Prime Minister GP Koirala has not yet accepted his defeat, nor is there any sign of his relinquishing the post. But if his latest remark about the poll outcome is any indicator, there are high chances that he will question it sooner than later. Koirala has said the poll was 80 per cent rigged.

In a meeting with top officials of the Nepal army on the occasion of a reception hosted by Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) in the army headquarters on April 19, Koirala said the poll was rigged, and in his estimate, it affected 80 per cent of the total results. Koirala’s brief statement came after a General said the rigging must have affected at least 20 per cent of the seats.

Koirala said the Maoists must dissolve the Young Communist League (YCL) and come out with an acceptable and practical suggestion on how and where to integrate their Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). “They cannot be integrated in the army,” Koirala, known for saying things pleasing to the ears, told the Generals.

What he said in the army headquarters in foul mood about the poll outcome is being seen as his way of taking up cudgels with the Maoists after the Congress party reviews its poll performance in the new political context. The two-day review meeting is slated for April 24 and 25. Individual leaders and parliamentarians have been told not to hold press conference about the poll irregularities before the party’s review meeting.

But the initial reports of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and some prominent observers group like DEAN have given much more detailed pictures of how the rigging and intimidation took place. The DEAN report also brings to light the indifference or lack of seriousness on the part of the Election Commission to contain the situation when Maoists launched a campaign of terrorising individual voters and intimidating candidates and their active campaigners. But more than everything, the PM’s assertion that poll was fair only 20 per cent not only brings the EC to ridicule but also sends out a signal as to how PM will officially respond to the poll outcome when it is finally announced.

Sujata Koirala, daughter of the PM, has reported to her father how ‘pathetically helpless’ the EC was when she complained about the large scale rigging and threats meted out to her by the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum. “The EC poll observers were either too scared or biased,” she is believed to have told her father.

The review meeting is largely going to hear three kinds of complaints - internal sabotage, mass rigging by the Maoists and helplessness exhibited by the Home Ministry and the EC. Party leaders are armed with ‘details’ of how the EC chose not to take any cognisance of their reports before and on the day of polling.
The number of Nepali labourers working as house maids in Saudi Arabia, is estimated to be around 15,000, although officially they are prohibited by the Nepali government to work in that country.

Diaspora

Majority of Nepali labourers lack Arabic language skills.

The number of Nepali women working as house maids in Saudi Arabia is estimated to be around 15,000, although officially they are prohibited by the Nepali government to work in that country. Rabindra Baral also adds that these women are often forced to work 18 hours everyday with very low pay and are often physically and sexually abused by their employers.

The new Saudi labor law does not include house maids, so it is almost impossible for them to get help through the legal system in case of abuse. Also, there is no way to file false accusations. Nisha Varia said that it is the embassy of the woman’s native country in most cases that come forward to help.

Zaki Alzyar, an undergraduate student at Purdue University from Saudi Arabia, says that the mistreatment of foreign labourers happens in the country mainly because the Saudi society is conditioned to look down upon those who do menial jobs and are poor. He insists that it has very little to do with the fact that they are foreigners. Not properly understanding Saudi culture and language barrier further alienate migrant labourers, says Alzyar.

Rabindra Baral also echoes similar sentiments. He says that the Nepali labourers are not trained in Arabic language. Saudi culture and customs before they come into the country to work. He emphasises the labourers so that they can protect themselves. He also points out that those who wish to work in Saudi should be sufficiently trained in their jobs and be aware of prospective employer’s history and reputation.

Impact on banks

Some countries have refused to honour the letter of credit issued by the Nepali banks without a counter guarantee from the international banks, thanks to the fears that Nepal’s economy will be a verve of collapse after the Maoists led government.

A top banker said banks are facing a hard time and the situation might derail Nepal’s trade if the Mahan (Maoists) did not change their behavior.

Avoiding Koirala and complications

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) is not keen to oppose the landing of the Prime Minister of India, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, in Kathmandu. He可是 is known to the CPN-M for his hard line towards the Maoists.

Koirala also had an ambivalent reaction to the NCP’s (Unified Communist Party) Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and the CPN-UMLs’ Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal. He seemed to be torn between his political allies and his personal feelings towards them.

The CPN-M has already come out with a veiled threat to Prachanda that they would not be backing Maoists at this stage.

Blame game in the south

The Matheshi Janadikrit Forum (MJF) in all likelihood will be holding the key to government formation and power balance once the new political arrangement comes into place.

As the final results of both First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation indicate, the Constituent Assembly is going to be a hung one with Maoists as the single largest party. But it will still fall short of at least 55 members to have a simple majority. For two third majority which is essential for any constitutional amendment the Maoists led government need at least 75 members from other parties to back it.

The MJF which has emerged as the largest regional party will have 40 plus members whose support or opposition to the government would be crucial in running the house business. “Our support or opposition will be determined by Maoists’ response to the accord that MUF and government had signed,” MUF leader Upendra Yadav told newsmen.

CPN-M which was part of the government when blue-eyed GP Koirala signed the accord with Yadav in presence of Prachanda in March has not responded to the MUF’s condition yet, as an influential Maoist leader has publicly stated that Maoists will not accept the ‘One Madhes, one Pradesh’ demand. The party is also a history of bitterness between the Maoists and MJF especially in the backdrop of Qaur incident in which the MJF had tried to protect the business growth of the Mahan (Maoists) for the killing of 29 Maoists cadres on March 23, 2007.

Nepali labourers in Saudi Arabia

Bhumika Ghimire

Every year thousands of Nepali labourers arrive in Saudi Arabia looking for employment opportunities. Trying to escape grinding poverty and stagnant economy back home, these hard working men and women arrive in the desert kingdom where economy is booming, thanks to soaring oil prices and growing trade with Europe and North America.

