his life," a Maoist leader from Chitwan said. The abrupt withdrawal from the election campaign for the remaining period followed the claims by top Maoist leaders that there were threats on their lives.

Despite Maoists' assertion that they would not back out of the poll at any cost, withdrawal of their 'first future President' and the star campaigner is not without significance. "All that we can say at the moment is we have serious doubts about meaningful election taking place," Mohan Baidya, a senior member of the party's central committee told newsfront. He refused to say categorically that Maoists will contest the poll. "That is something we want to do, but everything will depend on how the situation emerges," he said.

Prachanda's withdrawal from the election campaign becomes all the more mysterious as he along with his deputy, Baburam Bhattarai, have been stating that any defeat in the poll will not be acceptable for the party, and in that case, the CPN-M's next move would be to capture the 'power' at any cost. Prachanda has claimed time and again that there is a wave of support for the Maoists across the country, and there is a conspiracy by the external forces, mainly the United

States, to defeat the Maoists. The party also claims that its top leaders may be the target of 'assassination attempt by the external and internal forces.'

"Arms are being imported on the eve of elections. The Congress and the UML are being backed by the international forces. We are fully alert about the emerging scenario," said Baidya, adding, "We have grave doubts if meaningful elections can take place under these circumstances."

The Maoists apparently are moving cautiously this time, as an abrupt withdrawal from the electoral race at this stage will mean 'admission of defeat,' and their failing the international community as well. However, launching the movement to capture power after 'defeat' or finding an excuse to back out now are the issues that Maoist senior leaders will have to settle within less than a week's time. ■

**Despite Maoists' assertion that they would not back out of the poll at any cost, withdrawal of their 'first future President' and the star campaigner is not without significance.**



Two girls with UML election symbol (rising sun) painted on their faces in an election rally in Kathmandu on March 29.

Nraj Sapkota

Beth Paige questions, Are you the woman you want your daughter to be?  
Interview on page 7

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# Two killed in mosque explosion

In an act of sacrilege, unidentified criminals threw a powerful bomb inside a mosque that instantly killed people and wounded about a dozen others on March 29 at Sauruchiya in Biratnagar. The attack, apparently aimed at sabotaging the April 10 election, took place when Prime Minister GP Koirala was at his home town to instruct security chiefs of the region to ensure that elections took place at any cost.

At least two people, Feroze Khan and Parwez Iraqi Ansari, both local residents, died on the way to the hospital while the wounded have been admitted to the hospital for treatment. The Nepal Defense Army (NDA) has owned responsibility for the incident. RP Mainali, a self styled supreme commander of the NDA issued a statement soon after the explosion claiming responsibility for the mosque attack. However, there has been no

independent verification.

The administration imposed curfew immediately after the explosion, but was lifted after nine hours in the morning of March 30. PM GP Koirala who headed back to the capital appealed to the general people, especially the Muslims, to exercise maximum restraint and make the poll a success.

However, there were worrying signs among the security agencies as it happened soon after Koirala instructed eastern region security chiefs belonging to the Army, Armed Police Force, Nepal Police and the Intelligence Department to ensure that no untoward incident should take place. The Prime Minister categorically told them that he would not want to hear any negative thing on the poll preparation, silencing the officials.

Police said no arrest has been made within the first 20 hours of the

incident, but they were investigating into it based on first hand account of the victims and some witnesses. According to the information gathered by the police, at least two criminals had come on a motorcycle, and one of them threw bombs targeting the mosque from outside its compound in the evening when more than four dozen people were offering 'Namaj' inside. Apparently, only one bomb went off.

Ian Martin, Chief of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) condemned the incident which he said was a deliberate targeting of a place of religion. "Forces tempted to try to disrupt the election should recognise the backlash this would provoke, and should respect the overwhelming desire of the people of Nepal, supported by the international community, to see the election as the democratic basis for determining the future of the nation," he said. ■

## News Brief

### Denial

The government has denied the media reports that Chinese security authorities are active inside the Nepal border in view of the unrest in Tibet. The denial of the Foreign Ministry has come as the Indian and western media have carried news to the effect that the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) have crossed over to Nepal side of the border and is keeping a watch on the activities. "The news are completely false, baseless and aimed at maligning Nepal's image," the ministry said.

The Chinese authorities had approached the government earlier suggesting that no 'Free Tibet' and anti-Chinese activities should be allowed from Nepali territory. Shital Niwas sources said that it is Nepal policy not to let 'our territory' used against any of our neighbours and that, "China is convinced of our intentions."

assembly poll from the district.

### Large hearted UNICEF

In a rare or rather exceptional gesture, the United Nations office in Kathmandu, dropped ten Tibetan protestors to their homes in the UN vehicles, normally restricted for use by the UN employees.

The protestors had trespassed into the UN office premises in Pulchowk on March 27 to protest against what they called 'repression' of the Tibetans by the Chinese authorities. The UN office asked the Nepali police not to detain those who trespassed, and chose to drop them home and give them a free meal.

### Appointed

Kush Kumar Joshi has been appointed President of the Federation of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI). In an election held for a two-year tenure on March 27, Joshi secured 1468 votes, 120 more than his rival Chandra Prasad Dhakal.

Dhakal had led the FNCCI for two terms.



### Giving back arms

Maoists have returned three weapons to the Police in Rukum a week after they snatched it from the security personnel. Maoist district-in-charge Purna Gharti handed over three set of revolvers and 38 rounds of bullets to the district police office-in-charge of media and human rights representatives. All these weapons had been snatched from the security personnel provided by the government to a UML candidate contesting the constituent

# Talks with Terai groups a non-starter

It all failed as they wanted a treatment at par with the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M). The group of four armed outfits of Terai wanted all their cadres under detention released before the talks began on schedule on March 29 in Janakpur.

But as the government refused to concede to that pre-condition, the negotiation was called off. A joint statement issued by Terai Cobra, Madhes Mukti Tigers, Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha and United Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha said as the government failed to fulfill their pre-condition, they were calling off the peace initiative. They also announced that the joint team they had formed to negotiate with the official team consisting of members from the seven

party ruling alliance stood dissolved.

Deputy Prime Minister, Ram Chandra Poudel who headed the government negotiation team said that while the government was still open for dialogue, it would enforce the law and order hinting that the four groups might come under government attack if they tried to foil the poll.

He said the government was ready for the release of the cadres of the four groups, and had asked for details of their whereabouts. "Naturally, it takes some time for the government to complete legal and other formalities for their release," Poudel said.

In fact, the Terai outfits which are not among the most prominent ones apparently wanted the same treatment the government had

accorded to the Maoists while holding negotiation with them. All the Maoist cadres had been released without withdrawing the cases.

The four Terai outfits had accepted a written invitation from the government to begin the dialogue, but they set March 28 as deadline for en masse release of their arrested activists. The deadline was extended by a day later, but the government insisted that they must furnish details of their activists' whereabouts. The Deputy Prime Minister had already air dashed to Janakpur along with the entire negotiation team of the government. Poudel later rushed to Biratnagar to brief the Prime Minister about the failure of the dialogue for which he blamed the Terai groups entirely. ■

# Facing the people

"...Your party supremo was enjoying a ride on the back of a poor person even while crossing the small river in Rolpa. Comrade, is this the way Maoists want to abolish the feudal system?"

## ■ Chhatra Karki

Last week, Dilip Simkhada, a grade eight student from Budha Jyoti Academy, Dallu, was present in the conference hall of Nepal Tourism Board. "No political parties followed the spirit of constitution of 1990, how can you assure that the new constituent will dramatically solve the issues of Madhesh, Janajati, Dalit, women, Karnali and the marginalised groups?" Dilip asked CPN (UML) leader, Raghujee Pant. Pant answered, "Political parties have realised their mistakes and will respect the mandate given by the people."

Indra Tamang, a representative of the landless community asked, "How would the political parties address the problems of 10 lakhs, 37 thousands landless families?" Barsaman Pun Ananta of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) replied, "Only the Maoist government can solve these problems and destruct the existing feudal system."

Bimala KC, a housewife from

Chapagaun, Lalitpur asked Ananta, "Comrade, you seemed revolutionary in your speech but your party supremo was enjoying a ride on the back of a poor person even while crossing the small river in Rolpa. Comrade, is this the way Maoists want to abolish the feudal system?" Ananta as a result, looked uncomfortable and was left speechless.

Nepali Congress leader Narahari Acharya tried to clarify, "There is a lack of internal democracy in political parties and the party leaders have an overdose of feudal attitude. Unless such attitude is overcome, democracy cannot work for the grassroots people."

Sweta Sharma from Balaju said, "All the parties have decided to go republic. It only shows how immature the political parties are. How can you ensure that national unity and people's sovereignty remains without a



Nihal Sapkota

ceremonial monarchy? Any decision on monarchy without referendum is undemocratic."

