



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

Kathmandu | 17-23 Spet, 2007 | # 34 | Price Rs. 25



Indian foreign secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon with PM Koirala on Sunday.

Exit?

PM refuses to dole out 'republic gift' to Maoists

■ **nf correspondent**

An intense tug of war among the top echelons in the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) and Prime Minister GP Koirala's refusal to gift them a republic Nepal 'now' has brought the government's neck to a political guillotine.

Maoists inched very close to withdrawing from Koirala led government ending their five and a half month partnership in the eight-party coalition. The last hope that the Maoists would reconsider their extreme move was dashed; after Prachanda and Baburam explained Koirala's acts of deceptions, and pressure from their own cadres to quit the government, when India's foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon met them on Saturday evening. Maoists however, relented to his advice and indefinitely postponed their round table conference rescheduled on September hours before Menon left for Delhi at the end of his two-day trip to Nepal.

There are growing worries within the coalition that the pull-out by the Maoists would have an all round impact on issues like political stability of the country, leadership of Koirala and the credibility of the Maoists themselves. Political observers also believe that this would not only seriously discredit Prachanda-Baburam line in

the party in favour of eight-party unity, but would also bring Ram Bahadur Thapa aka Badal, backed by Mohan Vaidya and C P Gajurel, in the forefront of the Maoist leadership.

Home minister K P Sitaula's shuttled between the residence of the prime minister and Prachanda to save the coalition, with an assurance that a republic Nepal was just a couple of months away, and that collapse of the

Maoists told Koirala that they were not scared of their future political prospects.

coalition would weaken that prospect, apparently failed to convince the Maoists. "We have had enough of assurance and we do not trust the Congress any more," Prachanda is believed to have told Sitaula. The home minister also assured that he would undertake to ensure that the Congress party's republic

agenda is endorsed by the general assembly of the party.

Prachanda and Baburam last met Koirala at his official residence on Saturday to inform him that they were determined to withdraw from the government in protest against his refusal to abolish monarchy immediately. They told Koirala that they were not scared of their future political prospects. The Prime Minister, according to Baluwatar sources, warned them that they would be losing their last chance if they ran away from electoral politics. ■

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Butwal under curfew

An indefinite curfew was clamped in Butwal and Taulihawa after, unidentified assailants shot dead Mohit Khan, a leader of anti-Maoist groups, and a violent protest against snow-balled into a communal frenzy.

According to incomplete information, at three more people including a policeman were killed, as miscreants targeted a place of prayer. Locals gathered immediately after the news, of Khan being gunned down outside his residence in the morning, spread. They demanded that the culprits must be arrested and punished. Khan had been

targeted twice by the Maoists in the past. "We have no clue yet as to who killed him," said a police official.

In the chaos that followed, government offices, vehicles and shops became immediate targets paralysing normal life. In the meantime, an official of Shital Niwas said that the situation along the two border towns were being monitored closely and the government would take it up with the government of India for tight security on their side so that anti-social elements from across the border could not take advantage of the situation.



May all beings be happy

■ nf correspondent

The 64th birthday ceremony of His Holiness Sakya Trizin Rinpoche, the head of Sakya Sect was celebrated under the auspices presence of: Dhungse Asanga Rinpoche; Ghar Syabdrung Rinpoche; Guru Aama Niru Rana of Byoma Kusuma Buddha Dharma Sangha, Khenpo Nawang Jorden; Khenpo Vagendrasila; Khenpo Nawang Hoser Lama, president of Monastery Development Committee; and Chiniya Lama; at Mustang Samag's Monastery located at Sitapaila, Swoyambhu.

The ceremony was organised by the monastic & lay disciples of the three Sakya monasteries: Tharlam, Thari and IBA in Boudha. The program commenced by taking refuge on the triple gems and chanting Bodhisattva vows to liberate all the sentient being from the sufferings of samara. It was followed by 16-Arhat Puja. 16-Arhat were entrusted with the responsibility to protect the

Dharma by Buddha himself in his absence. These patrons of Dharma were invoked and offered a Puja, so that Dharma may prevail for a longer time in its purity.

Then the Mandala (a representation of the entire world system along with ones most precious possessions) was offered to Guru Sakya Trizin, by the disciples, as a symbol of complete trust and surrendering. This was followed by offering the Shakyamuni Buddha's Dharani,

mantra for the long life of the guru; seven-limb prayers consisting of refuge, confession and so forth and a special long life prayer dedicated to the longevity of His Holiness.

In addition, various Tibetan chants and songs were performed and an archery competition was held to represent the culture of Mustang. Finally, as an inevitable part of a Buddhist ceremony, the merit accumulated by all of those engaged in such a virtuous deed was dedicated for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings.

Nov. election 'must'

Menon says CA alone will give legitimacy for major decisions

■ nf correspondent

Election to the constituent assembly on November 22 in an environment 'free of fear and intimidation' is the crucial, if not the sole, pre-condition for India's future support to Nepal. That was the firm message that foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon conveyed to prime minister G P Koirala and other senior government and political leaders including Maoist Chief Prachanda during his two-day visit to Kathmandu.

During his meeting with Koirala on Sunday, he gave enough indications that India would consider any crucial decision in absence of people's mandate as seriously flawed. The message assumes significance in the wake of Maoists' demand that declaring Nepal a republic immediately is the pre-condition for their continuing in the government and contesting election.

Menon was much more guarded when asked, during a press meet before his departure to Delhi, whether India considered it necessary to have polls first to abolish the



Indian foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon

monarchy. "It is for the people of Nepal to decide," leaving it open to interpretation that India prefers decision on the issue not by leaders of eight parties but by the people.

He said India would support and assist the transition to a democratic, inclusive, stable and prosperous Nepal. He also refused to comment on PM Koirala's recent remarks that Nepal faced a threat to its sovereignty. "I am not going to comment on this. This is not my place. This is not my function," he said, adding, "if you have any questions, you ask them."

Koirala's demands from Menon varied from exploring Man Mohan Singh's visit before the election to

smooth supply of petrol. Menon is believed to have given positive response to the demand for petroleum.

Menon described Terai problem as Nepal's internal one which Nepal should be addressing, but admitted that he met some leaders from there. He also disclosed that India's water resources secretary would be visiting Nepal to explore bilaterally the strategy for flood control on all the rivers that, "we share."

On the UN role, he said that UNMIN is here with a very clear mandate to help arms management and election and added, "we hope they do the two jobs well."



Violating world heritage site

The government is in a soup over unauthorised construction of a road in Pashupatinath temple area, a world heritage site. The World Heritage center (WHC) which oversees cultural heritage and their protection activities on behalf of UNESCO, has sought the status of about 800-metre long and 20-foot road that passes through Sleshmantak forest linking Tilganga Hospital with Guheshwari temple.

But the government is in total confusion about how to respond to the situation. "The construction of the road is illegal," a senior official at the ministry of culture and tourism told newsfront, admitting that it violates Nepal's commitment to protect the world heritage site. "The road was built without any authorisation or permission from the government," sources said.

However, the road was built with full support and endorsement of the minister for physical works and construction, Hishila Yami. The initiative to build the road was taken by Krishna KC, a Maoist leader, who is now vice president of the Bagmati Sewer Improve-

ment Committee. The committee overruled the earlier objections raised by the Department of Archaeology and the Pashupati Development authority on the plea that no construction can be carried out in the area.

As a signatory to the convention for protection of the world cultural and natural heritage almost three decades ago, Nepal is obliged to honour the guidelines regarding any construction works in the listed heritage site. Following the query from UNESCO, the minister for tourism and culture is understood to have asked the chief secretary to formulate government response at the earliest.

Official sources said that the minister also asked senior officials to explain to him the cost of such violation. "We will soon be responding to the UNESCO as well as the world heritage center reaffirming our commitment to protect the listed sites," a senior government official said. A Maoist source said that the construction was carried in view of the local people's demand and needs without affecting the heritage site.

Newsbrief

Poorest leader

Matrika Yadav is arguably the 'poorest' of all central level Maoist leaders. But going by what happened last week, Matrika does not fit into that category any more.

Vivek, one of the security guards of Yadav defected to the rival militant section of Terai along with a AK-47 rifle. The central level leaders of the Maoists have at least five private security guards, each with arms. And if each of the security guards is in possession of Rs. 5 lakhs; it gives a rough idea about how rich Matrika must be.

Matrika was quick to return official property and facilities immediately after he resigned from the cabinet last month, but he is still the chairman of the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC).



Conspirator who?

G P Koirala is a great believer in conspiracy theory. And he brings them out when he is either out of power or when his chair is 'shaky'.