Unfortunately for many, the dream of escaping poverty and achieving financial security quickly turns sour.

Nisha Varia of Human Rights Watch in London sometimes leaves Kathmandu for his next assignment in London sometimes meets Prachanda after our poll assessment is over,” he added.

Maj.-Gen. Shashidhar Pradhan, who had openly stated that government of India’s favourite was GP Koirala, and that they would not be backing Maoists at this stage. The observation aired through his interview to a television channel was obviously based on misattribution that Maoists were going to be a distant third behind the Nepali Congress and the UML.

However, Foreign Affairs Minister Pranab Murherjee led the damage control exercise by instantly accepting the results and congratulating Prachanda for having emerged as the leader of the largest party. Ambassador Shiv Shankar Munshri who is likely to leave Kathmandu for his next assignment in London sometime this week met Prachanda at least two times to assure that Delhi will be cooperative with its ‘new favourite’ as before.

Yet, given Prachanda’s skill in making a total turn-around in his political line, and his one time eagerness to work with King Gyanendra against the political parties perceived as pro-India; India seems to be keeping a cautious watch on his reliability.

For India, Baburam Bhattarai seems to be better preferred given his wide contacts and ‘credibility’ as an Indian expert.

Prachanda’s history with the MJF activists have been blamed by CPN-UML. The MJF which has emerged as the single largest party.

As Nepali parties and players are yet to start a serious postmortem report on the poll outcome, Delhi seems to have already begun the exercise. The ball game has begun there, Nepal watchers say.

The biggest chunk of the blame is most likely going to be shifted to the security advisor of the Prime Minister, MK Dhakal, who had openly stated that government of India’s favourite was GP Koirala, and that they would not be backing Maoists at this stage. The observation aired through his interview to a television channel was obviously based on misattribution that Maoists were going to be a distant third behind the Nepali Congress and the UML.

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As the well-wishers that Nepal’s economy would be affected if the Maoists do not take any decision on power sharing.

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Advani gives in to Yechury

Months after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India’s main opposition, sunk over what it said was the government of India’s outsourcing its Nepal policy to the CPM, it appears to have finally fallen in line.

In a statement issued on April 19, the BJP stated that it welcomed people’s verdict in favour of democratic republic in Nepal. It hoped that a secular Nepal will continue to respect the ‘Hindutva.’ On January 17, BJP leader LK Advani had strongly opposed Nepal being stripped off its ‘Hindu identity’ and had also held constitutional monarchy as the ‘symbol of stability and unity’ of Nepal.

BJP sources say that the latest stance of the BJP on Nepal is in conformity with India’s well maintained practice of major parties having a common approach on foreign policy, especially the one on its neighborhood.

Vote rigging took place

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has said the poll on April 10 was peaceful but marred by several cases of rigging and booth capturing. It also said there were security lapses and inadequacies.

The NHRC report released on April 18 said the volume and instances of re-polling itself was an indicator that security provisions were not sufficient. “The NHRC has been receiving reports of booth capturing and terrorising for votes in the election,” it said, a fact that other observers chose to ignore.

The report mentioned serious complaints of rigging and intimidation by the Maoists in Dhading, Nuwakot, Gorkha, Ramechhap, Kanve Palanchok and Sindhupalchok, but gave no conclusion about the complaints. Similarly, it pointed out the terror that reigned at two places in Saptari district which resulted in zero participation of the voters.

Interestingly, the NHRC came out against the Election Commission’s (EC) over-enthusiasm in allowing candidates to file their nominations through fax. It was perturbed over the EC’s failure to stop candidates accused of committing serious crimes from filing their nomination, and said that would promote impunity.

Bringing out several facts of irregularities, the NHRC cited reports of one person casting votes many times, or children posing as adults. It held lack of coordination between the EC and the security agencies responsible for such lapses.

Free Tibet movement begins

The Free Tibet group which had suspended its protest has resumed the campaign for Tibet’s freedom again, soon after the polls to the constituent assembly got over. The group began holding demonstrations outside the Chinese embassy on a daily basis beginning April 16 in which more than 200 people staged Dharna, chanting ‘free Tibet’ slogans.

The demonstrators were rounded up by the police. On April 15 at least two protestors were injured as the police baton charged them. The government is facing double the pressure over the issue. On one hand the international groups including the human rights organisations have criticised the government for use of force on an unarmed scale against the demonstrators; and on the other, the Chinese government has warned Nepal against any further serious implications on bilateral relations if such protests and anti-Chinese activities continued from Nepal soil.

Miscalculation

What with the politics and the poll outcome, the country has no doubt seen many miscalculations. But the worst victim of the miscalculation was UML General Secretary Madhav Nepal. According to senior UML leaders, Maoist Chief Prachanda had approached Nepal as late as on the poll eve that he would lose from Kathmandu’s constituency number two if he failed to forge an alliance with the Maoists. Prachanda offered to have Jhajuk Rubeli retired if Madhav Nepal showed a similar gesture by retiring his party candidate from constituency no 10 from where Prachanda was contesting.

But Nepal refused to heed the advice. UML sources say the main reason was the advice he got from officialdom of Delhi that he should not spoil his chances of becoming the Prime Minister by embracing the Maoists. Delhi’s advice was, ‘keep them engaged, but do not embrace them.’

Day light robbery

Criminals looted Rs 8.5 lakhs from the Bank of Kathmandu in Sinamangal on April 21. The robbers armed with Khukuris attacked the security guard seriously injuring him and ran away. The injured security guard has been admitted to Kathmandu Medical College Hospital. No arrests have been made so far.

