Call of conscience
Whips defied by prominent ruling MPs

At a time when G P Koirala and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) are going euphoric about parliament declaring Nepal a ‘Republic’, records show many members, especially belonging to Nepali Congress and the UML had defied party whips.

Out of 322 members in parliament, about 35 defied party instructions to be present and vote in manner instructed. Most notable of those who defied the whip include Taranath Ranabhat of the Congress and Khadga Oli of the UML. Their absence confirms their displeasure and belief that this parliament has no right to pass a resolution of this magnitude without a fresh mandate from the people.

“Yes, I followed the dictate of my conscience. I will not be a party to any process that undermines the right of the sovereign people to decide the issues of crucial importance for the country”, Ranabhat told Newsfront. Former Prime Minister Oli was not available for comment. It is not yet known what actions the parties contemplate against them, but the UML seems to be more eager to punish the dissenters than Nepali Congress. The members had been issued whips to be present in the House and vote as per the official line that favoured Nepal being declared republic now and leaving it to the CA to implement it. “It’s absurd and unacceptable that a future CA has to work under directive from the present House”, said Ranabhat.

Former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai and P L Singh are the only two members who have not attended any session of the revived parliament. “This parliament has outlived its mandate. My conscience does not allow me to participate in its proceedings”, Singh told Newsfront. Former Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka is away in his home town Sunkhet while another Congress member Govinda Bahadur Shah is abroad.

Although more than 50 MPs from the Congress party had warned Koirala not go for the current resolution as that would ‘amount to surrender’ to the Maoists, they obeyed the party line once the whip was issued. But they have made their reservation known to Koirala. Those who obeyed the whip ‘to save the party from a split’ include former Ministers Khum Bahadur Khadka, Govindaraj Joshi, Bijay Gachedar and Arjun Narsingh K C. They had decided to fall in line after Koirala took the position that defiance of whip might invite disciplinary actions like expulsion from the party which will also mean their not being able to contest the CA poll as the party candidate.

A senior leader of the UML said that the party is investigating into the defiance and take stern action once full details are available.

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Supriya Tuladhar being crowned Miss Nepal 2007 in the capital on Saturday.
It may have been unintended candor, but Prime Minister P Koirala has admitted that he and his legendary brother B P Koirala were involved in manufacturing fake Indian currency notes during their days in the political wilderness. Incidentally, the Koirala revelations have come on the eve of his brother’s historic return to Nepal with an appeal for national reconciliation – a policy that B P Koirala has dumped – 31 years ago.

In his ongoing autobiographical interview series on Kanpur television recently, Prime Minister Koirala said that he had hired experts to produce counterfeit currency notes when he was in political exile in India after 1968. He added that all that was done was the consent of B P Koirala who was then living in Saranath. Giving graphic details of the family business, G P Koirala said he came into contact with forgers and artists in Bihar’s Purnea district. Once he was convinced about their expertise to produce indistinguishable fake currency notes, he engaged them in the business. “BP examined the notes and could not distinguish between fake and real ones”, said the Prime Minister.

In the revelation, the Prime Minister has also claimed that fake currency notes were produced at the residence of Dr Devendra Prasad Singh in Patna. Dr Singh, a long time friend of B P, was once the vice chancellor of Bhagpur University and later a member of the Rajya Sabha-Upper House of Indian parliament. This is another of the shining examples of our people-to-people bonds in India-Nepal relationship.

The Prime Minister further said that once the fake currencies were produced B P gave them to be deposited in a bank to test whether it could be detected. “Within days, the money was worthless without the bank detecting it”, says the Prime Minister.

G P Koirala also claimed that these were done to feed large number of party workers and tide over the financial crisis that the Koirala family was going through in exile. On another occasion, however, B P had apparently stopped his highly entrepreneurial younger brother G P from getting into a car-smuggling business in Bombay saying “If you get into these mafia activities, they will kill you.” Had the warning not been heeded, G P would never have heard of Chhota Rajan and Haji Mastan.

The involvement of Nepal’s most illustrious political dynasty in the forgery business did no doubt have much to raise the stature and social prestige so often denied to the con artist fraternity by society in general. The restored respectability is evidenced in the ease and comfort with which the fraternity in carrying out various forms of abductions, corruptions, ransoms and all other forms of income and employment generation.

At Capone could certainly learn from Nepal.

Koirala and Koirala counterfeit company

As India’s main opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party, appeared riding the crest of an electoral victory in two states – Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh – appears to be challenging the government not only on domestic issues, but also on international policies as well.

A clear indicator of that came when L K Advani, the party’s top leader, projected as its Prime Ministerial candidate for the next general election, questioned Delhi’s dual approach on Maoist problems in India and Nepal. He is also believed to have conveyed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that it was basically Maoist dictate that was shaping Nepal’s political future than the genuine will of the Nepali people.

Mr Advani’s reported comments come in the wake of interim parliament in Kathmandu declares Nepal a Federal Republic with the directive to the yet to be elected constituent assembly to implement it. Advani’s stance is also being taken as his party’s disapproval of the response of the government of India to the latest developments in Nepal. Rajnath Singh, National President of the BJP has publicly stated in October that the interim parliament should leave it to the CA to decide on the issue of monarchy.

