Finally, G P Koirala seems to be able to prolong his rule marred by defaults and poor delivery at least till April based on a power-sharing formula, which will cost billions to the state exchequer. But dual talks on the part of the Maoists have triggered fresh uncertainty regarding his stewardship.

On Dec 15, Koirala heaved a sigh of relief as Maoists agreed to go the polls to fill up the enlarged constituent assembly with 601 seats, that will have 240 seats filled under the first past the post system, another 335 under the proportional representation system leaving the remaining 26 to be nominated by Koirala who will be both the Prime Minister and the officiating head during the interim period.

But barely 18 hours later, Maoist Chief Prachanda said, his party has not given up the demand for 100 per cent PR system of election. Instead, he was engaged in a long and intense informal discussion with his senior party colleagues on Sunday, to find ways to defeat 'foreign forces' out to create problem in Terai and influence the entire political process in Nepal.

Prachanda's somersault comes after his party together with other six constituents of the ruling coalition, agreed to declare Nepal a 'Republic state through the present parliament' which will be enforced by the Constituent Assembly ‘to be elected by mid-April’. Everyone was taken by surprise when Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai agreed to have 335 of the total 601 seats elected under PR system as it fell far short (around 58 per cent) to their demand for a cent per cent PR system. It was only after the Maoist leaders had agreed that the government moved a resolution in parliament seeking to amend the constitution that primarily seeks to fix the new deadline for CA polls. If this fails, Koirala’s moral as well as political legitimacy to continue will come under severe scrutiny.

Confused by Prachanda’s statements that his party has not given up the demand for 100 per cent PR system, he called some senior party leaders as well as parliamentarians from Madhesh requesting them not desert the party as he was serious about solving Terai problem. On December 16, he met former Minister and party leader, Bijay Gachhadar asking him to continue in the party with a veiled promise that he would be accommodated in the government.

Like Prachanda, PM Koirala has also begun suspecting India’s role in fuelling the crisis in Terai, and he was more guarded when he met the leaders and parliamentarians from there.

Gachhadar is believed to have told Koirala point blank that he and his colleagues cannot wait indefinitely as Koirala promised many things and did nothing for Terai in the past. “But the uncertainty caused by Maoist game-plan needs to be sorted out immediately to enable the PM to take necessary decision on Terai as well,” a Central committee member of the Congress party said.
The first thing that Gen Rukmangad Katwal, Chief of Army staff, did on his return from a week-long visit to Delhi on Sunday, was to say no to Prime Minister GP Koirala’s willingness to ‘integrate’ People’s Liberation Army in the Nepal Army. Highly placed sources in the PM’s office told newsfront that Katwal said this cannot happen ‘now’ without Macabbs giving proof of their ‘commitment’ to democracy, by words and action. Sources also said that in fact Katwal even spoke to the PM a few times from Delhi saying that integration as wanted by the Macabbs will not be acceptable to the Nepal Army. “That is not on the cards,” Koirala however is believed to have assured Katwal.

The army was agitated after Home Minister KP Sharma said publicly recently that the process of ‘integration’ of the combatants in the Nepal Army will begin as soon as the verification of combatants being carried by the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) was over. During his seven-day visit to Delhi, COAS Katwal was conferred with the honorary title of the General of the Indian Army, in keeping with the tradition that two countries have maintained a reciprocal basis for long. His visit assumed significance as it took place amidst speculations that the Nepal Army will have a behind-the-scenes role in future political set up in Nepal as the existing government has failed. The visit also fuelled rumours that it was intended to secure support from India on such an eventuality.

A senior official of the Nepal Army said it was only a figment of imagination, and ‘Nepal army has never been a political arm. It is committed to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation, democracy and service of the people.’

A source in the PMO claimed that Koirala, during his discussion with Prachanda last week had assured the latter, that the combatants will be integrated in Industrial Security force, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and the Nepal Army. Out of 31,000 combatants initially placed in seven cantonments and 21 sub-cantonments, at least 7,000 are already believed to have deserted. Another six to seven thousand are likely to be disqualified on basis of age (below 18) and for being recruited after May 6, 2006, when the peace process began.

KB Mahar, spokesman of the Communiti party of Nepal-Macabbs (CPN-M) said that the government must treat the issue of integration of the PLA as importantly as it treats the issue of holding election on time. He stopped short of saying that the integration is a pre-condition for holding CA polls.

Not simply a pill

Among the 70,000 HIV infected Nepali people, currently 1250 people are receiving ART.

Although in policy, women have equal access to ART treatment, the social and cultural structure of Nepal has been a major obstacle for the women to access the services. The social conditioning and fear prevent women from disclosing their HIV status. Thus they remain in the dark.

To improve equitable access, the coverage of treatment sites has to be nationwide. In Nepal currently 16 sites are providing ART. There is inaccessibility of diagnostic test of HIV. There are 96 VCT (Voluntary Counseling and Testing) sites in 40 districts but what about rest of 35 districts? Universal access to ART requires better accessibility to HIV tests and counselling.

The government, international donors, civil society, private, public organisations and local communities need to collaborate in building local capacity to forecast the need, procurement and supply of ART and develop models for the community level provision of ART to increase access to it. All the stakeholders must confront the socio-cultural and economic conditions which pose obstacles to protecting oneself from HIV/AIDS, leading oneself and seeking counseling and treatment if tested positive.

ART needs to be well integrated into AIDS-related healthcare all over Nepal urgently.