New loader introduced

One of the world’s largest construction equipment manufactur- ing compa- nies, TEREX, has introduced next generation Backhoe Loader-TX760 4X4 model with 4WD option. The company says it is the finest and the most efficient utility machine in its product segment. This machine is equipped with advanced transmission and axles called CARRARO.

THEREX has 47 different products of earthmoving and construction equipment ranges. Now Terex-vec- ha has its own world class manufacturing facility in India. The 2WD machine selling since last one year, has already proven its competency.
Neutral dialogue

NEPSE crashed and then recovered a day later as Maoist leader Prachanda assured the business community that the Maoist government would be friendly enough to let business grow and flourish. It was no doubt, a welcome intervention as otherwise, the despair and fear that was sweeping across the business world could have assumed gigantic proportions.

But the fear is not confined to the business community only. Banking sector has already been hit and some countries have refused to accept the letter of credit from Nepal banks without a counter guarantee from international banks. Maoists’ radical economic approach and policies will in all probability be controlled either by the state or by their party organ has created a fear which is not at all investment friendly. While people have voted for peace, giving Maoists the mandate to lead a government that should run on consensus, fear gallops in the minds of many other sectors. Fear of attack on the independence of judiciary and media are deeply rooted in the minds of the people, since Maoists have time and again been shown to not be consistent. Similarly, likely humiliation of the security agencies including that of the Nepal army are other issues which could trigger an unpleasant, if not an unmanageable situation.

The list of sectors under the grips of fear is long. The education and health sector which have progressed a lot over a period of time, fear government takeover. International investors are cautiously watching if Maoists are going to reverse all these. No doubt, government needs to ensure basic health and education rights of the people, but discouraging the growth trend would send a wrong message.

Prachanda’s address to the business community alluding to their ‘needs’ is not going to help as the time-lag between now and their ‘graceful exit’ to King Gyanendra. This shows that they are growing somewhat in all its forms.

To sustain the trust of the people, the Maoists need not only include other political parties or leaders not to quit the government; but also to prove that they are more capable of running the government with transparency, accountability, efficiency, and with team spirit.

Be proactive or fade away

After being declared the winner of the most significant constituency in Kathmandu, Prachanda made statements to the private sector that adopting capitalist trade and labor law policy will allow for an economic revolution and elimination of the conflict in all its forms. For this revolution to take place it is necessary to form an environment, friendly for international investment, as domestic actors lack the necessary financial resources. But only by sticking to democratic principals will the Maoists gain the trust of foreign investment, necessary to achieve their economic ambitions.

To gain the trust of the people and of the international community, the Maoists need to go through a major transformation - from being a guerrilla on a rebellious mission to prop up the people, they will candidly say in all its forms. The way to move towards a peaceful Nepal. The Maoists have an opportunity to legitimise the so-called ‘people war’ but to prop up the commitment made by Maoists so as to move towards a peaceful Nepal. The moment Maoists start flaunting their victory as an endorsement of war, the end of their days begins.

True nature

One day, in ancient India, the Buddha was giving a teaching to his followers. On this day however, instead of a verbal teaching, he simply held up a flower. One of his disciples, Mahakashaya, smiled. The Buddha said: “Today, I gave a silent teaching and Mahakashaya alone understood it.”

This was the birth of Zen. Since that time, the Buddha’s message has been transmitted from person to person right up to today’s modern Zen masters.

Spiritual Corner

Zen stories:
“A student asked master Bankei ‘How can I cure my terrible temper?’
“Show it to me,” demanded Bankei. “I can’t just show it to you like that because it comes on unexpectedly,” explained the student. Bankei replied, “It is not your true nature, then. If it were it would be with you at all times.”

Master Bassui reduced the whole of Buddhist teachings to one phrase: “Seeing one’s own nature is Buddhahood.” When asked how to see into one’s own nature, Master Bassui would reply, “Now! Who is asking?”

A student who felt he had achieved emptiness of mind boasted to his master, “Now I have no idea.”
The master replied, “Why? I think you know about the weight of this concept ‘No idea’.”
Maosists should not be using the weight of the mandate and their still existent military set-up to make the CA totally irrelevant.

The other parties are so shell shocked that its leaders are not even speaking publicly about how will they cope with the ‘radical policies’ of the Maoists. But the CPN-M, along with its understandable euphoria, has also been trying to appear pragmatic whenever necessary, and at the same time placing its cadres by saying, ‘we will not compromise on radicalism’.

The ‘defeatist mentality’ of the non-Maosist parties with some exception like the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) also gives an impression that they are either keen for a back room monologue. International players, especially India and the Great Britain have only created a group of synopsis donors, including the bilateral donors, have clapped over Prachanda’s straight-forward approach, and ‘statemanship’.

The United States which still has the Maosists on its terrorist list may not be joining the rest in applauding the Maoists but will not take a different position. The reason is simple. Maoists’ campaign for King Gyanendra and ask him to vacate the palace. Buoyed by the euphoria, republic Nepalis no doubt must have clapped over Prachanda’s monologue. International players, especially India and the Great Britain have reasons to applaud Prachanda’s straight-forward approach, and ‘statemanship’.

The Maoists are clearly being misguided by the compulsion of the big ‘outsiders’ to remove the monarchy in whatever manner, constitutional or unconstitutional, by the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA). The move is going to subvert the entire constitutional process and the constitutionality, something that the constituent assembly should be irreversibly establishing.