But BJP assertion has grown in the wake of its electoral victory in the states. The new electoral fortunes in state elections has created political difficulties for the Congress led regime at the centre. Yashwant Sinha, former Foreign affairs Minister and a senior BJP leader, said in an interview to Amanjula, a vernacular daily from Uttar Pradesh that the recent resolution declaring Nepal a Federal republic was more of an outcome of the pressure of the Maoist party than the true reflection of the will of Nepali people. In fact, many BJP leaders are criticising the government that South Block’s Nepal policy was dictated more the CPI(M), a reference to party’s political member Sitaram Yechury’s visible engagement with Nepal’s politics.

Incidentally, Prime Minister Singh had recently directed to senior officials of 13 states of India which are under grip of Maoist violence to ‘crush the virus of terrorism’ to restore order in the country.

TU launches MA Conflict program

Tribhuvan University has recently started a new Masters program in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) program. The 2-year, 4-semester program is a multidisciplinary program that synthesizes insights from various social sciences and humanities for the study of contemporary conflicts around the world.

According to the CPDS vision, the goal is to produce new peace praxis that synthesizes critical social science theory and practitioner work experiences from the field.

The new program, whose classes began in September, was formally inaugurated by State Minister for Education and Sports Mohan Singh Raithor last Thursday. The program currently has 38 students. Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University Prof. Madhab Prasad Sharma said that the new program was intended to offer relevant and timely topics of study that they could use in society. Dean Prof. Ramesh Kumar mentioned the various individuals and agencies whose efforts had made CPDS a reality.

The CPDS is a joint program between TU, University of Life Sciences of Norway, Eastern University, Batticaloa and Ruhuna University. Matara in Sri Lanka. CPDS Coordinator Dr. Saubhagy Shal said that the goal of the new academic discipline was to produce graduates who can work on the issues of conflict and peace at the research, policy, and teaching platforms as well as working in humanitarian crisis, post-conflict reconstruction, peace process, governance, and complex emergencies.

One of the key features of the CPDS program is the regular exchange of students and faculty between Norway, Sri Lanka and Nepal to contribute to the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the partner universities. Apart from classes and workshops, CPDS program depends on extensive fieldwork and case studies from across the globe for teaching the students. CPDS has received support from Norway’s MoMA program for four years.
Price hike

Good news; petrol pumps have far less number of vehicles queuing up for fuel. And bad news; the petrol price has gone up second time in less than a month. According to the latest decision of the government, the price of petrol has gone up to Rs.80 from Rs.73 per litre. According to the Nepal Oil Corporation, the new hike is to adjust the price of petroleum products with the prevailing rate in the international market. An official has said that the price of diesel, kerosene and other fuel also may increase in the coming days, adding “but that has to be done carefully as it might lead to unrest among the consumers”. But whether the supply and distribution of petrol will be smooth in the days to come will depend on how promptly the Nepal Oil Corporation pays huge arrears to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

Minister chastiised

Minister for Industries and Civil supplies, Shyam Sunder Gupta often hogs media headlines for wrong reasons. He is no exception this time around as well. On December 29, parliamentary committee chastiised the Minister for ignoring the committee’s summon to appear before it on the petrol price hike issue. “It is unacceptable that a Minister ignores the committee’s summon”, said Mahendra Pandey, chief of the committee.

The committee has informed the Prime Minister as well as the Speaker about the Minister’s defiance. Gupta faces charges of abduction, torture and wrongful confinement of his political rivals, mainly the ones who broke away from Nepal Sadhavana party (NSP) recently.

Durgesh in Delhi

Durgesh Singh is being tipped as Nepal’s ambassador to Delhi. He will be replacing Shailaja Acharya whose appointment was cancelled by the cabinet recently on ‘health grounds’.

He will be replacing Shailaja Acharya whose appointment was cancelled by the cabinet recently on ‘health grounds’. Although Shilnathwai sources said they have no information about Singh’s likely appointment, a senior cabinet minister told Newfront that Singh was acceptable both to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan.

Singh, an economist, has earlier served as member of the Planning Commission. He was also Nepal’s ambassador to the European Union in the 90s.

Diplomatic snub?

The G P Koirala government feels a bit embarrassed that three of the ambassadors proposed by the government may not be acceptable to the host countries. France refused to accept Maoist leader Pampa Bhusal while Australia turned down Yogendra Dhakal’s nomination.

Dhakal, a nominee of the Maoist party, is supposed to have overstayed in the United States as an illegal immigrant. Similarly, Harned Ansari, a nominee of the UML, has not been accepted by Saudi Arabia. “Now that the agreement have not come for more than three months, we can assume that they are not acceptable to the host countries’, Foreign Ministry sources said.

In the meantime, Bhusal, a prominent Maoist leader, has been inducted as a cabinet-rank minister in the council of Ministers.

Resignation galore?

