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

Half the population to boycott polls

*nf correspondent*

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

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

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

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

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

“We are out of the electoral process,” was the instant reaction from Yadav who along with his colleague JP Yadav, set out to Terai to accelerate the ongoing movement for more autonomy.

Koirala had consulted Maoist Chief Prachanda and CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Nepal before he said ‘no’ to UMDF’s six-point demands. The boycott by Terai groups will directly affect the election in 125 out of 240 constituencies in the country. Together, these constituencies scattered across 22 districts along Nepal’s border with India have more than 48 per cent of the total population. But PM Koirala is believed to have told his colleagues that a controversial lobbyist for government of India cum academic who was recently in Nepal has asked to him concede the demand for “one Madhesh one Pradesh since the government of India wants that.”
PM - anti youth?

Prime Minister GP Koirala’s agitators seem to have just begun. He stands accused of being anti-youth by his own colleagues and camp followers. According to the official assessment of the Nepali Congress which Koirala heads, at least two third of the candidates have been decided by him, while Deuba who headed the Nepali Congress (D) until the two parties united last year, was allowed to finalise around 25 per cent of the names. Except for case of Dr. Minendra Rijal, Deuba was able to incorporate most of his followers.

Rijal’s candidature from Morang was vetoed by Koirala who was determined to have Mahesh Acharya, his nephew from the place. Koirala however, was able to pacify Rijal that he would be accommodated under the Proportional Representation (PR) system. But this was only a minor issue compared to the Proportional Representation would be accommodated under the PR system. Nepal Congress has projected an ‘anti-youth face. The protesting youths also accused the Congress leadership, mainly the PM and the Congress president - GP Koirala, of having violated the party constitution since the parliamentary board that finalises the candidates has not been duly formed.

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

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

The youths led and chanted the slogans of the mass movement of 2006. “Denying them space while deciding on the tickets was unfortunate,” Gagan Thapa, former General Secretary of the Nepal Students Union, the student wing of Nepal Congress told newsfront. According to the party sources, Tika Choudhary, former Student Union President of the PK Campus is the only one who has been given ticket to contest the election to the constituent assembly, although at least 30 such names had been forwarded by the party’s respective committees. Guru Ghimire, Vishwa Mohan Sharma, Umesh Rayamajhi, Nirmal Pokhrel besides Thapa were the names recommended by the respective parties. Available data suggests that at least 9.2 million voters - equivalent to 51 per cent of the total electorate constitutes the electoral list. By denying them adequate representation, Nepal Congress has projected an ‘anti-youth face. The protesting youths also accused the Congress leadership, mainly the PM and the Congress president - GP Koirala, of having violated the party constitution since the parliamentary board that finalises the candidates has not been duly formed.

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Ticket row

Embassy meeting

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

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

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

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

Jaya Prakash Gupta, UMDF leader, said it was clearly at the behest of the PM, “that we went there.” “We would not have gone there otherwise,” he said.

“This was done with two purposes and designs of the PM,” one of the five UMDF participants told newsfront. Firstly, Koirala wanted to show the country that UMDF was under effective control of the Indian embassy, and secondly, it was done to bolster the nationalistic image of his daughter Sujata Koirala. “He wants to project her as someone who refuses to be dictated by Indian Embassy, and that is why he sent along with her other members or relatives of the Koirala family too,” he added.

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

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

Multiple failure and delay in completing key election-related works has caused further erosion in the spirit and confidence of the commission. Printing of ballot papers has not yet begun and it is likely to get delayed as there are doubts if the process of filling nominations will not be withdrawn, as well as scrutiny will be on time. The commission reviewed the situation for cabins to extend the time for receiving the ‘closed list’ of candidates under the proportional representation system from Feb 20 to Feb 24. The attack on its helicopter in Rautahat district on February 22 was taken by the commission as a serious flaw on the part of the State to provide adequate security to the commission. The helicopter that had gone there with some electoral officers and the equipment for assessment training, was attacked. But it managed to fly back in hurry without suffering any damage. “Nevertheless, we have taken into account the development that took place and we are going to take it up with the government,” a senior official in the commission said.