The three major parties, UML, Maoists and Nepali Congress put forward a rosy future for Nepal and the enormous responsibility before the constituent assembly, but they failed to justify their past when they were being grilled by the people. The people said a federal Nepal, with autonomy granted to the regions on the basis of language, culture and geography will give a larger sense of ownership to the regions. They also felt while economy should be taken into account as a

factor for federalism, caste should not have a role to play.

The programme named Common question was conducted by BBC World Service Trust, and it had over 100 participants. Their major concern and questions revolved round the peace process, CA polls and visions of the party leaders. Acharya, Pant and Pun respectively represented Nepali Congress, UML and the Maoists. Sushil Sharma of the BBC Nepali Service and Narayan Shrestha of the BBC Trust conducted the programme.

The trust conducts the Common question and radio drama "katha mitho sarangiko" by covering the voices of voiceless people. The programme has become a platform where people who are normally not heard get a chance to confront the leaders. The leaders at times failed to satisfy the curiosity of the ordinary people and often failed to understand them.

The aim of the programme is to

interact on different agenda of CA polls and the new constitution building process. "It offers a chance to the people at the grassroots level, who have never spoken in front of a mike. We have tried our best to encourage participation of the rural people, students, workers and marginalised people in the programme," Keith Beech, Editor of the programme told newsfront.

That seems to have worked, if the popularity of the programme in such a short span of time is any indicator. "We have got very good response from the listeners. The programme will be recorded in remote areas of far west and east, and will try and get hold of real problems," said John Penn Country Director of the BBC Trust.

The programme which the BBC Nepali Service broadcasts is relayed through 70 FM stations in the country and is also shown on the Kantipur Television every Wednesday. It has already covered remote areas like Solukhumbu, Jumla, Taplejung and Achham. ■

## CA Election Countdown

## Army may be called in

■ nf correspondent

With little over a week left for the constituent assembly polls, the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), aspiring to emerge as the largest party, has spoken in favour of Nepal army being mobilised for the election.

CPN-UML General Secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal and another senior leader, KP Oli said that given the praiseworthy and effective record of Nepal Army (NA) in previous elections, and in view of the worsening law and order situation in the country, "the army may have to be used."

Nepal was specially critical of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) for what he called deliberate attacks on the rival politicians, mainly the UML

leaders, and said, "that might warrant deployment of the Nepal army."

Speaking at an impressive election rally organised by the party in Ratna Park on March 29, Nepal said Maoists were both 'anarchic and tyrants' the way they have been going around attacking their political opponents. "They must stop it if they are in favour of a free and fair poll. If they continue with their violent activities, the army must be called in," Nepal said.

It was perhaps for the first time that Nepal also praised NA by saying, "like the ordinary people, the army is also keeping quiet despite Maoists' excesses and provocations. If the Maoists' unrestrained behavior continues, the whole nation will turn against them." He also praised the efforts of the NA and Nepal Police in the previous elections and said that bad-

mouthed of the security personnel by any party will not be acceptable.

In the rally that had all the 15 candidates from the valley on the dais along with senior leaders, most speakers criticised the Maoists for their activities of violence, mainly directed against the UML. "They are suffering from defeat syndrome, and are angry with the UML because we did not give them what they demanded. Their demands were

unreasonable," said Ishwar Pokhrel, one of the candidates and party's central committee member.

KP Sharma Oli, who was a victim of the Maoist attack in Jhapa recently said that Maoists were the biggest obstacle in favour of the left unity as they were still, "authoritarian anti-democratic in nature and character."



## PLA exodus

The mass exodus of Maoist combatants from Shaktikhori cantonment in Chitwan district on March 27 has come not only as a violation of the election code of conduct by the Maoists, but has become an embarrassing event for the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), the sole monitor of the combatants activities and their movement.

A day after Prime Minister GP Koirala and his Deputy Ram Chandra Poudel who is also in charge of the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry took up the issue with UNMIN, the Election Commission (EC) took an unprecedented step of calling the mission Chief Ian Martin in its office to express grave concern over mass desertion of the camps by the Maoist combatants.

About 200 combatants in their combat dress had left their cantonment without informing UNMIN and attended the election meeting addressed by Maoist Chief Prachanda at Rautahat, some 100-km from there. "The combatants cannot leave the camps in a group under any pretext," Martin told the EC, promising that he would take up the matter with Maoist Chief Prachanda seriously.

The UNMIN was entrusted with the task of monitoring arms and armies of the government and the Maoists following an agreement between the three sides. "Such lapses on the part of the Maoist combatants might have disastrous effects as the Nepal army is confined in the barracks in deference to the agreement with the UNMIN," said Deputy Prime Minister Poudel.

The same fear was echoed by the UML also and its General Secretary Madhav Nepal praised Nepal Army for maintaining utmost restraint even on the face of provocation. As per the agreement reached by the government and the Maoists with UNMIN, Maoist combatants and Nepal Army would remain in the designated barracks or cantonments.

An EC source told ENS that Martin expressed his helplessness as UNMIN had neither the machinery nor the mandate to get back forcefully, those who deserted the camps. The success of the mission depended on the cooperation from the government and the Maoists besides strict adherence to the understandings from two sides, the source quoted Martin.

In addition to the Shaktikhori incident, Maoist combatants have deserted the camps temporarily to lodge their protest against one or the other issues in many areas on different cantonments.

This is however, not the only way that the Maoists have bypassed UNMIN. Only recently, the money meant for distribution among the Maoist combatants in various cantonments as 'monthly stipends' was paid without UNMIN presence which is an essential condition as agreed by the government, Maoists and the UNMIN.

Earlier, Usha Nepal, a member of the election commission, had taken strong exception to desertion of the cantonment by the Maoist guerrillas in Surkhet, but neither UNMIN nor the government took the matter seriously.

## Brief

## Uncomfortable support

Support does not always help one's political prospects. The former Deputy Prime Minister and Jana Morcha leader, Amik Serchan must have realised it by now.

Serchan, a candidate from Chitwan-5 is being supported by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) in the area.

But that is exactly what has created problems for Serchan since the constituency also includes Madi area where 39 villagers lost their lives following an attack by the Maoists on a public bus two years ago.

The survivors of the tragedy besides the family members of the victims are feeling ignored and humiliated as the Maoist leaders failed to pay the promised compensation to them. Madi residents have clearly told Serchan (whom they had backed in the last election) that they would vote for somebody else this time. The reason is simple - Serchan is an ally of the Maoists.



## Target Sujata

Sujata Koirala has been going through endless woes. On March 30, Abdullah Ansari, a tailor who used to stitch Congress party flags, was shot and wounded at his residence in Narsingh

that falls under Sunsari constituency from where Sujata is contesting the poll.

Ansari was rushed to BP Koirala Institute of Health and Medical sciences in Dharan. And he is still in a serious condition.

A couple of days before the attack on Ansari, unidentified criminals snatched a motorcycle from an employee of Sushma Koirala memorial trust in Inaruwa area. Kishore, the trusted employee, immediately lodged the case with the police, but there is no clue yet about the robbery. Sujata had



earlier complained that all her election materials like party flags, posters and placards put up at different places are often removed from the scene.

## Candidate abducted

An independent candidate from Rajbiraj has been kidnapped by an armed group belonging to the Akhil Terai Mukti Morcha. The candidate, Rajkishor Mandal was kidnapped during the day when he arrived at Pakari village development area of Saptari on March 30. He is the candidate from Dalit Janajati party. Abinash, who claimed to be the commander of Morcha's area number two, has owned the responsibility for the abduction.

## Dumping Harivansh

It is only on rare occasions that satirist duo Madan Krishna and Harivansh Acharya are not seen together on social and political occasions. But March 29 was one such day, and it perhaps came with an ominous message. Newa Jagaran Manch, an organisation founded by some representatives of the Newar community from Kathmandu for declaring the valley a Newa state, had Madan Krishna on the dais, but Harivansh was nowhere to be seen.

Madan Krishna was invited to light the candle to mark the formal launch of the Manch along with other luminaries from the community, but Harivansh, a Brahman, was left out.

Among those who adorned the dais included eminent historian, Satya Mohan Joshi; poet Durga Lal Shrestha; human right leader Padma Ratna Tuladhar, besides others. Madan Krishna's discomfiture was however, visible as he said that other communities should not be targeted while the Newar community launched its struggle for its rights.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has suggested creation of 11 states, nine of them on ethnic lines, under a federal Nepal under which Kathmandu will be a Newar state. Malla K Sundar, a member of the interim parliament from Maoist party said all the big parties were almost similarly biased against ethnic groups and it was visible at the time of selection of candidates for the constituent assembly poll.



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Point to Ponder

Political promises are much like marriage vows. They are made at the beginning of the relationship between candidate and voter, but are quickly forgotten.

- Dick Gregory

Endorsing impunity

Not a day has passed without violent clashes among the political rivals taking place in the country as the historic poll to the constituent assembly draws nearer. Already, one candidate has lost his life, attacked by criminals. At least two candidates of the Nepali Congress and one from the UML had to be rushed to the hospital for treatment for the injuries they sustained in the Maoist attack. On the other hand, at least eight Maoist cadres have lost their lives, six of them in poll related violence.