Terai party formed, more MPs to quit

Unconvincing

Verification raises more questions

The recently concluded verification of Maoist combatants has raised fresh questions about management of the Maoist arms and armies as more than 8,640 ‘combatants’ skipped the process and their whereabouts are not known.

The final report made public by Ian Martin, Chief of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) recently revealed that a total of nearly one third of those registered with the UN were found not qualified as combatants. Altogether 19,602 out of 32,240 registered were qualified as ‘combatants’ on final verification. UNMIN chief admitted he had no information about those who deserted the camps after their registration.

The reports lodged together 2971 were found to be child soldiers while another 4008 were found recruited after May 25, 2006, the day peace process had begun and were being disqualified on that ground.

Martin’s way of making details of the reports public through a press conference also drew an angry response from the Maoists questioning his right to go that way. The report in fact confirmed the sizable presence of the child soldiers in the Maoist army on one hand, and confirmation of mass scale desertion and desertion by more than 8,000 people is another issue that the party may not feel comfortable about.

On the other hand, the process of verification also raises some important questions about the reliability of the UNMIN process itself. The large scale desertion naturally brings into question the reliability of the verification process was. In response to a question ( during the release of the report) by a media person on the direct link between the disappearance of the combatants and the activity of the Young Communist League (YCL), Martin said the fundamental commitment was to keep the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) out of the constituent assembly election. He hoped that that the Maoist army would maintain full discipline over those in the cantonments as their future is under discussion.

But the government is more worried about the status of the disappeared combatants. “UNMIN is responsible for monitoring the supervision of arms and armies of both sides. It must gather information on the government that its job is done thoroughly”, Sources in the Prime Minister’s office told Newfront, adding “the Prime Minister is going to take up the issue both with Maoist leaders and the UNMIN.”

In fact, Martin has already acknowledg-ed that he had no information about how many of the deserters were in the YCL. He said, “I frankly, we have a little information as to where those people are at the moment. Certainly some of the child protection agencies have come across some of them back in their own communities. It may indeed be that some are now active in the YCL in their own communities or elsewhere. But we simply don’t have that information.”
Price of Democracy

World community has condemned Benazir's Bhutto's assassination in one voice—that it was an act of cowardice. But it is also a major victory for all those who practice the policies and religion of hatred, fanaticism and intolerance. While it is yet to be verified independently, it is known that Benazir has been the target for over three decades. After her election, she was the most hated enemy as 'she was America's most precious asset' to deflect the Islamic militants. And the other reason that her killers did not mention is so open—that they would never want a woman to lead Pakistan.

Benazir's assassination has now made the election process, and Pakistan's return to democracy totally uncertain. From Nawaj Sharif to Imran Khan, Pro-democracy leaders were combatted from the electoral process as the event triggered series of riots and clashes in parts of Pakistan. Bhutto who had just been back from nearly eight years in exile was not only seeking to lead Pakistan government, she was also looking for a larger endorsement of the people for her fight against militancy and religious fundamentalism. And she was right in her calculation that the state could defeat religious fundamentalists only with the support of the people. But this event has a wider implication beyond Pakistan's border as well. The world community's anguish and unequivocal condemnation of the murder shows its awareness of its implication. While Pakistan government's responsibility to bring those involved in the murder to justice, world community's responsibility lies in defeating terrorism in any form and manifest anywhere. In fact, it would be foolhardy for any one to treat terrorism as a 'short-term' ally even for a limited time and purpose. That will only grant them a platform and opportunity to grow. Great powers must desist from the short-term convenience of one country's terrorism is another country's freedom fighter' calculations. Any politics that promotes Intolerance, hatred and execution of the enemies' rights to deal with collectively by those believing in democracy. Perhaps, President Musharraf has come to realise that state alone could not defeat the forces of terrorism. His facilitating the return of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaj Sharif from exile had apparently been influenced partly by his own belated realisation, and partly by the compulsion of the emerging domestic politics. But far greater challenges are ahead for president Musharraf and in democracy leaders in Pakistan now. People's anger and anguish over the tragedy have taken the form of riots in parts of the country. A further deterioration in the law and order will only make fertile ground for the forces of authoritarianism to grow. If in the meantime, government's failure to contain militancy will make Pakistan and the region under increased presence and interference from international community. A consensus among the pro-democratic forces on how to face the immediate crisis and ensure Pakistan's smooth transition to democracy are the best way to move ahead. Ultimately, that will perhaps be the most appropriate homeland to Benazir Bhutto who sacrificed her life for democracy in Pakistan.

Editorial

Free the judiciary

Your editorial 'Judicial Emasculation' was very appropriate and timely. The supreme court is no more an apex representative of the judiciary, and it is only increasingly becoming the extended organ under the executive. Judiciary’s independence was subverted completely the day Kedar Prasad Giri was nominated as the Chief Justice by the Prime Minister after the parliamentary hearing had failed to endorse him. Girl is more like Koirala’s chief justice now, as his appointment is much against the provision of the constitution. But as your editorial rightly points out, this judiciary can no longer go against the government on crucial cases for the simple reason that we have an Executive or the Prime Minister’s representative as the Chief Justice. His first loyalty will be for the Prime Minister, and not for the constitution.

