Chief of Army Staff, Gen Rukmangad Katawal left for a week-long trip to India at the invitation of his counterpart, Gen. Deepak Kapoor, signaling that the traditional ties between the army of the two countries will be restored. After the initial confusion, the government of India has finally decided to confer the title of Honorary General on Gen Katawal, a practice that India had stopped as a mark of protest against the takeover of power by the King in February 2005.

Gen JJ Singh who retired as the Chief of Army Staff of India last month, did not pay any visit during his tenure to receive the honorary title of the Nepal Army; that came as a deviation to this practice of conferring the title on a reciprocal basis. Gen Katawal’s visit, mainly to participate in the Platinum Jubilee celebration of the Indian Military Academy, also paves the way for return visit of Gen Kapoor to Nepal where he will be receiving the title of the Honorary General of the Nepal Army.

There are indications that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had some reservations about the honour being conferred on Katawal ‘now’, and it was said to be in favour of Nepal Army’s democratic credentials being established. Apart from receiving the honorary title from the president of India in her capacity of the Supreme Commander, Gen Katawal is also likely to call on PM Man Mohan Singh. Gen Katawal’s visit to India however has triggered more political speculations at home as it comes at a time when some senior Maoist leaders have expressed fears about ‘takeover’ by the army. “We are aware of such speculations but Nepali army has a history of serving the nation and its people under legitimate authorities,” a senior official told newsfront, asserting ‘no politics will be discussed as it is not on our agenda’.

A former minister and senior politician told newsfront, “No army coup can take place in Nepal without India and the US endorsing it, but with larger international presence in the country, such a possibility does not exist any more.” But there are indications that the army headquarter is clearly against the ‘integration’ of the Maoist guerrillas in it without Maoists facing the polls. “Moreover, they must renounce politics of violence including abduction and extortion, accept rule of law and seek legitimacy from the people through process of election and accept the economic order that the world at large and our region has accepted….This is our stand at the institutional level and once Maoists fulfill it, it will not be a problem for us to abide by what they say,” army sources said, adding, “This will be our stand both at home and abroad.”

Your dream house for generations to come. Ensure it lasts.

Think further. Think Shikhar.

Shikhar Household Insurance covers Flood, Burglary, Riot, Strike, Malicious Damage, Sabotage, Terrorism and also other natural calamities like Flood, Storm and Earthquake etc.

P.O. Box: 11193, Naya Baradari, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: 4784514, 4784515, Fax: 4784516
No election!

Contradictory political messages and a clear-cut assertion from the top Maoist leadership make election to the constituent assembly increasingly uncertain even though top leaders of seven parties continue their mirage chase for a political consensus.

Maoist Chief Prachanda’s recent advocacy for understanding with the ‘royalist’ and party key ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai’s assertion that the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) would not accept the verdict of the constituent assembly polls if Maoists are defeated, have created further political confusion. “I would not react to what Prachanda has said at this moment, as it will take some days for me to judge their (Maoists’) political consistency,” said former PM Gyan Bahadur Thapa. Prachanda has of late been saying that since there are many nationalists among those who supported the monarchy, the party would want to work together with them in the national interest.

Prachanda’s statement is also being seen by the security agencies, mainly the Nepal army, as a clever ploy to create confusion in the security system and take advantage out of it. “First, they have to prove that they are a democratic party with respect for rule of law, and only after that their continued refusal to nationalism will convince us,” a senior official in the police department said.

Prachanda’s willingness to go with the ‘royalists’ has however attracted flak from Home Minister KP Sitaula, who has so far shown unfailing loyalty and devotion to Prachanda, facing criticism from his party, the Nepali Congress. “My illusions about Prachanda are disappearing now,” said Sitaula in response to Prachanda’s new political call.

But as PM Koirala has been insisting that all the seven parties including the Maoists must announce a fresh date for CA polls by mid-April, Baburam Bhattarai’s public stance that any outcome of the polls that goes against the Maoists will not be acceptable; for the party has once again made the ruling coalition suspicious of the Maoists’ commitment to the peace process and democracy.

Speaking at a programme organised by a Maoist-affiliated body, Bhattarai said that any outcome that would see Maoists defeated will be absurd and meaningless. “How will that election matter, if the Maoists, who have been able to establish their political agenda as the national agenda, lose?” He tried to justify Prachanda’s latest vision of working together with the royalists as something, intended to ensure that future Nepal will have everyone playing a role for peace and development.

Embassy sale row

Foreign Minister asked to reveal details

The Foreign Affairs committee of parliament has decided to seek clarification from the government on the controversial move to sell embassy property in London. Initially, the committee will be asking Foreign Minister, Sahana Pradhan to give details about the proposed sale. Moreover, the entire property, a part of which is located at Kensington Palace Garden at the earliest. But the House committee’s move might now put a spanner in the whole deal which appears guided more by lust for commission than in the interest of the nation.

“We will get the government to give full details about the proposed deal and see what is in the best interest of the country,” said Bijukchhe responding to Newsfront’s query. So far, the PM’s office as well as the Foreign Ministry is trying to justify the move to sell the embassy property purely on the basis of a letter, sent by former Ambassador Prabal Shumsher Rana, that said selling the property would be a better option than going for repairs which would cost around 45 million pounds. But officials in the Foreign Ministry assert that the cost of repairs was deliberately inflated in order to justify its sale.

The issue has already triggered a national debate as there is information that the government proposes to sell the property at a much lower price, anywhere around 45 to 50 million pounds, while the going rate for that kind of property is no less than 80 million pounds. Moreover, the entire property, a part of the crown property, was handed over to the government of Nepal way back in 1934 as a token of appreciation of the friendship between the two countries. The property is currently on renewed leasehold of the government of Nepal for a period of 59 years beginning 1977. “We will not let this government sell our embassy in the manner it is trying,” a member of the house committee said.

Along with the embassy sale controversy, the committee has also asked the government to take up with the government of India, the impact that the proposed roads with high-dams across the border, could have on water resources and rivers in Nepal. “We have also asked the government to specify how and on what parameters the ambassadors are being appointed.”

The issue assumes significance following PM Koirala’s decision to appoint Shalija Acharya as ambassador to Delhi even after the house committee refused to confirm her nomination. Besides, at least four ambassador-designates have not yet been accepted by the host countries—Denmark, France, Malaysia and Australia since all these nominations belong to the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M).
Not quiet anymore

China may be more visible in Nepal now

Known for its quiet and transparent diplomacy with non-interference in Nepal’s internal affairs as the bottom line, China may now opt for more visible role given other internal and ‘external’ factors at play in Nepal.

That its days for quiet diplomacy watching other ‘external’ players enhance their presence and role in Nepal should now be over, is the message that high level officials in Nepal have gathered following the visit of high-level Chinese delegation led by Wang Ziaur, Minister for International Development.

Chinese authorities are particularly worried about the growing violence in Nepal’s ‘federal region’, something they feel is ‘unusual’, implying that any external factors aggravating the situation there might have a chain effect in the whole of Nepal and China, across the north as well.

