B.P Koirala dumped

G.P Koirala makes his brother irrelevant in new Nepal

Twenty five years after his death, and almost 31 years after his return to Nepal to pursue politics of national reconciliation, the most charismatic and visionary leader of the Nepali Congress, B.P. Koirala has now been relegated to a non-entity.

And the credit for this goes to his brother, G.P. Koirala. The fatal blow to B.P.'s legacy of Nepali nationalism and policy of national reconciliation came from G.P. Koirala when he announced that congress should go republican.

"We must go for republic now and you draft the party manifesto accordingly," he instructed Chakra Bastola, a senior working committee member of the Nepali Congress on August 31. Congress going republican marks the end of an era, and ideological demise of G.P. Koirala who returned to Kathmandu on Dec 31, 1976 ending eight year long exile in India with a policy of national reconciliation which said that Nepal's sovereignty would be in danger if king and democratic forces did not work together.

G.P. Koirala's instruction has already sent a political tremor within the party. Some suspecting that he is a helpless prisoner of a strong 'coterie' that dictates him. Koirala's sudden instruction followed intense discussion in the Prime Minister's house about the unconfirmed meeting that Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mookerjee had with King Gyanendra on August 24. The PM was advised that it was an ominous sign as the two were 'plotting' against him, and it would be wise to target the king, to "nab the conspiracy at bud."

"Out of blue, Koirala suggested that we must go republic. We have a history and legacy of the party and we cannot desert B.P.'s philosophy just to blindly follow Prachanda republic theory," a CWC member told newsfront claiming that the party as well as the manifesto committee were divided over the issue. According to the report, even Koirala family is divided on the issue with Shekhar Koirala advocating a pro-republic line and Sujata favouring a measured study of the pros and cons of the issue.

BP Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh, the co-author of the national reconciliation policy had been arrested and tried for treason on their arrival at Kathmandu, but the party pursued the policy afterwards. The only surviving founder member of the party K.P. Bhattachar has clearly told G.P. Koirala that he would not be supporting a pro-republic line.
An exercise towards new constitution

Dr Abhishek M Singhvi

The countdown for the constituent assembly polls has begun and international initiative to advise what could be a better constitution model for Nepal has been stepped up. Leading the initiative now is India with a team of legal and constitutional experts descending here from Delhi to share their experiences on federalism, pluralism, secularism and affirmative actions on the invitation of the B P Koirala India-Nepal Foundation.

The findings of the three-day interaction programme which began on Sunday will be submitted to PM G P Koirala, by Indian ambassador Shi Shankar Mukherjee in his capacity as the co-chairperson of the foundation, as a reference material when Nepal goes into the process of making a new constitution following election to the constituent assembly in November.

"Nepals have taken their destiny in their hands…. an inclusive, prosperous Nepal at peace with itself and the world, is something people are looking for," ambassador Mukherjee said. He added that a new constitution which reflects aspiration of all Nepalis and giving space to those who have been denied that in the past is a major challenge, and that a frank, meaningful and a vibrant debate may provide rich input in the process. He said as Nepal is unique in the world, it deserved a unique constitution which Nepal itself has to prepare.

Prof Kirthi Govender shared his South African experience suggesting that a constitutional democracy based on the supremacy of the constitution and local levels were something that could be equally relevant to Nepal’s constitution making process. In his well-appreciated paper, ‘Federalism’, India’s parliamentarian and constitutional expert, Dr Abhishek M Singhvi said federalism was all about sharing of power, devolution of power and sharing of decision making authority. It also meant accommodating diversities, pluralities and multiplicities. He said while he was not well versed with Nepal’s ethnic, demographic and geographical complexities, the criteria of the devolution or federal pattern is something Nepals themselves have to decide. And the core issue to ensure is to make them viable and self-sustainable.

“Adapted Indian federalism, minus its several drawbacks and volatile elements, may be a valuable starting point for future models of Nepalese federalism.” He also suggested that independent judiciary, especially at the apex or federal level, has made its single most vital contribution towards uplifting federal principle. He also felt that the new federal Nepal should not only be secular in the sense of being ethnically, culturally and territorially neutral, but it is also necessary for ensuring future balanced growth of Nepal at the regional level which would create a level playing field, with each unit as a contributor and competitor in individual and collective prosperity.

Turning South

GP keen to bring Man Mohan Singh even for a day soon

Dr Bhol Raj Pokharel, who is in a hurry towards South, he is keen to have Indian Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh here in Nepal, even for a day before the proposed election to the constituent assembly. According to the informed sources, Koirala has sent feelers through official channel, but Singh’s visit to Nepal when the election process is on, is very unlikely, informed sources said. Koirala is believed to have conveyed that a visit will make election process much easier. During his visit to Delhi last year, soon after he rode to power at the height of the success of the people’s movement and his popularity, Singh had accepted Koirala’s invitation to visit Nepal at ‘a convenient time’. That was the time when Singh, breaking normal protocol, had come to receive Koirala at the India Gandhi International Airport, had called him the ‘legendary statesman’. But the magic of the legendary figure seems to be on the wane as Singh’s visit to Nepal at least till before the election is unlikely.

Taxing endurance

Once the model code of conduct is enforced, all these appointments will come to a halt. While the government has more or less finished the task of appointing Chief Justice, members and head of the National Human Rights Commission, new government secretaries and ambassadors, it is yet to find suitable candidate to head the Commission for Investigation into abuse of Authority (CIAA).

While the Prime Minister has proposed Sari Kant Regmi, a retired Home Secretary as its head, UML is lobbying for Tripureshwar, Kirtipur and Balaju. Somebody who identified himself as Mr John of Teraí Army has owner the responsibility but there has been no independent verification.

