The Barabigha ground in Janakpur was turned into a fort with several hundred security personnel deployed to protect the seven party leaders and their supporters during the joint election meeting of the ruling alliance on January 28. The mobilisation of the security agencies had become necessary because of the Terai Bandh call given by different Terai outfits to foil the seven party meeting.

But the failure of the meeting, in terms of attendance and the poor law and order situation, has led to speculations in Kathmandu that at least two prominent Congress ministers, Ram Chandra Poudel and KP Sitaula, might lose their posts for having provoked the Terai leaders.  

(Details on page 2)
Keep shut!

Do not provoke Terai: PM to Poudel, Sitaula

The failure of Janakpur election meeting addressed by the leaders of the ruling seven-party alliance, and the clash with Madheshi political outfits that left at least 70 wounded, has come as a rude shock to Prime Minister GP Koirala who instantly instructed the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, to review the entire situation including the law and order situation in the country.

An all party meeting held in the evening soon after the Janakpur election meeting which took place under a tight security arrangement, however reported back to Koirala that they, “have won the Terai fort and that elections are very much possible in April”. Not convinced, Koirala also asked the election commission to make its own assessment of the situation.

Within the Congress circle, the Janakpur episode has trigged fresh speculations about the change in the cabinet that might lead to the exit of the two powerful ministers, Ram Chand Poudel and KP Sitaula.

The poor turnout in the meeting in Janakpur despite all the state machinery having been geared for it, attack by the Madheshi outfits on those attending the meetings, and exploration near the venue of the public meeting addressed by Party leaders Sudhir Koirala and Dr. Rambaran Yadav in Sunsari, the same day, have led to doubts if the government will be able to improve the law and order situation for polls.

Pocketing local bodies

The government is now contemplating immediate revival or formation of the local bodies which have long ceased to exist.

The United Nations Missions to Nepal (UNMIN) has been granted a six-month extension beginning January 23, but will have to ‘strictly stick to its mandate’, a senior Minister has said.

The extension proposal of the government that was finally endorsed by the UN Security Council last week in New York makes no change in the jurisdiction and scope as the government had earlier turned down suggestions - directly and indirectly - that UNMIN be involved in the security sector reforms as well as negotiation with the Terai, other ethnic and marginalised groups.

“We are going to tell UNMIN that it sticks with the mandate it has got - monitoring supervision of arms and arms amnesties, to review the local government and observing the polls to the constituent assembly,” the Minister who did not want to be named, adding, “our concern will be conveyed to Mr. Ian Martin on his arrival here.”

The Minister also said that a prominent European Union country was in favour of UNMIN’s role being enlarged. “Apart from our own assessment, our immediate neighbours, China and India were also not in favour of the UNMIN role being enlarged,” the Minister said.

Prime Minister GP-Koirala is said to be unhappy with senior UNMIN officials making public statements in support of demands of one or the other ethnic groups in a manner that could be interpreted as endorsing demands for creating ‘ethnic states’. They are committed to bring into account the grievances of ethnic and marginalised groups. But UNMIN officials making such speeches in different forums is clearly outside their mandate, and the government is going to clearly tell them to stick to their specified mandate,” the Minister added.

The UNMIN was granted 80 million dollar budget for its remaining tenure in Nepal. It has got currently 500 odd staff, less than 40 per cent from Nepal mostly in junior positions.

Stick to the mandate

UNMIN granted six-months extension

The government coffer to the existing local bodies that will have a plum election commission. Pocketing or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum election commission. Pocketing or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum election commission. Pocketing or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum election commission. Pocketing or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum election commission. Pocketing or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum election commission.

Soon after the government’s disbursement of Rs one million each to the sitting members of the parliament, it is now contemplating immediate revival or formation of the local bodies which have long ceased to exist. A decision to this effect may be taken soon although the move goes totally against the code of conduct issued by the election commission.