Not long ago when he was out of power, he said there was a grand design against national sovereignty and democracy in Nepal with India and the palace as its architect. But with changed politics that brought him at the helms of state affairs, he was quiet about conspiracy theory till recently.

But last week, he came back to his pet topic, saying, "there are serious threats to Nepal's sovereignty and I have told Indian, Chinese and Americans that I will not make any compromise on this." But everyone knows who Koirala was hinting at as having posed a threat to Nepal's sovereignty. On Friday, he told some authors that he would not be able to reveal the identity of the conspirators at this moment.

However, those who can easily decipher Koirala's remarks now say his chair is perhaps getting shaky.



UNMIN protest

UNMIN has asked Maoists to honour its commitments regarding management of arms and armed personnel. The appeal comes in the wake of about 4,000 people's liberation army coming out of the cantonments in Arunkhola area on Friday.

UNMIN promptly communicated its resentment to the Maoist leadership reminding them that such activities would create hurdles in creating a conducive atmosphere for the election.

A UNMIN statement said, "UNMIN has communicated its concerns directly to the political and military leadership of the CPN (Maoist), who advised that it ordered the immediate return of personnel to the cantonment....Implementing the commitments in relation to the management of arms and armed personnel, without exception, is essential to the overall peace process and in particular to preparing a free and fair atmosphere for the constituent assembly election."



Promoting diversity

Students of Ullens School in Khumaltar promoted diverse ethnic culture in a different way on the occasion of the Children's Day on September 15. Teachers, students and school staff assembled in their ethnic wear and witnessed students perform their cultural shows.

A community meal that consisted of ethnic varieties was also part of the celebration. The cultural shows staged on the day included that of the Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Sherpa, Limbu, Chepang, Maithili, Newar, Bahun and Chhetris.

"Each ethnic group has its own existence, and it should be protected equally. That is why we observed the day in the manner we did," Medin Bahadur Lamichhane, Principal of the school said.



In favour of elites

Madhav Nepal emerges as the patron of the top 'class' politicians.

■ nf correspondent

In a unique exercise mooted by a very senior politician, top 30 leaders belonging to three major political parties would have a cake-walk in the proposed constituent assembly.

The idea mooted by CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal envisages that top ten leaders from each of the three parties, Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M), should get into the constituent assembly virtually without any contest.

Senior UML sources said the idea of reservation for the over-privileged is 'positive move' that would make Maoists feel comfortable to contest elections. "One reason why Maoists are hesitant to contest the election is because they are not sure about their prospects, including that of the top leaders," he said, adding, "if there is a guarantee that at least the top leaders would win, they will not be averse to the idea of facing

elections."

Although Nepal's idea has found favour from some members of the G P Koirala 'coterie', all the other five parties in the coalition have opposed it on the ground that this goes totally against the principle of the policy and spirit of reservation. "It is meant for under-privileged or under-represented. There cannot be reservation for over-privileged and over represented," a Congress central committee member said.

Sources in the UML said that Madhav Nepal has put forward his idea before Prachanda as well as the Prime Minister and both have not discarded it. There will be both first past the post system as well as the proportional representation system of election applied during the election. Although Madhav Nepal has not explained why those top 30 could not be accommodated under the respective parties quota under the proportional representation system, he apparently wants to ensure that the top ones 'get elected directly', a category considered more prestigious than the ones in the other category of 'elected'.



Tsunami fellowship for journalists

Asia Media Forum, a network of media practitioners from across Asia, has announced the grant of Tsunami Journalism Fellowship 2007 to four journalists from the region for an in-depth work on post-Tsunami issues affecting the communities. This is the first fellowship of the kind.

An AMF release said the four journalists will work in Tsunami affected communities in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. They will collect case studies for their stories around various policy, rehabilitation and rebuilding issues confronting the Tsunami hit communities. Actionaid has provided strategic and financial support to undertake the fellowship programme. During the two-week fellowship programme, the fellows will come up with their text and visual stories to be printed or broadcast in their respective media. This will mark the third anniversary of Tsunami in December.

The fellows will be given a lump sum grant worth US \$ 2000/- (including travel and other expenses) each with some logistic support where they will be working. According to the plan, the fellows will be assigned work in any one of the four Tsunami hit countries and they will be placed there from October 1.

The four who have been awarded the fellowship are: Tertiani ZB Simanjuntak – Reporter; The Jakarta Post, Indonesia; M Sajitha – Current Affairs Producer; Kairali TV, India; Nantiya Tangvisutijit – Senior Editor; The Nation group, Thailand and Hafsya Abdulla – Newscaster, Television Maldives, Maldives.

Bhagirath resigns

Bhagirath Basnyat, former acting secretary in the foreign ministry, has resigned from service. He resigned in protest against being denied promotion in the rank of the secretary in a conspiratorial manner.

Knowledgeable sources in bureaucracy said Basnyat handed over the resignation to the chief secretary on Friday alleging that he was victimised by some powerful elements for not having fulfilled their undue requests.

He is believed to have said it was much more dignified for him to quit than to run around for a promotion for which he was qualified enough. Sources said he complained about his being conspiratorially shifted to the prime minister's office from the foreign affairs ministry and later denied promotion.

"After having served for 33 years in various position keeping national interest in mind, my conscience does not allow me to continue in the post any more when norms of promotion and denial are flouted in such an arbitrary manner," Basnyat is believed to have told his colleagues who persuaded him not to take the extreme step.

He was being tipped as the ambassador to London, but a last minute change in the list, saw him replaced by Murari Sharma. Basnyat is the second bureaucrat to quit in recent days in protest against political interference in appointment of secretaries, something that is likely to be formalised very soon after the main three ruling parties, Congress, UML and the Maoists, agree on the list of their 'favourites'.

We hope that you are acquainted with the mass flooding in the nation due to which many are forced to migrate, many have lost their dwelling and have lost their lives. We also put our faith in you as a Nepali that you would contribute something while your fellow citizens are in much distress. Your one step can make a huge difference.

Let's help bring together, those who've lost it all!

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or
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 Tel : 4443888, Fax : 4421147 (Edt.), 4411912 (Mkt.)
 Email: newsfront@bhrikuti.com, marketing@bhrikuti.com (Mkt.)
 Printed by: Express Color Press, Buddhanagar, Tel.: 4781810, Distribution: Kasthamandap, Tel.: 2010821

Point to Ponder

A man who doesn't trust himself can never really trust anyone else.

- Cardinal De Retz

Sheer hoax

The parliamentary hearing for confirmation of some key constitutional and diplomatic appointments are over. And there is not much to boast about it. The special committee of parliament miserably failed to show that the members, may be with some notable exceptions, failed to act above narrow partisan lines. The members clearly acted on the dictates of the parties they belonged to.

Why else would Congress, Congress-D and the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party favour en block the confirmation of Kedar Prasad Giri as the Chief Justice, and the left block oppose him? Similarly, they went more or less along their party lines in confirmation of the ambassador designates. Supreme Court's independence has been thoroughly compromised as Giri would now be perceived as a pro-Congress and anti-left Chief Justice.

It would have been more appropriate if the committee consisted of independent members with enough knowledge on the subjects they were going to deal with. But a committee that acts purely on party lines would only prove to be a farcical exercise. The committee could not act above and beyond the party line during a series of hearings recently.

Chief Justice was opposed or supported on the basis that reflected the position of political parties. Ambassadors were endorsed because their choice was made on the basis of an understanding among the major political parties to pocket plum positions. Similar was the case of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

There has been a debate over a period of time that the lawyers who are members of parliament should not be allowed to practice. But no laws to the effect have come into force. Instead, some of the lawyer parliamentarians are now in the committee with a role in confirming (appointing) judges. This means that the committee hearing system has been introduced without a clearly thought out plan, although it may have had the best of intentions.

A diplomat confirmed by the House committee in the US will have reasons to boast about one's ability since it's done by a committee of experts which more or less acts on a non-partisan basis with no party whip. But an ambassador confirmed by our committee will literally have nothing to feel elated about. Each of the political appointee has been tipped because of his/her proximity with particular leaders, and not because of their possessing qualifications and experience for the post.

The House committee could have given much more meaning, substance and direction to this practice by trying to facilitate evolution of foreign policy, national security and economic interest besides trying to get members across the party lines on this move. Perhaps, a downsizing of the committee, with not more than 40 per cent of the current strength, with members having better understanding of the issues would be an effective way of taking this process forward in a meaningful and dignified way.



Letters

Prachanda beware!