Serial blasts

Preliminary reports suggest that maximum damage was caused in Balaju where the explosion took place inside a micro-bus. Police sources said, at least one person lost his arm as a result of the explosion at Sundhara. The person who is yet to be identified has been suspected of carrying explosive filled mobile phone. “But we cannot confirm it at the moment that he was responsible for it,” police sources said. He is undergoing treatment in Bir hospital under police custody. The Maoists had taken out a rally near the spot a couple of hours before the incident took place.
New Chief Justice

Breaking seniority in the appointment of a new Chief Justice was an idea that the government had been toying with for some time. Some senior leaders in the Congress party including a working committee member and a minister were lobbying with the Prime Minister against the elevation of Kedar Prasad Giri, the senior most judge, in the line of succession to Dilip Kumar Poudel, due to retire on September 7. But the move fell after the CJ Poudel and Speaker Subhash Nembawal put their foot down. They insisted that having a junior judge superseding the senior one would set a bad precedence besides bringing the apex court into controversy. And that was it. The back-room politics against the appointment ended there.

This sets a hard task in front of the new Chief Justice. Of late, Supreme Court is being seen as an institution under the influence of the executive, especially as cases against the present regime are getting unjustifiably deferred or delayed.

Quiet home secretary

Is it a sign of demoralisation or tactics? Home Secretary Umesh Mainali maintained total silence when a delegate from Madhesh recently threatened to abduct the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Siraha if their demand to install a toll collection center on the highway was not conceded to. Mainali’s silence betrayed nothing more than his helplessness. May be he was scared of two honourable members of the parliament who were heading the delegation.

All this apparently triggered rage in Baman Neupane, a joint secretary in the home ministry. An eye-witness said he was visibly appalled over the silence of his boss, Mainali. Neupane shouted at the delegate and said, “I will have you arrested right here and now. How dare you threaten to abduct my colleague, a CDO!”

The shout did the magic. Both the MPs maintained total silence and the delegate who threatened to kidnap the CDO knelt on the floor and apologised. Bureaucrats may have been demoralised, but their authority has not collapsed totally.

Biased government

Quitting nearly three decade old job on grounds of principle is not easy. But that is what Jamuna Krishna Shrestha, a joint secretary in the forestry ministry, has done. Shrestha put in his papers on September 1 requesting that it be retrospectively accepted from August 30, the day cabinet headed by GP Koirala denied him permission.

Shrestha said, it was indeed a humiliation to be denied promotion on the ground that he did not belong to one or the other political party as a bureaucrat. Koirala government has come under severe criticism for harming the image of the bureaucracy. In the promotion of secretaries, the main three parties - Congress, UML and the Maoists, were given fixed quota on the understanding that more than merit, their recommendation would be the most decisive factor.

And Jamuna Krishna did not figure in the list of any party triggering a reaction that is not so common in Nepali bureaucracy.

Modern Arjun?

GP Koirala is now trying to be a hero of Nepali politics. Like Arjuna, the disciple of the great archer, Guru Dronacharya in epic Mahabharata; Koirala is now aiming solely at timely conduct of election to the Constituent Assembly.

“I see nothing except election to the constituent assembly,” he said during a customary reception hosted by Speaker Subhash Nembawal at the closure of the House session on 1st Sept. Koirala said he is only concentrating on the CA polls.

Koirala’s close aides say he is absolutely confident about holding the polls on November 22. But skeptics are not quiet. After all, he was equally confident about holding elections in June, the earlier time frame for CA polls stipulated in the interim constitution.

Govt – MJF accord valid

Poudel overrules Prachanda’s objections

Minister for Peace and Reconstruction, Ram Chandra Poudel, who signed the agreement with Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) leader, Upendra Yadav, recently justified what he did saying it was in the national interest. “Prachanda’s objections have no meaning,” he said, leading to speculations that overruling Prachanda will not be without a political price.

While Poudel’s response during a reception hosted by Speaker Subhash Nembawal at the parliament building came a day after Prachanda called the accord a ‘conspiracy’ and dissolved it. “The accord was in the interest of the country and the people and in pursuit of government policy to create a conducive policy for holding election to the constituent assembly,” Poudel asserted.

It came as a morale booster as well as a political score for the government since Speaker Nembawal also endorsed the accord. Speaking at an interaction programme hosted by the BP Koirala India-Nepal foundation on issues for Nepal’s new constitution on Sunday, the speaker said accords signed with the MJF and earlier with the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN) earlier were major breakthroughs and they should be sincerely implemented.

Poudel overrules Prachanda will not be without a political price. Prachanda, apparently isolated on the subject, has expressed deep suspicions that some of the provisions in the 22-point accord are directed against the Maoists. Curt and angry over this, he said Maoists no more wanted to be seen as part of the eight party alliance. “We are not the eight party alliance. We are seven plus one party,” he said. He further said that what made Maoists different from the rest in the government was that it had its own army, and its integration in the national army alone will help the political process to move forward smoothly.

In a statement issued within 24 hours of the accord being signed, Prachanda said that such an isolated accord with Yadav “was controversial within his own group, and without going through the Maoist proposed round table conference issues of different nationalities was not at all acceptable for the Maoists. He called it an outcome of ‘conspiracy’ and asked the government not to honour it.

As Maoists dissown the accord, Upendra Yadav, a co-signatory to the accord went a step forward than Minister Poudel in chiding Prachanda. “He is upset because we are going to participate in the election and because people from Madheshi have got something which they had so far been deprived of.” “This also proves that Maoists never wanted election to the constituent assembly,” added Yadav.
Politics of deceit

The 22-point accord signed between the government and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) is all set to be consigned to the dustbin of Nepal's political history. But the whole exercise smacks of immaturity, deceit, dishonesty and distrust among the political players in the country. Less than 24 hours after Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel signed the accord with MJF leader Upendra Yadav, with the latter announcing suspension of all agitation in Terai and full-cooperation and participation during the Constituent Assembly election, Maoist chief Prachanda called it a conspiracy and disowned it.

Maoist disowning the accord certainly brings into question the legitimacy, credibility and substance of the accord. And on the other hand, it exposes how artificial and ill coordinated the so-called eight-party unity is. This also exposes politics of one upmanship and rampant groupism within the coalition. Why did Prachanda have to wait for accord to be signed to say that any understanding with Yadav, someone who deserted them few years ago, was not acceptable to them?