Not to be outdone

Many think comrade Baburam Bhattarai looks too intense that gives him an angry look and gives the impression that he does not care what people think of him. But recently, he gave a message on the contrary by emulating what his leader Prachanda does at times.

At a public meeting in Janakpur on December 12, Dr Bhattarai, the hill boy from Gorakha, occupied a seat in the dais, dressed in Dhoti and Kurta. He apparently wanted to be seen as a ‘Madheshi’ in Madhesh, signaling to the people that he was gradually learning the art of appeasing the locals at no cost, like Indira Gandhi was known for doing in India, donning locally traditional attire whenever he went.

Only a few months ago, Prachanda’s photograph in the Gunung airline was being circulated in the party and some of it was used by the media as well.

Manish Gautam

HIV intervention efforts in Nepal are evolving. Initially the intervention efforts revolved mostly around HIV prevention activities, but now, there is emerging strong advocacy for HIV/AIDS clinical care and treatment. Among other valid issues on AIDS, prevention activities; but now, there is emerging strong advocacy for HIV/AIDS clinical care and treatment.

Among the 70,000 HIV infected Nepali people, currently 1250 people are receiving ART for prolonging life. But hundreds of other HIV infected Nepalis still lack access to ART and are desperately waiting to gain access to it. Even for those on ART, it is not an easy way. ART is not as simple as taking any other drug. One needs to go for a CD4 count test, deal with counselors and medical doctors; before one can be placed on the waiting list for ART. The process is time consuming and unaffordable for the poor and there is no facilitation from the government to make it easily accessible.

ART services are concentrated only in cities and have not reached the neediest rural population. If we consider far western region of Nepal – the huge population migrating to India, face the highest risk of HIV infection. A HIV infected person from Achham needs to travel to Ghaghari, Mahendra Nagar or to Nepalgunj where ART is provided. Travel from Achham to these places takes from six to 12 hours of bus travel, and added to it the cost of travelling.

Once enrolled for ART, it is a life long process that makes it appear intimidating to most patients. And there are many other complexities that need to be addressed. For example, HIV infected people get easily tired and so it takes a lot of effort for them to travel a long distance every month to get the drugs. Others drop out as they do not understand the difference between taking ARV and taking medicines for cold or fever. If these issues are not dealt with, it could easily lead drug resistance. Among the estimated 4000 Nepali children infected with the virus, 10 percent are in urgent need of the treatment. According to National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, currently only 59 children are on ART.

Centre for AIDS and STD Control, treatment. According to National
Rebuked
Koirala wants unconditional extension of his rule

Nepal’s Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was recently rebuked by K.P. Oli, the chairman of Nepal’s Communist Party (Maoist). Koirala had refused to quit, if elections are not held by the new deadline. All through, Adhikary maintained a silence. Koirala’s point blank refusal to quit the post in the event of no election injects enough uncertainty about the CA poll taking place within the new deadline. About 200-km south west in Chitwan, Nepal also vented out his anger against Maoist chief Prachanda, saying, “Maoists cannot go to the polls as long as they have their combatants,” he said at a public meeting organised by the UML. “A political party cannot have an armed wing, nor can it go to the polls so long as its combatants are not settled.” Speaking at a party function in Bharatpur on December 15, Nepal has asked the Maoists for having continued with its politics of terror, and advised Prachanda that he must stop that immediately. Despite Nepal’s public criticism of the Maoists, there are indications that he is still exploring some kind of working understanding with the Maoists as their support is necessary for his succeeding Koirala in the event of his exit.

Although it is not yet certain whether the Communist Party of Nepal-Maosists (CPM-M) is going to embrace democracy in Nepal, it has been able to establish some cordial ties with the Maoists parties operating abroad under the democratic system that has a monarchy as the head of the state.

Former Minister and Maoist leader, Hisham Yami is currently in Norway, at the invitation of the Maoist Party of Nepal, which has a single member presence in parliament apart from visible presence in some local government that includes occupying Mayor’s post in some. Scandinavian countries are involved in encouraging Maoists to join the democratic mainstream. Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai had visited Norway in early July where he had met high level officials including the ministers as well the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Honoured

For Dr Sanduk Ruit, it has been a season of honours. The world of medical science, Ruit, Director of Tilganga Eye Hospital and Centre, was conferred the Honorary Order of Australia - the highest civilian Australian honour to be given to any foreign national, on December 14. Australian Ambassador to Nepal, Graeme Lade, handed over the award at a special function organised at the Australian embassy in the capital.

Dr Ruit and his Tilganga team have provided medical help restoring eye sight to millions in many countries of the world. He is also the recipient of the Magassassaw award for the year 2005. The Australian honour is in recognition for the Tilganga team’s success in providing simple, less expensive and effective eye treatment that has given vision back to millions around the world.

Grounded

That Nepal Airlines aircraft is grounded should not be making news anymore, but it still matters to those who booked its flight. There will be no external flight of the airlines for two weeks beginning December 18. The suspension of the service during the peak season is estimated to cost more than half a million rupees every day.

The suspension comes amidst fears, based on official assessment that it might go bankrupt if it is allowed to continue under the government management. One of the two aircrafts is lying without engine in Hong Kong while another engine has been sent to Brunei for C-check. “All this might take at least a couple of weeks and the service will then be suspended,” Nepal Airlines source told newsfront. Similarly, in the domestic sector, only three out of seven aircraft are in operation.

Loss of face

International community has lots of doubts on the new poll date

Prime Minister GP Koirala may have pulled through the crisis this time around, but his ability to hold an election in the new deadline is under the scanner of the international community. “We will support the initiative from Nepal, but we will have more questions about its success rather than total faith in the government’s ability,” a western diplomat told newsfront.