Buoyed by the euphoria, Prachanda gave an interview to the Maoist controlled Nepal Television saying that he would meet King Gyanendra and ask him to vacate the palace. Buoyed by the euphoria, the Maoists no doubt must have clapped over Prachanda’s straight-forward approach, and ‘statemanship’.

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Maoists have embarked on a populist journey. Prachanda gave an interview to the Maoist controlled Nepal Television saying that he would meet King Gyanendra and ask him to vacate the palace. Buoyed by the euphoria, the Maoists no doubt must have clapped over Prachanda’s straight-forward approach, and ‘statemanship’.

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The Maoists are clearly being misguided by the compulsion of the big ‘outsiders’ to remove the monarchy in whatever manner, constitutional or unconstitutional, by the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA). The move is going to subvert the entire constitutional process and the constitutionality, something that the constituent assembly should be irreversibly establishing.

What is the compulsion behind such a move? An unaccepted interim constitution ordered that the future CA shall enforce republican order by its first meeting which as per the established practices under any democracy, will be restricted to a problem speaker swaying in the new members.

The 601-member house has many parties and members who were not in the interim parliament that was a body filled by the handpicked members of the parties loyal to their leaders. All of them have a right to be part of any major decisions and issues in the CA independent of what the interim parliament’s order was. The political muscle and dominant will of one or more parties cannot be used to subvert the political process and rights of any member of the House.

If CA under the new regime is to thwart democratic process in such a brazen manner, then its natural targets will be the independent judiciary, Nepal army and the media, as they alone will be offering some resistance to the authoritarian design of any regime.

Political parties have spoken through their manifestations, and people through their ballots. That is a mandate to prepare a constitution through consensus after having a prolonged and useful debate in the CA. The implementation part follows only after that process is over.

If CA under the new regime is to thwart democratic process in such a brazen manner, then its natural targets will be the independent judiciary, Nepal army and the media, as they alone will be offering some resistance to the authoritarian design of any regime.
Uday Pariyar

The Maoists surprised many by doing well in the April elections. Their electoral victory shocked not just the mainstream political parties lightly and based intellectuals, analysts and opinion makers. Why did their calculations and predictions before the polls go wrong? And why did they think, in the first place, that a Maoists’ majority was unlikely?

The analysts and thinkers might produce many reasons why the Maoists made it to power. Probably one of the less obvious but important factors was the popular false assumptions about the actual influence, strengths and support base of the Maoists, not least in the rural parts.

The wrong beliefs existed since the start of the armed movement in 1996. The NC rulers of the time took it extremely lightly and went around making public comments about how they would be able to crush the budding insurgency within days or weeks. They used the poorly armed and not-for-battle police force for their anti-Maoist missions, which only contributed to the spread of the insurgency.

Lack of seriousness of the Maoist cause persisted for a long time, which provided space for the bloody movement to hit almost every village. The political players and thinkers could not fathom the level of penetration and influence of the Maoists among the citizens mainly because they did not visit the rural areas. The parties were busy with their power sharing and key towns. This is time for them to pay attention.

The mainstream parties at one stage also held a false belief that the Maoists were threats to one party and not another. The king believed that the Maoists were aiming at the parties. The NC believed that the Maoists were mainly hurting the UML’s support base and the UML thought that the NC was who they were in real danger. Also there was a lot of disagreement on whether the Maoists were political forces or terrorist ones. So the state parties failed to come up with any comprehensive political or military plans to confront the insurgents on time. The Maoist leaders happily played one party against another and went ahead with their mission.

No wonder the Maoists became extremely powerful, particularly in the rural areas where the State was largely absent. Although they did not win the war, they did not lose it either. The equilibrium of power forced the state parties to seek a negotiated settlement. And now, the former rebels have shown that they are competent fighters not just on the battlefield but also on the ballot fronts. The parties must have now realised with mostly the same old faces. Neither did they have any appealing new agenda nor did they have young and representative of marginalised groups contesting elections.

For instance, the NC had just one Dalit candidate under the first past the post system. It refused to let charismatic young NC leader Gagan Thapa contest elections under this system. Similar was the case with the UML. It showed that the mainstream parties had refused to change with the people’s aspirations for change. The Maoists did have attractive slogans and did try to find candidates from different castes, ethnic and regional backgrounds.

And now the Kathmandu intellectuals and parties are living with yet another false assumption on what the Maoists might be up to. They argue that the Maoists had now turned into another parliamentarian party. They believe that the Maoists will be no different to the UML. But this is an assumption not based on realities. The Maoists still have not explicitly stated that they have given up violent politics. Their cadre has not stopped intimidating other party workers and common people.

The Maoist leaders might not be able to offend their militant forces such as YCL and other hardcore workers by following the traditional parliamentary system. So, how could one be sure that the Maoists have changed by winning the votes? How can we be certain that the peace process is close to success by bringing the Maoists on board? What is the guarantee that the Maoists will adhere to the old agreements with the seven parties at a time when the parties’ coalition has to be reoriented?

This election taught many lessons. One of the key lessons was to the so-called prominent analysts and thinkers not to arrive at a judgement by reading some Kathmandu newspaper pages or paying some leaders in Kathmandu and key towns. This is time for not just party workers but also analysts to start visiting the rural people and getting their point of views as well. This exercise might help them arrive at better predictions next time.

In this new found political equation, the loss of Nepali Congress and the UML can be equated as an India’s loss in Nepal too.