It is true that G P Koirala, the head of the present government, either does not have the vision, or deliberately does not want ethnic, Dalit and regional aspirations for their rightful share in politics and power addressed. All along, he has been making piece-meal and half-hearted efforts to address it instead of appointing a high-powered commission or giving its platform to evolve into a larger policy in a comprehensive manner.

Koirala wants to pursue the politics of one upmanship. Prachanda deserves all support if he is categorically in favour of a comprehensive solution to the ethnic nationalities related issues. But his inconsistency so far on the issue only shows that his limited role on Terai if approached goes against the letter and spirit of the peace process in Nepal. It is a very important aspect in the peace process, which was incredibly active against the royal regime atrocities (except when they are themselves attacked). Civil society has all but disappeared. Why can't these groups organise and rally together to tame the Maoists the way they organised to tame the king? If the Maoists the way they organised to tame the king? The people rallied against the king under the leadership. They cannot now run away from the promises they made to the people. They better deliver, and deliver a just peace not something simply to appease the Maoists!

Thy Guru's feet

I am he, I am he, blessed spirit, I am he!

Beyond the flights of fancy, formless am I,

I am he, I am he, blessed spirit, I am he!

No birth, no death, no caste have I;

My mind, nor intellect, nor ego, feeling;

Father, mother, have I none.

Shankaracharya's poems:

Mind, nor intellect, nor ego, feeling.

But if to the Guru's feet thy heart unthereted still remain.

Thy body may be beautiful

And glow with flawless health.

Thy fame colossal and thou mayest have won fabulous wealth.

But if the Guru's feet thy heart unthereted still remain.

Then all thou hast achieved on earth is vain, is vain.

Thou mayest be deep-varsed in all that scripture have to tell

A beacon of light, a master of prose and verse delectable.

Bondage I do not fear; I am free, ever free.

Mind, nor intellect, nor ego, feeling.

Sky nor earth nor metals am I

Thy body may be beautiful and glow with flawless health.

But if the Guru's feet thy heart unthereted still remain.

I am he, I am he, blessed spirit, I am he!

Thy body may be beautiful and glow with flawless health.

Thy fame colossal and thou mayest have won fabulous wealth.

But if the Guru's feet thy heart unthereted still remain.

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Thy Guru's feet
For successful media industry

It is true that the security of employees, particularly financial security, plays a big role in the success of most enterprises.

The modern world seems to be doing business in a different fashion such as outsourcing, virtual networking and the like, causing massive in-house retrenchment and restructuring of many of its organisations. Today, most successful companies in the developed world have less employees, almost skeleton, but excellent automation to make up for the reduced level of employees.

Further, as opposed to the traditional cradle-to-grave employment, many countries have flexible recruitment policies allowed by the states under privatisation. It is very rare to find a long term employment today with a multinational entity. Most generous ones offer a two-three year renewable contracts. Notwithstanding these current developments, Nepal seems to have moved in the opposite direction by aiming to provide a job guarantee to the working journalists.

Acting on a bill prepared by a taskforce of the Parliamentary Committee for Environment, Communication and Technology, on working journalist act, the Nepal parliament approved the same recently. This action, now a law, obliges the media houses to follow a number of requirements for working journalists.

The Act limits hiring of 15% of working journalists on contract basis yet entitles permanent journalists. Besides, the media houses would be responsible for covering medical treatment and compensation to working journalists in case of accidents and deaths on duty.

Media houses are mandated to spend a minimum of 1% of their annual income for capacity building of the journalists failing which they will be deprived of government support including import facilities. A 13-member committee composed of government departments and journalists association will determine minimum salary of working journalists.

It is true that the security of employees, particularly financial security, plays a big role in the success of most enterprises. Only satisfied employees with motivation contribute to productivity and growth of an enterprise. Others simply waste their time and that of their companies as they lack the necessary commitment and hard work as a result of falling to meet their basic level of satisfaction.

How does the current act of the government help in a healthy growth of media and journalism for a new Nepal?

Although some of the provisions such as the accidental insurance and perhaps the limit on contractual employment can be accepted as the necessary reform required for the healthy development and growth of media industry in Nepal, there are certain other provisions that require closer scrutiny. The provision such as the contractual employees enjoying full facilities as permanent employees and the mandatory requirement for capacity building (minimum 1% of income) needs to be rationally explained. If there be no difference between contractual and permanent employees, then the bill could have simply restricted hiring of contractual employees.

Successful companies are known to have programs of career development for their employees so that both benefit in the long run, why cannot they be left to do what is also good for them? Why is there a need to determine minimum salary level for working journalists by the government when almost all media houses of Nepal, except the government owned, are in the hands of private sector? What might have been the problem of the Nepal market determining the minimum salary level of journalists? Or, could it be an action of the government to support the ever increasing number of private media houses at the cost of journalists?

Presuming that this is the first action taken by the parliament in its bid to provide essential security to the workers and daily wage earners in all sectors, the overall policy needs to be defined clearly for the benefit of all. Imposing certain conditions on private sector through law could do more harm than good now, and in future. There are so many workers who are in need of government support. The need to provide economic security to construction and transportation workers being as necessary as the journalists, it can be expected that the parliament with the help of government would enact appropriate laws soon.

Whatever the parliament does, certain decisions that interfere or obstruct the functioning of a free market based on liberal economic policies would not be sustainable. Nepal has agreed to abide by its international agreements signed with various institutions including the World Trade Organisation, and thus it needs to fulfill all its obligations. Moreover, how could the government create an environment for investment in the country by the foreign, non-resident Nepalis and private sector, as per the declared policy made public at the 2007/08 budget, if it were to impose conditions after conditions in the management of private sector? Or, does that fall under the public policy of workers safety and security?

(Bista is a development economist, works with Boao Forum for Asia in China.)
Ready to die or kill for dignity

It is not that we are naked but it is the state which is naked.