Nearly 100, mainly belonging to the three parties - Nepali Congress, UML and the Maoists, have been wounded. Maoist combatants have deserted the camps and participated in the election meeting of the Maoists in brazen violation of its agreement with the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN). And worse, Maoist Chief Prachanda heaped praises on Young Communist League cadres who made an attempt on the life of Bal Bahadur KC, a Congress candidate from Solu. Further, he has declared that his party would not accept the poll outcome if that goes against the poll.

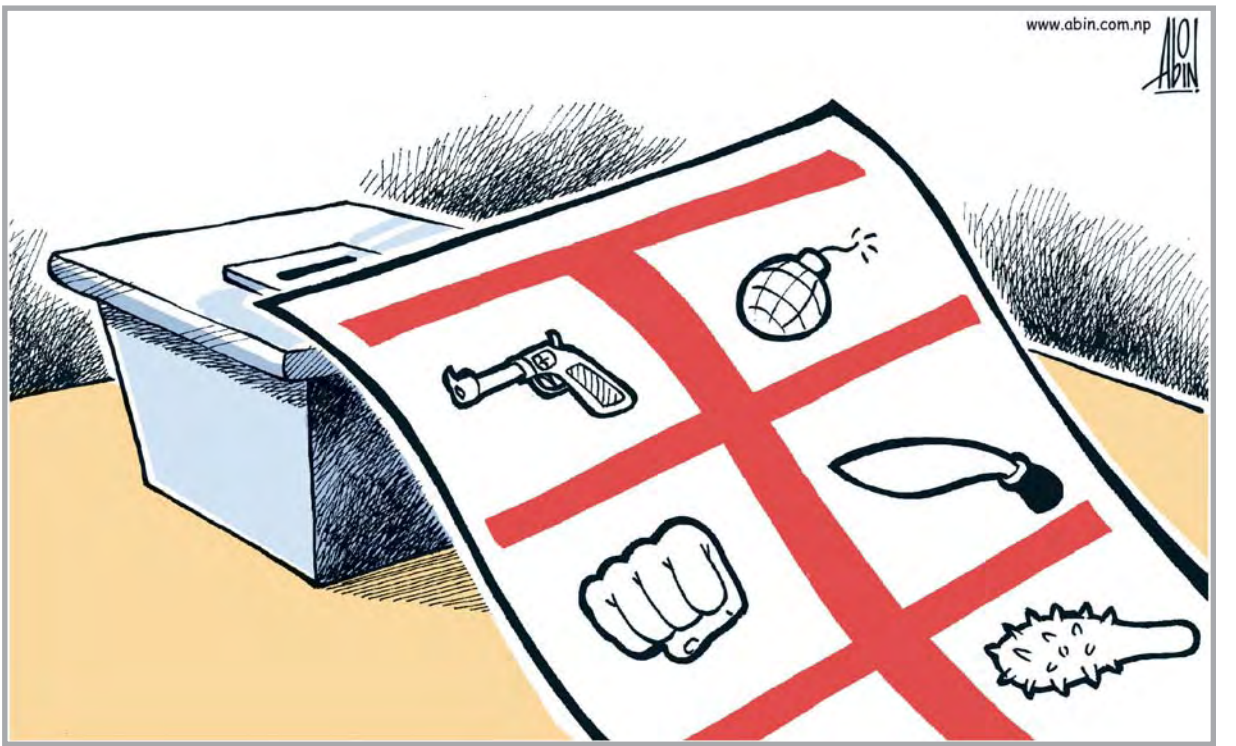
The election commission as well as the international observers who are here in large numbers do not seem to have taken these incidents with the seriousness it deserved.

They have not even bothered to discuss the situation with people like senior politician and former Deputy Prime Minister KP Oli who is also a UML candidate from Jhapa to ask for details, if he has any, about his claim that Maoists are out to assassinate top politicians including Oli himself before the poll. Similar fears are being expressed by the Maoist leaders.

The EC, armed with sweeping powers, has a responsibility to act independently and fearlessly. It cannot work as an election unit of the government which is controlled by the three parties. But unfortunately, the EC and the observer community, through their silence or ineffective response, are only endorsing the culture of impunity being enjoyed by violators of election laws and the code of conduct.

It is not just any kind of election that the country is looking for. Nor is it a mere formality for the national and international observers to endorse and approve any kind of election conducted by the election commission in the given situation. A process, where people's rights to vote in a free and fearless atmosphere violates the very basis and rationale of the poll, cannot and should not be endorsed as an acceptable model of poll. International observers will be failing in their duty if they refuse to understand this.

Not too long ago, this country under the royal regime, tried to enforce a farcical poll for the municipal elections under Keshav Rajbhandari, a retired civil servant. He simply tried to toe the line of his political masters of the day. His successor, Bhojraj Pokhrel, has a limited choice - to step in his footstep or be different. People will not treat him differently if he apes his immediate predecessor.



Letters

Save Dolma

It has been a long time since we read the news of Dolma who faces a death sentence for the alleged killing of her Pilipino colleague in Kuwait. The news that Nepal government is taking initiatives to save Dolma's life was highlighted by the media; which meaning raising funds for the expenses of legal proceedings and to compensate the victim's family.

I am from London and would very much like to contribute whatever I can to save her life. But we don't know the details as to where we can deposit the money and to make sure that the funds will reach the right place. I would assume there are other Nepalis living abroad who feel the same way. If you could find out the details and publish how and where we could deposit the money then it will speed up the process very quickly and save her life.

Anuj Khanal
London

Appreciation

Thank you for the excellent editorial in the last issue of Newsfront highlighting the injustice delivered by the Supreme Court to the NRB Governor.

Prativa Pandey, M.D.
Medical Director
CIWEC Clinic Travel Medicine Center
Kathmandu



stable and vibrant democracy.
Sanjay Tuladhar
Kathmandu

Love self and others first

I read Mrs. Adhikari's letter in newsfront about 'women's day matters' with great interest. It is a popular topic all over the world. I hope all women in this world, no matter in which country they are living, in any social system, educated or not, can one day develop some kind of strength to respect and love themselves.

The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love and care, to have mutual respect, for responsibility and knowledge. If we can respect ourselves and each other, we

can also love one another without generalising and imposing our will on others. Indeed, is it not a lifelong process?

Elsbeth Wetzel
Zurich

Bhutan's new Avatar

It was good to read that Bhutan has made a transition from despotism to democracy. Let us not ignore the reality behind the facade wherein over 100,000 Hindus of Nepali origin are denied their rights as citizens of Bhutan. For a democracy to be true to its meaning, it has to be inclusive, not discriminating its own citizen in the name of ethnicity and religion. As long as Bhutan refuses to acknowledge the rights of over 100,000 Bhutanis languished in the refugee camps in Nepal, Bhutan will not flourish as a

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

Spiritual Corner

Sea of illusion

Francis Brabazon was born in London and grew up in a countryside in Australia. As Francis grew into adolescence, he grew to love the natural world that surrounded him, and he began to write his first poetry.

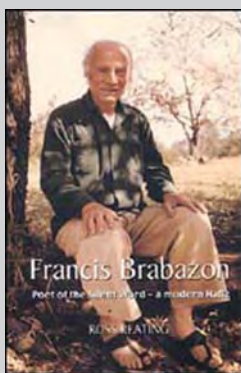
Francis was still a teenager when the famous droughts and rabbit plagues that affected large portions of Australia wiped out the family farm, and the entire family moved to Melbourne. In the city, he was exposed to many of the great artists of the time, and he soon saw his life as a quest to discover and express beauty through art.

In the 1940's, he became interested in eastern spirituality and soon became a student of a Sufi Shaikh. With the death of his Sufi teacher in the early 1950's, Brabazon became the head of the Sufi movement in Australia.

About this time, Francis Brabazon met the Indian spiritual master Meher Baba, who had become the leader of the Sufi Movement that Brabazon belonged to. Brabazon made several trips to India to be with Meher Baba, eventually staying with him for ten years.

Meher Baba was a great lover of the ecstatic Sufi poets, like Hafiz and others, and he encouraged Francis Brabazon to write poetry along similar lines. Brabazon came to be known as "Meher Baba's poet."

Perhaps his best-known work is Stay with God, a book-length poem of devotion to Meher Baba and the spiritual path. In Dust I Sing, another much-loved collection is



composed of Sufi Ghazals written in English.

Brabazon's poem: Ocean of truth

Our drop souls are of the ocean of truth; their bubbles are bright snares which keep us in the sea of illusion playing 'musical chairs.'

Dear soul, says one bubble to another, you are all I adore. Curl me up in your arms and I'll ask of heaven nothing more.

Good luck, brother! But it won't take you to where you're going — because the fly in that ointment is, every 'It is'

becomes an 'it was'.