Ramesh Thapaliya

Bishal Nagar

Letters

Now here to everywhere

Vinay Prasad Adhikary

When clouds gather in the sky and dissolve in the sky. When water bubbles in oceans and dissolve in the oceans. When thoughts manifest from nowhere and vanish in the same nowhere. Then, I see the nowhere in its naked form. I see nowhere now here. I see nowhere everywhere. When I drink a cup of tea. I see the taste of tea. When I see birch trees in the morning. I can smell the melodious sounds. When I see the blue ridges mountains. I taste some deep resonances. When I climb the mountain. When the mountain vanishes. stones, soils, pebbles and trees emerge. When I further climb. I kiss the sky high. When sky meets sky. then it is a great fly. When I smell a flower. Smell flowers me. When I write a poem. Writing poems me.
Buddha, Jung Bahadur and Prachanda

It seems Prachanda is quite fascinated by Lord Buddha. He has invoked Buddha’s name several times publicly. The first was when he surfaced at Prime Minister’s residence in Baluwatar on June 2006 signaling the end of his more than two-decade long underground political life.

Recently, he predicted the birth of either Buddha or Jung Bahadur to steer the country out of the current crisis. And on December 29, a day after parliament finally succumbed to his party’s dictat to declare Nepal a ‘Republic state’ leaving it to the future constituent assembly to implement it, Prachanda dwell on the matter in further details.

In an interview given to Shuvshankar Kandel of Sagarmatha Television, the Maoist supremo just stopped short of admitting that he indeed was Jung Bahadur in the offing. Surprisingly, his dream to be the 21st century Jung Bahadur came less than a week after he signed a fresh 23-point pact with the government, with renewed pledge to go to the polls for the constituent assembly by Mid April. But the latest Prachanda utterances go against both the spirit of peace agreement and democracy. Prachanda appears to be conditioning the public that the Maoists prefer to seize power “peacefully.” But should that option fail, Prachanda will be compelled to exercise plan B—that is to follow what Jung Bahadur did in 1846. But no matter how the Maoists seize power—through peace or violence - democracy and the democratic process will be the casualty.

A parliament led by G P Koirala and chaired by Subhash Nembang has already proved that Prachanda’s bandwagon is gaining momentum by the day. But Prachanda’s understanding of Buddha’s way and philosophy is not only limited, but distorted as well. For Buddha, his journey and mission began with detachment from everything he had—kingdom, power and privileges. He stood for truth, respect for human life and dignity, love, compassion and crusade against injustice and inequality—all through non-violence. Kindness and forgiveness together constituted his philosophy and way of life.

Prachanda path is just the reverse. He is driven by the lust for everything that does not belong to him legitimately. He has neither forgiven any one, nor even dared to repent for heinous crimes like Madi massacre that his party committed. It seems his understanding of Buddhism only means a convenient way of capturing state powers without bloodshed, and of course, without facing the electorate. Unfortunately, G P Koirala has already lost the moral high ground to question Prachanda’s interpretation of Buddhism in the current context. In the past 18 months of the controversial peace process and government, Prachanda has skillfully undercut G P Koirala of his historical standing and political stature which he had attained immediately after janaandolan II. Things have now come to such a sorry pass that how long Koirala hangs on to his position depends on the terms set by Prachanda.

G P dumped his visionary brother B P Koirala’s policy of national reconciliation to appease Prachanda and continue in power. Now He has assumed the power of a dictator with no accountability to parliament—a role that Prachanda hopes to snatch any time now.

G P dumped his visionary brother B P Koirala’s policy of national reconciliation to appease Prachanda and continue in power. Now He has assumed the power of a dictator with no accountability to parliament—a role that Prachanda hopes to snatch any time now.
Lessons from Himalayan degradation

The Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) continues to inspire religious devotion, conquest, and share wonder about its biodiversity riches for the region and for humanity. Often, the global community and national governments have given less attention to the lives of the mountain region’s own people. Many millions of working children strive to combine their disparate family obligations. Several hundred thousands migrant youth in the Middle East and South Asia have escaped conflicts and unemployment, and earn remittances which are critical for those left back. These are innovative female and male mountain farmers, industrious long-distance traders and renowned faith healers who with little or no external assistance, contribute to community wellbeing and prosperity.

The region harbours a growing urban population living in increasingly congested, polluted and crime-infested hill and foothill towns. Their inhabitants may score higher than national averages on income and educational indicators, but they depend on very poor services from for example water authorities and police. Often both popular media and the scientific community have picked up overly stereotypic meta-narratives about mountain peoples. Often they have been depicted as helpless victims of nature’s wrath or of plain crime-infested hill and foot-hill towns.

The good news is that there is indeed an institution who is about to respond to the demands from premier institutions in the member countries and to the renewed interest of intentional agencies in the HKH-mountains.