Badi community, a small Dalit community is considered to be an untouchable minority and is the most disadvantaged community. They mainly inhabit scattered settlements of Salyan, Rukum, Rolpa, Dallekh, Jajarkot, Dang, Barke and Bardia districts of western Nepal. In the past Badi community used to work as dancers and singers at kings’ palaces and rich people’s houses during ceremonies, events from where they used to get money and food. Badi women were the prime bread earner in their community.

Gradually, the women began to be sexually exploited and ultimately they were compelled to adopt prostitution as their livelihood, since they did not have any property or land. The women were thus systematically trapped within a vicious circle of poverty and patriarchal norms. However, these days most of the Badi women have become aware of their rights and many of them have already left their traditional professions and are engaged in other livelihood alternatives. However, their human rights and socio-political and economic rights are grossly neglected by the state agency and as a result they face social discrimination.

According to Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) network, which has been facilitating different interactions for Badi women in Kathmandu, Badi women are in Kathmandu, for their Kathmandu centered social movement, as the government did not pay any attention to their peaceful rally programmes in district and regional levels. They have been fighting against sexual exploitation, social injustice and discrimination.

“We submitted a memorandum to CDO offices in five different districts - Kalakot, Ranchanpur, Banka, Bardi and Dang and gave seven days’ ultimatum. We also called for a Bandh but the government did not listen to our demands. A month ago a few committee members came to Kathmandu to lobby for the demands to be heard. But still the state did not heed them. Thus we formed groups, collected money and came to Kathmandu for our protest program” said Ummi Devi Badi.

She added, “Our main demands are access to land for our livelihoods, provision of alternative jobs and rehabilitation of women who are still engaged in this occupation; representation of at least one male and one female candidate in the constituent assembly, legal identity to our children who are deprived of citizenship certificate, scholarship programs and free education to our children. We have submitted the 12 point memorandum to the government.”

Badi women have been protesting in the roads of Kathmandu since the past few days. Many Badi women were seen half naked in front of different important government offices. Their style of protest has drawn attention of many people in Kathmandu and attracted mixed reactions. According to Uma, “This so called people’s government did not bother to work for Badi women’s rights and justice. Our style of half naked protest is a symbolic message to the government that - it is not that we are naked but it is the state which is naked, the state which has failed to respect our rights.”

The current protest of Badi women shows a rise in the awareness level of the women. Ironically, instead of listening to their voices the government is using force to suppress their voices. Today, the first journalist from Badi community said, “State is being insensitive towards our protest because we are protesting in a silent way. If we had violent means, then it would have been serious.”

During the protests, many Badi women have been injured and many were sent to jails. The women complained that police forces hit them in their sensitive organs. Ganga Das said that many women were bleeding since they were hit with sticks in the lower abdomen area. “Many of them are injured severely, some have broken their hands and even our leader is injured,” she added.

The protesting Badi women have been living in Badi, Dhamara, in pitiful conditions. They do not have a proper place to sleep, they lack enough and risk starvation. In spite of it all, they are defying the state mechanism as a result of their protest. “Our demands are not fulfilled, we are ready to die and to killboo - if the situation demands it.”

A woman protesting for Badi’s right.

Debate federalism

Without proper assessment of economic and fiscal basis, federalism cannot be materialised.

After the April 2006 democratic upsurge Nepal’s political developments marked a substantive transformation in the relationship between the state and its citizens. A centralised Nepali state formed over the last two and a half centuries has been built over the unities of the Hindu state, Hindu religion, Nepali language, monarchy and various cultural and religious symbols. The institution of monarchy has now been suspended until the first meeting of Constituent Assembly (CA). The state has been declared secular. The interim constitution has recognised the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural character of Nepali society.

The unitary character of Nepali state will not survive in the future since the second amendment of the interim constitution provisioned for federalism due to pressure from various sections of society. Interim constitution stipulates to build an inclusive, secular and modern federal state through CA. Nepali modern political history began with the process of unification. Before unification, it was fragmented into many petty principalities. Each and every principality had their own state authority, political leadership, from government, its rights and duties of member of nation state on the basis of tribal practices. There was no dynamism and determining factor for the realisation of the western concepts of citizens and state. Formation of Nepali state was unique and it was defined in an unidirectional dimension. Now Nepal is at a point where it departs towards the federal form dismantling its unitary structure. Making Nepal a more inclusive federal state is a central problem. The realisation of political federalism depends upon its fiscal counterpart, the political economic resources. Public discourses should centrally focus to capture the processes of transformation of the two and half century long unitary structure to the meaningful, sustainable and foreseeable federal structure, with fiscal or public economics perspective. The excluded, marginalised and peripheralised communities only can be brought in the national development mainstream if the federal structure is compatible with the available resources, and permanent sovereignty of peoples over these resources is ensured.

More specifically, the proposed federalism is expected to answer these questions: What will be the fiscal or public economic basis of the federalisation in Nepal? What are the ground realties of spatial conditions such as resources endowment, development potentials? What is the human development situation? What is the current situation of domestic international trade and business activities? What are the current gateways to market centre and future potentialities for it? How much of physical infrastructure or social overhead capital is available? Other important aspects that must be kept in mind are the public revenue, regional contribution to GDP and per capita tax contribution on the regional/district level. What are their roles in political federal structure? What type of federal structure such as competitive, quasi-competitive or cooperative is appropriate for rapid economic and human development?

What will be the form of fiscal federalism? What would be the union list, state list, and concurrent list of the fiscal autonomy (both revenue and expenditure)? What kind of federal structure of the state can be designed in order to incorporate the marginal voices and minority aspirations in the federal form of the government? These are few key agendas that should be publicly debated. Then only can federalisation ensure the developmental aspiration of the people.
Uphendra Yadav, Chief of the Madheshi Janadikhtar Forum (MJF) was buoyant and looking forward to visit Terai as a hero after he signed the 22-point accord with Peace and Reconstruction Minister, Ram Chandra Poudel, on August 31. But that joy was short lived as not only a faction of the forum backed out of the accord, but Maoist Chief Prachanda who wields enormous clout on the government, called it a ‘conspiracy’ and disowned it. What does this mean? Uphendra Yadav spoke to Yubraj Ghimire about the accord and uncertainties. Excerpts:

Where does the accord stand now after Prachanda’s announcement to disown it?