The nomination or revival of the local bodies that will have a plum share of three major parties - Nepal Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) and the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) will only give total control of the three parties in the local bodies, but they will also influence voters in favour of the top three in the nominations to the constituent assembly.

The government move to revive the local bodies comes in the wake of wide ranging controversy and criticism of its decision to distribute Rs. one million each to the government coffer to the existing members of the interim parliament. The distribution of the money ostensibly to carry developmental activities in areas chosen by MPs has also been challenged in the Supreme Court.

However, the ministerial committee headed by Minister for Local Development, Dev Gurung, who belongs to the Maoist party, is negotiating with the CPN-UML and the Nepal Congress as they have some difference of opinion on the way to nominate these bodies. The UML has been insisting that the same old committees should be revived with ‘reasonable inclusion’ of the Maoist members, but that is something both the Congress and the Maoists are not happy about. An official in the ministry of local development told newsfront that Maoists are in favour of the leadership and majority control, equally divided among the top three parties. “The UML, the Congress supports the Maoist formula,” the official said, adding, “the revival could take place immediately if the three parties come to an understanding.” In the election to the local bodies which were last held a decade ago, the CPN-UML had established its control in a majority of them. The Maoists had not participated in the election then.
Not enough
Prime Minister GP Koirala’s daughter Sujata Koirala is not happy with her mere inclusion in the cabinet as a minister without portfolio. Apparently, she wants her role and status clearly defined. According to the Baluwatar sources, Sujata has not only been consulting party leaders and her followers who have been telling her that being de facto to her apparent to the PM is not enough, and that she should be officially recognised as the de jure PM.

Gift of wheels
A fleet of 1200 vehicles has come as India’s gift to Nepal government on the occasion of its 59th republic day. The vehicles are meant to equip the government of Nepal, mainly its security agencies, to effectively monitor the election process as well as polling.

Double speak
The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists is at it again. As Kathmandu burned and youths thronged the streets to protest against the price hike of petroleum products, the Maoist tried to drown their hand in it.

Bush cheers up Maoists
At long last, US President George Bush has tried to make Nepali Maoists happy. In a recent message that he delivered, he appealed to the government of Nepal and the Maoists to work for the success of the constituent assembly.

Indo-Nepal meet ended on a bitter note
The Indo-Nepal joint official meeting held in New Delhi last week ended without conclusion after the Nepali side declined to endorse the Indian side’s border principle was violated by the Nepali side.

Maoists want more security
Since the Constituent Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) gear up for elections and its top leaders plan to mingle with the masses, the party has asked the government to enhance their security arrangements.

Newsbrief
Ambassador Suresh Chalise presented his credentials last week in the government of Nepal and the Maoists to work for the success of the constituent assembly.

The Indo-Nepal joint official meeting held in New Delhi last week ended without conclusion after the Nepali side declined to endorse the Indian side’s border principle was violated by the Nepali side.

Although the security requirements are being reviewed in the tense situation, the government however, failed to meet the demand for multi-layer security umbrella for Prachanda, “he added.

The party had demanded that at least 100 security personnel be drawn from the Nepal Army and the police deployed around the clock for Prachanda. The demand was made in the context of Prachanda and another close aide Ram Bahadur Thapa a.k.a. Badal publicly claiming that top Maoist leaders would be targeted during elections.

The government which is yet to receive any concrete evidence that substantiate such claims, has however decided to provide additional security which would be led by a Deputy Superintendent of Police with immediate effect. There would be no exception made for his security by attaching personnel of the Nepal Army.
**Point to Ponder**

The government has the responsibility to create an atmosphere for a free and fair election to ensure the top three pockets, all or most of the 335 seats they sponsored by the state, or encouraged by its indifference will only fill in the interim parliament, when the CA polls take place under the supervision of the Election Commission. However, the current situation seems to be far from ideal.