An impression that many others from the diplomatic community share in private. The level of frustration in India is said to be much deeper over the repeated postponement of election with the entire political system’s legitimacy under question.

In fact, the repeated postponement of the polls has also come as an embarrassment for some countries, mainly the Scandinavian ones, as they have pumped in enough money for the election process. Denmark, for instance, has expressed its unhappi-

ness with the government and warned that it may have to retrieve the assistance it gave for election purposes if elections are postponed once again. A Swedish news source told newsfront quoting Danish embassy officials as having conveyed to the government, “What Nepal has been given is Danish tax payers’ money and that it cannot be spent for purposes other than what it is meant for.” Similarly, the government of Norway is assisting the management of cantonment and promised support in the process of integration of the combatants in the security agencies, mainly the Nepal army. It is not only the issue of financial assistance for timely conduct of polls, but many governments have also faced embarrassment for spending huge amount of money in funding observers for a pre-assessment of the November 22 polls. “All this has left bad taste,” a representative of the donor community said.

Sources say that the former United States President Jimmy Carter’s visit in November despite the election having been put off, took place largely because many donor agencies had already funded Carter Center’s visit here, and his not coming here would have meant having to return that money.

This, many think, will mean some kind of slackness on the arrival of observers, at least for the April election, and they would rather wait for ‘objective’ assessment of the diplomatic community from Nepal.

South watch

Shyam Sharan, India’s former Foreign Secretary, and now special advisor to Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh, is all set to return to Kathmandu, which will bring Delhi’s concerns to the highest level here. Sharan was here in the second week of October, just a week after the government had postponed the polls for constituent assembly slated for November 22. He visited this week is likely to conclude with the government setting a new time frame, mid April, for the CA polls.

Sharan, who is the ambassador here during the Royal takeover in 2005 is credited with bringing seven pro-democracy parties and the Maoists together under the 12-point agreement in Delhi. According to South watchers, Sharan comes here to give Delhi’s piece of mind, which is that Koirala’s legitimacy will be over if he misses the new deadline. Unity among the seven parties and resolution of Terai issues politically and justly are some of the suggestions he is expected to make as necessary conditions for holding election.

Sharan’s visit comes at a time when leaders from Koirala to Madhav Nepal and Prachanda have said in one way or the other, that the unrest in Terai is somehow being fuelled from across the border. In the meantime, India’s ambassador to Kathmandu, Shiv Shankar Malviya, who has been posted as High Commissioner to London, is likely to leave Nepal around the second half of January.
Brazen politics

A regime without mass support, purely care-taker and transitional in nature is not expected to take major decisions that would have far reaching consequences. But over a period of time, Prime Minister KP Koirala has not only crowned himself as the head of the state, but also as the ‘legitimate dictator’ without any role and involvement of the people. He derives more and more personal advantage and power as the nation moves towards an irreversible trap. For him, his inefficiency is an added bonus and opportunity to grab power.

Unfortunately, the political parties which are partners in the regime, have also proved to be partners in crime against democ-

acy, as they have always gone a step forward in fulfilling Koirala’s ambition. As Terai burns, and the situation gets worse there with four senior leaders deserting the national parties they belong to, all that Koirala showed interest in was to grab more power. He knows that he cannot hold election without addressing the issues of Terai as well as that of the Dalits, Tharus, Muslims and every other ethnic and marginalised group within a wider comprehensive package of Nepali nationalism. But he has shown least interest in it. It could only be called political and mental bankruptcy of his alliance partners who have chosen Koirala’s continuation at the cost of democracy and country’s sovereignty.

Mahanth Thakur, the senior minister who resigned from the cabinet as well as the Nepali Congress, was humiliated by the ik of KP Oli and Ram Chandra Poudel when he wanted to use his influence in solving the Terai issue earlier. It was a deliberate design on Koirala’s part to sideline Thakur. All that Koirala has told some leaders in private was that India was playing the game in Terai; and his refusal to make Nepal a Bhutan as per India’s wish is responsible for the southern neighbour’s rage against him. But Koirala is known to make all compromises for the chair and so it is now difficult to believe him.

Koirala knows election to the constituent assembly cannot take place as long as the law and order remains in the present state, and Terai continues to be in flames. He has deliberately even not bothered to form the high level commission for restructuring the state. He is a dictator, so he would not want an institutional mechanism and process to dilute his power. He simply wants to continue in power without any accountability. He is already above constitution.

Thakur’s quitting the party is Koirala’s own doing. He refused to treat Terai with utmost sensitivity and concern when violence erupted there. But all this has made him more powerful. He is a party chief, prime minister and also a ‘king’ in waiting, through a brazen unconstitutional manipulation. He seems to have one party chief, prime minister and also a ‘king’ in waiting, through brazen unconstitutional manipulation. He seems to have one

Culture bites

I truly agree with Pasang’s story of Ang Maya in the last issue of newsfront, where the bitter reality of the Sherpa culture, especially in the Khumbu area is exposed. Culture is our identity and we should conserve it without a doubt. But in present days it has become a means of competing ones prosperity and competing with each other how much wealth they can truth. This is more common in wealthy families but however, the impact it creates can be seen in all walks of life. This extravagant culture has become a social compulsion making the poor people poorer. Culture should be preserved for a right reason but not as a burden and ostentation. I don’t mean the whole package is useless but we as humans should make use of our conscience to sort out what should be kept and what should be dropped for our own good.