“Most parts of the country, mainly Terai, are in flames and we have to transport election materials and officials by planes…. and the attack on the helicopter in Rautahat sends an ominous sign,” the official said. The commission is also worried about the huge expenditure it has incurred in transporting officials and materials already; since all that has been spent the last time went a waste, after the government posted the officials elected on November 22.

“We spent Rs 2.5 million in transporting materials and officials for the 240 constituencies under the first past the post system, and even this time, we have incurred huge expenditure without being certain if the election will take place,” another official pleading anonymity, told newsfront.

Deuba cancelled their visit to Hotel Himalaya once the news of the royal family’s presence reached them. But both the leaders had visited Bhattarai’s Bhanepat residential house a day earlier when an elaborate Puja had been performed to mark the occasion.

“PL, I am fine if the country survives and democracy flourishes,” King Gyanendra whispered in the ears of PL Singh, a former Mayor of Kathmandu and someone Bhattarai seems to have a great liking for. Madhav Nepal said, ‘Maybe Bhattarai still has his ‘old belief’ that guides him politically, but the situation has changed a lot now.” Yet for many, Bhattarai’s beliefs are not out of place.

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

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

Bhattarai, seated in a wheel chair, however, seemed to be in a high-spirit. “This is a great country with tremendous strength and opportun- ity. We should achieve all that, his recommendation was but obvious – “We must follow the policy of national reconciliation and federalism in Nepal and Ganeshringi.... Constitutional monarchy and the democratic forces lead by Narayan Shrestha and I together to save this country’s independence, nationalism and democracy.”

Nude protest
A court in Bharatpur recently awarded life sentence to 50 Indian parliamentarians of Pappu Yadav, for killing Ajit Sarkar, a CPIM member of the Bharatpur assembly more than 15 decades ago. Sarkar, a popular multi-term legislator from Bharatpur’s Purna district had a funny habit and still further explanation when the issue he raised in the issue would go un-noticed. He used to just slug it up to the wall of the house, climb on the Reporter’s table there and strip off all his clothes, saying, “If this house does not take note of the plight of the ordinary people whom I represent, the only way I can attract the attention of the government is by standing naked in the House.” And that quite often produced remarkable results. No one knows if this is exactly what a Bad woman tried a few months ago while leading a protest demonstration outside Singh Durbar as their repeated attempt to attract government seriousness to their demands went unheard. But the trend seems to be catching up.

The latest to follow the Aji Sarkar pattern in Nepal was Swami Bikashananda who runs a centre called ‘Manokraini’. Angry that the media was not giving enough coverage to the great things he had been doing for the country, he got a group of his followers to parade naked in New Road recently. The police arrested them and is planning to lodge a case of ‘obscenity and indecent behaviour in public’, but Bikashananda is not surprised. He appears to be unabashedly busy devising more innovative methods to raise his points. But will he be able to have media to follow him now?

Good-will
No matter what the standing of Prime Minister GP Koirala is in his own country with his falling image, he has a reason to feel ‘resourceful’ in the foreign circuits. And makes it heard loudly and clearly in the early hours at his residence where the members of his ‘coterie’ have access to his bed room.

The message that these coterie members come out with is interesting, that he is better of Koirala that his Indian counterpart, Man Mohan Singh who sought to extend the tenure of SS Mukherjee until April in Nepal. Koirala, they assert, told Singh that it would be a proof of India’s commitment to the polls if Mukherjee is allowed to stay there few more months. Singh, whose posting to London as India’s high commissioner has already been notified, will have less time to spend there. While witnessing Nepal’s transition into a republic from a monarchy here, he will have to present his credentials to Her Majesty there.

Exit RAW Chief
There are intense speculations that India’s external intelligence Agency - Research and Analysis Wing, commonly known as RAW is up for a major shake-up that could see replacement of its current chief AK Chaturvedi, soon.