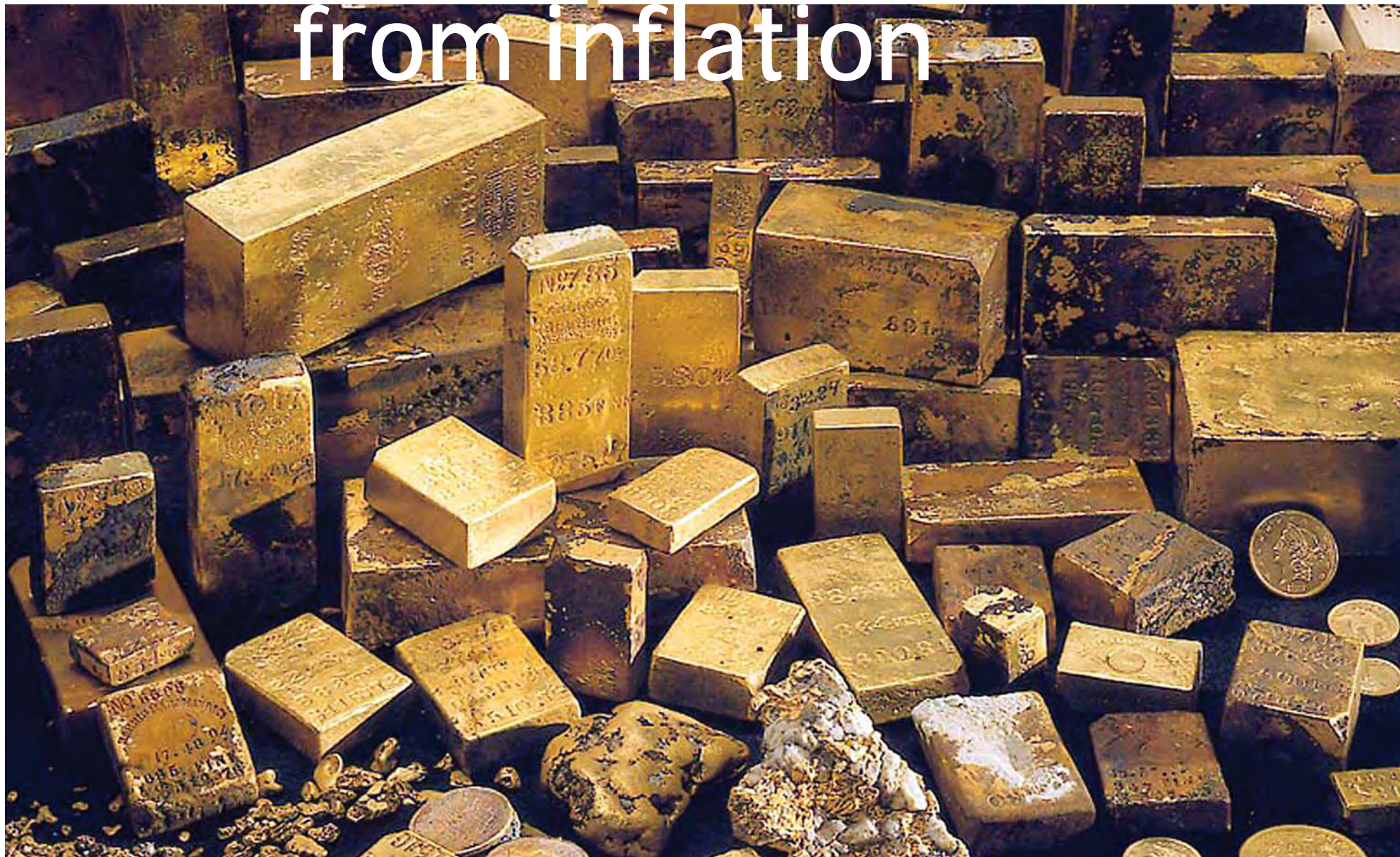
Distance ever grows longer; it never becomes shorter. The mirage stretches on and on but it never becomes water.

The distance between any two pebbles equals the circumference of Space. No matter how great our love, union is conditioned by time and place.

Come dearest droplet, let us together seek the beloved's door; Let us leave this wave which will separate us, and come up on the shore.

I hear his beautiful voice calling deep in my soul: 'The lover is nothing; the beloved is all in all.'

# Hidden shocks for Nepal from inflation



## No rich or poor can escape its implications

■ Shivanth Pande

We notice daily the price levels and read about inflation. No rich or poor can escape its effects. However, in this past decade inflation had become mute. Like a disease that we learnt to treat, it was promptly forgotten. Even in the lair of financial professionals inflation was not a problem; Central Banks the world over (the latest major one being the FED) switched to a system of inflation targeting as their primary monetary policy instrument and declared to the world that inflation was their primary concern and was firmly under control.

Why the importance towards inflation? Remember the 1970's when inflation acted as a wealth destroyer. 10 years of economic growth at 5% can be negated by five years thereafter of 10% inflation. Or Japan's lost decade struggling with the opposite of inflation and 0% growth.

Inflation is thought of as a symptom of rising wealth levels and economic growth. Basically put, too much money is competing for limited resources. The push can come from the supply or demand side and the various forms are called demand pull and cost push. Wages or the cost of factors of production can affect demand and supply and therefore prices. Sounds simple but there is a slight problem.

Take China's role. Today people

are grudgingly beginning to accept the face that the low inflation enjoyed the world over could be due to the fact that for the past 20 years, the world has been shopping at dirt cheap prices for goods 'Made in China'. Virtual slave labor in an economy where labor is the cheapest in the world has enabled the world to do many things. Looking around in the streets of Kathmandu, this process has enabled the locals to afford clothing and apparel equivalent to western countries, to use cellular phones, televisions you name it.

However things are changing. The past 20 years have brought tremendous upheaval to China, and it now has a colossally massive middle class. Wages there are on the rise and so are standards of living. Globally we should now expect the opposite of the benefits we once enjoyed. Super stellar Chinese demand has the

**China and India alone have fueled a massive demand for gold. Traditionally gold is seen as the ultimate store of value.**

power to raise commodity prices worldwide. Wheat, corn, pork, oil, gas, gold, steel and onion prices have risen globally on the back of double digit growth in China, 9% growth in India and a healthy U.S economy. We are now in a new epoch where battle for resources is being waged with places like Africa the new battlefield. Gold prices have risen three fold within the past five years.

China and India alone have fueled a massive demand for gold. Traditionally gold is seen as the ultimate store of value. As inflation eats into paper wealth (cash, stocks and bonds) people lose confidence and park their wealth in precious metals like gold, silver and platinum. Judging from the graph above, there is a global crisis in terms of confidence as the demand for gold skyrockets. One way of understanding the graph is to realise that one is about two times poorer if not holding a substantial portfolio of gold.

So what hidden surprises does inflation have in store for Nepal? Nepal has been crippled in the past year by the effects of global energy inflation. Crude oil prices have tripled and gas at the pumps here is still at heavily subsidised rates. As a result the NOC and the government are bleeding money and have not been able to pay the suppliers, resulting in shortages and insane queues for fuel. Any attempt to address this problem with an increase in prices promptly leads to riots.

We should expect to face difficulty in other commodities such as sugar, wheat, corn, rice, vegetables, which all matter as we are a net importer of such goods. The drain on our exchequer and reserves will increase further from the \$930 million we change into INR to pay off various imports. The remittance of two billion we get from abroad will be worth less and less as inflation rises and the dollar drops. Also the incidence of inflation in other countries means that interest rates will rise to combat the effects. This implication for our neighbors is scary. If India increases costs, this further increases capital flight from Nepal, wreaking havoc on our banking system and economy.

Perhaps the most poignant point to understand about inflation in our context is the relationship between inflation and the growth rate of the economy. As economists, we think in real terms. It basically means we adjust figures to take inflation into account, as it is a destroyer of value. If Nepal is growing at the officially given rate of 4%, and inflation as compiled by the central bank is at 5.4-6%, then in real terms we are not actually growing as an economy but in global terms declining by about 1.5-2% per year as an economy. This is based on the formal data. If informal data is taken into account the inflation rate is probably around 8% and the growth rate about 2-2.5%, so were are actually growing at an annual rate of -6% a year. Does this make sense?

# The meaning of this election

The new constitution needs to have the universal check and balance provision by ensuring the independence of judiciary, legislative and executive.

■ Binod P. Bista



The constituent assembly election for the people of Nepal is getting into high gear with the election manifestos made public. Though manifesto is defined as a policy or proposal or program, it is nevertheless a declaration of principles issued by a political party. It does contain

constitution for a new Nepal acceptable to all (at least in theory).

The state of political, economic and social development has lagged behind so badly that Nepal could remain the only nation in South Asia as least developed, poor and unmanageable. In the present time the external interventions and influences have been so strong that the ruling elite

secular state or retain Hinduism as state religion? Is there a need to transform Nepal into a federal system similar to Switzerland simply because Nepal's terrain resembles that affluent European nation? If yes, will the country be divided into eleven provinces based on ethnicity and geography? What about the economic viability of the newly created states (or provinces)?