Minister Ziaur, at the end of his visit, simply said that China was closely watching developments in Nepal, but in the series of meetings that he held with politicians, from PM Koirala to Maoist Chief Prachanda, he was more candid in expressing his worries. Of late, there are also indications that China is getting more convinced that Nepal, without monarchy in some role in it, might fall prey to a host of forces - both internal and external, that are detrimental to its unity and integrity.

“YES, Chinese have given their message in their own way very clearly without mining words,” a cabinet minister told newsmen.

“There could be more high level visits from the north, and their involvement in developmental and infrastructure sector might increase,” he added.

China which maintained close link with the palace right from the days of Mao Dze Tung and Chao En Lai, had supported the royal takeover in February 2005, but of late had been keeping silent regarding the political turmoil in Nepal. On record, it said, it is in favour of election to the constituent assembly taking place on time. But with less clarity on the part of the Maoists on their future politics, China has not found a suitable promoter of its legitimate interest in the event of Nepal going Republic. Neither the visiting Chinese authorities nor the ambassador here, however, have met the king after the political change that took place 18 months ago.

The simmering fissures within the Nepal Congress is fast turning into an organised revolt. with senior leaders including parliamentarians warning Prime Minister KP Koirala in public that he had no right and authority to bypass the party, and that he ‘must’ act according to the mandate he has received from the party’s delegate session.

Any such move on the part of the PM, the leaders warned, would be dealt, both within the parliament and the party organisation. The message was delivered through an open meeting in which more than six dozen parliamentarians and central committee members in addition to around 40 party representatives from different part of the country participated in the symposium - ‘Threat to democracy and the way to defeat it,’ held under the aegis of the BP Koirala Research Centre.

The warning came as PM Koirala, under pressure from the coterie led by Home Minister KP Staali and the Maoists, was said to be eager to ‘declare’ Republic from the parliament. “I will not be acceptable to us,” the meeting chaired by party General Secretary KB Gurung said, that set the tone for the four hour long debate.

One after another, leaders including former Speaker Taranath Ranabhat, former home ministers – Govinda Raj Joshi and Khum Bahadur Khadka, Congress Centre participating MP BP Koirala Research Centre – Sunil Bharadi, former ministers - Bijay Gachchhakar and Chiranjivee Wagle said that Koirala cannot be defined at the cost of democracy.

This is being interpreted as their mood to rebel against Koirala if he continues to adopt the policy of ‘surrender’ towards Maoists and accepts their conditions for declaring ‘Republicanism from the House and going for the proportional representation system of election. ‘It is time government ensured that Maoists return the property they have been forcibly occupying in different parts of the country,’ said Khadka. He also came in defense of the security agencies who, “fought and laid their lives on our order … This government is treating them badly and ignoring their sacrifice.”

The meeting stated clearly that the king should not be pushed too far just because Maoists or ‘Staali’ wanted it. King’s role and relevance should be reviewed positively in a spirit of conciliation and accommodation, said former Speaker Pratap Joshi – “Sitaula” wanted that a hasty declaration of ‘Republicanism’ will lead the country to disintegration. What comes as a shock to PM Koirala is the open secret that the party Working Committee President, Sushil Koirala, despite his not being present in the symposium, lent his support to it.

But in a signal that almost amounts to rejecting the threat from the rebels, PM Koirala appointed KP Staali as the spokesperson of the government.

Most of the speakers in the meeting demanded for Staali’s dismissal as the Home Minister calling him, ‘incompetent’ and someone who was working more for the interest of the Maoists than that of the country.

Firmly for monarchy

Rabindra Nath Sharma, Chairman of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal has turned down the invitation of Rastriya Janata Party (RJP) led by Pushpawati Shumsher Rana to attend its national conference as a ‘friendly party’.

Sharma turned down the invitation saying he would not attend the conference as the RJP led by Rana has adopted a pro-Maoist stance. Recently, Rana’s party not only dropped its ‘support to the constitutional monarchy’ from the party constitution, but he also went along with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) and the CPN-UML in favour of the proportional representation system, during the voting in the parliament last month.

VOITH turns 40

Vaida’s Organisation of Industries and Trading Houses (VOITH), a leading industrial house in the country and an umbrella organisation of several subsidiaries, turned 40 on December 7. The day was observed as the foundation day of VOITH as well as the 77th birthday of its founder and president, Dr. GN Vaida, at Godavari Village resort in which the employees, management representatives, family and friends participated.

VOITH is credited with initiating and expanding automobile sale and maintenance, beginning with Toyota, in Nepal. Outstanding employees were rewarded on the occasion based on company’s assessment of their performance.

Corruption in democracy

Since PM GP Koirala never gets tired of ‘firmly establishing democracy in Nepal’, the country under his leadership is making a record in the field of corruption in the world. Transparency International has listed Nepal in the list of the ‘most corrupt’ countries in the world, placed at 131st position, only 32 below the highest point.

The annual report, 2006 published by the Transparency International, brings to the public the index of corruption in the world. Sadly for Nepal, the corruption index in the year that GP Koirala and pro-democracy parties ruled has gone up by 12 points compared to its position in the annual report of 2005.

Mafia who?

The national flag carrier, Nepal Airlines is under the control of the Airlines Mafia, declared Civil Aviation Minister, Prithvi Subba Gurung, but he made no effort to identify them.

“They are too strong and dangerous. They have always sabotaged the growth and expansion of the corporation. “They are too strong and dangerous. They have always sabotaged the growth and expansion of the corporation. “They used the corporation to serve their interest,” Gurung told the media on December 8, and asserted he would go for a phased programme to resurface the airlines.

But in the process, he made it clear that right from GP Koirala’s earlier tenure until now, the mafia were actively sabotaging the growth and expansion of the corporation. “They were everywhere from Dhami to Ladau. A report of General Sales Agency for Europe (GSA) during his first tenure as the PM and then going in for a contract with Ladau eight years ago had brought Koirala under criticism of the media and the political parties; since a huge kickback and high level corruption was suspected in both the deals - all this at the cost of the national exchequer.

Minister Gurung said he is aware of the challenges he faces today. To begin with, his priority will be to convert the corporation into an autonomous company, and let it acquire the aircraft and expand business on a more competitive basis.

Vacate Susta

As the government is under pressure to take up with India the issue of its additional encroachment on fresh areas in Susta under Nawaparassis district, Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan has asked her Indian counterpart, Pranab Mukherjee, to respect the Nepali sentiment and immediately vacate the area.

She also wanted India to treat the matter with utmost urgency and respect Nepal’s sensitivity. Pradhan raised the issue with Mukherjee in Delhi where she is participating in the 15th meeting of the SAARC foreign ministers. "Mukherjee has assured that India will look into Nepal’s concern," a government official said.