Special qualities

I appreciate newsfront publishing Pramesh Pradhan’s articles on heritage sites in Kathmandu that are highly informative. I liked his piece on Changu Narayan the most. Although I had visited the temple earlier I did not really know what to look for. I do now, thanks to his article, which I have printed out from the website. Now, that I am in Nepal, I will go there one day and look at all the details that he has mentioned in the article.

newsfront in my opinion is a quality weekly that gives an all round balanced perspective not only in current affairs but also in other areas that are equally important. I look forward to the in depth interviews that feature diverse personalities from different walks of life. In my opinion I have yet to come across another newspaper that so acknowledges the voices of people other than the boring politicians and celebrities. Special indeed are the spiritual column by Sridhar Rinpoche and the spiritual corner that gives us readers so much to think about. Thank you.

E. Wetzal
Kathmandu

Hidden potential

The story of Ang Maya highlights how the potentials of a person gets hidden and emerges when the obstruc-

ing elements are removed. Thank you for sharing it with us.

Dhruva
Kathmandu

Dark side

Pasang’s article based on the true story of Ang Maya revealed the unspoken dark aspects of our culture. It was great.

Kaji Kisan
Kathmandu

Interdependent world

His Holiness, Dalai Lama often says, “I am just a simple Buddhist monk – no more, nor less.” He follows the life of Buddhist monk. Living in a small cottage in Dharamsala, he rises at 4 AM to meditate; then pursues an ongoing schedule of administrative meetings, private audiences and religious teaching and ceremonial. He concludes each day with a further prayer before retiring. Explaining his greatest sources of inspiration, he often cites a favorite verse, found in the writings of the renowned eighth century Buddhist saint, Shantideva:

For as long as space endures
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery of the world. Dalai Lama’s sayings:

Happiness
Happiness can be achieved through training the mind.
The fact that there is always a positive side to life is the one thing that gives me a lot of happiness.
Beliefs and values

Beliefs and values

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For as long as space endures
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery of the world.
Once again, this parliament which is not an elected one has pledged something to the nation which will prove to be a lie. A Prime Minister, who has defaulted at least twice before the nation in the past 18 months by not holding Constituent Assembly (CA) election on time, has been given a fresh lease of life ‘legitimately’ at least till mid-April. But no one including those who are promising election in about 100 days from now actually believe that they are serious about it. The only thing the leaders of the seven parties have proved once again is that, all that they want is sharing of power among them by keeping the citizens of this country away from the entire political process.

The country with a population of about 26 million will have a CA with 601 members because the seven parties have said so. There was no larger debate and discussion before coming to the magic number which is 56 more than that of India’s Lok Sabha representing around one billion people, and 166 more than the House of Representatives of the United States. The House of Commons in the United Kingdom has only 526 members.

As if having to look after the existing 330 plus members of the house is not enough, one of the poorest countries of the world and its people will be facing the burden of feeding a total number of 601. And all this is being done by an interim parliament whose right to exist has come under question increasingly. Mahanth Thakur and Upendra Yadav, to name few, have already put on record their demand that this house be dissolved. After all, what has this parliament done except rubber stamping the seven political Zamindars who decide parliament’s agenda at PM Koirala’s house?

Long before Koirala set a new deadline for CA polls, there were very clear indicators that Maoists want an election which guarantees their victory. Baburam Bhattarai, the most powerful and apparently the deciding voice in the party said recently that there was no point having an election if his party’s victory was in doubt. GP Koirala wants election only if he has the Home, Finance and Defense portfolio for his party in the cabinet, and if he continues to remain above the law and the constitution. He is not only the president of the Nepali Congress, but also the PM and the officiating head of the state having the authority to solely nominate the Chief Justice as well as the judges of the Supreme Court.

Even judges in the Supreme Court feel irritated over the way Koirala has handled the matter back to the constitutional council once the house committee refused to confirm his name through consensus as required under the constitution. This raises a question mark how an obliged apex court will dare give judgment against the government on crucial matters. At personal level, it has damaged the image of the Chief Justice undoubt- edly.

And sadly, the UN bodies and international community who came out openly and rightly, in favour of an independent Human Rights Commis- sion as well as inclusive politics have ignored the issue of judicial indepen- dence all together. An executive controlled judiciary and a government not accountable to the parliament with PM above the constitution are under no circumstances allowing Nepal’s transition to democracy. This has become doubly certain with no sign of election taking place yet again under the prevailing law and order situation.

People’s role or stake in democracy is likely to be diminished to the extent that they will have no ownership on any major decisions on behalf of the state. Nepal’s shift to secularism, and seven party imposed agenda that the future CA ‘shall’ implement what the present un-elected parliament has to say on ‘republic’, are already the indicators of institutionalised authoritarianism - all in the name of democracy. All that these parties can do legitimately is deciding within the government he leads as an example of dishonesty will be conclusively disproved.

As Terai is in an assertive mood, it will inspire many more marginalised groups within Terai like Thaurs and Muslims, just to name a few, for their rightful share in future power structure; and similar demands would be heard from the Nils, mid-hills and Himalayas in organised or unorganised ways. This will not only undo Nepal’s unification, but will also trigger the process of dismember- ment of the nation into caste and ethnic groups. Koirala and Prachanda, especially, have not been able to see possible declarations of ‘republican provinces’ on caste and ethnic lines immediately, which will also be followed by their challenging the ‘centre’s hegemony’. In fact, he has been able to create new problems to deal with and the election in mid-April will in fact be a non-issue.