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

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

The write-up also attributes Nepal-sources having claimed that Chaturvedi forced the internment government of Girija Prasad Koirala to a contract an an Indian firm for a hydro power project. “Questions have been raised in India as to why the Head of an Indian intelligence agency was promoting a commer- cial company in Nepal,” the article said. It has also been alleged that Chaturvedi may have benefited personally from the deal. Politicians in Nepal are also extremely upset with Chaturvedi, who made a number of visits to the country last December which were all unusually detailed by the Nepal press. To humble Chaturvedi, the media even published the names of all the RAW officers involved at the Kathmandu embassy.

School vandalised
Vicki Subrana, the Founder Director of VEDOFON, Spain, who has been providing quality education to poor children of Nepal for the past 18 years reported that one of the two schools she has been helping run – at Daleki School in Samakhusi – was broken into and robbed of the jewellery the approximate cost of which is 1000 Euros, on 18 Feb. The jewellery project was in place to support the school activities.

Soon after, on Feb 21, the school was vandalised. A case has been lodged with Maharajgunj police station. Police said they will look into the case. The case lodged with the Tash Dalpin Thapa (the principal of Daleki School and Chairman of VEDOFON), and her husband Nawa Raj Regmi (who is the administration of the school project) for vandalising the school. The school administration has also asked the police not to accuse the leave the country. The allegations are made on the basis of evidence provided by four witnesses. Mr Subrana said she has also appended the social welfare board about the incident seeking the board’s intervention in the matter.

YCL’s safety
Despite Maoist party’s commitment to face the electorate, it does not seem fully con- vinced that the election will take place. It has asked its Young Communist League (YCL) cadres not to live in big groups but rather split into smaller groups. The verbal directive to the YCL from its leader follows Baburam Bhattarai’s moving away to a new residence from Naya Bazar, where he was staying. In any case, the group led by Martin; but the Indian ambassador, Shiv Shanker MboBox was not present when Upadhyay made the loud comment. The only group that chose to turn down Bhattarai’s invitation was the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists.

Bhattarai, seated in a wheel chair, however, seemed to be in a high-spirit. “This is a great country with tremendous strength and opportuni- ty. We should achieve all that, his recommendation was but obvious – “We must follow the policy of national reconciliation and federalism in Nepal and Ganeshringi.... Constitutional monarchy and the democratic forces lead by Narayan Shrestha and I together to save this country’s independence, nationalism and democracy.”

3
Private affair

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

The government which has lost its constitutional legitimacy by all account is running the country on its whims. It is a government of, by and for three parties, with citizens having no stake in it. It is a government at all answerable to any institution for whatever decision it takes.

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

The EC’s claim that it has done all that to assist in the peace process simply sounds hollow. It has only acted as a pliable tool in the hand of the government which looks like a privately run institution where just three individuals, GP Koirala, Madhav Nepal and Prachanda seem to matter.

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

The EC needs to derive its strength through constitution. The manner it has acted is unconstitutional, and smacks of servility. Madheshi needs to be incorporated actively in the election process. Nor can Janajatis and other marginalised groups be left out from the process. The political parties need to arrive at an understanding on the basis of defining decentralised administrative system and for that a well thought out machinery needs to be formed. Koirala does not want to go into the substance of the issue, is a megalomaniac and in recent times, has shown no different from Koirala. Otherwise how could they shamelessly remain quiet while GP’s cabinet sit together with the Indian government and decide to effectively ruin Nepal? Has anybody seen examples from contemporary history where an 18 day or 20 day movement leads to the leader of the country voluntarily agreeing to disintegration of the country?

PM and India

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

Nepali people should call for his resignation. It seems that Madhav Nepal and Prachanda are also no different from Koirala. Otherwise how could they shamelessly remain quiet while GP’s cabinet sit together with the Indian government and decide to effectively ruin Nepal?

Avantika Regmi
Kathmandu

Dictator Koirala

GP Koirala has proved that he will go to any extent to stick to the chair; and for us to believe that elections will be free and fair under him, is foolish. He chose not to address any of the issues that are related with defining the model of decentralisation or federalism. He simply tried to show that he is the only one capable of solving all the problems of this country, and any group, be it Madheshi or Janajatis or any other, should come to him.

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

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

Is this true?