India has occupied fresh areas measuring around 12 Bighas in Susta recently disturbing some 50 families, while the earlier encroachment of around 1500 hectares remains unsettled. Apart from the directive of the parliamentary committee, media groups, youths and student groups belonging to various political parties including the young communist league, have criticised India for the encroachment.
Bombshell

Maoist Chief Prachanda has once again dropped a political bombshell by declaring that his party would be willing to work with the nationalistic forces or individuals in the country’s politics ahead. As expected, his speech has already triggered a fierce debate in politics with none less than Home Minister KP Siloua, who has long been servile towards the Maoists, questioning Prachanda’s political honesty.

No one knows the reason why Prachanda said so in a meeting organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, but he definitely wanted this issue debated and taken seriously. Otherwise, he would not have chosen a venue of the journalists.

In principle, it will be a welcome step on the part of the Maoists, if what Prachanda stated was an outcome of deep analysis and realisation that politics of exclusion of certain forces, or politics that gave monopoly to only seven parties all these months, was wrong and that it was not going to bring any political stability in this country. In fact, seven political parties, mainly GP Koirala did make a lot of promises in their political ideology and commitment in the name of opposing authoritarianism. How on earth would it be possible to oppose the authoritarianism of the king or that of Maoists’ one-party rule if a great ‘democratic’ like GP Koirala is to lead a seven party authoritarianism?

Any regime, not accountable to a legitimate parliament and not wanting to secure people’s mandate, can be termed authoritarian and democratic. If the King himself agreed to hand over the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution.

There is apparently a debate going on within the Maoists party that it must recognise Nepal’s own fundamental features; since it is independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution.

There is apparently a debate going on within the Maoists party that it must recognise Nepal’s own fundamental features; since it is independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.

In any case, this executive’s stated accountability to parliament is a farce as the legislature is only a rubber stamp of the three top leaders. In fact, not long ago, BP Koirala came forward with the call of national reconciliation as he thought bringing the king and democratic forces together alone would make this country more independent and sovereign in the real sense, purely within the framework of a democratic constitution. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people. If he had agreed to head the government for a limited transitional period to conduct election for the constituent assembly, he should have quit immediately after October 5 when he announced his definite time for the second time. By not doing that he only gave proof that he wants to prolong a rule that has no mandate of the people for the sake of power in an authoritarian fashion. Just because he belongs to the Nepal Congress does not make him less authoritarian if he continues to exercise absolute power without any accountability to people.
Debating Development

10-16 Dec, 2007

Losing common sense?

Except perhaps during the prehistoric times, when everybody fought, chased and even killed one another all over the world; Nepal, the land of Janaka, Buddha and many other illustrious personalities, was never found wanting on patience and perseverance that strengthened harmony and brotherhood among her people. From the time of sage king, Janaka, who has been portrayed as the key character to support and strengthen Rama’s resolve towards his duties in the Hindu epic Ramayana, to the time of lord Buddha who spread the message of compassion to the Asian continent, Nepal has been always portrayed as a peaceful nation in South Asia.

Until recently, nothing came between the people belonging to different religions and cultures. Sadly though, everything that was built with patience and courage seems to be tumbling down rapidly now. Worst of all, the change lacks neither direction nor purpose.

Ever since the success of Jana Andolan II, Nepal is said to be trying to build an all-inclusive democratic society with full regard paid to human rights of every citizen. This certainly is an objective that every developing, as well as developed country, aspires for. While on one hand, Nepal seems to be making some effort to involve the downtrodden and other groups excluded in the development process; on the other, the political leaders in power refrain from the slightest notion of involving the political parties that have a long history of siding with monarchy. How then can an all-inclusive society be created without the participation of all the people of Nepal?

Strong reactions to a recent comment made by Maoist Chairman, Prachanda, of forging ties with ‘nationalists royalists’ indicates that there might be a hidden campaign in Nepal to unsettle and disrupt everything aimed at preventing the coming together of the Nepali society peacefully. Although one can always argue that the comment, coming from the Maoists as it does, is aimed at weakening the only tested democratic party, the Nepali Congress. Whatever might be the motive of this statement at this time, the fact remains that without all the Nepalis coming together, the dream of a new democratic nation would remain unfulfilled.

The continuing violence in several cities, quickly spreading in the Terai plains, does not give any respite to the millions of peace-loving people. Lack of any progress in the activities of the truth and reconciliation commission, that can be made instrumental in healing the wounds of the common man; postponement of constituent assembly elections, and the lack of understanding between the six political parties and the Maoist led party, hardly provides any hope for a future that is secure and certain. Everyday extortions, torture, kidnapping and killing of innocent civilians including the civil servants, reflect the image of an utterly disorderly nation.

Increasing attacks against journalists, medical professionals, businesses and others are taking the sap out of Nepali life. No amount of justification, mostly hindsight, can work for such behavior. Most amazing is the behavior of the political and social leaders of the country who seem to be mysteriously quiet at this time of need. Immediately following the brutal murder of John of Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States of America in Dallas, a Mr. Allan Mallay, Secretary Treasurer of AFL-CIO Council, had remarked ‘There are powerful leaders who have encouraged or condoned or at least remained silent while the preachment of hate helped condition a citizenry to support the most reactionary sort of political philosophy’. The Americans, though hurt, found enough courage through other leaders to come to terms with reality and resolved to build the country they loved. They stopped from any sort of hate campaign against Dallas.

That was one city in the USA. But, Nepal seems to be brewing hate campaigns against selected persons virtually in every city and towns. Yet the powerful leaders keep their silence in public but are alleged to confide in private. This behavior is more dangerous to the society and the nation as a whole. At this juncture one can only hope that some day soon, the Nepali leaders would wake up with enough courage and conviction to do what they have been promising since long. ■
Debating Development

End the impasse

Is another Jana Andolan needed to revive that vigor and hope?

Amit Pyakurel

Maoists and utter disapproval of the NC, could also be a good option.

However, both these assessments should be wary scrutinised among political pundits, intellectuals and the general public. People should be made clear whether living up to one or two of the proposals or discarding them completely could give a most reasonable and best way out. Finding a way between the demands of the contrary to the democratic norm of respecting people’s verdict and its outcome would be unsustainable. In contrast, the Maoists insist that fully proportional electoral system would only ensure the wholesome representation of the less privileged and not dedicating republic would give leeway for the institution to play foul and disrupt the CA polls.

Nepali Congress (NC), opposing both the proposals, has been asserting that the fully proportional electoral system would communally break the nation and its outcome would snatch individuals’ liberty. It has also maintained that declaring republicism right away without waiting for the polls would imply to fish in this dirty water and push the country into a deeper quagmire.

No rule can sustain if the universally accepted democratic norms, more precisely the individual liberty, are made to pay in the pretext of any kind of reform. King Gyanendra’s autocratic tactics did not work. It will not be different if the Maoists try to follow a similar strategy. Fundamental democratic values are not only the most legitimate foundation for any political faction but also their greatest source of power. Stronger the democratic structure of a country is, the more trust of people leading factions can enjoy, opening the doors of reform more easily. It’s already clear that any attempt to safeguard the monarchy or to establish an absolute (communist) totalitarianism on the vague pretext of “ensuring rights for all”, will not be accepted by the Nepali people. Across the political spectrum, the very word democracy has a basic share of privileges provided by the state and everyone, irrespective of their political or social status, can express their discontent.