Prachanda has the experience of having signed the peace agreement, and I am sure he understands the meaning of signing it, although he did not implement what he signed. His party has not returned the property they captured. His joining the democratic process and the government should at least teach him one thing that Maoists’ conduct and behaviour has to be dictated by norms, rules and agreement.

As far as the status of the accord between the MJF and government is concerned, it is a full fledged accord and the onus to implement it lies with the government. If the government fails to implement it, its credibility and honesty would come under severe question.

What are the immediate steps you expect from the government?

Certainly, all the 22 points have to be implemented. But to begin with, I will expect that the government honours martyrs’ families and gives them a token of compensation, the wounded are given medical treatment at government’s expense and the people from Madhesh are accommodated in political appointments immediately. If these steps are not taken soon, the government will suffer a loss of credibility.

In order to assure Madheshis and address the sentiments, government also need to send officials there so that the vacuum does not create more uncertainties and misunderstanding.

But with election process already so near, is it possible for the government to do all that?

I understand that. The interim government may have its own limitations. But it must send positive messages now.

How do you react to Prachanda’s statement that the accord was a conspiracy and should be scrapped?

Let the government react to it. Maoists have indulged in activities that clearly violate the norms and ethics befitting a ruling party. I still expect that Prachanda will bear his two responsibilities: to honour by words and deeds each and every provision of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) he has signed with the government and to behave responsibly like a constituent of the ruling coalition.

Have you had any dialogues or meetings with Prachanda? It appears that some diplomats have taken this initiative.

I have had no meeting with him so far, after we parted ways. Yes, some friends are suggesting that we meet but it has not materialised.

Your own colleague, Kishor Biswas from the MJF, has also disowned the government-MJF accord?

There are some forces who do not want the constituent assembly election to take place. They are supporting and instigating the anti-democratic and regressive forces in different parties. They may have done it in the MJF as well. What Biswas has done is not at all a pragmatic thing. May be he has done it out of the spur of the moment. I hope he will realise it sooner than later that this is a historic accord. The government has promised federalism with autonomy besides representation in all the wings of the state. This is a major step forward towards building a new Nepal.

Are you sure election will take place on time?

Not having election will be catastrophic for the country. It could lead to social and ethnic divisions and discords. Yes, those who thought that the MJF would continue with the agitation and still elections are disappointed. That is why they are opposing the accord. They are the ones who are actually trying to sabotage the poll. We want to defeat those sentiments with the support of the people.

Are you sure the confusion and conflict within the ruling party will not come in way of implementing the accord?

This is certainly unfortunate. At a time when we were looking forward to going to our areas to concentrate on election, this unnecessary confusion has arisen. But again, I repeat that it is for the government to respond to the situation and dispel any negative impressions over the status of the accord.

May be there are some people and factions within the Congress and the ruling coalition who do not want Madhesh issue sorted out. But not to listen to Madhesh is not possible if we are going to write a future history.

Since the MJF is going to contest elections, do you envisage any understanding or alliance with other political parties?

I am in favour of a broader democratic alliance which will take the country along democracy and republic. I will certainly work for such an alliance so that it gets comfortable majority in the constituent assembly since only then can we give proper direction to the yet to be written constitution.

You will have no problem having to work together with the Maoists?

I do not see its possibility it in near future. But I will have no reservations in being part of a broader democratic alliance on the basis of common objectives and programmes even if Maoists join in. I will have no objection to work that way.

Don’t you think that the Gaur Massacre in which more than 30 Maoist cadres were killed still casts its shadow on that possibility?

I am more pained than the Maoists over Gaur tragedy. That was not our intent. I sincerely wish that, now that Maoists are in the government, let it be thoroughly investigated. Our plan was just to hold the meeting. I am still at a loss to understand how it happened. And we regret it. The truth about it has not yet come to the public, and it must. At the same time, it is also time we move forward in writing a new history. Prejudiced views and stands will not take us to the desired goal. Understanding and consensus will determine the emerging future.
The first "Shri Bisweshwar Prasad Koirala at present is not even a common office holder of our party...."

The reader can now decide for himself/herself, whether B. P. Koirala was really the first elected president of Nepali National Congress. This article disputes this and sets the historical events in the correct perspective. D. R. Regmi was unquestionably the first elected president of Nepali National Congress.

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**Nepali National Congress.**

This article disputes this and sets the historical events in the correct perspective. D. R. Regmi was unquestionably the first elected president of Nepali National Congress.
Nawaz chickened out, I didn't: Bhutto

London: Pakistan’s former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has set September 14 as her deadline for announcing when she will return to Islamabad.

Speaking to CNN-IBN’s Sanjay Suri, she blamed members of the ruling party in Pakistan for putting her talks with President Musharraf to a “standstill.”

There is a possibility that Benazir might have lost all talks with Musharraf, which could mean an end to power shortages and an end to the power shortages and the Indian nuclear deal.

Mrs. Gandhi also denied allegations that the Left and BJP were kept out of the loop and that Parliament, UPA allies, the Left parties and the opposition were “kept informed” about the negotiations with the US.

In a bid to counter criticism that national strategic interest will be jeopardised through the deal, she said, “We have negotiated with America keeping our national interests and the Indian nuclear defence programme has been in no way undermined.”

The Congress President further said in the letter that the 123 agreement “satisfies all the conditions laid out in the agreement that is in the long term in the interest of India,” she said in a “Letter to Congress Workers.”

Her comments on the deal assume significance in the present standoff with the Left and signals total backing for Mr. Singh on the need for a civilian nuclear deal.

The Indian Prime Minister is embroiled in a major row over the deal, which has drawn condemnation from the Left and other political parties.

The letter was published in the latest issue of the party journal “Congress Sandesh.”