Paralysed

Kathmandu literally choked in poisonous smoke of rubber tyres as youths and students descended on the streets to protest against the hike in the petroleum price. Anarchy and violence reigned supreme in most of the country. Robbery, abduction and murders were reported from Siraha, Mug, Kapilvastu and Jhapa. Home Minister KP Sitaula had to be rescued by his security personnel as his own followers found it difficult to digest when he said such events were not uncommon when the country was moving towards constituent assembly polls.

The GP Koilai government rolled back the price in absolute panic, but the government agencies made no effort to curb or limit the vandalising that protesters indulged in. UN and embassy vehicles as well as the media vehicles were targeted by the mob. Worse, the press representatives were assaulted. Prime Minister Koilai who has mostly remained ineffective ostensibly for reasons of health ever since he elevated his daughter as the cabinet rank minister, only reacted to the whole situation by withdrawing the price hike, but he is unmoved by the killing of his party’s three leaders by Maoists in Siraha, or that of the manager of the Agriculture Development Bank there.

In Khotang, three police posts were over-run while in Kapilvastu, a Maoist Janadhikar Forum leader was shot and wounded. Dhanusha is witness to communal tension. Yet, like Koilai, Koilai has little concern and time to improve the law and order. People’s security is secondary to him. Prolonging his days in chair without any accountability is all Paul Koilai seems to be indulging in.

The series of events, especially the abduction and murder of three Congress activists by the YCL goes against the 23-point agreement that the seven parties in the government signed on 20 December, in a reiteration of what was already stated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed way back in November 2006, the 23-point agreement had pledged that there would be no recruitment into or sponsorship by the state, or encouraged by its indifference will only fill in the interim parliament, when the CA polls take place under the supervision of the Election Commission.

The government’s failure to ensure that, with mounting attack on diplomats and the media, and silence of the three major parties - UML, Congress and the Maoists, show that they only want to go for a mock election only. A state of terror and anarchy either sponsored by the state, or encouraged by its indifference will only go in the hands of three parties if polls take place now.

Their major concern at the moment seems to formulat a way to ensure the top three pockets, all or most of the 335 seats they sponsored by the state, or encouraged by its indifference will only fill in the interim parliament, when the CA polls take place under these circumstances. The Koilai government must understand that it is obligated to create an atmosphere for a free and fair election that will be representative of the people’s will and mood. Any other type of election that seems the government’s priority now, will not be acceptable.

**Saint Bernadette of Lourdes**

Bernadette Soubirous, born 7th Jan 1844, had 18 visions of the ‘blessed lady’ in a grotto in the outskirts of Lourdes. On February 11th 1858, Bernadette had her first vision of a ‘beautiful lady’. She describes how initially she was bewildered, but after a while she felt overcome with great peace. The visions of Bernadette created remarkable interest and speculation within the village of Lourdes. However, although some believed they were witnessing a miraculous occurrence, others in the town were both critical and suspicious.

However, under cross examination she retained a childlike innocence and also an imitable faith in the veracity of the experiences she had witnessed. Despite frequent and intense investigation they were unable to find flaws in her story. She didn’t want to exaggerate or material profit from her experiences.

On the ninth apparition Bernadette was asked by the lady to drink from the spring. Yet, Bernadette could not see any spring (there was none at the time), therefore she began digging with her bare hands in a muddy patch and drank a few drops of muddy water. The lady also asked her to eat some loose grass. To the onlookers this appeared to be a sickly idea, however, the tourists, on the environment and our future were asked to be patient. The tourists, on the environment and our future were asked to be patient. The tourists, on the environment and our future were asked to be patient. The tourists, on the environment and our future were asked to be patient.

The story on street kids last week shows the miserable state of the children who are supposedly the future of our country. There are more than five hundred organisations working for children in Nepal. and there are thousands of children out there on the streets of Kathmandu and elsewhere in the country.