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

Ashok and Shreya Sherchan
Budanilkantha

No separation exists

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

Muso Soseki’s poetry: Green mountains have turned yellow so many times. The troubles and worries of the world of things no longer bother me. One grain of dust in the eye will render the three worlds too small to see. When the mind is still, I do not care what is endless space. A virtuous man when alone loves the quiet of the mountains. A wise man in nature enjoys the purity of water. One must not be suspicious of the folks who take pleasure in mountains and streams. But rather measure how well he sharpens his spirits by them.

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

The upper worlds, the lower worlds originally one thing

There is not a bit of dust there is only this still and full perfect enlightenment.

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

In the real world, the pure world, no separation exists why wait for another time and another meeting the teaching on Vulture Peak is here today who else are you looking for to preserve the way?
What else to expect when, for almost two decades now, the right of the Nepali people to a proper education has been substituted by NGOs and INGOs doing ‘capacity building’? Had the money poured into these elite groups been spent from the onset of foreign aid in this country on education, we wouldn’t be at the impasse we are now at.

The Alliance has only itself to blame for the current impasse. Democracy is not a single system, like a scheme that adapts to cultures and individuals. It takes on forms that are compassionate and committed. It is government by the people, not by sycophants and another for those who are not. Our laws are out there on the streets burning tires. Observing that the interim government made a number of illegal decisions, it was logical of Tera politicians to think they could push for another illegal one. The Alliance has only itself to blame for the current impasse. Democracy is clear about a couple of points: rule of law and all are equal before the law. We have never been able to do this.

Looking back it was a mistake not to call a general election. This CA election will be a farce without the Terai. Terai leaders should also reflect on their demand to separate. True they can cripple the valley and the hills, but there are dangers in this kind of game. The hills may well be forced to seek trade and supply routes north at great expense just to survive (our neighbor to the south may have to grin and bear that), but our Himalayas are the source of Asian water towers.

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

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

Rulers need to change

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

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

I noticed one interesting character of his statements. He defined all his arguments and claims as “people’s mandates” or “people’s directives” or people’s desires and aspirations.” I literally counted the number of times he quoted “people” – more than 100 times in about 30 minute show. Almost all the sentences he spoke began by stating that people of Nepal had wanted his party to do this and not that. Then suddenly, lights went off – the beginning of a four hour rolling blackout. I wondered if people of Nepal wanted this as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, our experience is that creating a wonderful constitution alone is not a guarantee for the better future. The best safeguard to a peaceful, prosperous and new Nepal is not election per se, but the attitude and behaviour of those in power.
KP Bhattarai’s birthday wishes

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

KP Bhattarai or Kishunjee (to those who know him well), one of the key founder members of the Nepali Congress, and its long time president has faced many upheavals, including excitement and misery, in the 84 years that he lived in Nepal. He has the single most distinction of a Nepali political leader who preferred to fight for democracy and peoples’ rights from within the country rather than the late BP Koirala, perhaps the most famous and international statesman. Kishunjee (to those who know him well), one of the key founder members of the Nepali Congress, and its long time president has faced many upheavals, including excitement and misery, in the 84 years that he lived in Nepal. He has the single most distinction of a Nepali political leader who preferred to fight for democracy and peoples’ rights from within the country rather than the late BP Koirala, perhaps the most famous and international statesman. KP Bhattarai or Kishunjee (to those who know him well), one of the key founder members of the Nepali Congress, and its long time president has faced many upheavals, including excitement and misery, in the 84 years that he lived in Nepal. He has the single most distinction of a Nepali political leader who preferred to fight for democracy and peoples’ rights from within the country rather than the late BP Koirala, perhaps the most famous and international statesman.

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

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

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

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

Just a few days ago, the prime minister of Nepal, belonging to Nepali Congress, is reported to have informed an Indian delegation led by KP Bhattarai’s track record in Nepali politics shines brightly. It was he who first negotiated and coordinated an agreeable compact between the people of Nepal and the king in 1990 after peoples’ movement known as Jana Andolan I. It is worth noting that the 1990 constitution of Nepal was possible, and also agreeable to all parties including the yet to be born insurgents, which gave full sovereignty to the Nepali people.