Regrettably, the people-consented rule by the current political alliance of seven parties would gradually lose its significance and legitimacy, as it is only distancing them from the people. Is another Jana andolan needed to revive that vigor and hope?

If there is an open and sincere discussion on the discrepancies taking place, it would not be hard to find a solution, given that both the sides in the current alliance realise the people’s desire and rights stand above all else. The underlying postures of all the political parties seem to contain a common ground, i.e. to ensure peace, complete democracy, and equal rights to all Nepalis. But this very idea also seems to be misunderstood, basically in line with the presumed strategic gain or loss of the parties, especially by the Nepali Congress and the CPN (Maoists).

However, time demands that both the sides need to come out of their political egos and get flexible on their demands to rescue the nation. Unity and reciprocal understanding is the only beneficial way-out in the current context. (amit.pyakurel@gmail.com)

Blame game continues

We are abusing the free gifts of freedom and democracy with our relentless apathy and ignorance.

It is time to start taking responsibility for our own apathy and inaction. We, the people, must take responsibility for the dismal government that we have and for believing in these dishonest leaders.

End of the game

Amit Pyakurel

Maoists and utter disapproval of the NC, could also be a good option.

However, both these assessments should be wary scrutinised among political pundits, intellectuals and the general public. People should be made clear whether living up to one or two of the proposals or discarding them completely could give a most reasonable and best way out. Finding a way between the demands of the contrary to the democratic norm of respecting people’s verdict and its outcome would be unsustainable. In contrast, the Maoists insist that fully proportional electoral system would only ensure the wholesome representation of the less privileged and not dedicating republic would give leeway for the institution to play foul and disrupt the CA polls.

Nepali Congress (NC), opposing both the proposals, has been asserting that the fully proportional electoral system would communally break the nation and its outcome would snatch individuals’ liberty. It has also maintained that declaring republicism right away without waiting for the polls would imply to fish in this dirty water and push the country into a deeper quagmire.

No rule can sustain if the universally accepted democratic norms, more precisely the individual liberty, are made to pay in the pretext of any kind of reform. King Gyanendra’s autocratic tactics did not work. It will not be different if the Maoists try to follow a similar strategy. Fundamental democratic values are not only the most legitimate foundation for any political faction but also their greatest source of power. Stronger the democratic structure of a country is, the more trust of people leading factions can enjoy, opening the doors of reform more easily. It’s already clear that any attempt to safeguard the monarchy or to establish an absolute (communist) totalitarianism on the vague pretext of “ensuring rights for all”, will not be accepted by the Nepali people. Across the political spectrum, the very word democracy has a basic share of privileges provided by the state and everyone, irrespective of their political or social status, can express their discontent.

Regrettably, the people-consented rule by the current political alliance of seven parties would gradually lose its significance and legitimacy, as it is only distancing them from the people. Is another Jana andolan needed to revive that vigor and hope?

If there is an open and sincere discussion on the discrepancies taking place, it would not be hard to find a solution, given that both the sides in the current alliance realise the people’s desire and rights stand above all else. The underlying postures of all the political parties seem to contain a common ground, i.e. to ensure peace, complete democracy, and equal rights to all Nepalis. But this very idea also seems to be misunderstood, basically in line with the presumed strategic gain or loss of the parties, especially by the Nepali Congress and the CPN (Maoists).

However, time demands that both the sides need to come out of their political egos and get flexible on their demands to rescue the nation. Unity and reciprocal understanding is the only beneficial way-out in the current context. (amit.pyakurel@gmail.com)

Blame game continues

We are abusing the free gifts of freedom and democracy with our relentless apathy and ignorance.

It is time to start taking responsibility for our own apathy and inaction. We, the people, must take responsibility for the dismal government that we have and for believing in these dishonest leaders.

End of the game

Amit Pyakurel

Maoists and utter disapproval of the NC, could also be a good option.

However, both these assessments should be wary scrutinised among political pundits, intellectuals and the general public. People should be made clear whether living up to one or two of the proposals or discarding them completely could give a most reasonable and best way out. Finding a way between the demands of the contrary to the democratic norm of respecting people’s verdict and its outcome would be unsustainable. In contrast, the Maoists insist that fully proportional electoral system would only ensure the wholesome representation of the less privileged and not dedicating republic would give leeway for the institution to play foul and disrupt the CA polls.

Nepali Congress (NC), opposing both the proposals, has been asserting that the fully proportional electoral system would communally break the nation and its outcome would snatch individuals’ liberty. It has also maintained that declaring republicism right away without waiting for the polls would imply to fish in this dirty water and push the country into a deeper quagmire.

No rule can sustain if the universally accepted democratic norms, more precisely the individual liberty, are made to pay in the pretext of any kind of reform. King Gyanendra’s autocratic tactics did not work. It will not be different if the Maoists try to follow a similar strategy. Fundamental democratic values are not only the most legitimate foundation for any political faction but also their greatest source of power. Stronger the democratic structure of a country is, the more trust of people leading factions can enjoy, opening the doors of reform more easily. It’s already clear that any attempt to safeguard the monarchy or to establish an absolute (communist) totalitarianism on the vague pretext of “ensuring rights for all”, will not be accepted by the Nepali people. Across the political spectrum, the very word democracy has a basic share of privileges provided by the state and everyone, irrespective of their political or social status, can express their discontent.

Regrettably, the people-consented rule by the current political alliance of seven parties would gradually lose its significance and legitimacy, as it is only distancing them from the people. Is another Jana andolan needed to revive that vigor and hope?

If there is an open and sincere discussion on the discrepancies taking place, it would not be hard to find a solution, given that both the sides in the current alliance realise the people’s desire and rights stand above all else. The underlying postures of all the political parties seem to contain a common ground, i.e. to ensure peace, complete democracy, and equal rights to all Nepalis. But this very idea also seems to be misunderstood, basically in line with the presumed strategic gain or loss of the parties, especially by the Nepali Congress and the CPN (Maoists).

However, time demands that both the sides need to come out of their political egos and get flexible on their demands to rescue the nation. Unity and reciprocal understanding is the only beneficial way-out in the current context. (amit.pyakurel@gmail.com)
Self-reliance is possible

Begging bowl and borrowed funds cannot do much in the long run.

Swoyambhu Ratna Tuladhar is a seasoned businessman who has experienced the challenges in the economic climate in Nepal fluctuate with wild abandon. He recently received the national level award for remarkable success in export and performance and also the title of ‘Commercially Important Person’. Exceptions of his talks with Sushma Amatya recently:

What does this recognition mean to you?

The national level award we received in Nov 07 was given for silver jewelry export by the government of Nepal, based on our performance in 2004 - 2005. I only received the honour on behalf of all those hardworking people who have been collectively contributing to handicrafts. This award has great value in our business and can be used as a tool for business promotion.

How is your organisation, Yak and Yeti, different from others in the handicrafts industry?