An ambitious mandate

The International Centre for Mountain Research and Development (ICIMOD) is a regional institution with a mandate of contributing to improved living conditions of mountain peoples and environment in the eight mountain countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Since its foundation in 1983, ICIMOD’s regional headquarters has been located in Nepal. In 2005, ICIMOD moved into its own new headquarters. The regional member countries have all contributed. As for example, the host country Nepal donated land, Bangladesh and Bhutan have contributed with two exquisitely carved and decorated outdoor pavilions and China with the impressive heritage-inspired reception area. Is this symbolic demonstration of regional pooling, backed by a more active use of and larger financial commitments to ICIMOD? Indeed, the recently concluded meeting of the Board of Governors is indicative of an emerging trend of the regional members’ countries greater interest for investing in ICIMOD.

Earlier on there has been a mismatch between the overall high expectations in terms of impact and actual results. The Centre’s multiple users - including national research institutions, the international research community, the civil society, community-based and user-federations, and donors - in recent years principally Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, all except the two latter, themselves mountainous countries - have from their different vantage points expressed responses varying from tempered appreciation to rather harsh disappointments over heavy-handed technical orientation, ICIMOD’s attention to leading national institutions’ mountain-focused work and to diplomatically touchy issues, of also regional
and international importance. Sharing of scientific data for transboundary cooperation and the linkages between social inequities such as ethnic conflict, poverty and environmental stress, are among these issues.

These external critiques from various national and international stakeholders have often, but not always, been rather well-founded. The critiques have for a variety of reasons, not the least purely financial viability, been taken increasingly seriously by ICIMOD’s own governing bodies and management. In fact, the recently concluded meeting of the Board of Governors in Dhulikhel (Nepal), does provide decisions on strategic redirection which are

consultations were coordinated through the recently established country offices. The new programme is planned to be implemented in much closer collaboration with national nodal research institutions, to be and central governments, and civil society organisations than has hitherto been the practice. There are signs that ICIMOD is coming to age as regional convener where critical issues such as landscape protection and water management, are placed within a broader framework for regional cooperation that realises ICIMOD’s Mission. This mission also compli-

saar’s vision Beyond 2000. ICIMOD will have to show diplomatic finesse, while member countries must be parties to, most notably the growth engine China and India. If such a global compact fails to be established and adequately implemented, the interdependent global and regional climate systems will affect living conditions of both upstream and downstream populations in adverse ways we have yet to fully comprehend and design scenarios for.

The disturbingly limited tangible results of regional cooperation be it through ICIMOD or SAARC, are to a very large degree the result of troubled bilateral relations. These are a considerable degree related to the failure of Partition in 1947, and to subsequent contested nation-building projects built on homogenising

approach to the stakeholders of this vast and underdevel-

owing for the following reasons:

The three strategic thrusts on (1) adaptation to environmental change and sustaining eco-

system services, (2) integrated water and hazard management and (3) sustainable liveli-

hoods and poverty reduction, are critically intercon- 

nected. For the first time has the Centre

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The Nobel Laureate, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) recently
launched their fourth assessment report, which contained strikingly sparse data on the impacts of climate change in the Hindu-Kush Himalayas. This is a growing consensus that Himalayan glaciers are thinning and receding, melting will lead to increased glacial lake outburst floods and changes in melt water, all of which will affect ecosystem services, and the livelihoods of 150 million of mountain dwellers and the 1.3 billion of plain peoples downstream. How fast and uniform are these changes and what are the most likely scenarios for the future generation?

Will climate change provide new opportunities for agriculture and increasing yields in high plateau areas? What are the hydrological effects of climate change? How are ecosystems and human wellbeing already being affected and what are theirs’ and societies’ adaptive capacity for increasing water shortages, floods, other hazards, new pests, biodiversity losses, changed food-chains, erosion of cultural knowledge and conflict resolution mechanisms for averting and solving resource conflicts?

ICIMOD is currently preparing, in collabora-
tion with partners in and outside the region, to play a key role in identifying and filling regional knowledge gaps and scaling-up and down good practices that may become vital for the regional governments’ ability to formulate regional and national policies and action initiatives. Both in the area of climate change and in the other

proritised areas, the recently established Himalayan University Consortium with its goal of establishing a regional framework for networking, customising of knowledge, and

mountain-focus in policy advocacy can play a significant role. It is to say, if what the third
civil society/ have argued for quite some time - that social justice, environmental and sustainable livelihoods have to become mutually supportive - is clearly and articulated in the ICIMOD regional initiatives and in government departments’ policies and plans.

(Tore Bie) is a Professor of Public Planning and Co-ordinator, University of Tromsø, Norway and outgoing Independent Member of the Governing Board of ICIMOD)
Terai party's challenge and opportunity

It was an outcome of combination of various factors that have given birth to a new Political party in Terai. Apart from its negligence by the state, treating it more like an internal 'colony', its own leadership have betrayed it on occasions in the past. Terai does not have much hope and faith in the present leadership and the government to provide a new direction and hope either.