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

It does not help to simply brush off his comment saying that he holds an old mindset and his thoughts are outdated. In fact, the Nepalis would be insulting the intelligence and contribution made by one of their own. For all the sacrifices and contributions that he made for Nepal, KP deserves to be heard at the minimum. For the sake of a new Nepal, and for a better understanding of the issues at hand, he must elaborate on this stand. The least the people of Nepal could do to this grand old young bachelor would be to listen to him patiently.
The current democratic process is about to slip away with the extremist demands of the Madheshi movement. The demand at this climax is not the one as originally sought for an autonomous Terai state with the right to self-governance and right to self-determination under the federal system structures. It is the demand that has been convoluted wishfully beyond the norms of federalism that can violate the national integrity.

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

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

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

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

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

All ethnic demand for the constitutional provisions, which guarantee the establishment of federal democratic republic, full proportional representation electoral system for CA elections based on population, and federal republican state on the basis of regional and historical background of ethnicity and linguistics with the right to self-determination, must be fulfilled as long as within all federal states the local government units are formed with the right to self-determination of resident electorates of the constituencies that make a unit of a local government without central or state supremacy.

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

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

Madheshi movements’ way is not the way to establish the federal democratic republican of Nepal. Consensus of all people of Nepal must be sought if the demand of such as of Madheshi for ‘an autonomous Terai with regional autonomy’ is going to be established either prior or after elections. Under Madheshi intimidations if SPA leaderships make such a decision than political instability is unavoidable in defense of national integrity.

In my opinion, Madheshi movements have really punctured the prospect of federalism for Nepal. It has tried to suck all at once with the self-contradictory proposals against the norms of federalism and the dignity of Nepal nationhood. For example, the demand of the full proportional representation electoral system if approved its electoral system will make 100% representation of ethnic and indigenous groups. However, to implement these demands nation needs a new system of governance. Thus the demand of federal system of government has become a necessity. Nevertheless, this does not mean to intimidate nation for disintegration, by taking advantage of the situation.

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

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**Hill parties rally behind GJM**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nandigam, warned BJP president C K Shreshtha.

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

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

(Times of India)

**Sri Lankan rebel violence intensifies**

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

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

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

(Upi)

**From the region**

25 Feb-2 March, 2008 9

**Pakistan-Post-Election Scenario**

US frustration will benefit extremists

**Muhammad Amir Rana**

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

The American concern is obvious: who will pursue its policies if President Musharraf is either not in power or no longer in a position to do so? Will the new government be able to advance US policies, especially in the war on terror? Will the US be able to translate into government policies: more cooperation with Washington or a change in the character of the alliance? Much was invested in Banazir Bhutto by the Bush administration as a post-Musharraf political ally. But the US diplomatic assassination last year, it seems to have no option but to continue backing Musharraf.

Diplomats at the US embassy in Islamabad are closely monitoring post-election development and encouraging a deal between Musharraf and opposition parties, mainly the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP).

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

If al-Qaeda and the Taliban are driven out or handicapped, there is something of peace in the tribal areas, they could shift their centres into Afghanistan, where NATO troops are already struggling, and can scatter into other parts of the world posing a bigger security threat for the United States. So, the main objective of Washington’s counterterrorism strategy in Pakistan has been to restrict and eliminate al-Qaeda’s epicentre by building cooperation with Pakistan for intelligence sharing and military operations. It is understand-able that after many years of concerted efforts and having spent billions of dollars in pursuit of this military option, Washington wants to see continuity in Islamabad’s policy. President Musharraf is the best bet to ensure that. At the same time, however, anti-Musharraf emotions are very high in the country and no political formula can ignore the public’s sentiment.

In the election year, the Bush administration has already been facing criticism from the U.S. media and Democrats over its unpopular support to Musharraf. If the new parliament seems less responsive to the demands from Washington, it would create more trouble for the Republicans in the November elections. By giving a verdict against extremism, the Pakistani voters have sent a clear message to the interna-tional community that the fears of fundamentalists taking over Pakistan must be severely undermined. Pakistan will be more stable for the Republicans in the November elections. By giving a verdict against extremism, the Pakistani voters have sent a clear message to the interna-tional community that the fears of fundamentalists taking over Pakistan must be severely undermined. Pakistan will be more stable for the Republicans in the November elections.