Siddhartha Thapa

The unbinding political situation in Nepal, where the Maoists have secured a majority, will lead to a revolution which Indian influence is severely curtailed. Professor SD Muni, a Nepali expert, during his last visit to Kathmandu had commented during a TV interview with Bhunai Dahal that, “Whenever the kings have been at the height of their power, Nepal has been insensitive to India’s national security.” Muni went further to suggest that the king was paying the price for “inducing the Maoists onto the Sinisa” and a Maoist amalgamation without India’s consent. If there are any similarities amongst staunch royals and the Maoists, it is a fact that both perceive themselves as uncompromising nationalists.

In line with this assessment, King Gyanendra’s two latest statements, one before and the other after the elections cannot be ignored. In the first statement issued on the eve of the polls, he urged his countrymen to vote in order to protect Nepal’s unity, integrity and sovereignty. In the second statement after the polls, he succinctly stated, “the enthusiastic participation of the Nepali people in the Constituent Assembly elections, through which they have emphatically reiterated their firm resolve not to compromise the nation’s existence, independence and integrity under any circumstance is a source of satisfaction for us.”

What is significant is that the king seems unperturbed by the victory of the Maoists. It is also seen as most royalists and Maoists consider the political parties as agents of Indian rule in Nepal. Although King Gyanendra may be devastated by the inevitable joining of monarchists on the other side, he has found some solace in the Maoists victory because the Maoists have promised to challenge Indian hegemony in Nepal. Undoubtedly, the king is having the last laugh in this bitter battle that has ensued between the monarch and the beleaguered main stream political parties over the last two years.

In this new found political equation, the loss of Nepali Congress and the UML can be equated as an India’s loss in Nepal too. In actuality, the Maoists will do what King Mahendra did by victimizing an Indian hegemony in Nepal – consolidate domestic support base through popular programs and use China as a counterbalancing force against India – in other case, India’s influence in Nepal is all about to erode significantly. When the Maoists do take control of the state, it is highly unlikely the Maoists will want to repeat the mistakes of what other communist leaders around the world have done – adherence to radical communism.

Given the global reality and their acceptance of a free market economy, the Maoists will aim to consolidate their domestic support base by sympathising with labor unions and by bringing about popular programs aimed at rural Nepal such as free health education to name a few. However, the success of radical policy programs will prove to be counter productive for the Maoists. Similarly, the Maoists will also aim to neutralise Ananda Pratap’s Production of PLA. But, since the Maoists have secured a majority, the necessity to neutralise Nepal Army does not become a strategic compulsion.

In other words, the Maoist foreign policy and the anti-Indian rhetoric they stand for will naturally convince some influential officers in Nepal Army to support the Maoists on the basis of anti-Indian nationalism. Therefore, in such a situation the deterrence level of main stream political parties and India will lessen dramatically.

But on a different level of analysis the rise of Maoism in Nepal also opens a new arena for a political crisis in Nepal and in South Asia. Since these elections have reflected the insecurity of the Nepali people, the coming of a stand off, credibility leading to a short term political situation. Democracy in Nepal will be severely threatened by extreme forces.

Consequently, the rise of Maoism in Nepal will also serve as an ideal benchmarking model for the Maoists and Naginals in India to make significant inroads in their revolution through much of impoverished India. Due to ideological and emotional linkages that have existed between the Maoists in Nepal and India, it is but natural for the Nepali Maoists to support their counterparts in India on moral and ideological grounds. Possibly by 25 % and unemployment at 7 % may further augment the support of Maoism amongst the vast majority of neglected Indians.

Then there is every indication that China’s bilateral relationship with Nepal will establish its influence in Nepal. China may now opt to play a subdued role, but when the Maoists are in control of Nepal firmly, it is inevitable that China will consolidate their base in Nepal on both ideological and strategic grounds. Other aspect of consideration for India could be the possible influx of Nepali refugees in India but this depends on how the Maoists conduct themselves. However, if such a situation arises, can India afford another refugee exodus into their borders after Bangladesh? The other problem for the Indians amongst many is the systematic victimisation of the Indian minority population in Nepal that will gain momentum in the days ahead.

In any event, the threat to India’s national security has multiplied. But on the other hand, Nepal, on issues related with national unity and same forces: King and Prachanda – have been a major threat. King and Prachanda – have come together fostering ideological and political obstacles. It is now perhaps the time for the Nepal Congress and UML, both take valuable lessons from this colossal defeat – there are no shortcuts to an indigenous solution.
In turbulent times, voters tend to choose candidates who promise radical changes.
Binod P. Bista

What was different in this election from the previous ones? Was it the presence of a huge number of international election observers (almost 900) as well as the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN)? Or because of a relatively large amount of funding received from donors for the election? These questions need to be answered truthfully and understood fully if a new Nepal were to be built within a democratic setup that would demand periodic general elections in a free and fair manner for receiving people's mandate to govern.

Finding the right chord would not only help Nepal and other poor developing countries in Asia but the whole developing world that is trying hard to find the right choice: suitable electoral process acceptable to all; without which democracy stands a slim chance of survival and people keep on suffering from lack of development.

All successful democratic systems being practiced in the developed western world and with some exceptions in the developing world, belonging to both presidential and prime ministerial system, have one thing in common. The leaders of the parties, after a hard fought contest, sometimes turning nasty during the run up to elections, accept the outcome of election based on a pre agreed framework, rules and remedies of the electoral process.

Humility in humiliating circumstances, as observed during the last general elections in India, is the most sought out commodity in all leaders of the world. Most importantly, the party in power (BJP) not only accepted defeat gracefully but also handed back power to the winner in an urgent manner. This is a normal transfer of power in all matured democracies.

In Nepal, too, a start has been made by the UML resigning from the government after electoral defeats. The other major party, which has also lost the election, is yet to make similar announcement since the winner is certain to secure the absolute majority in direct elections for 240 seats, in addition to leading in the proportional representation contest by a comfortable margin.