The fact that Prime Minister G P Koirala takes latest developments in Terai solely as India's conspiracy to weaken Nepal and his own leadership only proves his myopic vision. Koirala's agreeing to sign the 23-point agreement with the Maoists and his complete reversal of position on the issue of monarchy just within a span of six weeks shows how scared he is of that 'conspiracy'. In the special session of parliament in November, Koirala's Nepali Congress Party's stand was clear—we are in favour of Nepal going republic, but the reversal of that stand comes in the wake of Koirala's latest perception that the South is out to get at him, and as a counter, he must not lose Maoists.

Unfortunately for the country and the Terai, the three major parties are now asserting that the Terai issue has been addressed with the 23-point agreement signed. This is likely to be a costly misconception to hold for the ruling parties to hold at this point.

India, despite a federal set-up of the government all these decades, has faced social and political movements, sometimes with demands for cessation.

Manoj Dahal

Mahanth Thakur

The formation of the Madhesh-Terai Loktantrik in the aftermath of the 23-point agreement shows Terai leaders are not convinced by the claims being made by the ruling alliance in Kathmandu. In the past, Terai leaders terminated their movement for two goals—being co-opted into Kathmandu's ruling circle, and being recognised by Delhi as Terai leaders.

Going against this Terai political tradition, Mahantha Thakur has taken a new direction. He got out of Kathmandu's power centre to lead Terai's cause. He stated that it was not at somebody's behest, but for the love for his soil that he was forming a new party. He snapped his more than four-decade long association with the Nepali Congress, quit the ministerial post and Parliament position to earn his eligibility to head the New party.

Terai was headed towards an unprecedented political vacuum ever since the peace process begun. Koirala's henchman Home Minister was instrumental in creating a situation in which Maoists and popular Terai forces frequently clashed. As a result, Maoists were forced to vacate most areas in Terai, but national level political parties failed to show their presence in the area. As a result, more and more armed groups came into existence for Terai's rightful share. But they could not take shape of political parties. Koirala not only chose not to give larger role to the likes of Thakur to keep Terai connected with Kathmandu, but deliberately chose to have him work under dictat of the likes of Sitaula. The other person used by Koirala to deal with the Terai issue was Ram Chandra Poudel, another hill Brahmin, equally despised in the Terai.

Yet, the formation of the new party is just a step towards correcting the historic mistakes. Any aberration in its conduct, however, might lead to serious accidents. Terai is a unit of the proposed Federal Nepal with its own challenges and pitfalls. Some of them might be common to other groups in the hills and mid-hills, while some could be fundamentally different. Secondly the new Terai could reproducing the historical injustices if the minorities and socio-economically backward groups within Terai as well if they continue to be marginalized. Thakur, as a senior leader and a minister in Kathmandu in the past, has been on the side of Kathmandu when Gajendra Narayan Singh and his likes represented Terai aspiration. Similarly, the new political outfit and its leadership also need to be aware that creation of a separate state is not panacea for all problems and disparities. There could be more demands for smaller states from within on the same ground which Mahanth Thakur has raised while forming the new party.

India, despite a federal set-up all these decades, has faced social and political movements, sometimes with demands for cessation. But with the authority of the centre intact, it has been able to diffuse the situation. North east India still faces these challenges. The decade of the 90s saw a shift in India's policy to strong centre and empowered regional states. That also saw the beginning of a process that encouraged inclusion of more regional and state parties in the political alliance governing Delhi. But political parties there have not gone to the extent of demanding local autonomy with the right for self determination. This is where the Nepali leaders including the newly formed MTLP needs not only to be careful, but also lead the rest of regional and other groups that have been left out from the power groups in the past. A stable and united Nepal alone would be in the best interest of the country, and the way to address regional and other aspiration can not be found in isolation. Only a comprehensive package through an institutionalised mechanism will do the magic. The seven party alliance has shown any will or ability to lead Nepal in that direction.
Who killed Benazir?

The unusual press conference by interior minister spokesman Brigadier (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema on the death of Benazir Bhutto has created a controversy that threatens to linger on for weeks, perhaps even months and years. Cheema, releasing the transcript of a conversation that allegedly took place between South Waziristan Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud, and an associate, has accused the militant leader was behind the assassination.

He has also maintained that Benazir was not shot, or injured in the suicide bombing that took place at Liaquat Bagh on the day of her rally there, but died after hitting her head against the lever of the sun roof of her vehicle, as she tried to sit down again inside it. At least one PPP legal aide has instantly denied the veracity of these claims. More details are expected to be provided in the days ahead by the PPP leadership. The problem is that the lack of official credibility makes it almost impossible to separate fact from fiction. As this is all the more so, as, on the one hand, the PPPs legal aide has instantly denied the veracity of these claims, and on the other hand, the PPPs late leader had laid blame for attacks on herself on other quarters, close as, on several occasions, the PPPs legal aide has instantly denied the veracity of these claims.