If Pakistan’s new government is able to stir up anti-US sentiments for political gains. In such circum-
stances, the ability of the new government to settle and govern will be severely undermined. Pakistan will still be an ally of the United States in its struggle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. But the goals this policy can be better achieved if democracy is allowed to flourish. The problem of terrorism needs to be addressed more broadly and strategically than the military-only tactics employed by the United States and Pakistan. While the use of force to counter terrorism is essential, it cannot be resolved only through military means. It is in the best interest of Pakistan and the United States that the democratic process should remain on track. Pakistan’s new government will have to take up the fight against terrorism as its own war. Terrorism is as much a threat to Pakistan as it is to the world.

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

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
Perspective

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

Kaya (the body), Vedana (the feeling sensation), Chitta (the mental continuum) and the Chaitta-dharma which are the four used in the Smritypaasam Sutra as Alambana (objects of meditation to gain insight (Vipassayana) into the way phenomena (dharmas) exist). It is only such an insight that can liberate and no other methods of meditation can liberate.

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

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

The Four Noble Truths was the first teaching the Shasta (master/teacher) gave and it was in Sarnath when the time comes. But Purvanivasanuttri also helps in the realisation of the Four Noble Truth (Chatwari Aria Satyani), which is the very foundation of Buddhism and its practice and in itself is the whole teaching of the Buddha in a nutshell.

We shall go into greater details about Vipassayana and the difference between Shamatha type meditation and Vipassayana type meditation, later to the five who had abandoned him in the middle of his endeavours because he started eating. When a person moving on the Srasvakayana path has his first glimpse of enlightenment, he experiences in his own mental streams the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths.

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

This glimpse is technically called Srotapatti and the person is thenceforth a Srotappanna. Srota means the stream, i.e. the stream that leads to final emancipation (Mukti/Mokchhya) and Apatti is falling into or entering. So it literally means entering into the stream that leads to or flows towards Arhathood which is the final emancipation (Mukti/Mokchhya).

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

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

Walking in the legendary squares of Kathmandu under the dark silhouettes of the pagoda mansions and temples, sauntering in dusk in the spacious squares lit by lamps, one gets the feel of the a nation that Nepal has been for centuries without any invasion of the concrete, without much aid, assistance or intervention. As you walk down the lanes of history, it looks like a magical trick that the government could use to lure more tourists. Not only is the valley an ideal location for the Hollywood producers, you must visit Kathmandu now to get a glimpse of what the past was like. I still sometimes find solace in the memories of Kathmandu I saw two decades ago when in small wooden shops people huddled together.

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

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

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

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

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

While none of the above may challenge the sensibilities too much, others are likely to prove more divisive. Try "If You Want Closure in Your Relationship, Start With Your Legs" or "Are Women Human?" and other International Dialogues.

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

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

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

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

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Helping buds to blossom

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

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

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

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

The FNC’s Ankur programme at the moment works with three counselors, Anita Shrestha, Chhori Maharjan and Anubha, with Anita as its coordinator. It has in a short span of time encouraged more parents to bring their children for counseling with the realisation that: it is urgent to get children to ventilate or share their problems, and that concealing their problems would have far more disastrous consequences, both for the children as well as for the family.

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

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

Having teachers and parents understand children’s needs and problems is equally important so that the children get these facilities; since counselors and counseling facilities are too inadequate in number. FNC has involved the principal and vice principal of Ullens Schools in Satdobato, as both share the same value in education and have similar approaches on children’s growth besides having a common network. “But we want to extend such interaction and enlarge the involvement,” Sajani said.

The causes behind stress and trauma of children differ and challenges lie in helping them identify the causes and to overcome the stress. “We need to respect the privacy of the children as well as their families but some of the cases have really motivated us a lot,” Sajani added. She narrated a case of a girl who spent her days begging around the Pashupatinath area and was brought to the centre. The girl despite a tragedy in her family now displays tremendous social responsibility towards other children like her. Children from her kind of background also get informal schooling.

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

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

“We need to respect the privacy of the children as well as their families,” said Sajani Amatya, President of the NFC.

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