However, would we have witnessed a similar picture if there were not a coalition government of unelected members of all major parties that governed the country for two full years? Disagreement among major political parties after elections leads to a stalemate. Foreign election observers are of little use so long as the major parties refuse to accept election outcome. Even if a government is formed, it remains unstable and always under pressure from opposition to function smoothly.

Adequate funding and necessary support by the incumbent government to the national election commission for preparing and conducting polls is the least that any democratic government could do. Owing to paucity of funds (and sometime lacking access to technology and techniques) election commission is most often compromised at source in most developing countries. Funding support by donor agencies and international institutions would go a long way in the conduct of relatively free elections.

It is seen time and again that the loser (individual) almost always challenges the election outcome as it (including many other smaller parties) finds several anomalies and shortcomings in an election. However, the established parties and their leaders take care of the situation and prevent it from getting out of hand unless they, too, feel that the government funds and machinery were used to support ruling party candidates including taking up populist measures just before the elections. Not to mention of vote rigging and other such unfair measures.

The dream of a new Nepal can be realized only under a liberal democratic system that respects the fundamental rights of every individual, group and society. Free and fair elections are an integral part of it. Conduct of elections by a coalition government, comprising all major parties and some minor parties, did the trick this time. Since the constituent assembly members must be eager to draft a new constitution for our self-governance, a serious thought must be given to make all future elections as successful as the present one.

Supporting an atmosphere of transparency, accountability and level field for all players can build trust among the contestants and their parties, lacking which it could give rise to several problems, and if unattended, it will cause premature demise of democracy. Nobody in Nepal is willing and prepared to face this situation.
Iraqi cleric threatens 'open war'

Irqi Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr has threatened to wage "open war" on the Baghdad government if it does not halt operations against his supporters. Moqtada Sadr said he was giving the government a "last warning", and urged it to take "the path of peace".

His statement came as Iraqi troops, with US and UK support, clashed with his forces in Baghdad and the south.

In August the cleric's militia declared a ceasefire, pledging not to attack government or foreign soldiers.

"I'm giving the last warning and the last word to the Iraqi government," Moqtada Sadr said. "Either it comes to its senses and takes the path of peace... or it will be (seen as) the same as the previous government," he added, referring to former President Saddam Hussein's fallen regime.

"If it does not stop the militias that have infiltrated the government, then we will declare an open war until liberation," he added.

Moqtada Sadr issued the warning after soldiers launched fresh operations against positions being held by his Mehdi Army.

The BBC's Crispin Thorold in Baghdad says the government is slowly beginning to establish a presence in areas where the Mehdi Army had been all-powerful.

In Baghdad the US army and Iraqi troops clashed with militiamen in the area of Sadr City. Local hospitals say that seven people died.

Sadr City is the site of frequent confrontations between Shia fighters and Iraqi and coalition forces.

Tensions have been increased by the construction of a wall in the district by US and Iraqi forces. They say the wall aims to hamper the militants who regularly fire mortars at the Green Zone, Baghdad's huge diplomatic and government compound.

Also on Saturday, clashes were reported between Iraqi forces and the Mehdi Army in the southern city of Nasiriya.

Meanwhile, in the southern city of Basra, Iraqi security forces, backed by British artillery and American warplanes, moved into the district of Hayania, where Moqtada Sadr also has strong support.

The operation, which apparently sought to seize illegally held weapons, opened with a massive display of firepower by supporting US and UK forces, who pounded a deserted area of the district with artillery.

The unknown captors calling them as Taliban Saturday released videotape of Mr Tariq Azizuddin, Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan who went missing mysteriously on February 11, 2008.

The videotape was released through computer CD, which showed Mr Tariq Azizuddin along with driver Gul Nawaz and security guard Amir Sultan.

In his brief but comprehensive statement on video, Tariq Azizuddin said, "I am Tariq Azizuddin. I am in custody of Taliban. My health is deteriorating. Accept all demands of Taliban. Government should work for my release."

In his around four minutes statement through tape, Mr Tariq Azizuddin informed that he along with driver and security guard was abducted from Al Masjid area of Khyber Agency on February 11, 2008. He said that they were abducted by Taliban and were still in their captivity. He said there wasn't any problem. They were living in peace. "We are being respected and properly looked after," he remarked. However, he said, "Personally I am facing health problems." He said at the moment, he was well and healthy. Mr Tariq Azizuddin who grew beard during captivity mentioned in particular the names of his brother Tahir Azizuddin, Secretary Foreign Affairs Mr Riaz Mohammad Khan, Pakistan's Ambassadors to China Mr Shafqat Saeed and Iran Mr Salman Bashir to accept demands of Taliban and to release their prisoners. "I also tell my family and children that I am well and our health is satisfactory at the moment. Pray for our health," he added.

The alleged Taliban besides demanding release of their members were also asking for money, which they spent on abducting, shifting and holding of Mr Tariq Azizuddin since February 11 last. At the end of his statement, he also said, "Today is Saturday, 8th of March."

Though the names of members of Taliban who were demanded to be released, were not mentioned yet some highly placed internal sources reveal that Mansoor Dadullah brother of late Taliban leader Mullah Dadullah is on the top. Mansoor Dadullah was removed from his office by Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar in January last when he (Mansoor) without taking his seniors into confidence held meetings with high-ranking Al Qaeda leaders.

(Nation, Pakistan)
Samyag Dristi

Correct view is very important, as karma - that is, one's actions depend heavily on one's views.

Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

In the Buddhist experience, the experience of an Atma is sheer fabrication and thus it leads to bondage. This non-conceptual experience of Sunyata is called the first Bhumi when the Bodhisatwa has his/her first glimpse of emptiness (Sunyata) non-conceptually. Then there are ten such Bhumis (stages or steps) before the Bodhisatwa becomes a Buddha. Through such knowledge the practitioners gain insight (Vipassana) into the reality of impermanence (Anitya), suffering (Dukha) and non-ego (Anatma) and non-substantial existence (Sunyata).

Then the fifth Abhigya is known as Chyuti-utpaada gyana. This is the knowledge of the passing away and the rebirth of sentient beings. This is a little different from the above Abhigya. This is also called Dibya Chakchhu gyana. He fully realises that those sentient beings who are given to evil conduct in deeds, speech and thoughts, who are revilers of the noble ones (Aryas = Arhats, Bodhisatwas etc.) who are of false views (Mithya drsti, i.e. wrong views) acquire the karma of their false views. Correct view is very important as karma, that is, one's actions depend heavily on one's views. For example, if a person is of the view that killing goats to various deities is good for the goat and for himself, she will definitely sacrifice goats to various Devi-dévatas. If a person is of the view that killing other sentient beings is a heavy bad karma no matter for whom it is done, she will not sacrifice animals to any deity.

That is why Samyag drsti (correct view) is very important in Buddhism. Those beings with wrong views after the dissolution of their bodies after death have been reborn in Durgati (lower realms) in hell. But those sentient beings who are given to doing good karmas in words, deeds and thoughts, who do not revile the Aryas (noble ones), who have Samyag drsti and who acquire the karma of their right views, at the dissolution of the body after death have been reborn in a happy existence (Sugati) in the world of the Deva lokas (heavens).

Because this is similar to the sight of the Devas (gods) it is called Dibya Chakchhu and it is very useful to gain Samyag drsti as the person can see for himself how those who have lived a life of bad karmas based on wrong views fall into lower realms, and those who have lived good lives with good karma based on Samyag drsti, attain the higher realms. Again, the various texts prescribe various exercises to attain this psychic power.

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)
Lucille Bolduc

As the police rain Latli blows on Tibetans' heads, and the Election Commission condemns the dangerous people who run Nepal's domestic monitoring organisations, there was a country without a lot of problems. A country whose institutions can stop to smell the spring rhododendrons, taking the crisis with the flash of their political scales and the gleam of their teeth.

The tide that washed Gyanendra away washed the Maoists in.

Sabita Gyawali

This election has been a unique landmark in the history of Nepal also from the perspective of women. While looking at the participation of women in the election, it is clear that the women of Nepal are politically conscious and are actively seeking their rights within the political process. This increased political consciousness and political participation of women will definitely make a huge impact in the overall transformative politics in the country.

There is a level of satisfaction when one looks at the victory of women candidates. The country finally gets to see a number of new faces of women as the Member of Parliament. Many of them come from diverse background, along with some women who

Women and election

Nepali women cannot be sidelined anymore.

Shah's are left to flip-flop in the ponds of Narayanhiti, while the Maoists daze Koirala and Nepal with the flash of their political scales and the gleam of their teeth. Two years ago only the Maoists wanted Constituent Assembly elections; today every party in the country claims them essential. Republicanism is now orthodox.

The PLA soldiers disqualified by UNMIN are still in cantonments that have become internationally subsidised campaign headquarters, places where often uniformed and sometimes armed cadres have a meal and a nap in between forays to terrorise the locals with threats of death and vote-reading binooculars.

Sadly that's still an important distinction, and the weak men who run the ULC and NC, possibly, in time and under the right circumstances, come to admire justice more than strength.

That's a faint hope, but at least it is hope. I will choose the weakness of cowards over the strength of bullies, any day. And I hope, one day, that Nepal rejects all the creatures the tide washes in.

The greater good. Both claiming to atrocities justified as sacrifice to divinity, the other their infallibility. Possessed of certainty, one their own but still dangerous. Both possessed of certainty, one their own but still dangerous. The king walked the streets of mid western towns, surrounded by conscripted schoolchildren and frightened functionaries. Weeks later his police responded with casual brutality. The PLA responded with similar.arrangement. The king, walking the streets of mid western towns, surrounded by conscripted schoolchildren and frightened functionaries. Weeks later his police responded with casual brutality. The PLA responded with similar.

There is a level of satisfaction when one looks at the victory of women candidates. The country finally gets to see a number of new faces of women as the Member of Parliament. Many of them come from diverse background, along with some women who already have an established political image in the mainstream politics. While looking at the emerging figures, it is clear that a majority of women representatives are from the revolutionary background. The victory of Karma Begum, a Muslim candidate who has also marked a significant importance which will have a political as well as symbolic impact in overall women's empowerment process and also in the Muslim community. The women's fair representation has also been one of the major causes for Maoists getting public support this time.

Some established women leaders such as Bijaya Bandari, Chitra Lekha Yadav, Sujat Koirala, Sabiti Bogati, Asta Laxmi Shakya etc. have lost the election. On the other hand, some of the established male leaders such as Bamdev Gautam and Raghu Panta of UML, Anuj Nar Singh KC, Chiranjib Wagle, Krishna Khanwar Ghimire of Nepal Congress have been defeated by women candidates. This clearly shows that women candidates in the parliament have come through a rigorous process and they have created a new political dynamics which will have a long term impact on politics from women's perspective. Though, the number of women candidates was not as significant as it could have, the increase in their number is an important issue and the victory of more than 26 women (so far) is praiseworthy. Media coverage also shows that a large number of women eagerly participated in the election. This shows an increase of political awareness in Nepali women who cannot be sidelined anymore.