Abhin Shrestha is perhaps the most powerful cartoonist in the country today. His cartoons speak volumes about slaves of politics and are so simple to understand and enjoy.

The one that shows Maoist chief Prachanda first running after election, and now running away from the election says in that small space, the entire truth of the Nepali politics and Maoists' predicament. Prachanda should take it as a serious warning that not only has Abhin understood it, but he has made many Nepalis understand the politics of deceit and dishonesty that Maoists are pursuing now.

Not facing election in a free and fearless atmosphere means Maoists do not believe in a politics where people play a role. That also means they continue to believe that power comes from the barrel of guns.

Mukti Shakya
 Bangemuda, Kathmandu

BP out says GP

G P Koirala may have been a loyal follower of his older brother BP Koirala at one point of time. But now, especially after the successful people's movement of last year, GP Koirala has become the 'tallest' leader of the country now.

The policy of national reconciliation which B P Koirala championed once has become irrelevant. BP may have had reasons to return to Nepal following his differences with Indira Gandhi. But it was again due to GP Koirala's pragmatic wisdom that he succeeded in securing trust and confidence of India. BP has become irrelevant in present context of Nepal. And GP Koirala has every right to declare, by words and action, that BP and his politics and days are gone.

Sabin Thapa
 Tahachal, Kathmandu



Petrol for women

For quite some time there have been long queues for petrol every where in the country. Looks like it is going to be a long before the situation normalises. At a time when we are talking about women's empowerment and their involvement in the decision making process, it is also equally important that special attentions are paid for increasing their efficiency.

Facilitating their movement for assigned or any kind of works they do is therefore very necessary. As we have different queues for males and females in cinema halls, can't we have separate queues for fuels as well for women?

Shital Dahal
 Ramkot, Kathmandu

Ridiculous banking charges

Most of our banks are still showing their miserly attitude and charging any amount they like, when they issue and renew debit and credit cards of their customers. For example, Nepal Investment Bank charges annual fee and maintenance charge against each customer's account.

We, the customers are taking the matter lightly and pay anywhere between 200 to 1000 rupees per year as fees. However, such banks make huge amounts collecting those thousands from each of us. This shows banks are making more money from us due to our lack of knowledge and less because of their efficiency and management.

Most of our banks' CEOs studied in UK and USA and they are aware of the fact that leading foreign banks like NatWest, Barclays, Lloyds, City, American Express etc. from UK and USA do not take any such charges from their valued customers. My opinion is that such high charging banks should stop levying ridiculous charges on their customers.

Binod Timsina
 Kathmandu

Spiritual Corner

Tracing a Siddha

Bhoganâthar or Bhogar, the Jñâna Guru of Babaji, in the poem "Bhogar Jñâna Sagarama," identifies himself as a Tamilian. In the same verse he states that the great Siddha Kâlangi Nâthar initiated him in Jñâna Yoga (supreme self-knowledge).

He belonged to the ancient tradition of Nava (nine) Nâth sadhus (holy ascetics), tracing their tradition to Lord Shiva. There are nine important shrines associated with this tradition, five of which are in the Himâlaya Mountains: Amarnâth (where Shiva first taught Kriya Yoga to his Shakti partner, Parvati Devi), Kedarnâth, Badrinâth (India), Kailâsanâth, (Tibet) and Paúpatinâth (Nepal).

Bhoganâthar practiced Kundalini Yoga in four stages. The first three stages are described in a later chapter on "The Psychophysiology of Kriya Kundalini Pranayama." Bhoganâthar chose the Palani Malai (mountain) in what is now southwestern Tamil Nadu as the site for intensive yogic practice (Tapas) for the final stage. He attained swarûpa samâdhi at Palani, through the grace of Lord Muruga, or the eternal youth, "Kumâra Swâmi". The Kumâraswâmi temple at Palani became



the epicenter of his activities. He visited many countries astrally, and physically and through transmigration. In one of his songs Bhoganâthar claims to have flown to China at one point in a sort of airplane which he built: he held discussions with Chinese Siddhas before returning to India.

His visit to South America has been confirmed by accounts left by the Muycas of Chile: "Bocha, who gave laws to Muycas, was a white, bearded man, wearing long robes, who regulated the calendar, established

festivals, and vanished in time like others (other remarkable teachers who had come across the Pacific according to numerous legends of Incas, Aztecs and Mayans)."

He convened a meeting of many Siddhas just before the beginning of the present Kali Yuga, in 3102 BC, to determine the best way for humanity to progress along the spiritual path during the coming period of darkness. The Yoga of love and devotion, Bhakti Yoga, was chosen as being the best means. Bhoganâthar was entrusted by the siddhas with the task of defining the rituals for the worship of their favorite deity "Palani Ândavar", the Lord (Muruga) of Palani.

Source: <http://palani.org/bhogar-biography.htm>



newsfront

Nepali pancake

It is insufficient to argue that bringing hordes on to the streets to commit acts of violence is an expression of the people's will.

■ MSR. Wanderer

A pancake is flat and thin, made from a batter of water and flour- a drop of milk if you're lucky. You can serve it with different fillings to hide the fact that it's nothing substantial. It's not much to write home about, yet enthusiasts talk as if it's the most wonderful dish in the world. That's because it has a comforting sameness and you can add variety to it according to your taste, sweet or sour.

Spam, originally, is nothing to do with the stuff that floods your emails promising sexual delights beyond your wildest dreams, or that rubbish that comes through the post as junk mail, but is a bland, mediocre lump in a tin that tries to pass itself off as meat.

We've had a taste of both in Nepal over the past two decades. The pancake is the Panachayatiraj – a rather dull dish that could have been tastier if only sufficient variety had been brought into its flatness. If only the people had had more voice about the ingredients, the pancake just might have edged up the scale in terms of appeal.

Now, in switching over to spam, let's avoid the D word for goodness sake. It's been flogged to death in this country, not least by aid workers, INGOs, NGOs,

diplomats; and, incidentally, none of them appears to come from a generation in their own lands that had to fight for the vote, so what they would really know about suffering and suffrage is a moot point – suffering for them seems to be doing without electricity.

Well let's get back to spam, or our political elite: a nice contradiction in terms since elite suggests special-ness and political infers that one has the skill to govern and is promoting one's preferred form of governance. Our political elite are neither skilful in governance nor very special. They well deserve the acronym they have given themselves –SPAM– because they are, at the end of the day, just a mediocre concoction passing themselves off as meat, enclosed in a shiny casing which they call democracy.

Democracy does not, however, involve deliberate destruction of everything that has been built up before, it does not involve witch-hunting but rather defends the freedom of expression and difference, and it does not involve squabbling for positions and commissions.

In two movements, one with tremendous popular support and the other with a large dose of coercion of the populace whether by fact or fear, we have arrived at the current impasse—an interim government that has failed to govern justly and wisely; has failed to impose law and

order and the equality of all before the law; and the most abysmal failure of all which is to give the people of Nepal a voice in their own destiny.

It is insufficient to argue that bringing hordes on to the streets to commit acts of violence is an expression of the people's will. Sooner or later our interim 'representatives' will have to realise that 'a volunteer is worth ten pressed men,' and that their misuse of the people's assets will not buy their status forever. One day their house of straw will collapse.

Vindictiveness has no place in governance; and yet the vindictiveness of a few has led to the mixture of mediocrity we suffer today. Mediocrity is destroying us and depriving us of a voice. It is not democracy when we are obliged to accept the diktats of leaders who wish to present everything to the people of Nepal as a fait accompli without submitting themselves to the people's mandate. That is autocracy and dictatorship, and it is maintained by fear.

We, the silent majority, are not so stupid as to believe that one single faction brought us to this sad impasse. Politicians might seek personal blamelessness in appointing a 'whipping boy' as all autocrats do, but each and every one of us must share the blame. We must also accept that none of this charade has ever been about helping the poor and dispossessed: it was before and is now all about the political elite

benefiting from the assets earned by the majority.

Without free and fair elections we'll be stuck with the same ingredients we have now, violence, empty rhetoric, breakdown of law and order, and graft and corruption. It is time for we the people to speak and lay down the gauntlet, or the alternatives will be dreadful.

The challenge is to find us a government that is transparent and honest—no deals behind locked doors and no strikes called out of vindictiveness—a government that accepts that it is there to serve the people and not be served by them; and a government that will keep its fingers off commissions and incitements to destroy the assets of this country. Above all, it must be a government that submits itself at timely intervals to the voice of the people through election, instead of continually trying to avoid the very institution that is the basis of democracy.