The Congress president’s letter is another pointer to the trip from Yangon to Bago.” Some 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of the country’s commercial capital, said one businessman in his 30s.

“Was I had to walk in front of policemen three times. It annoys me because every time I get on a highway bus, I have to get off at checkpoints,” said the businessman, who declined to be named. A housewife in her 50s said she had to get off her bus 10 times for police checks during a three-day trip last week from the eastern Karen state to Yangon.

“Police thoroughly searched the bus and each passenger,” she said. In Yangon, small teams of plainclothes security officers are now roaming “every corner” of the city, residents say. They can stop residents for identity checks and unravel any suspicious people on the spot, they said.

“Never happened before” August 19, said one Yangon resident, who declined to be named. While the junta has banned citizens from riding motorcycles in Yangon, it allows security forces and police to do so, and residents here said they were seeing more “motorcycle riders” now than ever before.

Analysts say the intensified manhunt and search procedures are not surprising. “The junta is very uncompromising,” said Aung Thu Nyo, a Thai-based Myanmar analyst.

“The government does not tolerate any form of public dissent and is always ready to crush demonstrations. This is the nature of this regime,” he said.

Freed Taliban captives return to SKorea

Nineteen South Koreans freed by Taliban insurgents after six weeks in captivity returned home to tearful embraces from loved ones Sunday, expressing sorrows for two in their group who were killed in Afghanistan and apologizing to the nation.

The former hostages, let go in stages last week under a deal between the insurgents and the South Korean government, arrived on a flight from Dubai to their home in Seoul. Before undergoing medical checks at a hospital in Anyang, just south of Seoul, they were reunited with their family members. After the hugs and tears, some family members were gently critical, questioning why the group went to Afghanistan in the first place.

“I thought you would be killed,” Choeun Kwang-sil, 77, told her granddaughter Lee Young-kyung, who at 22 was the youngest of the hostages. “I told you not to go there!” Lee, who looked thin and pale with hands marked by insect bites, said she spent 20 days of captivity in a cell. “I was really scared the whole time,” she said, adding she wasn’t able to eat well.

“Don’t come back,” she pleaded.

Earlier, they spoke briefly with reporters, apologizing to the South Korean people and the governement for causing them to be concerned. “We appreciate the Korean people for helping us to return home,” they said.

“Don’t come back to this big debt to the nation and people,” said one of the former hostages, You Kyung-shik. You, fighting back tears, also expressed condolences to the families of the two Koreans who were killed.

(CNN-IBN)
In the Sravakayana systems, the emphasis is on the Shila and Theravada being a Sravakayana system; it is natural that the emphasis is on the Shila. Although there are Samatha (Samadhi) and Vipassana (Pragya) practices within the Theravadin system, the emphasis on Vipassana is a new dimension within Theravada which began approximately 150 years ago from Jetavana Sayadaw of Burma.

Before that, Vipassana was limited within Theravada to only special Bhikkhus, whereas in Tibet Vipassana (Tibetan: Lhag Thong) in the form of Mahamudra practices and Dzogchen practices were commonly given even to cow herders. In the Chinese systems and their satellite systems which flourished in Korea, Japan, Vietnam etc. too, Vipassa (Tibetan: Lhag Thong) in the form of Mahamudra practices and Dzogchen practices were commonly given even to cow herders. In the Chinese systems and their satellite systems which flourished in Korea, Japan, Vietnam etc. too, Vipassana was well known in various forms. The Chinese for Vipassana is ‘Kuan’ and for Samatha is ‘chi’. There seems to be a kind of misconception that Vipassana is taught only in the Theravadin system and that too only in Burma. This is based completely on lack of knowledge.

As I said earlier, all the Tri Shikchya are in full form in all forms of Buddhism i.e. in Paramatmyana and Vajrayana of Mahayana. This misconception began in Nepal because a form of Theravadin Vipassana arrived in Nepal in the late seventies and because it was presented in Nepali and Newari it became very popular very quickly; and the Acharyas etc. of this particular system went around claiming that only their method is Vipassana and especially Mahayana does not have any Vipassana.

But Samatha and Vipassana of one form or the other have been taught and practiced in Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, Central Asia and the Cis – Himalayan belts for centuries. Samatha – Vipassana is called Shinya – Lhagthong in Tibetan and Chi – Kuan in Chinese. And all the forms of meditation found within the Tibetan or Chinese Buddhism are one or the other forms of Samatha – Vipassana.

Perhaps we need to go more into detail about what Samatha / Vipassana means to really fully understand how this confusion, mentioned above is not correct. As we said before, Samatha is intimately related to Samadhi and Vipassana to Pragya. Without following Shila properly the Kleshas will not be weakened. Without weakening the Kleshas or cooling the mind from the fire of Kleshas (emotional defilements), there is no possibility that the mind will attain Samadhi. And without some degree of Samadhi, Pragya just becomes an intellectual game (Buddhi-vilash). However without Pragya, Shila can become a source of neurosis, a means of making people self – righteous and puritanical. Shila must always be peppered with some Samadhi and some Pragya. Samadhi without Pragya is Mithya Samadhi.

Most people of the Indian subcontinent think that once a Yogavachara (yogi) attains Samadhi he has reached his goal. This may be true for non – Buddhist systems; but in Buddhism the Shasta (Master) himself has said very clearly that there are many types of Mithya Samadhis [Samadhis which propagate the continuity of ignorance (falsity / avidya)]. So Samadhi without proper Pragya is a trap into which many unwary Yogavacharas fall.

Now let us go into Samatha – Vipassana. Samadhi in Sanskrit means remaining in equipoiser level/quiet place. ‘Sama’ means equipoise, level, quiet, tranquil, peaceful etc. and ‘Tha’ would mean place and abiding, dwelling. It is translated most accurately in Tibetan as Shinya. Shinya is the exact counterpart of ‘Sama’. The word Samadhi also has a similar meaning with ‘Sama’. This part of the training begins after the wild whirlwind of a mind has cooled down by following Shila to the best of ones ability. Then the mind is slowly but steadily trained to abide (Stha) quietly (Sama) on an object if it is a focused meditation or to remain objectless – remaining aware without focusing on anything – if it is a non-focused meditation.