Maoists now have a historical opportunity to lead and change the face of the country. However, it is important for them to work together with the seven parties. In this context, women have specific responsibilities to amplify the voice of women in overall political process and also to maintain their effective leadership in the parliamentary process. Nepali women are capable of leading the political process in the country and all women need to support and encourage each other in the journey towards self emancipation.

Silence in the Shangri-la

On my way up to Chicago, I met a young man. “I’ve long wanted to visit two places in the world,” he said. “One is Nepal and the other, Shangri-la.”

“Yes,” I laughed, “you can still dream of visiting the Shangri-la of your dreams and may even discover one, but Nepal that you are looking for has vanished and become a hidden Shangri-la.”

He became instantly apologetic about his lack of information on the region, and expressed his earnest concern about the current state of Nepali politics.

Right after the election results, the people in the west have started looking at me as if I am about to face a calamity. “You have no clue what you people are about to face,” a professor at Knox College told me. Right before the elections, a Kathmandu-based British friend had written to me. Was he referring to Cuba? Or Venezuela? Burma?

He wrote names of some such nations in crisis.

“Maybe your reading at Knox College, the place where Abraham Lincoln debated the abolition of black slavery, will be your first reading after Nepal has turned Republic,” said he. The joke has turned out to a truth. I try to look for news in the North America media about the recent Maoist lead. I have not yet seen any major coverage here of the political developments in the Himalayan nation. Only Jimmy Carter has moved to Palestine to meet Hamas after a brief comment on the credibility of the Nepali elections.

In the middle of my literary tour, I am being asked vague questions about rationale behind Nepal’s decision to go republican. Is Tibet issue related to this, some ask. Is it Chinese influence? Anyone vaguely familiar with Nepali polity will dismiss these claims and questions as baseless. But I am a poet only, I tell them. Nepal, I believe, is a land of extremes, a land of extreme hardship and hunger and at the same time a land of extreme natural splendor. It’s an land of extreme political hunger, anger and plunder.

No wonder people would opt for an extreme political system. The pendulum seems to have swung from extreme right to the extreme left. The moderates have suffered a serious setback. Will the Maoist insurgency spread to the Indian subcontinent? Is it a reflection of emerging influence of the Chinese expansion as a superpower? Is this, as some have claimed, a wake up call for the Indian subcontinent? Or is this the way the young republic’s first few days of silence before unprecedented tur- bulence? The timepiece, for sure, is ticking most menacingly.

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The discovery of two critically abused, injured donkeys, dumped by the main roadside in the Kathmandu city has signalled a new crisis in animal welfare in Nepal. The rapid urbanisation of Kathmandu has created a booming brick factory industry in the city. Around 1,000 donkeys have recently been introduced to work in the brick kilns. They are used to transport bricks and mud and are forced to bear loads beyond their capacity.

The two donkeys were dumped by the owner on April 1 near Kushunti in Lalitpur, nearby Ring Road. One died after a few days from its injuries, starvation, overwork and exposure. The other was found to be suffering not only from a broken leg but also from multiple large open sores and serious leg wounds. The local children and community tried to help the donkeys by feeding them and covering them with plastic to protect them from rain. They showered their generosity to save the donkeys, but did not know whom to inform for rescue and treatment.

A local, who knew about Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT) contacted them if they could help the dying creatures. As soon as KAT was informed, its team rushed to the scene. KAT Manager Khageshwar Sharma said, “Although KAT does not have facilities to house large animals, this was an extreme case of animal cruelty which we could not ignore at all.” The surviving donkey has been named, ‘Asi’ and is still under treatment and care at the centre.

Dr. Dar, a veterinarian from Israel, who is currently in Kathmandu said, “I have never seen such a case of abuse in my life. It seems to be that this mule underwent multiple severe prolonged abuses in the past, since there is an old untreated fracture on her fore left limb that caused a twisting of that leg. The poor body condition indicates severe starvation and malnutrition. Poor hoofs and atrophy of the hind legs are also present. In spite of all the lesions, somehow this stoic jenny (female mule) could maintain and manage to stay alive up to the point of the recent rescue. A severe open on her fore right limb probably was the one that finally became too much for her.”

KAT resident vet Dr Kiran Pandey added, “The fact that she was neglected while on the ground and could not move herself created further severe pressure sores all over her body side and dehydration. This supports the assumption that this animal was subjected to a severe abuse and heartless cruelty for a long period of time.”

KAT Founder Jan Salter said, “I despair at this new development. We have done important work mainly with the stray dogs in the Kathmandu Ring Road area and are just starting to see the results with much healthier animals on the streets. Now we have another new crisis to face. Information gathered from the local NGO in the area who are working and are helping the community that labour in these brick factories say that the working conditions for these beasts is appalling. “The brick factories destroy the surrounding vegetation so there is very little for the donkeys to eat. It appears that they are just forced to work until they drop. We need to educate the factory owners and workers in the care of these long suffering animals in the future. We hope that ‘Asi’ will become a symbol for the future wellbeing of all suffering working animals in Nepal.”

KAT was founded in 2004 and carries out a programme of animal birth control and rabies vaccination amongst street dogs to reduce suffering and benefit the community. Street and community dogs are caught each day, taken to KAT Centre, treated for conditions such as worms, fleas and mange, and then sterilised and vaccinated against rabies. Once they are fully recovered they are released back where they came from. Since it began, KAT has sterilised and vaccinated over 5,400 dogs – preventing around 55,000 unwanted puppies being born.

Animal right activists hope that human beings would recognise all animals as sentient beings and treat them with love and respect they deserve.