To date, mediocrity is destroying the nation and it is time for the political elite to put up and shut up, go to their constituencies—honestly, if they possibly can—and let the people decide, based on past performances and without exchange of money or false promises, whether they can trust them with their future and that of generations to come.



Masayuki Tanigawa, professor of political science at Nagasaki University, Japan; has published many books and articles including *The constitution of the kingdom of Nepal*, *Improvement of India-China relationship and the Prospect of the peace building in Nepal*, *Fatalism and democratisation in Nepal*, *The rationale of the kingship in Nepal*. In the following interview that he gave to Newsfront, Prof Tanigawa expressed his critical opinion on election, federalism, republicanism and Japan's role in the UNMIN.

Are you optimistic about the peace process leading to a settlement of the conflict?

The issue now is how to materialise comprehensive peace agreement into a new constitution in the constituent assembly established by the constituent assembly election. But this implementation of general agreement is really difficult, because it demands many political compromises from political parties.

Politics is a compromise or "the art of possibility." Parliament is the most important public space for political parties to reach an agreement through mutual political compromises. But these political compromises are possible only in a state in which people are not totally divided into some social groups.

Unfortunately Nepal has serious social divisions among castes, ethnicities, regions, etc. Among them, the most serious is the division between the rich and the poor, or the development gap. Due to economic liberalisation after the 1990 revolution, economic or development gap is growing rapidly. Many statistics testify it. We must realise that this development gap is not only a statistical objective fact, but also a psychological gap. Thanks to popularised mass media, even poor people in rural area can know well about prosperous Kathmandu life. The gap between their life and latter's life is tremendous. Now that they know this gap, they cannot endure it anymore.

A gun cannot produce food, clothes, houses and other things Nepali people really need in their lives....Ethnic, language and religious problems as well as development gap cannot be solved by election.

Unitary sta ceremonial h and Japan's in peace pro

This objective cum psychological development gap sharply divides Nepali people and makes political compromises very difficult. Even if leaders of parties think compromises are reasonable under given conditions, rank-and-file supporters do not accept them. This is especially the case with the Maoists. If Maoist leaders really want reasonable compromises necessary for agreements, grass-roots supporters will not accept them. The grass-roots radicals will organise their own organisations and start new wars against the establishment including their own past leaders.

But in the long term, I am rather optimistic. For an outsider like me, Nepal seems to have developed amazingly. England needed about 400 years and Japan, more than 100 years for democratisation. Nepali history of democracy is about 50 years after 1951, or more strictly only 17 years after 1990. In this very short period, Nepal has admirably developed industries and democracy. We must evaluate history fairly. And we also should not fail to see the growth of the middle class. They are the core people of civil society who can stabilise society and gradually mature democracy in Nepal.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Nepal is very vulnerable in international relations. The global society now can use much influence for the peace building in Nepal.

If Nepali government recovers its legitimacy and reliability through peace process, it will be able to give its people a hope of steady step-by-step improvement. Japanese people just after the defeat in the World War II were in miserable conditions. They did not have enough food, clothes, houses and other necessary things for daily life. But the Japanese government with help of the US government could give them a gleam of hope for better future. With the hope, Japanese people could avoid anarchy or coup and follow a way for steady development and democratisation.

Nepali government with cooperation of political parties and civil society can give a hope for better tomorrow. With it, people can accept political compromises for peace, expecting a steady improvement. In this way, peace will

come again to Nepal.

One major area of difference is about how to address the cases of gross human rights violations during the years of insurgency. What is your view on this?

To solve problems related to human rights violations is a necessary step for the peace settlement. For this purpose, an independent powerful commission must be established. The government can delegate an investigation power to the commission. After close investigation, the government must compensate for all property damages from national budget or let the concerned persons compensate them.

Theoretically, property compensation is not very difficult. But in practice it is hard to carry out. Maoists caused much damage to houses, land and other properties, so to let them compensate for all these damages is in fact very difficult. The government should let Maoists return confiscated houses, lands and other

properties as much as possible, and for the rest the government must compensate the same way as in cases of government caused damages.

Physical and mental damages caused by both sides are much more serious. In this case, a truth reconciliation commission like the one in South Africa is practical and effective. After the facts about damages are fully disclosed

and recognised by assailants and victims, the commission requests reconciliation between them.

In Nepal where both parties have waged violent attacks against each other for more than 10 years, punishment due to past deeds tend to result in revenge, so it is not good for the reconstruction of peaceful society. To victims and their families, the government must provide mental care and financial support. Civil society is also expected to contribute much to this victim care and support program.

How hopeful are you about the election taking place on schedule?

Election to the constituent assembly may not be possible on 22 Nov under present circum-

Fortunately or unfortunately, Nepal is very vulnerable in international relations. The global society now can use much influence for the peace building in Nepal.

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stances. To have elections, the eight parties should put full trust in the interim government which is the election administration government established by themselves. This is a compromise necessary for peaceful free election. And the UNMIN as well as NGOs can contribute much for free election. If eight parties can compromise for the election and international society gives full support to the government, it may be possible.

But here we must be careful not to expect too much from the election. Election is very important, but many other things are required to legitimatise the government. "Election democracy" has failed in many developing countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Ethnic, language and religious problems as well as development gap cannot be solved by election. Election is not magic. To solve these problems, we must utilise other available means that are non-electoral or sometimes traditional. Election is only one of many means, so we should not put too much weight on it. Paradoxically speaking, political parties and other interest or social groups can compromise for the election.

One major agenda now is moving towards federalism. How effective will the federal system be for future Nepal for its development?

I do not think federal system is good for Nepal. Many people say federalisation is necessary for various social groups such as ethnic, language, religious or regional groups to be recognised. This is not true. It is not realistic and even dangerous both for national integration and for the social groups themselves.

Clear definition of social groups is almost impossible. To which group does a family belong whose father, a Chhetri, married a Newari woman and has lived in Terai since several generations? There are many such attributes in a person. And groups are always changing their character. So, if we want a clear definition of each group for federalisation, it means forcing a person to select only one identity among his/her many multiple identities.

Federalisation for group rights inevitably intensifies identity politics, which forcefully divides people into social groups, cements them, lets them differentiate from one another and leads them to endless group or communal conflicts. Federalisation will endanger national integration and peace. It endangers even individuals and minorities in a component state.

If component states are set up according to ethnicity, religion, languages and so on and have autonomous ruling power over their respective territories, the majority in a component state can much easily suppress individuals or minorities in it, and the central government cannot defend them effectively because it has the right of self-rule. Federalisation is dangerous both for individual citizens and small minorities.

For development too, it is disadvantageous. It cannot realise a lasting peace in Nepal, and up to a certain level of development, a strong stable centralised government rather than a weak government is necessary for planning and managing development.

What alternative model would you suggest?

It is much better for Nepal to maintain the existent unitary state system while promoting devolution and local self-rule. Japan completely destroyed the Tokugawa regime, feudal or in a sense federal system, by the Meiji revolution in 1867, and built a unitary, extremely centralised modern state. The Japanese government since then successively suppressed minority groups and local cultures, homogenised Japanese society by the national language, national religion, general compulsory education, and modernised and industrialised Japan by strong top-down method. This was a typical developmental dictatorship.

After Japan, some Asian countries such as South Korea did it and developed dramatically. Japan is still one of the most centralised states though democratised only after the World War II. Centralisation of power does not necessary prevent development but, on the contrary, promoted top-down development in states like Japan and South Korea.

However, Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. The government cannot forcefully homogenise Nepali society, even if it wants it. A unitary state Japan cannot be a state model for Nepal. And Nepal is not a state as the United States that was established by the agreement of several existent states. Nepal has been a unitary state for a long time, so its division into states is difficult. For example, how to draw border lines and how many states to be created? Artificial forcible creation of states will cause new ethnic or cultural conflicts leading civil war or separation of some parts of Nepal. Therefore, Nepal has to follow gradual step-by-step transformation. It will be a compromise of some systems.

Nepal is a modern state, so its base must be liberal democracy. In public sphere, each person is treated as one person irrespective of his/her ethnicity or culture, that is, as an independent individual with equal civil rights. Instead, ethnicity and culture enjoy freedom in private sphere where government does not interfere. This is modern individualistic liberal democracy of which France is typical. It is liberal, but majoritarian democracy, so it tends to majority rule and, in worst case, to totalitarian democracy. Minority rights tend to be only nominal in it.

Therefore, Nepal as a unitary state must introduce drastic devolution and strong local self-rule. For example, if 75 districts are delegated much power to rule their own area, it is almost same as federal system. In addition to this, Nepal should be bicameral. The lower house should be composed of representatives of the nation, not of any group or regions; elected on the basis of individualistic liberal democracy. The upper house should be composed of representatives of various social groups.