Yak & Yeti Enterprises Pvt., Ltd., was founded in 1983 with the intent to provide a means of support for the artisans of Kathmandu valley. Since most of the craftspeople were farmers they could not support themselves solely through their farming. So our main goal was to bring their products to the world market and fill the under-employment void while making a fair profit at the same time. This tradition continues to this day as we utilise over 100 plus artisans families who supply us with their products.

Manufacturing/export and wholesale of silver jewelry with semi-precious stones is our main specialty. We also export a wide variety of other Nepal handicrafts, Silk and Pashmina fashion garments and many more accessories feature in our product range which is popular in the international market today.

What challenges do you as a businessperson have been facing in the recent political environment in the country?

The unfortunate political situation is hindering our economic growth. We can do a lot and generate more employment and grow tremendously, if a favourable working environment is restored in our country. Foreign buyers are losing their faith in Nepal and taking their business out. If there is no improvement in our current situation, business will die out and there will be an uncontrollable growth of poverty level as well in the society. Economic activities and politics should be totally separated from one another. These two are like water in oil. You cannot mix them together. It is a law of nature. They function smoothly if they do not mix.

What might be the consequences if the situation does not improve?

I cannot escape from what is happening here today. What affects others also affects me. It is a pity what is happening here politically. If every political party has the same goal for our country; then I wish everybody followed the three big Cs to resolve our problem once and for all, which means - consensus, cooperation and coordination. Then only can all Nepals enjoy economical growth. I do not even want to think about the consequences if the situation does not improve.

What are the most pertinent issues the business community in Nepal is facing today?

We have faced ups and downs and have passed through many vulnerable situations. We literally sweated out our blood during the conflict ridden years. But we were continuing with what we were doing no matter what came our way. We never gave space for frustration to enter our minds. The livelihood of many people depends on what we do, so we do carry a huge responsibility.

How did the years of conflict impact on the economic condition of the country?

The number of people flying out of the country everyday under pretext of foreign employment or studying abroad says a lot. This situation could have been reversed with some foresight. Lacking that, a huge chunk of brain and brawn power is going out for good. I strongly believe that a large number of those who left due to instability in the country would come back and be happy if they are convinced that peace is here to stay and if they are reassured of unhindered, healthy economical growth. But sadly, this is not the case.

The reality is that our trade deficit is alarming and unfortunately we have revenue driven economy. Something needs to be done about this fast. Everybody should start thinking about a self sustainable economy. With the current economic condition in our country, all the rhetoric about how fortunate we are to be born in this country, how beautiful this country is, how nationalistic we are, etc., etc., will remain just that – empty jargon. After all, begging bowls and borrowed funds cannot do much in the long run.

What suggestions do you have to improve our economic growth?

We should aim to sell more than we buy from other countries. Productive areas should be improved and there is no indication of any light to be seen here today. What affects others also affects me. It is a pity what is happening here politically. If every political party has the same goal for our country; then I wish everybody followed the three big Cs to resolve our problem once and for all, which means - consensus, cooperation and coordination. Then only can all Nepals enjoy economical growth.

The national level award we received in Nov 07 was given for silver jewelry export by the government of Nepal, based on our performance in 2004 - 2005. I only received the honour on behalf of all those hardworking people who have been collectively contributing to handicrafts. This award has great value in our business and can be used as a tool for business promotion.

How is your organisation, Yak and Yeti, different from others in the handicrafts industry?

Yak & Yeti Enterprises Pvt., Ltd., was founded in 1983 with the intent to provide a means of support for the artisans of Kathmandu valley. Since most of the craftspeople were farmers they could not support themselves solely through their farming. So our main goal was to bring their products to the world market and fill the under-employ-ment void while making a fair profit at the same time. This tradition continues to this day as we utilise over 100 plus artisans families who supply us with their products.

Manufacturing/export and wholesale of silver jewelry with semi-precious stones is our main specialty. We also export a wide variety of other Nepal handicrafts, Silk and Pashmina fashion garments and many more accessories feature in our product range which is popular in the international market today.

What challenges do you as a businessperson have been facing in the recent political environment in the country?

The unfortunate political situation is hindering our economic growth. We can do a lot and generate more employment and grow tremendously, if a favourable working environment is restored in our country. Foreign buyers are losing their faith in Nepal and taking their business out. If there is no improvement in our current situation, business will die out and there will be an uncontrollable growth of poverty level as well in the society. Economic activities and politics should be totally separated from one another. These two are like water in oil. You cannot mix them together. It is a law of nature. They function smoothly if they do not mix.

What might be the consequences if the situation does not improve?

I cannot escape from what is happening here today. What affects others also affects me. It is a pity what is happening here politically. If every political party has the same goal for our country; then I wish everybody followed the three big Cs to resolve our problem once and for all, which means - consensus, cooperation and coordination. Then only can all Nepals enjoy economical growth. I do not even want to think about the consequences if the situation does not improve.

What are the most pertinent issues the business community in Nepal is facing today?

We have faced ups and downs and have passed through many vulnerable situations. We literally sweated out our blood during the conflict ridden years. But we were continuing with what we were doing no matter what came our way. We never gave space for frustration to enter our minds. The livelihood of many people depends on what we do, so we do carry a huge responsibility.

How did the years of conflict impact on the economic condition of the country?

The number of people flying out of the country everyday under pretext of foreign employment or studying abroad says a lot. This situation could have been reversed with some foresight. Lacking that, a huge chunk of brain and brawn power is going out for good. I strongly believe that a large number of those who left due to instability in the country would come back and be happy if they are convinced that peace is here to stay and if they are reassured of unhindered, healthy economical growth. But sadly, this is not the case.

The reality is that our trade deficit is alarming and unfortunately we have revenue driven economy. Something needs to be done about this fast. Everybody should start thinking about a self sustainable economy. With the current economic condition in our country, all the rhetoric about how fortunate we are to be born in this country, how beautiful this country is, how nationalistic we are, etc., etc., will remain just that – empty jargon. After all, begging bowls and borrowed funds cannot do much in the long run.

What suggestions do you have to improve our economic growth?

We should aim to sell more than we buy from other countries. Productive areas should be improved and there is no indication of any light to be seen here today. What affects others also affects me. It is a pity what is happening here politically. If every political party has the same goal for our country; then I wish everybody followed the three big Cs to resolve our problem once and for all, which means - consensus, cooperation and coordination. Then only can all Nepals enjoy economical growth.
UNMIN in need of immediate reform

UNMIN is in Nepal to do what the Nepali people deem is right for their own country, not what UNMIN deem is right for Nepal.

Kamal Tamang

Months before the November 22, 2007, political pundits, their minions and Nepali civil society all understood that holding elections under continued Maoist duress would be impossible. It was fear of acknowledging this false reality fabricated by these very actors, that the alarm bell was not rung in time and the Nepali people were betrayed once more.

Where the setting of false election expectations is concerned, UNMIN and every high-ranking UN official who flew in and out of Nepal, is guilty as charged. They were all responsible for exacerbating a lie that intentionally subdued glaring incapabilities of their “army” of advisors, were incapacitated in every way and public manner.