In fact, there is already visible contempt lining collective cynicism of the people for Koirala, Nepal and Prachanda. But once people realise that their right to vote and right to take decisions are being totally undermined by these leaders, they will rise to dislodge the present government, and the means may not always be legitimate. If and when it happens, the person who will have to bow out of office as a total failure and as an example of dishonesty will be the all powerful GP Koirala and the government he leads.

Since the Maoists can assess this emerging scenario, they are trying to find excuses not to join the govern- ment in a hurry. They want to cash in on the failure of the Koirala govern- ment and be seen as its alternative. But given their anti-people stance and refusal to honour the rule of law and democratic norms, it is still hard to believe that they will inspire people’s faith in them. That is why they became a party to settling a new deadline for election knowing fully well that it is not going to take place.
Niels Gutschow, 66, an architect and a committed conservator, loves to do what he does, and does only what he loves to do. He described his connection to Nepal and his views on Nepali heritage without mincing his words to Sushma Amatya recently, at his residence in outskirts of Bhaktapur. His typical Newari house that has been renovated; stands at an elevated spot, a short walk through a narrow path through the fields, and the house has no boundaries around it.

What attracted you to Nepal?

I came to Nepal first in July 1962 on my way to Burma and Japan, where I learned carpentry. Returning home I studied architecture in Darmstadt and returned to Nepal in September 1970. Then I saw the ruins of the Pujari Math in Bhaktapur, for which the German Government presented a gift of 100,000 Deutschmark on the occasion of the marriage of the Crown Prince Birendra. I worked on the site in 1971 with my friends from Darmstadt - the first bilateral conservation project in Nepal.

Then I completed my PhD in 1973 on Japanese cities and returned to Nepal and from 1974, I received a scholarship to work in Nepal on issues of "urban space and ritual" because we young architects were extremely fascinated by the complexity of urban space in Nepal. We saw, what we in Europe had lost. It was a kind of romanticist approach out of which serious research grew.

At that time, the only way to travel to Bhaktapur was a bus that ferried passengers three times a day. The environment here then, for us youngsters was experiencing our own history. We were beginning to fight against traffic back home and here there was none. We felt like coming home to the past really. It was like that for our generation in our profession at least.

Tourists who come here always see the dirt first and then they want to return home. I don’t see dirt first because I have other things to see. 30 years ago the streets of Bhaktapur were full of shit but it did not bother me because I saw other many other beautiful things.

What was your work in Kathmandu valley like?

In 1972 our Darmstadt group of architects invented the Bhaktapur Development Project (1974-86) and was successful in persuading the Ministry of Cooperation to establish a project, but we young people did not get the job. Anyhow, I worked extensively in Bhaktapur in 1974-76 before I joined a Municipal Conservation Office in Germany to gather more experience in practice.

I returned to Nepal in 1980 under a new programme of the German Research Foundation with subsequent architectural survey in Gorkha and Nuwakot, as well as Buddhist architecture ("The Nepalese Cailya", published 1997). In the nineties I conducted architectural surveys in Mustang (Kagbeni, Te etc.) and even Mugu.

Besides research I faced actual conservation practice with the reconstruction of the Cyasilin Mandap in Bhaktapur (together with Goetz Hagmueller), again a present, brought by Chancellor Helmut Kohl on the occasion of his visit in 1987. At the same time I made the Swayambhu Conservation Master plan (1990) with Goetz Hagmueller, in cooperation with Ramesh Jung Thapa and Shaphalya Amatya, two outstanding contributors in the field of conservation in Nepal.

In the early nineties we (with Goetz Hagmueller and Erich Theophile) invented the Patan Conservation and Development project. In 2000 I guided the conservation of Chusyabaha in Kathmandu and in 2003 the conservation of Itumbaha in Kathmandu. For 2008 we are expecting the German Foreign Ministry to support the conservation of the Bhandarkhal tank behind Sundari Chowk in Patan.

Where do you live mostly?

I live in both worlds, in Germany (around eight months a year) and in Nepal (four to five months a year) on a tourist visa! There is no other chance for those who love this country, strangely enough; we even have to pay our entry fee in Bhaktapur although we belong to that place which I call home. Living in two worlds really sensitises one towards human, social and political problems. And my fascination with urban life in Bhaktapur never ceases!

Are you happy with what you have achieved?

I am extremely happy with what I achieved, having published almost a dozen books on Nepal. A really
The work I'm currently involved in, producing a book, goes on without any problems but when it comes to conservation of architectural heritage, there are lots of problems since nobody in the ministry wants it. It is an old attitude in the ministry—you all fight doing nothing, you are safe and if you do something it is not right. It is a general sickness in government offices.

You need time to overcome such trouble and quamelling, which is a habit here. We have learned to wait for six months and start again. But it does get so tedious! I no longer am involved in conservation now since ten years. The ministry does not have any money. We bring in the funds trying to help and the money goes through Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust where any donors are invited to contrib-ute.

Actually, people do not learn from mistakes. All that is happening is a process one has to go through. You degenerate and transform. There is always a kind of apocalyptic thinking prevailing but you don’t die really. Nepal is in a painful situation now but how can you tell your politicians to be serious? I have hope for the next generation but where are they?

It is a social process really, although difficult to justify. First you have to drive a motorbike, a car, then you get bored and then you realise there is something else.

You work with the cream craftsmen here. How can their numbers be increased?

The richness of Nepal is the craftspeople, the artisans who are so good. They don’t need computers. I enjoy working with them. I am something else.

Everybody is perfect. The ministry does not have any money. We are only human beings!