The lower house is superior in general, but the upper house has veto power under given conditions to those matters related directly to group interests. This bicameral legislature is a typical compromise or combination of two representation systems, and is more realistic in Nepal.

Do you envisage a Nepal minus monarchy? How would a republic Nepal be different from a monarchial Nepal?

Ceremonial monarchy is better for Nepal. Many people say that Nepali kings usurped power and were dictators and so monarchy should be dumped. Nonsense! If so, why don't you dump election or parliament that Hitler used for getting state power? Systems and their users should be separated. First we evaluate systems themselves, and then consider the risks of human misuse of them. In case of monarchy, an active monarchy is completely out-of-date, but a ceremonial monarchy, or a pure symbol king with no political power, is useful in Nepal.

For example, in Nepal about 80% of the population is Hindu, and people's daily life is closely interwoven with religion. So, Nepal cannot be completely away from religion. The state must take part in many religious ceremonies. When PM Koirala received the blessings from the priest at Krishna Mandir on 4 Sep; it was a violation of the interim constitution that provides secularism or the separation of religion and politics. Pious Muslims, Christians or non-religious people would never accept this religious activity of the prime minister. If the prime minister continues such religious activities as the head of secular state, non-Hindu people will be irritated, and this might lead to religious conflicts as in India. This is not the path Nepal should follow.

If Nepal is a ceremonial monarchy, secularisation of politics is much easier. The king performs religious and other cultural ceremonies while the prime minister focuses only on secular politics. Nepali monarchy has a long history and people are used to it. A ceremonial monarchy is suited well with the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural state.

But ceremonial monarchy will be impossible if the king does not accept complete renunciation of political power. Unfortunately he seems not to accept it up to now. So, Nepal cannot help but go for secular republicanism. In this case, the

republic Nepal should have a ceremonial president whom every citizen irrespective of ethnicity or religion can respect. This ceremonial president takes part in various ceremonies in order to observe the separation of religion and politics. Ultimately, the ceremonial president system will become almost same as the ceremonial monarchy.

What is the role that you see for Japan, one of the biggest donors, in the peace process in Nepal?

Japan can and should help Nepali peace building by peaceful means. Japan has sent six soldiers to the UNMIN. The UNMIN is a political mission and the soldiers are not armed. Japanese government officially explains their role is completely non-military and most Nepali people may think so too. But this is a wrong policy.

Japanese Constitution clearly prohibits military forces. The Article 9 provides "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." Therefore, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) is completely against the



In Nepal about 80% of the population is Hindu, and people's daily life is closely interwoven with religion. So, Nepal cannot be completely away from religion.

constitution and to send its soldiers is much less constitutional. What an irony! How can the unconstitutional Japanese government promote Nepali constitutionalism? Six Japanese soldiers in the UNMIN are symbols of Japan's militarisation. They are utilised to advertise the remarkably increasing overseas mission of the new ministry of defense.

But, what can the six soldiers in the UNMIN do for Nepali workers and farmers? And worse, the Japanese government seems to utilise the Japanese role in the UNMIN for setting up military relationship with Nepal. So, Nepali people as well as Japanese people should demand immediate withdrawal of the soldiers from Nepal. Instead, Japan should help Nepal by other non-military aids. Peace should be realised by peaceful means.

Conflicts in Nepal are resulting mainly from widening gap of developments. In the 1990s, Japan and other advanced capitalist states forced on Nepal an open free market economy. Big global companies like Toyota, Suzuki, Canon, etc. promoted their products in Nepal. This economic liberalisation presents big profits to the rich and serious unemployment to the poor. Japan, one of the global economic powers, is responsible for it.

A gun cannot produce food, clothes, houses and other things that Nepali people really need in their lives. Japan should not venture military role in Nepal. Japanese non-military development aid so far is very highly appreciated in Nepal and Japanese government should promote it more.

Finally, we can learn three lessons from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's resignation on 12 Sep. Firstly, the American-led globalisation should not be introduced without considering social conditions of each country. It has sharply widened the rich-poor gap in Japan like in Nepal. The depressed people especially in rural areas of Japan overthrew the Abe administration. Secondly, the separation of religion and politics should be strictly observed. Thirdly, militarisation should be stopped anywhere as violence causes more violence.

The root of conflicts in Nepal is global market capitalism, so we as global citizens should and can strengthen our people-to-people relationship to build a lasting peace in Nepal. We sincerely wish peace by peaceful means in Nepal.

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Huge scope for micro

In Nepal, there is a lack of coherent micro and small enterprise development strategies

Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE) play a crucial role in generating employment opportunities and alleviating poverty in Nepal. In Nepal, outside agriculture, MSE sector is estimated to employ 1.6 million persons or more than 70 percent of the persons employed in the non agriculture sector. It has a crucial role in employment creation. In most countries, the major part of employment can be found in MSE.

These enterprises are also important in unlocking the capacity of entrepreneurship and providing for dynamism in an economy. In most countries, the share of women workers and employers in micro enterprises is much higher than their share among larger enterprises 60 percent in Nepal.

The business environment in Nepal contributes only moderately, at best, to the growth and sustainability of the MSE sector. Physical constraints make it costlier to more goods, but they also protect micro enterprises from completion. Rising under and unemployment has encouraged people to opt for MSE sector, but it may be able to absorb only a small segment of people

coming into the labour market in absence of requisite skills.

Right incentive schemes can make an activity competitive and create a foundation for growth. The basic available are the tax incentives to cottage industries, incentives to promote technology, capital goods and inputs at nominal import duty. However, MSEs generally cannot avail these incentives because they do not import inputs and capital goods directly. There are many diverse support services available in the country at present.

The regulatory requirements for MSEs generally prove to be burdensome to smaller enterprises operated by less educated persons with lesser access to resources. Likewise, legislation requirements are also not clear and have a large segment of micro enterprises that is not registered.

Better performance on the ease of doing business is associated with more jobs and conversely, where regulations are costly and burdensome, businesses are more likely to operate in the informal economy, remaining very small and creating few decent jobs. There are examples



■ Shankar Man Singh

Right incentive schemes can make an activity competitive and create a foundation for growth. The basic available are the tax incentives to cottage industries, incentives to promote technology, capital goods and inputs at nominal import duty.

where, in aggregate, successful regulatory reforms demonstrate significant pay-offs for job creation.

The low levels of protection coverage of labour and labour related laws are an important part of the problem of the decent work deficit in the MSEs as they are related directly to shortcomings in the levels of income i.e. minimum wages, social protection and job security. While the content of the law may be problematic for MSEs in some cases, it is very common that complicated administrative procedures for compliance are more of a burden than the law itself.

It is, therefore, important to simplify the application of labour and labour-related laws by eliminating unnecessary fees, reducing the number and complexity or simplifying the contents of the forms, removing the need for legal verifications and advice, reviewing the periodicity of cyclical reporting and data collection and strengthening the capacities and transparency of law enforcement agencies, including the elimination of corrupt practices.

The liberalisation of the economy in 1990s has clearly spurred private

sector growth. The importance of micro and small enterprises including the home based works in contributing to job creation and output growth is now widely accepted in both developing and least developed countries like Nepal in particular. In Nepal, there is a lack of coherent micro and small enterprise development strategies, which take into account the three dimensions of enterprise evolution (i.e., start up, survival and growth) We should also identify the different needs of enterprises in their various stages of evolution, which is another important contributory factor.

In the absence of a coherent policy framework for enterprise development, globalisation and the opening of domestic markets as part of liberalisation policies has had an adverse impact on the enterprise structure in many developing countries and LDCs. In particular, the products of home based works are continually losing ground in terms of their competitiveness. Since, these home based workers mostly woman produces the niche products. So the focus of these products from collection from each producer should be focused on niche markets. ■

■ Roop Joshi

The interim government of Nepal saw it fit to declare the country, a Hindu Kingdom since 1769, a secular state. Along with the stripping of the king's powers, the negation of the word 'royal' from everything from the national army to the national airlines, and the general fever of 'loktantra' or even 'ganatantra,' this was yet another politically rushed initiative of the EPA (Seven Party Alliance plus Maoists). The advent of democracy in the so-called 'new' Nepal, with at least 85 per cent of its Hindu population, become instantaneously secular without a single citizen being solicited for his/her views. That this feat was achieved by an un-elected government is entirely another issue.