The seven party coalition and the Maoists should produce a set of target objectives that need to be met, in order for CA elections to be held. These objectives and their associated dates should be shared with UNMIN and its engagement sought in an advisory capacity.

Once all parties are in agreement, UNMIN should allocate its resources to ensure that agreed upon milestones are met and should produce weekly reports on its website that outline progress-to-date, challenges, obstacles and upcoming milestones. Should the danger of missing any milestones become obvious, the information should be shared with the Nepali people and the international community-at-large, in a transparent and public manner.

UNMIN’s practice of inflicting progress by subduing hyped success should be halted immediately. All agreements, official and unofficial, between UNMIN, the SPA and the Maoists should be shared in the public domain. For example, Ian Martin’s revelation after the arms verification process had begun, that details on Maoist arms, numbers of verified combatants, etc., could not be kept from public disclosure is the kind of practice that UNMIN should be reprimanded for enforcing.

In order to avoid the plethora of excuses of the past and repeated failure to meet its mandate, Ian Martin should once and for all, tell the SPA and the Maoists the common minimum set of conditions UNMIN requires, to effectively carry out its responsibilities.

Fortunately for UNMIN, Nepal’s peace process has yet again arrived at a juncture where Ian Martin can better negotiate the terms of UNMIN’s engagement. Martin should take advantage of the lessons he has learned and negotiate a more effective mandate for this mission. A restricted version of an expanded role is what Martin should focus on.

The perception that the UN alone can help Nepal navigate its peace process is a myth. The nature of conflict has morphed drastically since the UN’s inception. With these transformations have emerged numerous institutions and think tanks that may not be as well funded but are intricately better structured to handle discrete components of Nepal’s peace process.

Because independent oversight is desired, it is understood in Nepal’s case, the existence of the inextricable relationship between UNMIN and known civil society actors, incapacitates civil society as the sole, logical source of unfounded governance. Employment of arrangement in particular, hamper the independence of most vocal opinion makers in Nepal’s case.

With all the double standards that have been practiced, the time to carefully re-evaluate UNMIN’s most effective application is now. It is important to revisit the fact that UNMIN is in Nepal at the behest of the SPA and the Maoists, but is accountable to the Nepali people. UNMIN is in Nepal to do what the Nepalese people deem is right for their own country, not what UNMIN deem, is right for Nepal.

Nepalis need to wake up to these facts and stop elevating UNMIN onto a pedestal where it does not belong. For all the progressive politics that Nepal’s elite allegedly represents, its constituents should take a moment to dissociate their wallets from their professed morals and take a good look in the mirror. It is time to break the vicious cycle where matters of the chasm that defines the failures in Nepal’s peace process lies.

Pasang Dolma Sherpa

Ang Maya Sherpa had to bear the agony of her husband’s death in close succession to the loss of her mother. This meant added responsibilities and unlimited challenges, both financial and social to her. Apart from having to raise her three children, she also had to look after two sisters orphaned by her mother’s death. While looking after five dependents was not something that dampened her spirit, the burden of expensive funerals, a rigid social custom, coupled with having to inherit heavy loan her parents had taken, only painted a bleak future for her.

What one spends on social customs like funerals in Nepali society, especially in the Sherpa community, is not what one can afford easily. One’s social status and existence is judged by how much you spend on such occasions. Ang Maya plunged into fresh financial crisis, as she borrowed more to give a decent funeral to her mother and husband. There was a time when the community members would contribute to such occasions so that the poor would not feel the financial burden but it has changed now.

Ang Maya not only pledged to take up any kind of job to earn enough to maintain the family, but also decided to take up the cudgels against expensive social customs that had nuted many families. She also knew it was not something that could be changed overnight and by her alone. Yet she began her mission in a modest way and has never looked back.

Today, after six years, Ang Maya is a proud owner of Maya Lodge in Thamo, in Namche Village Develop- ment council (VDC) in Solukhumbu. She is also an already recognised social and environmental activist and a community leader. She is an inspiration for many, and the credit goes to her hard-work and perseverance. Unlike most people in the area who normally migrate to new and undisturbed places under the burden of loans, she chose not to leave.

Ang Maya was married when she was only 13, and a class five student. Her marriage was broken up soon after marriage since her husband, a mountain climber, would spend all his time in alcohol and expensive travels. I never experienced any happiness during years of my marriage as it neither turned into financial support nor social security. There was nothing to feel satisfied about.

Educating her children has become her priority now. She has also been leading a campaign to educate all the children in her village. She is the chairperson of the village school management committee that invited all parents to compulsorily send their children and facing severe financial hardship. “I never doubted raising money for their children, and defying it would mean a fine of Rs 100 and children’s punctuality in the class. Looking back, Ang says, “I used to get angry at the children who normally migrate to new and undisturbed places under the burden of loans, she chose not to leave.

Ang Maya Sherpa working in her ‘greenhouse farm’

One’s social status and existence is judged by how much you spend on funeral ceremonies.

The flight of a large number of Nepalis need to wake up to these facts and stop elevating UNMIN onto a pedestal where it does not belong. For all the progressive politics that Nepal’s elite allegedly represents, its constituents should take a moment to dissociate their wallets from their professed morals and take a good look in the mirror. It is time to break the vicious cycle where matters of the chasm that defines the failures in Nepal’s peace process lies.

But I have no hesitation in speaking my mind now.

But the real focus of her mission which was to change extravagant expenses in rituals which were still to take shape. She has already started performing all the rituals in the family that would traditionally be done only by male members.

Culture and traditions are to be preserved as a factor that unify the society and give its members a sense of belonging for generations. But they not only need timely reviews but also discouraging superstitious and extravagant expenses are also very important. If not checked, such traditions will encourage the entire society to be highly materialistic, all in the name of preserving culture and customs.

The flight of a large number of educated youths to the west; some of them bankruped by such expensive rituals and others who saw no future in the country, shows how hopeless this society is becoming. While policy makers and social planners have not yet thought about the perils that evils of so called culture may cause, small efforts like Ang Maya’s have begun to make its impact.
From the region

Bhutto, Sharif threaten poll boycott

Former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have said their parties could boycott the January 8 elections if their demands to ensure free and fair polls were not conceded by the government. For its part, the government has said that some of the demands that the parties are making, like the reinstatement of judges sacked following declaration of emergency in the country, were “not negotiable”.

Political analysts, however, feel that it is the political parties and not the Musharraf government which is on a weak footing since Musharraf has secured his place as president and the ruling coalition is set to give the opposition parties a tough time in the polls.

“Whatever is a question of how united the opposition parties are,” commented analyst Javed Fatma. That many while Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif may seem to be presenting a united front at present, the chances of a political alliance working against the Musharraf government in the long term are dim.

Sharif has accepted that the opposition alliance needed to sort out its differences before it could present a united front before the government. “I am aware of the problems but we are working in a manner that we want to take all political forces along and this will only happen through talks and consensus,” he said on Tuesday.