(To be continued.)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)
Nature watches
Nothing escapes her, nothing breaks her.

This is another experiment in line and colour; this three panelled artwork is done on handmade paper using inks. The greens and blues represent plants, water and sky. The reds and purples represent earth, minerals and plants, water and sky. The symbol of the natural elements of the universe. The eyes at the top and bottom represent nature’s ever watchful eyes. These pieces are dedicated to nature and to caution those who continuously exploit, waste, desecrate and vandalise her natural elements, bounties and blessings. Nature watches! Nothing escapes her, nothing breaks her. She watches and when it gets too much, she retaliates, unleashes her wrath. She unleashes her fury to say enough is enough. She watches and with time, she heals herself. Perhaps we all should be as vigilant as she is!

(Sanchita, 44, painter and writer currently works from her studio at Gargoon, Haryana, India. She can be reached at: cell: 91-9871803916, sanchitsar@gmail.com)

Hidden truths

Bhupi touched the forbidden borders of Nepali consciousness and attacked the false, vainglorious notions of heroism of the Gurkha gallantry.

Bhupi Sherhan’s reading of Nepali society and polity seems to hold validity even today. His poems reveal the fact that poets’ reading and analysis of the contemporary life remains more authentic than ostensible political commentators and civil servants apparently eloquent and shrill, like our countryside roosters.

A poet of a nation speaks for his people and their problem in a more realistic and at the same time in a prophetic way. Always above and distrustful of the lure of the fast changing political happenings, he refuses to be hooked in the spider webs of bare visible facts. Instead of concentrating on the factual accounts of events that seem to shape the contemporary history, a poet goes for the hidden life energy that defines the future and fate of his nation.

Bhupi’s power lay in this truth about a true artist, his depiction of his people as vainglorious louts and fools leaping into frenzy at some one else’s calling. How could we be brave without being dumb, he asks. Who would leap into fire at someone else’s provocation? He calls Nepali soldiers fighting in foreign lands as children of partridges, quails and sacrificial bulls; and Nepali a nation of rumors only.

Bhupi, a true successor of Rimal, wrote stunning poems. He saw what his contemporary political commentators failed to see. For the first time in the history of Nepali literature, he dared to touch the delicate issues that had remained hidden in the shared memory of its people. In the tradition of his master, Rimal, he wrote on the agony of Nepali in an unjust, automatic system.

Bhupi touched the forbidden borders of Nepali consciousness and attacked the false, vainglorious notions of heroism of the Gurkha gallantry. He evoked the geopolitical compulsion of Nepal to remain a nonentity and raised the delicate questions of nationalism, sovereignty and a liberated prosperous Nepal.

He also foresaw the current instability of Nepali politility and described the ruler of his times as a blind man in a revolving chair. His poems set the mood for the rest of the century and there is hardly a poet, right or left in Nepal who would refuse the debt to this epoch making figure. Like all Nepali poets, Bhupi had that ego that sees the hypocrisy of the politicians and lashes mercilessly at them, holding them responsible for the crushing an innocent nation under the ruthless trucks of their hypocrisy and greed. (twitter@yuyutsu.de)

Show living love

What really matters is how we treat people, today and now, not after they are dead.

Sushma Amatya

What is it that prevents most of us from cherishing people around us, showing them respect and letting them know how much we care while they are still alive? Why do we take people around us for granted; only to sing praises of them once they are dead? Why cannot love people be showing love and appreciation they deserve? What could be the reason behind so many negativites that prevent people from co-existing in peace and harmony?

Is it deep social conditioning? Does watching one’s parents unable to have cordial relationships with their relatives, friends and other members of society drift a pattern in one’s minds that ultimately renders one incapable of cultivating harmonious relationships? Are negative stories handed down through generations enough to create a sense of distrust rendering one incapable of viewing others in positive light?

Standing on a higher ground and watching with a broad perspective how most members of Kathmandu society function is like watching a mega-series that can outdo any Indian or western television saga. It can be hilarious, heart-wrenching, outrageous, the adjectives abound. Examples are aplenty of how grown up children give heartaches and headaches to their parents while they are alive only to make a dramatic display of grief once they pass away. If one percent of the show of love displayed for the deceased was shown to the person while she still alive!

Why assume that the dead hover around after their death to see how much their children or relatives love them? What matters are these, how we treat our family members with genuine love, pure-intentions and clear communication, today. How do I care if who I think is being nasty or unfair to me today, sings praises of me after I am dead? I would rather the person makes peace with me while still alive. Scriptures say that the dead can read the true intentions of the living, so it is really no use pretending in any way.

Elaborate displays of rituals are often attempts to purge the guilt of not having treated the person right while alive. In many instances such a show are put up simply to exhibit one’s effort for the deceased to impress one’s relatives and neighbours. In some cases, it could be just that those who indulge in showing off simply have nothing better to do than try to earn approval from others through grandiose display of wealth acquired, without one’s effort or through unfair means.

It is also common to see people spending more for the rituals for the dead expecting benefits for oneself, while the dead were ignored, forsaken or ill treated while alive. It appears the dead are feared more. It is well and good to pay respect to the dead but my point here is that we all deserve as much respect and more while alive.

Treating the dead with respect out of fear of the unknown repercussions while taking the living for granted is a prevalent attitude in this poverty ridden society; where there are many suffering from extreme impoverishment of hearts. This disease drives people to act irrationally, pushing them to commit shocking acts just so that they benefit materially. A visit to the old people’s home or the silent walls of many homes tells many such stories.

The fact remains that no matter how one tries to justify one’s greed driven actions, or tries to brainwash self as well as others, the truth of having deceived or cheated gets rooted in one’s subconscious mind. The day one day does sprout and comes back to haunt one’s conscience or it boomerangs with increased intensity. There are innumerable examples of such incidents in our minds, around us as well as in recent history.