UML rally in Kathmandu on Saturday

People's grievances could be the budding ground of instability for the nation in the long run.



policies and objectives pursued by a party with a view to assisting the people in the understanding of that party.

Many have argued that the parties have come out with the respective manifestos as if they were doing so for general elections. After failing to take up this task in the 1950s, being the first leap to democracy, Nepal is trying again to accomplish this task. After eliminating the last democratic constitution (1990) approved by the people of Nepal, the present coalition partners have drafted an interim constitution and amended it twice within a short span of less than 18 months.

The forthcoming elections to the constituent assembly can be considered from two stand-points: critical assessment of the interim constitution, as amended, for finding the right path as truly desired by the Nepali people; prepare a new document (constitution) altogether and take the interim constitution as one of the several reference materials. The objective of either of these approaches is to come up with a

has lost its standing and Nepal is in the verge of losing its identity as an independent and sovereign nation.

The upcoming elections assume greater importance since the members to the constituent assembly have manifold tasks and responsibilities. While they need to check the rapid erosion of nation's sovereignty immediately after the elections, they have to also see to it that the new constitution has the universal check and balance provision by ensuring the independence of judiciary, legislative and executive. It does not matter whether the system they choose as people's representatives is based on a presidential system or a prime ministerial system but under a fully democratic set up so long as the system is workable and capable of producing desired results.

The key issues which have been stated and restated during all of the past two years and earlier, belong to distinct categories. Will Nepal become a republic or still choose to retain monarchy in some form? Will it become a

Does Nepal need to follow positive discrimination to bring about inclusiveness of the left out classes? What effect would it have in the overall development? Does Nepal need to compartmentalise its affairs by creating separate bureaucratic set ups for provinces and allowing the provincial language as the official one? What happens to the freedom of movement and employment within Nepal for Nepali citizens?

Since there are takers on both sides to these questions, it is of utmost necessity to give undivided attention to all issues even if there is one small group contesting majority views. That alone can safeguard the new constitution and democracy.

Most importantly, Nepal emerging from a serious internal conflict that claimed more than 13,000 lives and destroyed precious state infrastructure, must find a development path under an agreeable system for accelerating economic growth and development in a stable environment. Anything less would be betraying the trust of all Nepali people. The members of the constituent assembly must not fail this time. ■

## Pave the right way for the elections

■ Amit Pyakurel

The political sphere in the country seems to have taken a great leap forward, following the recent agreement between the government and the two chief Madhesi groups. It is a hard-earned triumph, in view of some drastic demands by the Madhesi groups, which had shown almost no way-out to reconciliation. Through ostensible intercession by our southern neighbor, there was finally a mutual accord, with the promise to fulfill some core, politically righteous demands of Madhesis, with

some flexibility from both the government and the Madhesi parties on the demand of "one Madhes, one Pradesh,"

issue was finally resolved through negotiation.

If the yet agitating factions in Madhes are all intended for equal rights and fair representation in the CA polls, they should come to the negotiating table and sort out the discrepancies peacefully. The government should give equal attention to the negotiation. In the event of total non-compliance by the agitators (which would illustrate that they are more for disintegration and regression, rather than for their rights), only then could the government resort to security measures to restrain any untoward activity causing harm to the CA polls and security of the general people. Likewise, it's worth considering the possible infliction of violence aimed at disrupting the polls, from those not wanting the institution of monarchy to be uprooted.

People's apprehension over security in the polls is, however, not going to be boiled down just by the mere rhetoric to provide 'enough security' from the government. People are bound to have qualms over safety in the coming elections, due to the fact that they have witnessed a considerable level of impunity from the state to many brutal crimes and murders, during and even after the official end of the Maoists' 'people's war' and after the joint oath by the major parties (including the former rebels) to give the country sustainable peace and progress by the mean of the CA polls.

We seem have developed a sad tendency of forgetting the past brutalities inflicted by different 'political' outfits towards innocent civilians. Given its past record of forgetting the pain inflicted on the civilians and the ones having one or the other political affiliation, the government really needs to do a lot now. It should beef up the security condition and punish the criminals. It is vital that the government root out criminal outfits, which could wreak havoc to foil the election. The polls would also be a historic test for the professed democratic parties to make it a success, and the world is watching.

The government's apathetic way of reacting to the public's grievances, even those regarding the deaths of their loved-ones is not only tragic from a humanitarian perspective, but is also a way to earn distrust and hostility from the citizens. People's grievances could be the budding ground of instability for the nation in the long run, although it doesn't appear substantial in front of the big political aspects which are considered to be the 'only' major hurdles.

The general mood have definitely turned optimistic with the prospect of the election closer to reality than ever before. However, there should be a guarantee for the election to be fair and peaceful for it to be successful. Only a genuine election could guarantee the country's peaceful and prosperous future.

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yet without enough elucidation on the actual deal made.

It is now imperative that the words meet proper execution. It is also worth taking seriously the displeasure shown over the accord, by some Madhesi groups who have vowed to continue their agitation, or even worse, to foil the polls. The groups, still embracing violence for their political haggles, like that of Jwala Singh and others, have cited that the Madhesis were 'betrayed' by the understanding reached under the Indian canopy, and would continue their 'struggle' unless the demands outlined by them were met before the CA polls.

Here, the situation demands that the government correctly identifies criminal or political outfits, and reciprocates accordingly. It was true that the government earlier had tried to concede to the demands of the Madhesi groups inefficiently, but was finally forced to listen to the Madhesis who are concerned about the unequal share of state privileges and rights. Though their demands sounded aggressive and intrinsically anti-election, it was more of a pressure-tactic rather than an ultimate desire to wreck the election and lead the nation towards regression, given that the

**Beth Paige**, USAID Mission Director, struck a chord with most women with the speech she gave in a gathering on the International Women's Day.

"I adopted a deep sense of gratitude for the women who struggled and fought — and who continue to struggle and fight — so that women like me could have the opportunities they didn't have. .... Pauline (my friend) advised me to always ask myself — "Are you the woman you want your daughter to be?"

"....The question had a profound effect on me — it taught me that if I want my daughter to be respected, then I had to be respected, if I want my daughter to have courage, then I need to be courageous. If we want our daughters to be strong, then we have to be strong. If we want our daughters to live lives that are greater and go beyond the barriers that society has erected, then we have to knock those barriers down....It taught me that rights and opportunities are not something that we leave to the next generation — they are something we give to the next generation."

Beth for sure passed on the torch of inspiration to other women on that day. She replied to **Sushma Amatyia's** questions for newsfront, recently:

#### **USAID has been in Nepal for more than 50 years now. How do you view its involvement and achievement?**

I think USAID has had a very strong and rich history in Nepal. USAID's programs have always focused on assistance that responds to needs that the people of Nepal themselves consider the most important - health, education and economic opportunity. Nepal has seen impressive progress in these areas. That's not to say that there isn't room for more progress — there certainly is. I think it's important, though, to acknowledge the extraordinary successes that the Nepali people, with USAID's support, have had in the last 50 years.

In 1961 the average life expectancy of a Nepali citizen was 33. Today it is 64. There has been an 81% reduction in infant mortality. In 1961 there were a total of 160 skilled doctors, nurses, and health workers in the entire country. Today there are over 20,000. In the last fifty years the literacy rate went from 5.3% to 67.9%. Fifty years ago there was a total of 376 kms of road in the country. Today there are over 17,000 kms of road. In 1951 there were only 300 Nepali students enrolled in college — today there are over 132,000 Nepali students attending college.

The development progress that Nepal has made in the last 50 years has been phenomenal. While USAID — along with the international community — has provided important support, these achievements would simply not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the Nepali people.

#### **How would you describe USAID's contribution to Nepal in the area of health?**

USAID's program has always supported improved health care in Nepal, and health continues to be our single largest portfolio. There has been considerable progress in the health status of the people of Nepal; however, research has shown that not all the Nepali people have benefited equally from this progress. USAID's health program is now



focusing on those segments of the population that are at highest risk of illness or mortality, and/or doesn't have adequate access to quality medical services. For example, USAID is supporting the Ministry of Health to improve maternal survival and community-based treatment of pneumonia and other childhood diseases.

Success in these areas is a main factor behind the astonishing 30% drop in child mortality in the past five years. USAID-supported semi-annual Vitamin A distribution alone has prevented about 15,000 child deaths



per year. In the 1990's USAID took an early lead in HIV/AIDS assistance for Nepal, which continues today. USAID's HIV/AIDS assistance is aimed at helping to maintain — and eventually reduce — its low rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence.

#### **USAID's contribution to Nepal in the area of Peace Building?**

USAID has several activities in support of Peace Building in Nepal. USAID supports programs that increase citizens' access to information, and that encourage diverse and open public debate on issues critical to Nepal's democratic transition. USAID has funded over 140 small grant activities that support Nepali — based peace initiatives and solutions. USAID supports the efforts of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction and the Election Commission. For example, USAID has supported voter education campaigns and training of election officials and volunteers.