In a major development, the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy and the All Pakistan Democratic Movement on Monday night decided to give the government a “charter of demands” to ensure free, fair and transparent elections in the country. “We have decided to present the charter of demands to the government. If the government accepts our demands, all opposition parties will participate in the elections, otherwise they will resort to boycott,” Sharif and Bhutto said after a three-and-a-half-hour-long meeting.

At the press conference, Sharif announced that an eight-member committee has been tasked to start the charter of demands. The committee is expected to present its report within two to three days so that it can be presented before the government.

Benazir Bhutto said the ARD and the APDM discussed many points and agreed that the elections could not be free, fair and transparent in the present circumstances. Replying to a question, Benazir said they did not want postponement of the January 8 polls. She said the charter of demands was being presented to the government to ensure that free, fair and transparent elections are held.

Sharif told the press that the opposition did not want to boycott the elections but if their charter was not accepted by the government, they would be forced to stay away from the polls. He said: “The rejection of my nomination papers exposed the farness of the elections.”

105 confirmed dead in N-China coal mine gas blast

In this photo released by China's Xinhu news agency, a mine spillage site in Hongtong county near the city of Linfen in coal-rich Shanxi province is seen.

“TAYUAN- A State Council investigation team confirmed on Sunday that 105 people died in a coal mine gas blast in Hongtong County of north China’s Shanxi Province. Headed by Li Yizhong, director of the State Administration of Work Safety, the investigation team was formed at 9 a.m. Saturday.

The gas explosion occurred at 11:15 p.m. Wednesday at Xinyao Coal Mine, a village-run coal firm in Hongtong County, Linfen City, while 128 miners were working in the shaft. According to Li, the colliery managers delayed reporting the accident to local authorities while sending another 37 workers down to the shaft for rescue operation. In this way, the mine let slip the first opportunity for rescue efforts.

In addition, the mine owner and other chief executives escaped after the accident, causing great difficulties for rescue operation. Of the 60 rescued miners, 18 were injured, including four in serious condition, Li said. Police have so far detained 35 people, instead of previously reported 33 people, who are alleged to be relevant to or responsible for the blast and gas explosion.

Among those detained was the mine’s manager Gao Jamin, Wang Hongliang, the mine’s legal representative. The mine’s license has been seized and its bank accounts frozen. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Security has issued a class-Barrat warrant for the owner of the mine, Meng Xuexin, acting governor of Shanxi Province, said on Sunday. Shanxi should draw lessons from the accident and improve work safety, especially in coal mines.

The accident is believed to be the nation’s second deadliest mining disaster so far this year. In August, 181 miners died when heavy rains flooded two mines in eastern Shandong Province.

Clean-up of Korea's Worst Oil Spill Continues

TAEAN, South Korea - Coast Guard officials Sunday were struggling to clean up crude oil leaked from a super tanker in the country's worst oil spill that has blackened some of South Korea’s pristine western coast and endangered wildlife.

Spillage from the tanker was completely stopped early Sunday after repairs were made to its crane hit the Hong Kong-carrying barge from Samsung Heavy Industries. The crane hit the Hong Kong-registered tanker and punctured holes in three of five containers. In two of the damaged containers, oil leaked into waters mostly on Friday, but leakage from the third container was only completely stopped early Sunday after repairs were made.

The accident spread fear among farmers of grave damage. The South Chungcheong provincial government said necessary to prevent the oil from hitting the shoreline. Some 90 vessels and six airplanes were dispatched to the scene of the accident and 6,650 soldiers and police have been working to contain about 10,500 tons of oil leaked into the western waters.

The large size of the spill made the containment difficult, but the oil won’t expand more given the tides and wind and their speeds. "Lee Bong-gil, a pollution management official in the Korea Coast Guard in Seoul, said. The oil was leaked after a 146,000-ton tanker collided with an 11,800-ton cargo-carrying barge from Samsung Heavy Industries. The crane hit the Hong Kong-registered tanker and punctured holes in three of five containers. In two of the damaged containers, oil leaked into waters mostly on Friday, but leakage from the third container was only completely stopped early Sunday after repairs were made.

The accident spread fear among farmers of grave damage. The South Chungcheong provincial government said some 3,570 hectares of fish farms, more than half the entire 6,500 ha in the region, will be damaged.

The spill has already hit some 20 km of the coastline where damage is extensive, officials said. An 11.8 km oil fence was built and dispersants were sprayed to contain the leak. Of the 10,500 tons of oil that were leaked, only 100 tons have been collected, officials said.

The police were questioning officials of Samsung Heavy Industries, the tanker owner, as well as the tanker captain and crews of the barge, and Fisheries Ministry officials overseeing the control tower.

Some witnesses have reported a communication failure between the tanker and the control tower, the police said.

The oil spill, the largest in South Korea’s history, is about twice the size of the leak of 5,035 tons in 1995.

The leaked oil formed a round shape as wide as 20 km, while a 10-meter oil slick was created about 17 kilometers from the seaside. Pushed by tides and the wind, the spill has already reached some beaches and is threatening fish farms in Taean County.

Some coastal areas such as Simnipo and Mohang have been turned black as the crude oil has soaked into the sand.

The disaster is expected to deal a heavy blow to tourist businesses and oyster and abalone farms in the ecologically pristine Taean County. All major candidates in the Dec. 19 presidential election have traveled to the disaster area to encourage containment efforts and express sympathy for farmers.

The accident could cause compensation payments of as much as 300 billion won (US$330 million) from British Lloyd P&I, the insurance company for the barge, and from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, an intergovernmental organization that provides compensation for damage caused by oil spills. In the 1995 accident in which a tanker struck a reef, its insurers and the international organization provided payments of 50 billion won.

(Korea Times)
Prime Minister Koirala is running against both time and fate in seeking an amicable solution to the problems that have surfaced recently. Hopefully, he will succeed if he provides the right leadership by building national consensus. However, there are only four months left to the end of the Nepali calendar year and a lot has to be accomplished if Koirala is indeed serious about holding elections within March-April.

But the main problem with Koirala is that, neither does he have an exit strategy nor has he envisioned a victory strategy to challenge the ascending left hegemony. The only strategy that Koirala seems to be toing so far is the strategy of survival – an act to appease ideologcal opposites to stay in power.

It is imperative that Koirala chalks an exit strategy and, the appointment of Sushil Koirala as the working party president was in fact a bold strategic move by GP Koirala. The unity of NC and the appointment of Sushil Koirala has strengthened the position of Koirala invariably. This is because after the unification of the two Congress and the appointment of Sushil Koirala, a broader perspective has developed within the Nepali Congress vis-a-vis the Maoists and the peace process. Concurrently, Sushil has also reactivated the Congress CWC and this in return has energised and reactivated the party's Congress brains.

What all of this means is that Congress is finally asserting its rightful hegemony in Nepali politics and in tandem; the growing influence of the NC CWC and the acting president have forced GP Koirala to break his reliance on sycophants within NC who have been speculated for March-April.

Similarly, GP Koirala would help himself if his ability to come to terms with reality. If Koirala were serious about survival and their future, he would make sense for him to start preparing for the elections that have been speculated for March-April.