In this situation as in any other life context, negativities abound where the wisdom of impenetrance, awareness and acceptance of change and death is lacking. When one mistakes oneself to be indestructible, oversteps one’s boundaries and tries to dominate and control, one is well on way to increasing the devil nature in oneself; devil that acts like a chameleon, an imposter or a tyrant. How many such examples do we see around us?

Such people need help. They need to be told what they are doing is wrong. They are so lost caught up by envy, jealousy, greed, obsessions that they risk drowning themselves in the murky waters they have created in their own minds. They need sympathy, and need to be shown the eternal truth of love to regain their sanity. The sinless need the courage, the right views to regain their lost selves that are essentially pure.
He sees the music

Daniel Lanois lounged on an ivory leather sofa in his loft studio in Toronto, dressed all in black, with eight silk-covered buttons marching up his sleeve. A few feet away, in a soft pool of light, stood an enormous mixing board, just arrived from England. Lanois, who has often manned such a board for Bob Dylan, U2 and many others, spoke of his new acquisition with pleasure, but also with a sense that anything he could tell me about it would be beside the point. He can talk audio gear with more authority than most, but in the end the circuits that really matter to him are the baky, surprising conduits that lead to the heart.

“I see the heart and soul of the people in the room. The sounds and how you build the thing are only ever a canvas, or an invitation for the soul to jump out.”

“I invite the soul to jump out. That’s a pretty concise description of what a good music producer does, but how does it happen in the real world, with actual musicians trying to find the right shape for something that maybe didn’t exist before they entered the room?”

The short answer is that it probably happens in a different way every time, depending on the personalities and the moment and a million other variables. The 90-minute answer is Here & What It. Lanois’s debut film about music and the art of making records, coming soon to the Toronto International Film Festival.

It’s a highly personal film, focused on Lanois and people he has worked with ever since he began trying to coax interesting sounds from cheap equipment in his mother’s basement in Hamilton. Brian Eno, Garth Hudson, U2 and Sinéad O’Connor all appear, speaking or performing or just groping their way toward that soul-jumping moment. Lanois appears in every scene, as the poser of questions and the person who enables partial answers. Sitting in a medina in Morocco, he tells Eno he’s making a film “about the source of the art, instead of everything that surrounds the art.”

That means no concert footage, no shots of screaming crowds, no clips from million-dollar music videos. Lanois’s subjects sit in functional rooms, shun guitars with head-phones clamped to their ears, or try to figure out how to enlarge what has already been recorded.

While Lanois’s hands, as the Band’s pianist played an improvised introduction to Lanois’s song Lovechild, the camera gets even closer to Lanois’s hands as they glide over the pedal steel guitar a few minutes later. These sequences are shot in beautiful black and white by the young Ontario photographer Adam Vollick, whose portrait orientation, vivid angles and rich textures feel analogous to the way Lanois approaches music. The graphic style of Vollick’s video processing gives the impression we’re seeing an X-ray of the performers and their music, and when he uses colour it feels like ﬂares of emotional energy.

These effects don’t ultimately tell us much about what Lanois says he’s up to, just as a musician’s hands moving in close-up are not “the source of the art,” however engrossing they may be to watch. But like most serious investigations into mysterious subjects, Here & What It succeeds mainly by raising the questions in a compelling way. The mystery remains, powerfuly resisting a solution. It’s no digression when Blade, a preacher’s son, says that everything he plays is a form of praise, or when Lanois refers to his pedal steel as a “church in a suitcase.”

The constant theme is that these denuded spaces contain everything that’s needed, as a matter of principle. You never see more players being called in, or extra ﬁlters and gadgets being ordered, because Lanois doesn’t work that way and never has.

“My heroes were always the people in the room,” he told me after we’d watched the film together. “Maybe that’s why I managed to pull it off on records. At the moment, I believe in the magic of the people around me. I never doubt them, and that’s maybe where the power of belief becomes contagious, because people feel that.”

In one vivid scene, Lanois asks Brian Blade, a gifted jazz drummer with whom he has worked on several projects, to play on top of a track by New Orleans drummer Willie Green. Lanois explains that doubling the drums will help him take the song to a different place harmonically. You can see Blade trying to absorb the concept and get past the audacity of the request, and then he divies in, laughing. It’s a touching display of trust, and of a willingness to follow the power of belief in a totally unexpected direction.

Later in the film, Lanois gives Blade a verbal sketch of a new song, acting out with his voice and body the way he wants the arrangement to feel. The scene is intercut with bits of the song as it eventually came out in the studio. For another song, Lanois sits at a board doing a live mix, telling us what he’s doing with those faders and why. His torso bends and weaves as he makes subtle but telling changes, riding the board as if it were a wave on a sea of sound.

The opening of the film gets close to the source in another way, through a long keyboard-level shot of Garth Hudson’s hands, as the Band’s pianist plays an improved introduction to Lanois’s song Lovechild. The camera gets even closer to Lanois’s hands as they glide over the pedal steel guitar a few minutes later. These sequences are shot in beautiful black and white by the young Ontario photographer Adam Vollick, whose portrait orientation, vivid angles and rich textures feel analogous to the way Lanois approaches music. The graphic style of Vollick’s video processing gives the impression we’re seeing an X-ray of the performers and their music, and when he uses colour it feels like ﬂares of emotional energy.

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Blade also says he can’t separate the sacred from the secular, and that comment seems doubly apt in a film whose unstated second theme is seduction. The gorgeous sound and imagery are custom-made to win you over, as Lanois muses on the details that make a listener revisit a song. A few red-hot sequences with salsa dancer Carolina Cerisola state the theme loud and clear.

Here & What It will be useful as a promotional vehicle for Lanois’s next solo album, due next spring, which he coyly says “might” have the same title. By then he’ll have done a fourth session with Eno on the next U2 album, which he said is turning out to be “very exotic” and “eastern-sounding, though not derivative of any particular tradition.

But first, the film needs to be sold, which is one big reason it has been entered at TIFF.

(“Globe and Mail”)