So grave is the nature of the assassination, and so profound its potential impact on the future of Pakistan, that the truth must be uncovered. The fact that almost all the past political assassinations and unusual deaths in PakistanOs history — including those of Liaquat Ali Khan, Hayat Ahmed Sharpos, General Ziel Aghar Khan — remain shrouded in mystery provides little assurance that questions surrounding this killing will be satisfactorily answered. Only an inquiry by a credible, neutral panel of international experts would hold any weight with people — and it is unfortunate the government has dismissed the possibility of permitting such an investigation, despite the fact that BenazirOs death is no small matter.

It must also be noted that even if the official claims regarding the involvement of Baitullah Mehsud are accepted at face value (these were denied on Saturday by a spokesman claiming to speak for Mehsud), the regime itself must take responsibility for allowing so dangerous a criminal to operate freely. In August this year, after Mehsud and his men capture at least 200 army troops — almost an entire company — the PakistanOs government, in exchange for the release of these men, caved in to the demands of Mehsud. Over 100 militants were released and the 2005 Sara Rogha accord, which restricts government operations in the South Waziristan area, including actions against the Taliban, revived. Some reports say pigeons and balloons were joyfully released after agreements were reached. Perhaps if these dubious deals had not been struck, Benazir Bhutto would be alive and Mehsud behind bars.

There are also other facts that raise questions about possible links between the PakistanOs establishment and Mehsud. In the transcript of Baitullah MehsudsOs conversation, released to the press by Cheema, there is a mention of Operation Dragnet in the context of one of the militants who allegedly carried out the attack, possibly a reference to a member of the Al Badr jihadi organization. It may be noted that the Pakistan establishment is widely believed to have played a role in the setting up of this shadowy group. It is also unclear why, since Mehsud conveniently revealed his location and the home he is staying in the intercepted phone conversation, why no effort has been made to apprehend him.

This may have served a more useful purpose than releasing a plethora of material to the press, which in fact would have only ended up alerted him — that is, if all what Brigadier Cheema said is true. There are, as such, still many questions that need answers. (The News International)

Christians Fear Attacks by Hindus

Hundreds of Christians, fearing more clashes with Hindu nationalists, fled to government-run relief camps where authorities on Saturday were providing them with food, medicine and security.

The clashes left at least four people dead last week, including three killed when police fired on a group of hard-line Hindus that had torched a police station in Kandhamal districtOs Brahmaganaga village. Another person also died in the communal fighting.

The Christians had complained that the police were failing to protect them from Christians.

The killings and subsequent flight of nearly 700 Christians to four relief camps are the latest in a series of religious and political power struggles in the secular but Hindu-dominated India-state of Orissa, which has one of the worst histories of anti-Christian violence. In 1999, an Australian mission- ary and his two sons, aged 6 and 10, were burned to death in their car in Orissa following a Bible study class.

But relations between religious minorities — such as Christians, who account for 2.5 percent of the countryOs 1.1 billion people, and Muslims, who make up 14 percent — are usually peaceful. There were conflicting reports of what sparked the violence in rural Kandhamal. Some said two men, aged 20 and 30, were burned to death in their car in Orissa following a Bible study class.

Indian Christians stage a silent rally in Calcutta, India, Saturday, Dec. 29, 2007 to protest the recent violence on Christians and Churches in the eastern Indian state of Orissa.

BhuttoOs son to lead

As Pakistan remains in mourning and in the wake of the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, CBS has learned that the Bhutto dynasty will continue for another generation. Bilawal, her 19-year-old son is stepping into his motherOs shoes, taking over leadership of her political party.

Prospects for elections scheduled on January 8, 2008 look increasingly unlikely as the government continues to insist al Qaeda was responsible for BhuttoOs death.

The government says it knows who carried out the attack, but Pakistani police say their investigation is just beginning.

Despite a government-released video which shows a group of people marching towards Bhutto moments before the suicide blast, officials claim she died, not from a bullet or shredded wound, but after her head hit a lever on her car.

Violence in reaction to BhuttoOs killing continued to rage in the streets of some Pakistani cities Saturday, with hundreds of demonstrators throwing stones and looting stores.

Hong Kong to elect their leader in 2017

In a rare move, Hong Kong received an official acknowledgement from China to directly elect its leader in 2017 and its legislators by 2020.

However, the decision disappointed some pro-democracy supporters who were pushing for electing a new leader in 2012.

Hong Kong, a former British colony, became a part of China in 1997.

Currently, an 800-member committee elects a leader for the region, which in the past has tried to embrace democracy.

Hong KongOs Chief Executive Donald Tsang was chosen for a five-year term in March by the committee.

Tsang had submitted proposals on Dec. 12 to the Standing Committee of ChinaOs National PeopleOs Congress to receive an approval for its regionOs public to democratically choose its successor and 60 members for the Legislative Council in 2012.

After the region became part of China, the Chinese authorities had agreed to maintain social and economic autonomy of Hong Kong under one country, two systems. But achieving a universal suffrage by 2017 is still an important step in the regionOs history as on paper its constitution has no specific date to empower Hong KongOs public.

Hong Kong is entering a most important chapter in its constitutional history,” Tsang said Saturday in a press conference.