#### **What are USAID's large-scale priorities?**

USAID's number one priority is assisting the Nepali people in the development of peaceful, prosperous

# Are you the woman you want your daughter to be?

**"...Rights and opportunities are not something that we leave to the next generation — they are something we give to the next generation."**

and democratic nation based on principles of inclusion, where all citizens have equal access to essential services and opportunities, and where the rights of all citizens are respected. Currently we have programs in health and family planning, peace building, education, economic growth, agriculture, rule of law, democracy and good governance, human rights, and disaster response and preparedness. All of these programs are in place to support the Nepali people as they build a new Nepal.

U.S. that "the third time is a charm." Let us hope this third try at CA elections in Nepal is a charm.

#### **Is USAID planning to increase its aid volume or will it just focus on prioritizing the basic necessities?**

I think USAID's future program for Nepal will depend largely on a free and fair election and the successful formation and functioning of the Constituent Assembly. I would like to see Nepal take advantage of the entire range of the US Government's foreign assistance options — not just

This is the third time I've lived in Nepal. I lived here in the late 1960 and early 1970s and attended Lincoln American School. Nepal was a very different country and Kathmandu was a very different city then. In Kathmandu in the late 60s, there were very few cars, the ring road did not exist, and people were very, very poor. We can all read the development indicators and know that there has been considerable progress in a wide range of areas, but most telling to me is the visual difference between the Nepal I remember and the one I see today. People are healthier, small business is thriving, there are more products on the market, there are more modern houses, there are more schools and health clinics, and there are more trees!!

#### **What do you hope to achieve in the future?**

In terms of USAID/Nepal, I would like to see our program intensify its efforts to help economic and social progress to reach those citizens who have so far not benefited from the growth and development that Nepal has experienced in the last 50 years. I would especially like to see our program intensify its efforts to support women to have a greater voice in the future of their country, and in their own lives.

Finally, I would like to see stronger ties between the people of the United States and the people of Nepal. Nepal and the United States have enjoyed a strong history of friendship and I hope that the USAID Mission and I can contribute to making that friendship stronger.

Other excerpts from the speech Beth gave on March 8 which says a lot more about her:

"...I was raised by parents that instilled in each of us children the belief that there wasn't anything that we couldn't do. My family placed a very high value on education and not being educated was never an option. Outside the structure of my family, I would sometimes hear subtle and, sometimes not so subtle, messages that contradicted what my parents taught us at home about what girls could or couldn't do."

"...It's not that I didn't encounter gender discrimination or bias and it wasn't that it didn't sometimes dampen my spirit — my parents instilled in me such strong belief that I just never let it get in my way....I will admit, that for a long time I took for granted the freedom and opportunities that I had as a young woman. It wasn't until I started working for USAID that I started to understand the difficulties and injustices that women in the generations before mine faced — and that many women still face all over the world today." ■

#### **As a donor agency how satisfied is USAID in its post-conflict reconstruction efforts?**

This is a difficult question to answer. While a Peace Agreement has been signed between the main parties to the 1996-2006 conflict, until it is honored by all groups, it is difficult to say that the country is truly in a post-conflict stage. Bands and threats of kidnapping and extortion and attempts at corruption result in the delay or cancellation of assistance projects, which ultimately hurts the Nepali people.

USAID supports reconstruction efforts through activities supporting the development of small rural economic infrastructure, and we have plans to increase this support. However, for the impact of these efforts to be maximized, there must be an environment that permits these efforts to succeed.

#### **What would USAID's reaction be if the elections do not take place?**

It is difficult to predict. The U.S. has invested a lot in the CA election and wants them to happen, peacefully, on April 10. There is a folk saying in the

the USAID program. For example, hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign assistance is available through the US government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), for countries that qualify.

Qualification is based on a variety of indicators that measure movement toward effective, transparent democratic governance, as well as increased prosperity and improved education and health status. After the elections, we hope to work with the Government to seek new opportunities for collaboration in support of Nepal's development.

#### **The British and European counterparts emphasize security sector reform. Does USAID plan to get involved in it?**

The US Foreign Assistance Act restricts USAID's involvement in the security sector. As such, we maintain our focus on the sectors identified above. There are other USG agencies — particularly the U.S. State Department — that provide support in the area of security sector reform.

#### **What is your background in relation to Nepal?**

Manish Gyawali



The recent acquisition of failing investment services giant, Bear Stearns by rival J.P. Morgan, for a fraction

of its former price might offer a few lessons to our own 'banking giants.' Do they lend carefully? The reason Bear collapsed is precisely because it did not. Overeager to profit as much as it could, it went on a lending spree. In business, reputation matters, so when it was revealed that this 80 year old institution was in the habit of giving bad loans, mania set in and people withdrew their money.

Bankers are at least expected to display considerable common sense in their day to day operations. Those who want to avoid repeating the Bear Stearns debacle in Nepal will have to come to terms with the phrase, 'fiscal responsibility.' A country like Nepal cannot afford financial anarchy.

Bank runs are contagious; the Bear Stearns episode could lead to the public repudiation of the entire financial system as deeply flawed and not worth investing in. The Fed had a choice in this matter. It could have stayed on the sidelines and watched as Stearns completely disintegrated. Stearns could then have filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, but that might have had more devastating consequences for the financial system. Bankruptcy courts would then have to study the company at length, and that might expose other corporations that

# Responsible banking

A country like Nepal cannot afford financial anarchy.



it did business with.

What if there are more companies like Bear Stearns out there? Can the Fed rescue them all? No. If it turned out that Bear Stearns' practices were more the rule than the exception, then the Fed's actions would be merely delaying the onset of a disaster. After all, there are limits to how many institutions the central bank can afford to 'bail out' if it can guarantee paying \$30 billion in debts of one investment bank alone.

If there's a lesson to be learnt here, it is that, had institutions like Bear Stearns been prevented from taking such risks, risks that would eventually have to be borne by the taxpayers, everybody would be better off. Of course, business thrives on risk, but there is, or there should be, a limit as far as speculation is concerned. Some free market apologists argue that business firms should be allowed to do whatever they want to do while they are in operation, but that if they foul up, they should not be helped so that they learn the consequences of their actions.

It is too much to expect that businesses will self-regulate out of a sense of moral responsibility. A few do, undoubtedly, but the majority of them don't, and this has been proved time and again. External controls are needed to ensure that businesses don't step across the line. The Bear Stearns debacle has revealed the need for more general regulation, one that cuts across the entire cross section of dubious business practices.

Some might argue that 'excessive' regulation might harm businesses. Sure, it might, but businesses could be harmed just as well by their own incompetence. Bear Stearns once again demonstrates this point. In any case, if certain businesses are net liabilities to society, why should we care whether they are harmed or not? In fact, it may be better for business as a whole if stricter regulations are enforced.

Those firms which are genuinely competent, which do not have to resort to dubious shenanigans will not be seriously affected by tougher regulations. In any case, there is no symmetry between the information businesses receive and those consumers receive. Corporations always know more about the consumers than vice-versa. Regulations are an attempt to level the playing field.

Thus, regulations should not be thought of as red tape. Those are two quite separate matters. Unfortunately, in our part of the world, people with political power have been known to

use regulations to squeeze corporations. Unlike in the United States, in Nepal, businesses do not have that much power. In fact, an argument can be made that they have too little power. True, the sort of corporate-government nexus that exists in the US, with corporations being at least as powerful, does not exist here.

Politicians are generally thought of as being much more powerful; sometimes able to arm-twist businesses into doing what they want them to. But the reverse side of the coin is this: in Nepal businesses are often patronage rackets. True entrepreneurship has not been able to flourish because established businesses have used their connections to prevent new players from moving in. Thus, I believe that impartial regulation would certainly be beneficial to newcomers who have the right ideas. We could start by breaking up some of the monopolies.

Again as Bear Stearns demonstrated, old is not always gold. Compare it to a company like Apple, and one sees the difference. Apple indulges in no shady business practices, does not run afoul of regulations. It is only interested in providing cutting-edge technology with a 'human' face. True, Nepal has seen some decent entrepreneurship in the IT sector, but what it needs are dynamic new corporations willing to penetrate 'older' markets. And that's where effective laws and regulations are needed.

*(The author is a political science graduate from Miami University, USA).*



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# Gilani unveils coalition govt agenda

All black laws, including the Pemra Ordinance, promulgated after November 3, and Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in Fata would be done away with, declared Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani here on Saturday.

Spelling out the agenda of his government, after getting an unprecedented unanimous vote of confidence from the National Assembly, the prime minister also set a two-week deadline for the Army to call back its officers from civil institutions. The prime minister said, "war on terror is our own war". He urged extremists to surrender and come to the negotiating table. "The elimination of the menace of terrorism from the country is our utmost priority," he added.

Gilani also announced 40 per cent reduction in the budget of the Prime Minister's House. He said the cabinet members would not use vehicles of more than 1600 cc and travel in economy plus class only. He said no unnecessary lighting would be arranged on public buildings on festivities and no money would be spent on the renovation of government buildings and residences. He said the NAB would cease to exist and cases



would be heard by the judiciary. He said there would be no ban on trade and student unions. He said concurrent list would be abolished in a year. The prime minister also raised support price of wheat from Rs510 per 40 Kg to Rs625 per 40 kg.