Why this undemocratic declaration of a secular state? It was a political tool to appease the "internationals" (various countries, proselytizing groups, INGOs, etc.). Even the Maoists, submerged in doctrinaire Marxism, had dared not pressure this issue knowing fully well the feelings of Nepalis. By this treasonous act of appeasement, the interim government compromised the sovereignty of our nation. By bending to the will of foreigners, we became but a pseudo-colony long after the demise of colonialism. While countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Israel maintain state religions, helpless Nepal was pressured to give up its historical culture and religion by a bevy of 21st century proselytisers.

In juxtapose, we are well aware that the current US President's politics is heavily influenced by the religious right-wing of that country – the same right-wing which has bizarre beliefs such as advocating abstinence as the only solution to teenage pregnancy. The Queen of the United Kingdom is not only the Head of State but also the Head of the Anglican Church.

UNDEMOCRATIC DECLARATION

Nepal, with at least 85 per cent of its Hindu population become instantaneously secular without a single citizen being solicited for his/her views



Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark all have constitutional links between church and state; yet they provide more freedom of religion than a secular state.

For example the Finnish government provides funding for the construction of mosques; and Iceland was among the first countries to legalise abortion. Religion has also proved resilient despite repression. Case in point is Mongolia where religion was suppressed during three decades of Soviet influence and communist government. Nevertheless, Buddhism survived and has flowered again openly since 1990. State religion is certainly not

rare even in the 21st century.

Having explored how and why Nepal lost its Hindu identity let us see what it is that we lost. The term Hinduism is actually an aberration: the people from the Indus civilization were originally known as Hindus. The religion they practiced was Sanatan Dharma - Sanatan meaning from the beginning of the world and Dharma meaning the path to real happiness through self-realisation. Sanatan Dharma, the oldest religion in the world, advocates spiritual or religious practices that result in the salvation of the soul.

It is considered the religion which eternally

exists in God, which was revealed by God, which describes the names, forms, virtues and the abodes of God, and which reveals the true path of God. Sanatan Dharma is not a 'religion' in the western sense. It is a 'way of life', a philosophy to achieve salvation. Every religion has an 'apostle' - except Sanatan Dharma. The teachings of this religion have come through the spiritual meditation of various enlightened Gurus who received revelations from God.

Sanatan Dharma is the most secular of all religions. It does not criticise any other religion. It does not try to convert people of other religions. It provides freedom for all to practice their own religious beliefs. It has not conflicted with any other religion in Nepal. The pluralistic nature of this religion further bears testimony to its openness. For example, different members of the same family may worship Shiva, Kali or Krishna, without any conflict whatsoever. It is recognised that there is but one God and communication with God through any avenue is perfectly acceptable.

So in this current time of political fluidity, a euphemism for turmoil, what is to be done regarding the irrelevant designation of Nepal as a secular state? The occasional mass demonstration or convention has not made any dent in the government's policy. Funding for this cause appears pitifully scarce. Once again, the silent majority, in this case at least 85 per cent of the population, remains complacent.

It is time for voters to also think about the position of candidates on whether Nepal should revert to a Hindu state or not. Whether that view is extended to the choice of a Hindu kingdom will likely be decided by a referendum. Political theology may apply to the latter issue, but religion need not be constrained by the chains of petty politics. ■

Sri Lankan troops clash with Tigers



Sri Lankan forces have killed at least 15 Tamil Tiger separatists in clashes that also left six soldiers dead in the north and eastern parts of the

island, the military said. Saturday's violence came after government forces launched a new offensive to drive out members of the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the Mannar area.

Sri Lankan forces said that the Tamil Tiger fighters were killed in the last 24 hours in the northern districts of Jaffna and Vavuniya, as well as the eastern district of Ampara. The military said it had previously forced the group out of jungle areas in the eastern part of the country.

A large stock of arms and ammunition were also uncovered during the offensive, the military said. "A claymore mine exploded by the LTTE, targeting a military bus, killed two soldiers and wounded seven in Jaffna," a spokesman at the Media Centre for National Security, part of the ministry of defence, said on Saturday.

"Soldiers killed 14 terrorists in three different incidents in Vavuniya. Three soldiers were killed in the fighting," he said. The military also said that an elite commando police officer, wounded in fighting in Ampara, had died later in hospital.

The Tamil Tigers, who want an independent state for the Tamil minority in the north and the east of the country, were not immediately available for comment. An estimated 5,000 people have died since last year in renewed fighting after a peace process collapsed.

About 70,000 people have been killed, including thousands of civilians, since the civil war erupted in 1983. (mwcnews)

BHUTTO'S RETURN: what will be different?



The PPP has announced that its chairperson Ms Benazir Bhutto will return to Pakistan on October 18, 2007 and she will land at Karachi airport. TV channels showed PPP workers celebrating in all the big cities of the country, displaying the party's grassroots loyalty to her leadership. Ms Bhutto says that she has not been able to reach any understanding with the Musharraf government, and this has been confirmed by

the Information Minister, Mr Muhammad Ali Durrani in Islamabad.

The government says Ms Bhutto will not be deported like Mr Nawaz Sharif but that she would have to face the corruption and misuse of power cases pending against her in this country. Ms Bhutto counters by saying that the cases have dragged on for years since the last Sharif government initiated them and that she has not been convicted in any of them so far. This being so, she is willing to come to Pakistan to be among her supporters in the run-up to the general election and also present herself before the newly independent judiciary for justice. She says the matter of her becoming prime minister for a third time will be resolved in due course by the new parliament.

She has chosen to land at Karachi this time for significant reasons. Karachi is today the bailiwick of the MQM, which dominates the provincial assembly and the local government. Out in the streets, the MQM-cadre party is almost unchallenged by any of its rivals. It must be noted, however, that when the PPP-Musharraf "deal" was being negotiated, it was the PML chief minister of Sindh who condemned it. The voice of protest arose, as it were, from a Sindh rival of the PPP, but not from the formerly anti-Sindh MQM. In fact, out of the ruling coalition, MQM was the most positively inclined towards the "deal". Ms Bhutto is therefore testing the waters of MQM tolerance in her province where she expects to form a government in coalition with the MQM.

The landing in Karachi has probably been made possible by the transformation of the parties involved, under threat of Islamic extremism. It was in recognition of this development that the US is rumoured to have favoured a coalition of "liberal" forces under President Musharraf. Washington is said to have recommended the "deal" with the PPP in light of this recognition. President Musharraf, on the other hand, has held fast to the support of the MQM and has not responded to the alarm bells sounded frequently by the ruling conservatives of the PMLQ about the "terrorism" of the MQM. It is said that the May 12 show of force staged by the MQM against the visit of the cashiered Chief Justice of Pakistan was suggested by him.

Her decision not to come to Lahore has probably been prompted by the harsh reaction shown by the Chief Minister of Punjab, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, to the PPP's proposed "deal" with President Musharraf. Mr Elahi has been more decisive in his resolve to confront the PPP at the polls than most PMLQ leaders. He has been active with blandishment in southern Punjab to break the traditionally confirmed support there for the PPP, a kind of extension of the PPP domain from next-door Sindh. In 1986, when Ms Bhutto landed in Lahore to a record welcome, the prime minister in Islamabad was a fellow Sindh, Mr Muhammad Khan Junejo. Today, it is a scion of the clan of Chaudhry Zahur Elahi who was killed in the city by Al Zulfikar, then a PPP terrorist wing.

The PMLQ secretary general, Mushahid Hussain Syed, says President Musharraf will be re-elected by the same assemblies but will get rid of his uniform before October 15. The PPP's stand on the issue has become unclear with the passage of time. At first it was opposed to the president retaining his uniform, which means that the PPP could reconcile to his additional tenure and not boycott the elections. But lately its spokesperson in Islamabad, Mr Farhatullah Babar, has been stating that the party was opposed to his being re-elected by the current assemblies, full stop. This lack of clarity may lead to an understanding as events unfold after Ms Bhutto's arrival.

If opinion polls are to be trusted, Ms Bhutto is back as the front-runner in the country. Mr Sharif, who topped the popularity surveys before his arrival and exit, has gone down to number two. It appears that the stage is set for a positive transition in the country for the next five years. The coming general election — not to be boycotted by the opposition despite vows to the contrary — will be hotly contested and, as in 2002, the PPP may poll the most votes and contribute to a new identity of the parliament in Pakistan. Whether it will be able to show the required responsibility in sharing power and helping run a stable ship with General Musharraf, the PMLQ and the MQM remains to be seen.

(Editorial published in Daily Times, Pakistan on Sunday)

"Free Burma and Aung San Suu Kyi"

The ongoing solidarity fast in support of Irom Chanu Sharmila's struggle to repeal Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has broadened its agenda congruent with the declarations of past New Delhi (2005) and Lahore (2006) Peaceful South Asia Conventions — demand for a Free Burma and Free Aung San Suu Kyi.