RPP and RJP have removed constitutional monarchy from their party stature, so these two parties should be approached to form a democratic alliance. Similarly, other ethnic fronts should be brought into confidence and made to participate in the broad based democratic alliance. This will prepare ground for political mobilisation to counter left machismo in the streets. This move would also compel the Maoists to respect the views of other parties as their case will be outnumbered in the streets and in conjunction this move would force the Maoists to participate in the elections bearing both domestic and international isolation.

The present survival strategy that Koirala is toing is shortsighted and suicidal both for democracy and the Nepali Congress. Under this strategy, there will be no elections and no solution. And what is worse is that the stalemate will continue and the dependency on the armed forces will grow. And at last, GP Koirala will be blamed for all the failures by the left who would want to see Nepali Congress, democracy and GP Koirala all go down together to the rubble of Nepali history.

The clock is ticking incredibly fast and it seems that Koirala has lost track of time. Koirala has an uphill task and we must all give him the benefit of the doubt for one last time. The next four months are his last as the prime minister, and they are crucial times not just for him but also for the survival of democracy in Nepal. However, his success is linked with this ability to come to terms with reality.

But on a larger scale, the future success of the democratic forces is correlated with NC's ability to build a broad based democratic alliance that aims to prepare ground for political mobilisation to counter growing left hegemony. Also equally important is the ability of Koirala to redefine the law and order situation to conduct free and fair elections. Time is against Koirala. But if he truly wants to seal his share of immortality in Nepali history, he must act now.
This detour into the altered states of mind and scientific studies into them, including the various levels of meditations, was mainly to show that various phenomena are possible in various specific states of the mind. Thus, just because what are called Riddhi–Siddhis or Pratiharyas in Buddhist language are not available in the beta state or what is more commonly called waking state; it does not mean they cannot be available in other altered states. Many things are state specific and are not available to the ordinary waking state of beta waves. And most of all, it does not make them automatically unscientific as some writers have tried to posit.

It must be reiterated that the Buddhist scripture are replete with such miraculous powers of the Buddha and his immediate disciples – be these scriptures Mahayana, Theravada or Sarvastivadin. In fact one of the two major disciples called the Agra–sravakas of the Buddha himself was very famous for possessing such miraculous powers. The life of the Buddha himself is also replete with manifestations of such abilities which are paranormal. And many other Arhats like Saagat, Aniruddha and Mahakashyapa were also endowed with such abilities. The Buddhist scriptures go into great detail into not only describing them but also categorising them and also explaining how they are obtained.

As I have said, such abilities of the mind are developed through the type of meditation called Samatha in Buddhist terminology. In fact, these are only potentials found in the mind itself which becomes more trained and cleared of emotional defilements. The more the person is free from emotional defilements (Kleshas in Buddhist terminology) the more such potentials manifest. According to Buddhism even those who have very pure Shila manifest some such capacities. But this is not really a new thing as Samadhi is deeply related to emotional defilements and that, in turn, is intimately related to Shila. It must be said that here, we are not talking of maintaining the Shila in a self–righteous way by hook or by crook. Such suppression of emotional defilement is not freedom from emotional defilements, and thus even though the person seems to maintain his Shila in front of others, this is not true maintenance and will not contribute to a cool and quiet mind which contributes to Samadhi which awakens the paranormal potentials of the mind. A good clue to his inner turmoil, according to Gestalt therapy is that such a person is very self righteous and extremely critical of other peoples purity. In short his own impurity or inner turmoil, which he has learned to suppress so well that for all appearances he seems to be someone that is free of emotional defilement, is projected out onto the screen of the world out there.

Thus he sees all others as impure; but in fact he is looking at his own emotional defilements. Needless to say such people will not have such paranormal capacities which are so dependent on the maintenance of a pure Shila. And that is not what is meant by maintaining a pure Shila.

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

Mind potential

Suppression of emotional defilement is not freedom from emotional defilements.
We arrived at Howrah station in Kolkata after almost 27 hours of train ride from Hyderabad. The train was two hours behind schedule. We tried to match our strides with hundreds of other people-packed platform. The first thing every traveler notices while getting out of the station is obviously the Howrah bridge. It lay to our left, barely 100 yards in the air, shining against the pitch-black sky. More than the engineering miracle, it is the height and the bulky steel structure supported by cantilevers that captures your attention. Howrah is the world’s busiest bridge with 60,000 vehicles plying on it every day.

But down in the street, it was a lot more chaos than you could imagine with run-down lodges, old and shabby buses, heavy traffic and a deluge of crowd. We tried to get a room in nearby hotels but could find none. After traveling for almost a week by now we knew only too well that asking the help of a cab driver is often fruitful. We caught a rickshaw who drove us to Kyd Street close to Esplanade, a 15 minutes drive. For just IRS 550, the rooms you get there are very simple with attached bathrooms. The provision of water and electricity here, like in any other metro cities, is more than enough.

Kolkata is famous for its fish cuisine so we wanted to try out some. After going through a list of 20-25 varieties we chose Rui & silver fish, which cost us not more than IRS 12; and a plate of rice and curry cost us IRS 8 and 9 respectively. The food was cheap, clean and tasty. The following day we saw all those buildings that were veiled in the darkness of the previous night. As we passed the street for a morning stroll, I noticed a little placard hung outside a house nearby. It read, 'Here was born novelist Robert Maugham in 1881.' It seemed the building has not undergone any changes since the British era. With high rise buildings and the 20th century furniture, utensils, carpets, Egyptian articles, Indian statues of gods and goddesses, precious stones and antiques, geographical excavations, the treasures of Maharajahs and Rajahs, East Asian earthenware, African treasures and so on. Some of the items that captured my interest were the remains of the first Indian dinosaur excavated from Gujarat, three million year old tree-log, the replica throne of Egypt’s Pharaoh Tutankhamen and the statues of Avalokiteshvara from Nepal and Tibet. But I wished they could have displayed it all in a much more attractive way. The trip for the day was exhausting but we enjoyed it.

Our next stop was the Indian National Museum at Jawaharlal Nehru Road. It is one of the best museums I have ever visited in India. It takes at least two hours for you to take a complete tour around the museum if you are seriously considering acquainting yourself with one million exhibits on display! It was worth depositing IRS 50 for the use of camera inside the museum on top of the entrance fee of 20 rupees. The 10,000 sq. feet area in the museum houses rare artifacts related to botany, geology, zoology, art, anthropology and archaeology. There are specimens of flora and fauna, 17th - 20th century furniture, utensils, carpets, Egyptian articles, Indian statues of gods and goddesses, precious stones and antiques, geographical excavations, the treasures of Maharajahs and Rajahs, East Asian earthenware, African treasures and so on.

Some of the items that captured my interest were the remains of the first Indian dinosaur excavated from Gujarat, three million year old tree-log, the replica throne of Egypt’s Pharaoh Tutankhamen and the statues of Avalokiteshvara from Nepal and Tibet. But I wished they could have displayed it all in a much more attractive way. The trip for the day was exhausting but we enjoyed it.