The situation of architectural heritage conservation is bad, but whom to blame in a country which has other problems. I insist on remembering that in Germany we had similar problems, with conservation gaining popularity only in 1974 in the context of the German Federal Heritage Year. Reconstruction after the war over, the upper middle class suddenly started to buy houses in historic centers, running away from the boring suburbs, with squares being pedestrianised and cars banned. Eventually that will happen in Nepal. Although there is no future without the past, every generation has to find out what it means.

Nepal faced considerable problems with the World Heritage Sites, which were in fact inscribed in 1979 after having been identified by a travelling expert from the USA. UNESCO desperately needed signatures! We should not forget, Nepal inherited the British legacy in conservation. Till today the department is named Department of Archaeology, although the Newar heritage has nothing to do with archaeology.

Even the idea of architectural conservation is a western import Nepal has problems to cope with. Where traditional support fails—the outcome of the land reform, the death of the Gurungs: the state has to take over but we have to admit that is a long and difficult process. On 23rd August 2007 for example, the state took over the palaces although we never heard that a king did anything for the Patan palace since generations. But what does it mean, after all, that a state that claims to be secular “owns” the palace with architectural, cultural values?

What are the challenges of working here and how do you overcome it?

The work site of Nepal is the craftspeople, the artisans who are so good. They don’t need computers. I enjoy working with them. I am something else.

Whatever I’m involved in, producing a book, goes on without any problems but when it comes to conservation of architectural heritage, there are lots of problems since nobody in the ministry wants it. It is an old attitude in the ministry—you all fight doing nothing, you are safe and if you do something it is not right. It is a general sickness in government offices.

You need time to overcome such trouble and quamelling, which is a habit here. We have learned to wait for six months and start again. But it does get so tedious! I no longer am involved in conservation now since ten years. The ministry does not have any money. We bring in the funds trying to help and the money goes through Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust where any donors are invited to contrib-ute.

Actually, people do not learn from mistakes. All that is happening is a process one has to go through. You degenerate and transform. There is always a kind of apocalyptic thinking prevailing but you don’t die really. Nepal is in a painful situation now but how can you tell your politicians to be serious? I have hope for the next generation but where are they?

It is a social process really, although difficult to justify. First you have to drive a motorbike, a car, then you get bored and then you realise there is something else.

You work with the cream craftsmen here. How can their numbers be increased?

The richness of Nepal is the craftspeople, the artisans who are so good. They don’t need computers. I enjoy working with them. I am something else.

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What are the challenges of working here and how do you overcome it?

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What are the challenges of working here and how do you overcome it?
December 10, Human Rights Day, is celebrated annually across the world to honor the UN General Assembly’s adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Human Rights Day 2007 marks the start of a year-long commemoration of the 60th anniversary of UDHR. The theme for 2008, dignity and justice for all of us, reinforces the commitment of UDHR to universal dignity and justice. UDHR, for the very first time in the history of mankind, codified a common standard of human rights for all peoples and nations – a true milestone in the progress of civilization.

Unfortunately, the term “human rights” has been bandied about by all and sundry so much that it has begun to lose its meaning. A concept meant to safeguard the dignity and worth of every individual has been used haphazardly by politicians and pressure groups. Even the industrialised countries use it regularly to pick on the developing world. It is worthwhile here to recall the words of Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on the occasion of Human Rights Day in 2006: “Today, poverty prevails as the graved human rights challenge in the world. Combating poverty, deprivation and exclusion is not a matter of charity, and it does not depend on how rich a country is. By tackling poverty as a matter of human rights obligation, the world will have a better chance of abolishing this scourge in our lifetime...poverty eradication is an achievable goal.”

These are not empty words of a UN bureaucrat. They embody the essence of the most pressing human rights need today of the world. Indeed, fighting poverty is not charity. Not at the social and humanitarian level, it is in the helping the disadvantaged. At the economic level, it is the most prudent action to preserve and expand wealth. At the political level, it will keep on assuaging wealth ignoring the poverty surrounding us, we should not be surprised when the ‘have-nots’ rebel against the ‘haves’.

A recent survey cited Nepal, along with China, as having the widest gap between the rich and the poor in Asia. China’s galloping economic growth has created surveys for this, Nepal has no such excuse. For at least the last three years, poverty alleviation and development in Nepal has taken an unfortunate back seat to politics in Nepal. Moreover, even excluding the issue of poverty, our brand of politics has paid scant attention to human rights.

The country is plummeting towards anarchy and this claim can be validated as the apparent lawlessness throughout Nepal; and the very democrats who talked highly about the democracy are falling in the Maoists’ trap once again. And Girija is of course oblivious to all of this.

The Terai is burning and the problem has morphed significantly. This is primarily because the Maoists have lost their base in Terai and are not in no state of mind to allow other groups to prevail there. Perhaps it is naive, but even now the political pundits and the Maoists’ key demands, it is only foreseeable that the Maoists will put forward a new set of demands as a prerequisite to their participation in the polls. Indeed, Nepal vote to decide on whether the country Republic. Koirala has indeed gone too far in trusting and shedding Sitaula and in the process has hastened a Rasulpin in Sitaula.