(AHN)
Relying on meaning, not words

...In the Mahayana Sutras, there are more collections of deeper level teachings on realisation...
Journeys made in the outer world cause a dramatic transformation within. You move out to turn deeper within. The paradox of journeys is most vividly described in our folklore and legends. You feel the difference once you have traveled, the changes you perceive most when you see realize how human life in spite of all the changes has remained the same.

During my journeys, to most people in Europe the male behavior Nepalese men do, man woman relations in Asia remained reminiscent of their own society some fifty years ago. The era I approached. My spouse and the way she reacted to my so-called orders at every step of her life reminded people in Europe of their parents. In the middle class Nepalease families men are seldom allowed by their parents to do any menial work. “My father used to behave like you do in my mother’s presence,” one of my English friend remarked.

After my journey to Europe I can never ever write a poem or create an episode in a novel approving such a behavior that a writer who has not traveled could easily write. Nor can I ever dismiss the same sex relations as monstrous and unsocial. Even if you do not approve, you accept that these people exist, like you do. There is very little available in Nepali literature on the same sex relations. They are simply ignored as obscene and probably the person showing such tendency would be at once be taken to a shaman or a priest. One gay writer I met in London seemed appalled by my aesthetics. He strongly disliked my “River” poem that most of my readers find very smart and enticing. To describe a man woman relationship, the River poem employs erotic images reminiscent of Sanskrit masters evoking the Shringar Rasa.

I had great difficulty in translating famous Irish language poet Cathal O’ Seanaragh’s poems into Nepali. Some Nepali critics refuse to understand the poems as they do not or can not comprehend the nuances of a poem celebrating the same sex relations. Also with male dominated Nepali verb, it’s difficult to express the emotions containing the same sex relationships.

On meeting people from all over the world in London, for example, you release how multiculturalism remains the future of modern world. And that in spite of tribal uprisings and rise of obsolete ideologies, the future of Asian society like its economic metamorphosis lies in understanding the essentials of the other world.

A journey outside become a journey within, leading you to the ultimate nirvana of the new millenium. The writer can be reached at writer@yuyutsu.de.
Brooks’ historical novel tells tales of the lives linked to ancient book.

Geraldine Brooks has enjoyed three successful phases of her writing career: first working as a foreign correspondent for the Wall Street Journal in Bosnia and other war zones, then writing nonfiction books, including 1994’s acclaimed Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women, and most recently trying her hand at historical fiction.

She hasn’t done so shabbily at it: She won the Pulitzer Prize for her most recent novel, March, an imagining of the life of Louisa May Alcott’s father.

Brooks’ resume would seem to make her uniquely qualified to tackle the complex subject matter of her new novel, People of the Book. The tale traces the history of one coveted tome, a Jewish prayer book traditionally used during the Passover seder, through time as it travels and influences the lives of the people who create or encounter it.

In April 1996, rare-book conservator Hanna Heath flies into Sarajevo to inspect and repair the Sarajevo Haggadah, which has just turned up after being lost during the war. “The Haggadah, which has just turned up, is a famous rarity, a lavishly illuminated medieval Spain,” Brooks writes, “was committed to her own independence. Hanna is only 30, but as she says, “I don’t go in for false modesty: I’m great at what I do.” She was chosen to complete this important work in part because her country of origin, Australia, offends none of the parties involved in hiring her. Despite her skill at her profession, Hanna’s egotistical, world-renowned neurosurgeon mother belittles it, and they clash frequently. Hanna is no less acerbic than her mother and is fiercely independent.

During her inspection of the Haggadah, Hanna finds a fragment of an insect’s wing, wine stains, salt and a hair, which she collects to consult with her colleagues who are experts in these subjects before carefully rebinding the book.

These objects serve as clues that launch the narrative into historical episodes from the Haggadah’s past, beginning with the most recent times - the Haggadah’s narrow escape from burning during World War II with the help of another Muslim scholar - and extending back to the most ancient, the creation of the Haggadah’s illuminations by an artist in medieval Seville.

These historical sections are richly detailed, enthralling accounts and could almost stand alone as short stories. The chapters, all in third-person, most depicting people trying to survive times of great suffering, contrast markedly with the punchy first-person narration of the Hanna chapters.

Although People of the Book contains scads of beautiful writing, the overall work is uneven. Sometimes the mystery-thriller aspects of the novel - such as globally dispersed expert analysts sending Hanna breathless messages about the incredible facts they’ve discovered about this bit of parchment or that bit of hair - sit uneasily alongside the finely crafted historical episodes. Brooks’ effort to create an entertaining narrative in which to embed the historical vignettes is admirable, but she handles the Da Vinci Code-like thriller moments as if splicing Masterpiece Theater with CSI.

Additionally, a few of the plot points don’t seem believable. Is it possible for a hair from the brush of the original painter of the illuminations to have been preserved throughout the book’s travels and yet overlooked by all previous expert examiners of the Haggadah? Theoretically, sure, but when so many coincidences add up - including a similarly preserved insect wing and a suddenly revealed missing genius father whose heritage links Hanna culturally to the Haggadah - it strains the readers’ suspension of disbelief.

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