He also announced formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to alleviate the alienation of various segments of society. Gilani promised to restore the deposed judges and ensure independence of the judiciary according to the Charter of Democracy and the Murree Declaration.

The prime minister said that the new government had a

vision, determination, commitment and zeal to serve the nation with the help of Almighty Allah. He said he government would do its utmost for the development, progress, prosperity of the country, for ensuring rule of law and promoting democracy.

He said the government stands by the people and it would continue to stand by them in the hour of miseries and hardships. He announced an ambitious plan for rapid and sustainable development of the country and the people.

The prime minister said that the nation was facing grave challenges but terrorism and

extremism were the major challenges that were threatening the national integrity.

Lauding the decision of the Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani to withdraw Army officers from the civilian institutions, he hoped that it would boost the image of the armed forces. He said, however, those Army officers whose presence in these institutions was imperative would continue to work.

He said that every institution must work in its prescribed parameters and it was the people who had the right to govern the country. He called for withdrawal of Army officers from the civil departments within two weeks.

Gilani said there was a need for coordinated reforms for the development of tribal areas. He said to overcome terrorist activities there the government would announce a special package for the socio-economic development of these areas. He said the people were facing challenges of price hike, unemployment and poverty and the government was determined to resolve these issues on priority. *(The News International)*

## DIASPORA

# Crackdown on protestors

Nepal is being criticised for the way police violently shut down peaceful demonstrations by Tibetan monks and refugees in capital Kathmandu.

■ Bhumika Ghimire in USA

The volatile situation in Tibet and some of the surrounding provinces has turned out to be a major headache for the Chinese government. On March 27<sup>th</sup> during Chinese Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson Qin Gang's regular press conference, the focus stayed firmly on disturbances in Tibet and subsequent world reaction.

On March 26<sup>th</sup> Mr. Gang commented on various French officials' statement on situation on Tibet which essentially blamed China. He said that "The Lhasa incident is a separatist act of violence carefully planned and deliberately provoked by the Dalai clique. The Chinese Government took measures according to law and has restored social stability in Lhasa and other areas. Any country upholding objectiveness and justice will understand and support the lawful and necessary measures taken by China."

There is no doubt that Chinese government has been trying very hard to make sure that the Tibet flap does not get out of hand. Regular press briefings and statements on the issue, and now allowing journalists access to Tibet; all designed to end negative international attention.

All the efforts by Beijing, the sharp reaction to China's response to violence in Tibet is still unfolding. Now even China's neighbor, Nepal is being criticised for the way police violently shut down peaceful demonstrations by Tibetan monks and refugees in capital Kathmandu.

Linda Mancini of the Boston Tibet Network said that Nepali police' brutal handling of the Tibetan protestors shocked her. It dismayed to see the Nepali government showing no respect for the Tibetans' right to free speech and peaceful demonstration. Karma Tsewang of Tibetan Youth Congress of New York and New Jersey also expressed concern at that way Nepali police handled the Tibetans protestors.

A more pointed reaction on Nepali police's action came from Giovanni Vassallo who is with Committee of 100 for Tibet. He said that for a country like Nepal, which itself is going through profound changes to install meaningful democratic system, to engage in violent crackdown against peaceful demonstrator is extremely disheartening.

Mr. Vassallo, who has spent some time in Swoyambhu Gumba as a student, asked the Nepali people to remember teaching of Buddha and support peace and justice. He also asked the Chinese government to begin negotiation with the Tibetans as early as possible.

We tried to get reaction from Chinese and Chinese Americans but majority of the respondents did not wish to comment. A Chinese university student, who is also president of local Chinese student's association, said that she cannot comment because she is concerned about the reaction from her friends.

Despite the seeming international outpour of support for Tibet and criticism of Nepal and China, not everyone is on their side. Even the United States, which has expressed concerns over situation in Tibet and continues to roll the red carpet to Beijing's arch enemy the Dalai Lama, has refrained from saying or doing anything substantive. ■

## Gaddafi condemns Arab leaders

Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan president, poured contempt on fellow Arab leaders at a summit that was overshadowed by the absence of several key figures.

At the annual Arab summit, which opened on Saturday, he criticised Arab countries for doing nothing while the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 and overthrew Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president.

Gaddafi also repeated his frequently made proposal that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be settled by creating one democratic state where the two peoples live together, to be called Isratine.

The Libyan leader's undiplomatic railing at the disarray of Arab nations has become almost a tradition at the annual gathering.

Al Jazeera's Middle East analyst, Lamis Andoni said: "Gaddafi says what many think, but do not say. His words reflect a prevailing sentiment in the Arab streets that is fed up with the failure of Arab leaders to rise up to challenges.

Gaddafi asked: "How can we accept that a foreign power comes to topple an Arab leader while we stand watching?" *(Aljazeera)*

# US warns N Korea on missile tests

The US has called North Korea's latest missile tests "not constructive" and urged Pyongyang to instead focus on nuclear disarmament. The call came in response to a North Korean test-firing of several short range missiles off its west coast.

North Korea also warned that US demands over its nuclear programme could delay plans to disable atomic facilities agreed in a landmark deal last year. The US suspects Pyongyang of hiding nuclear weapons development.

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said North Korea should "focus on the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" and "deliver a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear weapons programmes and nuclear proliferation activities".

It should also "complete the agreed disablement," he said. A South Korean government official told Yonhap news agency that North Korea launched three or four missiles at 1030 (0130 GMT) on Friday.

The official said that the missiles were fired into the Yellow Sea. Yonhap said the missiles were Russian-designed Styx ship-to-ship missiles with a range of 46km (29 miles). A South Korean presidential spokesman downplayed the missile tests as "ordinary military training".

Analysts say such launches are often timed to make a political point. North Korea's actions came a day after it expelled South Korean managers from the Kaesong



joint industrial park on the border. The expulsions are being seen as a diplomatic protest against the Seoul government, which said it would link progress at the park with progress on the North's denuclearisation effort, says the BBC's Kevin Kim in the South Korean capital.

At the same time as the missile tests, a North Korean foreign ministry spokesman warned the US not to pursue its suspicions that Pyongyang has hidden some of its nuclear programme.

North Korea blames deadlocked nuclear talks on the

US, accusing it of raising "unjust demands". Under a landmark disarmament-for-aid deal reached last year, North Korea has shut down its main atomic facility at Yongbyon and

taken steps to disable it.

But the US wants North Korea to fully declare its nuclear weapons stockpile and answer US suspicions of nuclear proliferation and possession of a secret uranium enrichment programme.

North Korea successfully tested a nuclear device in 2006 and analysts believe it may have any a number of atomic bombs ranging from one to eight or more. However, it is not believed that the country has yet succeeded in building a nuclear weapon that could be fitted on to a missile. *(BBC)*



MARSHLAND FLOWERS

# Limitless capacity

This kind of insight gained by remembering ones own past lives or the past lives of others is a prominent feature of Buddhist literature.

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

The capacity to see far becomes more as we climb up from the Tirthikas to the Buddha. The Hindu and Jain yogis may be able to remember thousands of Kalpas but they have their limits as the mind is not completely free from emotional defilements. The Sravakas may be able to remember up to 80 thousand Kalpas, Agrasravakas etc. even more than that and even more for the Bodhisattvas but there is no limit to the capacity of the Buddhas.

We must remember that when the Buddha began his long journey to become a Buddha (3 – 4 Asankhya kalpas ago – one asankhya kalpa has 60 zeroes), he was already a powerful Rishi called Bhikchhu Sumedha who had all the siddhis – riddhis already. These siddhis – riddhis became refined through the kalpas of practice. So how can we expect ordinary yogis to have the same power as the Buddha? Not even the Devas in any realm of existence can come anywhere near the Buddha. Again there are special

exercises in the various texts to develop the power of Purvanivas anumriti, if the yogi is a fit vessel.

It must be said that some of the Abhigyas can be achieved through drugs (ausadhi) and mantras too but the strength of such remembrance and the distance in past time will be far below those who have attained it through samadhis and also they will be less permanent in the case of drugs.

This is the proof of rebirth within Buddhism. The Buddha's past life as given by the Buddha himself is recorded in the Jatakas. The stories of the Jatakas seem to have influenced the making of similar genre of literature in almost all religious systems of the Indian subcontinents and further on.

This kind of insight gained by remembering ones own past lives or the past lives of others is a prominent feature of Buddhist literature. It is illustrated as I said in the Jatakas and the life stories of the Buddhist Arhats, Mahasiddhas and lineage masters. Memory of past life can also be achieved by other techniques, one of

which is past life regression through hypnosis and the other is a technique called Jati smarana gyana. This is the technique of tracing events backwards. One tries to trace back the events of the day and then slowly extend it to two, three hundred days, one year, ten years, 20 years and back to birth and onwards to next life. This method can be used without attaining samadhis.