If the country is declared a republic without the mandate of the people, the decision can be reversed at any time in the future. A large section of the people would have achieved when the people of Nepal vote to decide on whether or not they want a republic in the country. But if the country is declared a republican abruptly without going to the people, the move contradicts democratic norms and values. Equally disturbing and embarrassing was when Dr Shekar Koirala, the prime minister’s nephew declared that “a referendum would give the king the benefit”. This cowardly statement only signifies that the political parties are seeking ways to avoid the exit polls by either refusing the people to vote or by initiating electoral mechanisms that are designed specifically to produce the desired results. Who knows what Girija has under his sleeves, but he sure does not have a plan. He has failed repeatedly to live up to his assurances and his time is certainly running out.
After a long wait, 42 days, President Musharraf has finally revoked the state of emergency and repealed the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), restoring the country’s constitution, thus bringing Pakistan back on the right track of rule of law by the book as against the embarrassing and internationally unacceptable state of rule by one man. But what can initially be said about the highly complicated legal and constitutional orders issued to revert to the pre-PCO 3 position is that the book by which the country would now be governed is no longer the same.

It has been amended, for some still a highly controversial and debatable issue, to fully protect and indemnify all acts, decisions and orders issued during that 42-day extra-constitutional period. The order to revoke the emergency and repeal the PCO clearly states it shall not invalidate, nullify or render ineffective any order passed or action taken during the emergency and all such acts shall be deemed in order and not legally done notwithstanding anything contained in the constitution or any other law for the time being in force.

But the country would now be governed not on the legal rights of the President, but authorities but critics say it delivers a positive move by British military. The handover is being hailed as a milestone on the road to full with-out the president on Nov 3 to pre-empt the huge plunge and the unconstitu-tional steps for setting up mechanisms under Kyoto’s carbon-market innovation, a prototype method of piping carbon capture and sequestration, a small boost.

The key points are: The preamble notes the ‘urgency’ of scientific evidence that global warming is unequivocal and that a delay in reducing emissions increases the risk that the impacts of climate change will worsen.

The Roadmap sets for negotiations for a long-term agreement on emissions cuts, including the United States, which only industrial power to remain outside the UN’s Kyoto Protocol.

The negotiations are to wrap up in Copenhagen at the end of 2009, to give parties time to ratify the treaty so that it takes effect at the end of 2012, following on from current commitments under Kyoto.

Four meetings are scheduled in 2008: in March/April, June, August/September and finally in December, in Poznan, Poland. The Roadmap does not specify any clear emissions goal, nor suggest which countries should make emissions cuts or how deep these cuts should be. But in a footnote to the preamble, it refers to scenarios by the UN’s Nobel-winning scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which include a goal of halving global emissions by 2050, compared with the level for 2000. Rich countries would have to cut their emissions by 25-40 percent by 2020. Developing countries will be urged to meet “measurable, reportable and verifiable” steps for tackling their emissions, supported by cleaner technology, financing and skills-building.

The Roadmap includes financial support to halt deforestation and forest degradation, which account for roughly a fifth of global greenhouse-gas emissions today. Other decisions from Bali

The conference agreed on the mechanism for governing and administering the Adaptation Fund, set up under the Kyoto Protocol to administer the Adaptation Fund, which was drawn up.

The conference asked its scientific and technical body to report back in December next year on the possibility of integrating schemes into the clean development mechanism after 2012.

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Perspective

Within your reach

Psychic powers are not limited to the Buddha and Arhats

Stories of the manifestation of psychic powers are to be found in abundance amongst Hindu yogis, Sufis, Christian saints and Jewish mystics of the Kaballa.

Marshland Flowers

Mahayogi Acharya Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

Pure Shila cools the mind, such a mind becomes soft, gentle, loving and understanding of the pains, sorrows and the human weaknesses of others; and certainly not a mind that is critical and sees only the loopholes and breaking of the Shilas by others. However this is not to condone losing Shila. In the journey of spiritual growth, Shila is the very foundation upon which all higher experiences of the spiritual path depend.

Before we go into the details of the explanation of psychic powers and the like, as found within Buddhist texts, I would like to say that psychic powers are not limited to the Buddha and Arhats or Buddhist Mahasiddhas and yogis. Stories of the manifestation of psychic powers are to be found in abundance amongst Hindu yogis, Sufis, Christian saints and Jewish mystics of the Kaballa and the like, as well as in Taoists and Kahuna masters and Shamans all over the world.

If such things were fakes and totally fabricated, such stories would not continue through the ages, generations after generations in all cultures. These are not stray stories found here and there but across all cultures and across all times. And especially within Buddhism those who recounted such stories were highly educated scholars who had studied logic and philosophy etc. anywhere from 10 to 20 years and they were not simple country bumpkins. Such a phenomenal amount of stories across all cultures and times cannot be lightly waived away as superstitious stories.

With this in the background we shall now go into the Buddhist classification of such phenomena according to the Abhidharma. The Abhidharma is that part of the Tripiṭaka which classifies into categories the Buddhist view of reality. The Abhidharma is that part of the Buddha's teachings which classifies his teachings into various categories and enlists its philosophical aspects.

In short, it is the analysis of the Dharma. Dharma here in Buddhist terminology does not mean “religion” as in Buddha Dharma or Hindu Dharma but rather phenomena. Thus the Abhidharma is that part of the Tripiṭaka wherein are recorded those teachings the Sakyamuni gave, in which he has analysed the phenomena and philosophical tenets.

(To be continued)

(Mahayogi Acharya Sridhar Rana Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

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Love and war

Yuyutsu RD Sharma

Forty years separate me from her. I could have wandered in the desert, longed for the flesh pot, eaten quails God dropped, down from the clouds. I could have passed by Mount Nevi, been a spy, seen a whore in Jericho. I gave it all up for the war in which the booty was the word “father.”

Translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden

Translating Hebrew poet Ronny Sorek’s poetry into Nepali can be an interesting experience in many ways. Living in Nepal one can feel the sense of loss and indecision writ large on the nation’s face. Ronny’s poetry evokes the deep hidden frustration and agony of an individual living in a nation reeling under the ruthless chariot of violence and bloodshed. For this reason my days spent in translating this vibrant voice from Israel became an exhilarating experience.

In Ronny’s poetry strikes a familiar chord in the Nepali language. His fusion of Israel history and his own Iraqi roots with icons and images of contemporary times bring a strangely familiar extension works like magic of the poet’s line such as; “When silent is the body’s commander-in-chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the chief.”

Not many Nepali poets with the exception of Ritimal and Krishna Bhatika Shrestha have been able to take the poetic line to such profound dimensions. Ronny’s line extension works like magic of the Arabian nights, or more like Asian riddles encompassing the dualities and complexities of war and peace, love and violence, eloquence and silence.

Often his line extends with the focus on the reported speech, ignoring the self, a serpentine flow of the hillside creek that goes underground to gush forth more vigorously in its end extension as in the short poem, “That”: That the mind is the body’s commander-in-chief/ that the prisoner is a broken tooth in the mouth that shouted the command/ that the command knows neither limit nor border/ that the border is stretched taut like a sock/ that the sock is silent/ that the silence unveils threats from the tangles of words/ that in the mind words are stuck like a fence/land that behind them nothing is left to discuss. 

Town of glory

It was Kirtipur therefore to be struck first and the hardest.

Pramesh Pradhan

There are numerous interesting places close to Kathmandu which have remained isolated and less explored. Kirtipur is one of them. A natural fortress situated at a hillock at the south-western part of the Kathmandu valley, six km away from the centre of Kathmandu, Kirtipur is renowned for its ancient monuments and diligent people known for their bravery in many historic battles. Kirtipur literally means, town of glory. History describes Kirtipur as being founded by Shiva Deva in 1197 and later known as Bhawa Shanker temple. It was built in 1673 and had four roofs until the earthquake in 1934. One of the newer attractions in Kirtipur is a Thai styled stupa of Theravada Buddhism in the eastern part of the town. It also houses the four roof replicates of the four holy sites of Buddhism: Lumbini (where Buddha was born), Bodh Gaya (where Buddha was enlightened), Sarnath (where Buddha first taught) and Kushinagar (where Buddha left his body).

Ancient streets lined with artistic houses and temple squares, people known for their skill in building and weaving make up this small town. Worth watching are the Indrayani and Ganesh festival which are paraded through the town. A rich museum indeed is Kirtipur.
Analysis

The post-conflict era of Nepal has been the center of attention for all. Human right activists and organisations, law makers and politicians have been excited with the launching of Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There are and perhaps can be a lot to inquire and learn about the development of this commission.

One of the vital ideas of the commission is to bring together perpetrators and victims during the period of conflict in a forum, and develop mutual understanding between them. When addressing perpetrators and victims one should not ignore stress and traumas caused during the period of conflict; generated due to threats and tortures given to the victims or their family members, which leaves deep psychological scars.

Significantly age, sex, and ethnicities of victims varies. There are children who have witnessed their parents, brothers and sisters being threatened, tortured or killed. Exposure to violence at such early ages impacts on their psychological development. There are men and women who have faced threats and torture and have lost their partners. For widowed women, along with cultural challenges, there are psychological challenges in coping with the loss, sustaining livelihood and supporting their children.

Threats and tortures not only violate one’s human rights, it leads to vulnerabilities in mental health of victims. It is the nature of the commission to reconcile perpetrators and victims; therefore one must understand that it is not possible without addressing feelings such as fear, grudges, guilt, hostility, pain and revenge in their minds. These feelings can be channelled in constructive and positive ways, through structured mental health care such as counseling and psychotherapy which includes individual and group therapies.

Counseling process can support victims and prepare them to forgive perpetrators. Similarly the process can help perpetrators acknowledge and accept their wrongdoing. Counseling can be effective in dealing with various stages such as the denial stages that includes denying forgiving on victims’ part or denying the offences on the part of the perpetrators. Where people have witnessed their loved ones tortured or killed right in front of them, grief therapy can be an effective approach. If the commission is pragmatic, mental health issues of victims and perpetrators should be facilitated. Without intervening mental health issues the success of the commission is questionable.

Professionals such as clinical counselors, psychologist, and psychiatric social workers can be good facilitators. The process of structured counseling should in fact start prior to bringing victims and perpetrators together. The interventions that include individual, group and family therapy can be screened depending on nature and uniqueness of each case. Here facilitators should be cautious that they do not mix up victims and perpetrators in the same group while providing counseling. While intervening, specific as well as eclectic counseling approaches can be implemented.

Since a majority of victims can have issues related with stress, torture and trauma; post traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and adjustment disorders etc can be identified. Treatment plans can be developed for them, using stress management modules and specific therapy such as cognitive behavior therapy, person centered therapy, solution focused brief therapy and motivational interviewing.

For perpetrators, existential therapy, cognitive behavior therapy and psychoanalysis can be effective in exploring and intervening their issues such as denial of offenses, guilt and aggression, to name a few.

The importance of mental health perspectives in the commission should not be ignored. The government cannot afford to be indifferent to the needs of clinical counseling in the process of reconciliation between perpetrators and victims of the conflict. If the government takes the required measures in providing clinical counseling to both the populations as one of the primary and prior steps, it would be a great start for the commission.

(Subrath@gmail.com)