Aung San Suu Kyi is imprisoned under the 1975 State Protection Act in Myanmar (Burma), which grants the government the power to imprison persons for up to five years without a trial. She has been intermittently under arrest of one kind or the other since 1990.

Irom Chanu Sharmila — the iron lady of Manipur in India, has been on a continuous fast since 2000 demanding repeal of AFSPA. Despite the restrictions of house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi continued to campaign for democracy, similar to Irom Sharmila, who has been under confinement and steadfastly protesting against AFSPA since past 7 years now.

Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt has endorsed this fast along with hundreds of other Countless people are fasting for five days (13-17 September) in Keishampat junction, Imphal, Manipur, to lobby more support to the anti-AFSPA campaign.



Significant others from different countries in the world have signed up on www.ashaparivar.org to fast for varying durations from September 13 to support the campaign. The launch of this five days solidarity fast came two days after the 'Apunba Lup' observed Anti-army Act Day on September 11 here to mark the completion of five decades of the act in the North-East. The present UPA Government had constituted the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission in 2004 to review AFSPA in response to an intensive campaign led by 'Apunba Lup'.

By 1988, Burma was burgeoning with pro-democracy movement, fueled by the energy and idealism among the country's young people. There were demonstrations against the repressive, one-party socialist government. Aung San Suu Kyi was drawn into the pro-

democracy movement, which was snuffed out by State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which seized power on September 18, 1988. Thousands of pro-democracy advocates were killed.

Next came a general election in 1990, which political parties were allowed to contest. Aung San Suu Kyi, who was leading the National League for Democracy (NLD), won a landslide victory, with 80 per cent support. SLORC leaders refused to accept the election results putting the elected pro-democracy leaders under

Despite the restrictions of house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi continues to campaign for democracy. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1991.

The protests of Sharmila and Aung San Suu Kyi represent the most ideal form of peaceful struggles for a democratic demand. Their victory is essential for the strengthening of democracy in South Asia and for the respect for human rights around the world. Their victory will determine whether the voice of common citizen will be heard or the state will continue to trample over people's rights with anti-people laws and policies.

■ Bobby Ramakant, development journalist



Leader hype

Why Nepal's desperate call for a national leader will not solve its problems.

■ Ingo Wagler

Nepal, in its current political transition does not know how it will look like at dawn. Out on streets these days one frequently hears the call for a good and strong leader which reflects the desire to end the lasting uncertainty. The leader of the nation GP Koirala is seen as dying one, what is probably his most important asset of credibility. But who else then, Prachanda, Deuba? The unasked question remains: Who will become the new 'king'?

Nepal's desire for a good and strong leader who will reoccupy the vacant position as the head of the nation might be understandable but is fundamentally counterproductive for the quest of establishing democratic rule. Doing away with monarchy and having the choice between various parties makes no democracy. Only the establishment of structures of governance that strictly delimit the competencies of the respective posts, defines the procedure of selection and maintains accountability to the polity will provide the necessary foundation for a democratic state, that deserves its title.

And what is imperative for the state must also count for the ones who fill the rows of the parliament and ministerial chairs, namely the parties. Dynastic succession, personality cult and autocratic rule have a long tradition in the Nepali party landscape. Frequent splits, internal rivalries and interpersonal hostilities have left the credibility of all parties

severely battered, thanks to the leadership of certain overextended personalities.

But it would be just too convenient to pass on all the blame to the leaders simply because it was the people who made them the supreme. The party as much as the non party people demand a leader they can follow, for the nation as much as for the party. And obviously any organisational structure needs an in charge. But, there is a crucial difference between the representative who carries out the mandate lent by the people or the party and the autocrat who rules after his own whim and will.

To the latter, people are mere passive subjects, but in a democracy people have to become active, articulate their interests and dictate them to their leaders. In this respect, the anticipation of the principle of equality represents a crucial presupposition. In order to transform the notion of authority, the fact that neither the 'king' nor the leader deserves uncritical respect has to be internalised.

The good leader does not draw his/her strength from strategic agitation and egomaniac willpower, but from his/her ability to merge the bandwidth of interests and opinions into one. Therefore democracy is not about legitimising the leadership of the one elected but rather to establish a system that limits the role of the leader to a defined mandate in order to prevent autocratic excess.

True, democratic systems might be prone to inefficiency, corruption,

pointless agitation and seemingly disintegrating rivalries. It might also be true that a centralised leadership often creates stability in the short run. Though, the functioning of the latter is based on the oppression of interests and aspirations that are contrary to the static definition of power relations that keeps the supreme in position.

In fact, Nepal had to experience this form of stability extensively, which led to a steady increase in conflicting pressures to the point when it could not be suppressed anymore, with well known consequences. Therefore, the call for unitary leadership is not more than a fallback to old habits of being subjected instead of utilising the opportunity to become an active subject. The fundamental strength of democracy is that conflicts are not being suppressed but released and eventually solved within an institutional framework that does not know the inequality of supremacy.

Nepal has already voted for democracy and after the half hearted hybrid of constitutional monarchy and autocratic party democracy has miserably failed, the time has come do away with unsustainable concepts of glorious leadership. The stabilising and unifying factor that will represent the future Nepali democracy must not be tied to a personalised leadership. Only then could Nepal become a rare role model for overcoming a symptomatic tradition of autocratic leadership which has in the end caused much more trouble than stability.

(The author is research associate with the FES Nepal)

Marshland Flowers

Such states can be easily produced and are not considered as either enlightenment or even near to it.

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche



Here we are talking about genuine high level Samadhis of pure awareness by itself where the

person remains absorbed in it for six, 12 or 24 hours without taking a single breath. Even such an experience is not considered as having penetrated the veil of ignorance, what to speak about watered down, thoughtless states of clear awareness where the person is not even in the first Dhyana level.

Such experiences of thoughtless awareness by itself without entering into various levels of Samadhis are even further away from the Buddhist enlightenment. Such states can be easily produced and are not considered as either enlightenment or even near to it. In fact, according to all Buddhist traditions especially the Mahayana, such states are considered dangerous and if the correct view is not present, it can be even detrimental to the process of enlightenment.

The great Siddha Pandit of Tibet, Sakya Pandit said cultivation of such pure awareness without the correct view can cause the person to be reborn either in the formless Deva realm or as Naga etc. To be reborn in the formless Deva realm (Arupa Dhatu Deva Loka) is considered as the worst birth for a Bodhisattva as once born there, s/he cannot help sentient beings from 10,000 to 80,000 Kalpas. In that state, the yogi remains in a highly blissful, and formless state which can easily be mistaken for the non-dual state from anywhere between 10,000 Kalpas to up to 80,000 Kalpas.

There are others types of Samatha systems which are conducive to deep Samadhi that take you to the state of super-consciousness, like meditating on the inner sounds called Nada yoga or in the Shanta Parampara of India as Sabad Surati yoga. There are four levels of Samadhi related to Nada yoga technically called: Vaikhari, Madhyama, Pasyanti and Para.

During the process, the person

hears various types of sounds like the humming of the bumble bee, the sound of the bell, drums, thunder and the sound of Om (Pranava) and so on. At the Para level, all sounds subside and only the infinite pure awareness by itself or super-consciousness remains. Likewise another well-known method is to concentrate on the light/sparks or the like seen between the eye-brows. This too has various stages similar to different levels of Samadhis etc. until one reaches the infinite light of the mind or Atman as non-Buddhists would call it.

All of these methods are only varieties of Samatha and, according to Buddhism, these states neither are enlightenment nor do they produce enlightenment by practicing them for a long time. This statement is true of the famous Kundalini yoga methods too; which also ends in the super-conscious state of pure awareness by itself which is infinite. That one can experience such awareness through various methods of Samatha is well-known to Buddhism and is not alien at all to Buddhist literature. However, Buddhism neither regards such a state as enlightenment or liberation nor regards such states or production of such states over and over again for longer and longer periods as productive of enlightenment.

Let me repeat again, that any method that only absorbs the mind on anything belongs to the Samatha type of meditation. And Samatha meditations, no matter how extraordinary or different from other Samatha types, are not enough to attain enlightenment. And in this context, Buddhism is very emphatic that only the types of meditation that probe into the mode of existence of all phenomena (Dharmas) to gain insight can cut through the 'Innate Ignorance' (Sahaja Agyan) and thus destroy that ignorance. And this type of meditation (and there are many techniques here) is called Vipassana in Sanskrit, Vipassana in Pali, Lhag thong in Tibetan and Kuan in Chinese and Kan in Japanese.