Certain individuals, generally children remember their past lives, but generally such remembrances are feeble and sometimes not fully accurate and they also tend to fade away. Dr. Ian Stevenson (MD), the Head of the Department of Parapsychology of Virginia University has four huge volumes of records of such children from all over the world – from Alaska to Lebanon to Turkey to India, Sri Lanka etc. etc. And as I said before these are well researched, scientifically shifted materials that cannot be denied easily, as the research method applied by Dr. Ian Stevenson (MD) is impeccable. (To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

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It's time for Nepal's political parties to take control and remind the Maoists that being in government is a privilege, not a right.

# Tough love

■ Lucille Bolduc

Who gave Nepal's political parties the right to give the country away? Was it some surfeit of guilt, some sense that the chaos of the last 18 years is their fault; did that lead them to walk through this so-called peace process, to sleep-walk into this so-called election, like goats into a slaughterhouse?

Deals, agreements, codes of conduct, constitutions, laws... flimsy paper veils covering two facts I challenge any reader to dispute: the Maoists are only interested in peace when it serves their interests, and Nepal is weakening, with every passing week. Both assertions are supported by objective observation. But their reverse is presented as fact by most Nepali

politicians and the international community: the Maoists want peace, and a stronger new Nepal is being born. Who do these lies serve?

I do not believe in conspiracy theories. A policy based on lies is unlikely to bring lasting joy or success to its authors; ask George Bush or Tony Blair. We are not talking about an Indian, American, or Chinese plot, but a cause much more basic and depressing: cowardice. The government is a bad parent that thinks you give a crying infant what it wants. And worse, they think giving in is a solution to bad behavior, not the sure-growing seed that will grow into a more serious problem. Every day they nurtured their bullying Maoist baby. Now it has grown into a big angry teenager with every reason to believe he will always get what he wants, by crying as loudly as possible.

We are embarrassed to acknowledge bad parents when we see them, especially ones clearly doing their best, whose flaws come from exhaustion and a lack of imagination, not cruelty. There is no arguing that the NC and the UML did not do the best job in the 1990s, even though according to the UN the country did improve a lot. But they are reasonably decent people, as politicians go.

Corrupt, some of them, yes, but not disinterested in the future of the country. Cowards; but they're doing the wrong thing from a fear of worse consequences, not ill-will. But those of us watching this political delinquency do Nepal no favors by staying silent. The sort of advice we offer—"there there, it's just a phase he's going through"—just encourages the parents to deny they have a problem on their hands.

And it is not a problem to be underestimated. Every day the Maoists are attacking party rallies, cadres, and candidates; party offices are burned down, and the public is being threatened. And you can't blame the CPN-M; violence is part of their ideology and every day their ideology is strengthened by success: Nepal has shown that the Maoists were right, violence does produce results.

Breaking this pattern will not be easy. It could push the Maoists out of the peace process; that is not desirable. Despite the fond hopes of monarchists and goose-stepping BJP cadres the country can no longer choose between kings and revolutions; there must be negotiations, disarmament, peace, and democracy. But that process will not start unless the Maoists are put back into their place. And that place is on the opposite side

of the negotiating table, not part of the government. Not if their current behavior continues.

The NC and the UML need to stand together and recognize they have more in common than either admits. Take control. Spell out changes the Maoists must make, no excuses, including implementing UNMIN's March 22 recommendations. If the Maoists continue to confuse ballots and bullets give them a list of demands, deadlines, and consequences. Before the charter members of the 'Munich in the Himalayas' club lay into me: I am not advocating an extreme position; concessions for peace are appropriate. If the Maoists say they need three days, not one, to return the PLA to cantonments, then that's fine. But if the cadres are still roaming the countryside a week later, there have to be costs.

Being part of government is not a burden a party accepts with a sneer, it is an honor and a responsibility. If the Maoists refuse to behave, throw them out. Make it clear they can only rejoin if they behave. Repeat as necessary. At worst we discover the Maoists didn't want peace, at best firmer foundations are laid for a genuine settlement. It is time Nepal's weak, divided, outgunned political parties reminded the country's armies that, under the democracy the people said they wanted two years ago, they are in control. But the parties can't look to UNMIN, India, or the Election Commission for leadership. This is their moment, and they can either take control, or be swept away. In the next week, we'll see their choice, and live with the consequences. ■

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# The Trojan Horse



**This is simple parasitism, extortion by those who are too darned idle to work when it's so easy to live off another person's labour.**

## ■ The wanderer

In the spring of 2006, when 'Priam' Minister (misspelling intentional) Koirala formed the coalition for peace affectionately known as SPAM, he led us all by the nose right down the garden path. The general belief was that a period of peace and reconciliation had been ushered in: Nepal had achieved a historical breakthrough and it was the end of the People's War.

Think again. Until this point those who could tell the wheelers and dealers in Kathmandu about the realities of that war were out of sight, on a back burner somewhere in our deepest conscience, whether victims of the People's 'Liberation' Army (smart quotes intentional) or of the state security forces. Hence, Kathmandu, a city as gullible, indolent, and as prone to ever and ever more exaggerated rumours as ancient Troy, heaved a sigh of relief.

In retrospect 'Priam' Minister Koirala and his associates, foreign pals, and sycophants have behaved injudiciously. Like late king Priam of Trojan War fame they opened up the city to a Trojan horse in the guise of the YCL. In their hasty and hyperbolic euphoria at the second People's Movement, they threw caution to the winds, pretended the uprising had been completely spontaneous on the part of all involved, and left the state open to disintegration, ethnic conflict, dacoity, and fascism.

Like the Trojan horse of old, the YCL is brute force and thuggery cloaked in rhetoric: rhetoric, incidentally, that usually comes from Maoist leaders. Nothing is their fault, they smell sweet with absolute blamelessness, and it is all the fault of other forces. Whether these forces are regressive, capitalist, Congressis, UML, Madhesis or—the all time favourite whipping boy—royalists makes no difference at all.

Everyone else is wrong and the Maoists and

their ubiquitous YCL cadres are right. Such an adamant rightness could only be found in fascist states like Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and the Roman Empire to name but a few; and there are many more but I'm sure you get the picture. Come, come comrades, this is not democracy. If you think it is, then you've lost the plot: then democracy is not your goal but rather dictatorship. Compare your deceitful tactics to the brave ideals you claim to hold.

"Working men of all countries unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains," wrote Karl Marx in 1848 when, to refute accusations against communism, he wrote his famous manifesto. It should be remembered that Karl Marx had Germany in mind for his revolution and he was familiar with European conditions; so communism is a European philosophy in that respect. Europe is where he envisaged his workers' states.

Implicit in the text of the manifesto is the belief that it is labour not capital that creates wealth and, hence, capitalism is the enemy of freedom. It is a remarkable and laudable fact that Marx, for the first time in economic history, gave value to labour.

But he wasn't the only one that valued labour. Almost, at the same time, a kind of social capitalism was forming, a social capitalism that was eventually to extend into the epoch of the welfare states. Housing, clinics, and schools were built for workers and their families, and they were given shares in the factories—the Rowntrees, Cadburys, and Titus Salt—readily spring to mind, but the Tatas in India follow similar concepts.

So bourgeois capitalist owners weren't all wickedly exploitative and although the fact that the industrial revolution destroyed the hierarchical order and industrialists' concern for fair treatment and a good living for all was, according to the manifesto, supposed to be creating the

conditions for the end of capital and individual ownership. In most cases it just didn't happen that way.

Universal education and a growth in social consciousness along with states' accepting, and believing, that if political intervention was to do anything at all other than declaring war and making politician's rich, it could just as well deliver services like civic drainage and cheap transport, care of public spaces, and equitable administration of laws. So you see everyone's concepts of social good have come quite a way since 1848, except those of the YCL.

How does the YCL live up to the call to liberate the peasants and workers and bring about social justice? Interestingly, on first entering Kathmandu, the YCL comrades were like fleas on the proverbial cow dung going from factory to factory, hotel to hotel forming unions "for the benefit of the workers". While threat and force were not explicit in making the workers sign up, they were implicit. Frankly, many of the workers would have been better off with their bourgeois managers who, for the most part, today realise that the wellbeing of workers and their families is

in their best interests. Yes, even in Nepal.

What do the YCL care? They are now busy demanding 10% of hotel workers' service gratuities. How does this liberate workers or ensure the wellbeing of their families? This is simple parasitism, extortion by those who are too darned idle to work when it's so easy to live off another person's labour. But wait, isn't that what the YCL claim bourgeois capitalists do?

Somewhere, someone has it wrong. Unions are for workers, and union money is for their welfare, not for political parties. Unions can support any party they like or none at all: it is up to workers to vote on such issues.

The YCL are not only making it difficult for workers to vote and decide for themselves but also for the rest of the country to vote and decide for themselves. It is time their dialectic is brought to bear upon them in a simple call: "Working people of Nepal unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains".

And please, Priam Minister Koirala, no more Trojan horses!

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