*(To be continued.)
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)*

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Irish champion

I write for ordinary people, someone who wouldn't require a dictionary to read my stories.

■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma



"I didn't write to make money, there's no money to be made in the literary novels," said the Irish novelist and story writer, Harte. He talked at length about the freedom of being a writer and how the publishers commissioning the writers to produce novels curtail the freedom of a writer.

Harte was born in Killeenduff, near Easkey, Co Sligo, Ireland. When he was nine years old his family moved to Lanesboro, Co Longford, where his father worked for Bord-na-Mona. At the age of eighteen, he came to Dublin. He later took up a job on the Dublin docks. He has worked as a bus conductor, a courier, a laboratory technician, an executive officer in the Civil Service, a teacher and a school principal.

Active in Irish literature for several decades and well known, Harte sees similarities between poetry and fiction, especially short story. He thinks that a short story has been an artifact similar to a poem. "A short story goes straight to the imagination and follows all possible line of development like a poem does." In short story everything is specific, everything wrapped up. "I get tremendous satisfaction after finishing a well crafted short story."

"Irish Story is not very good, in Ireland respect for short story is nil. It's only those people who have vested interest in story who care for story. No magazine publishes a good story. The big publishing groups are not interested in short

story," said he. I was surprised to hear such words from a writer of nation that has been a champion of short story for decades; and has produced most famous story writers like Oliver Goldsmith, Frank O' Connor, James Joyce and Liam O'Flaherty. Harte refers to sixties movement of stories and points out there has been no exciting development in short stories in recent times. "There's a lack of experiment and ingenuity that leaves it so poverty stricken."

John McGahern, Liam O'Flaherty, Bernard Malamud, Borges and Kafka remain Harte's favorite writer. He admires South Asian story and seems intrigued by its lively texture and how it employs folklore and mythology in the narrative. In Eastern Europe short story is very popular and still alive, discerns Harte

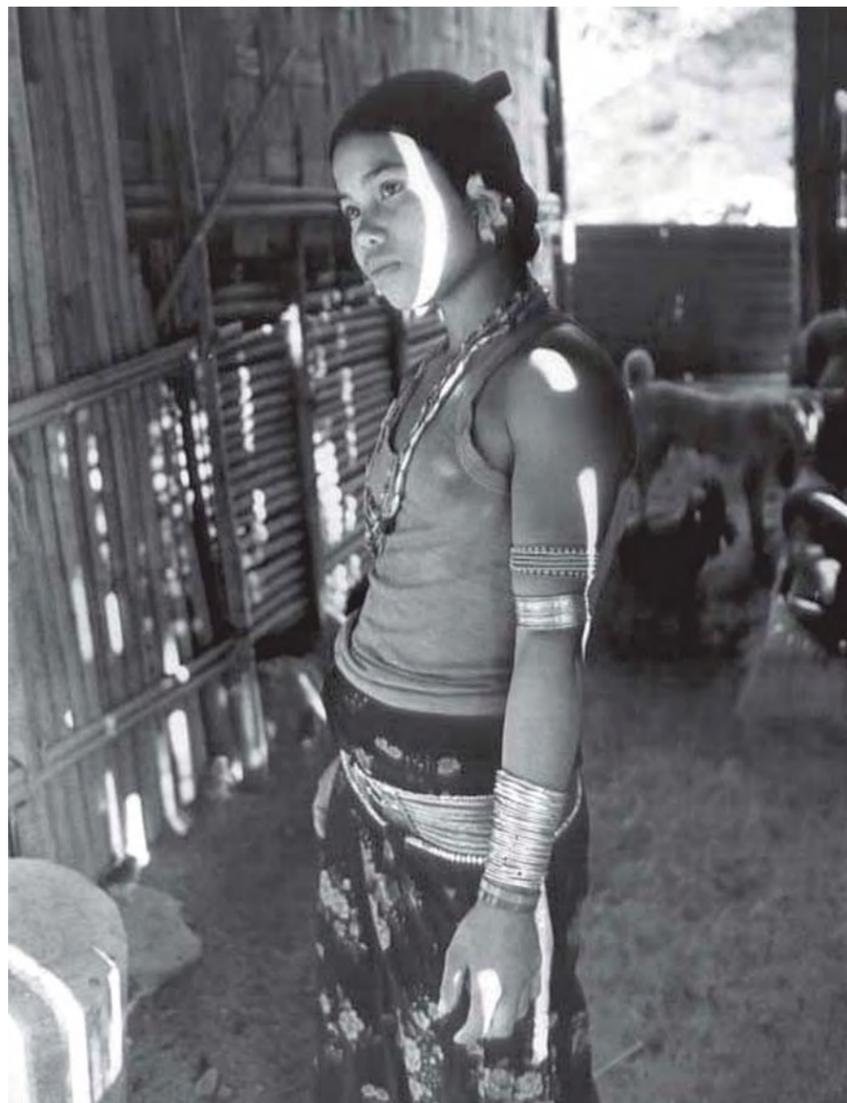
Harte who teaches story writing at various universities and creative writing centers in Ireland believes you can't give talent to your students, you only develop them. Though novel is on the top in terms of readership, what thrives in Ireland is poetry in Irish language.

He believes writing a short story is like beating his head against a stone wall. "When I shape meaning out of my struggle and get a good story, I am content. I am content even if I get just one reader, even if there's only a small readership. I write for ordinary people, someone who wouldn't require a dictionary to read my stories. In Ireland short stories have select readerships; it's like writing a poem to a select audience."

The writer can be reached at riter@yuyutsu.de

Insight

■ By Sushma Amatya



Mro girl in her home, Chittagong hill tracts, Bangladesh.

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Six of the top 10 finalists of Indian Idol, Charu, Deepali, Emon, Ankita, Parleen and Chang during a concert in Kathmandu on Saturday. Nepali viewers are keenly watching the Indian Idol contest where Nepali-origin singer Prashant Tamang has reached at the final.

Ph: by Bhawanee Ojha



PRAISE FOR PRASHANT



Enthusiasm has gripped lakhs from Shillong and Darjeeling to get Amit Paul or Prashant Tamang voted as India's next singing sensation.

Sikkim CM Pawan Chamling was quoted in Himalaya Darpan, a local daily, on Tuesday as saying he'll do "much more than any government" to see Tamang, a fellow Nepali, beat the competition. Immediately after the CM's announcement, Anant Rai, a businessman in Gangtok, announced he'll give Rs 1 crore to fund the Darjeeling singer's campaign. Nearly 10,000 students came out in a raucous procession in neighbouring Kurseong on Wednesday chanting "win-Prashant" slogans.

Asked if cadres of Gorkha National Liberation Front and sundry other outfits which fought a bitter war in the 80s against the West Bengal government for Gorkhaland are putting pressure, as alleged by some, on residents to support Prashant, the secretary of the singer's fan club in Kurseong, Pradip Pradhan, said, "Everyone is doing it on their own. The allegations are baseless. Instead, we hear from outsiders settled in Meghalaya that they are being threatened with expulsion if they don't vote for Amit."

But Pradhan agreed that the Darjeeling hills are afire. "Pahad ma aago laage ko cha (The mountains are raging)," he said from Kurseong, the small town that quietly nestled between Siliguri and Darjeeling until Prashant, a village boy from Tung Sung tea estate

who's now a constable in the Calcutta Police, reached the final of the show. Now the place, known for little more than the mushroom-like sprouting of its English schools, is throbbing with feverish anticipation and tension.

The Amit Paul fever in India's north-eastern states is equally scalding. Even as Lapang reminded the singer of the laurels Kapil Dev brought to India and said he had similar expectations, Purno Sangma, the former Lok Sabha Speaker, said, "Amit has already created history. He is the pride of Meghalaya and the whole of Northeast. We are proud of him and I personally appeal to all citizens of Meghalaya and Northeast to vote for Amit generously and make him the next Indian Idol."

Everybody, regardless of political affinity, is pitching in. Laban MLA Jopsimon Phanbuh has donated three PCOs for the purpose of free voting. Meghalaya urban affairs minister Paul Lyngdoh has given out three, Mawlai MLA PT Sawkmie 20 and Pynthorumkhrah MLA AL Hek five.

In all this frenzy, what binds the people of the two regions in their latest obsession to "win" is the distinct awareness of being an alien in their own country. Debojit Saha, a former Voice of India winner from Assam, summed up the sentiment when he said, "Amit Paul and I are both from the Northeast, a region hardly known to the outside world. We know what hurdles we have crossed to reach our desired destinations." ■

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