What are such organisations doing for the kids for whom funds pour in from all over the world? We all know now that such organisations are here, just to make money by selling poverty and misery. Had this been untrue, there would not be so many street children out there, freezing to death. Where does the money go? Not to the children surely, although all their reports may justify every paisa! How about every organisation picking up two or three of such children and use all their skills to keep them off streets? That way, there will be no such lost souls wandering the streets.

**Ugly and foolish way of demonstrating**

Raman Gondan has shown the possibility of rafting and kayaking tourism in Nepal to newfront last week. Tourism is the prime sector to enrich the economy of Nepal. But our government doesn’t seem to recognise this. Bandhs, protests and hooliganism are destroying tourism in Nepal. For instance, I saw a number of terrified tourists last week when students were protesting against the petroleum price hike. Why do we have such barbaric protesting methods? Can we not express our rights more intelligently, keeping our concern for other citizens alive? Have we now become a nation of fools who do not understand the drastic implications of protesting in such an ugly manner, on the tourists, on the environment and our fellow citizens health and peace of mind? If educated youths start behaving like that, what hope do we have for our future?

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There have been some clearly visible indicators that the US diplomacy in Kathmandu already confirms to the latest approach of President Bush. The quiet meeting of Ambassador Nancy J Powell with the Maoist ministers cannot be taken as developments in isolation. Not long ago, Patrick Leahy, a prominent Republican senator had asked Maoists to be part of the political process and earn confidence of the world so that they could be taken off the terrorist list by all including the US.

This at least seems to have had a somber effect on Bush. Also, the US embassy in Kathmandu was more generous in granting visa to the Maoist leaders to the US in recent days, and there are already positive signals that it would facilitate Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai’s trip to the DC when they go the World Bank head office, as they have a standing invitation to brief the bank about their economic and pro-reform agenda.

The appeal by Bush also comes in the wake of revelations by Prime Minister GP Koirala that he was involved in counterfeiting of the Indian currency notes and was tempted to get into gold and uranium smuggling, and urging the state in Nepal has almost collapsed while that of India’s centre has been intact when its provinces ravaged by insurgency led violence had gone out to carry assassinations of the political opponents by the state and their selective persecution of the political opponents by the state and their selective victimisation on the basis of a political commission like the one headed by Krishnajung Rayamajhi; added control of judiciary by the executive and legislature; blatant misuse of government fund to manipulate electoral outcome in favour of the three major ruling parties, including the Maoists; and the appropriation of the authority and jurisdiction of the yet to be elected constituent assembly by the current parliament. These are not mere issues or dimensions of Nepal’s internal politics, but democracy can not be meaningfully restored without their being addressed.

Nevertheless, it will be a real opportunity for the Maoists to listen to Bush and create an atmosphere for the polls. Winning the American president’s hope, if not trust at this moment, would be the real recognition of the Maoists as neo-democrats. The modified message of the American president in gist is: “you have all the opportunities to be recognised as democrats world wide. In that case, you do not have to run, and you do not have to hide.”

Moriarty even challenged Prachanda to furnish him with the proof to substantiate his publicly made allegations that the CIA was out to carry assassinations of some political leaders in Nepal. It will be a welcome move on the part of the US to support Nepal’s democratic and electoral process. But the election in Nepal should not be something like that happened in Iraq last year or in India’s Kashmir, Punjab or Assam in the 80s. While the first happened under the shadow of foreign army, the ones in India hardly represented the popular will of the majority. Moreover, the authority of the state in Nepal has almost collapsed while that of India’s centre was intact when its provinces ravaged by insurgency led violence had gone out to carry assassinations of the political opponents by the state and their selective persecution of the political opponents by the state and their selective victimisation on the basis of a political commission like the one headed by Krishnajung Rayamajhi; added control of judiciary by the executive and legislature; blatant misuse of government fund to manipulate electoral outcome in favour of the three major ruling parties, including the Maoists; and the appropriation of the authority and jurisdiction of the yet to be elected constituent assembly by the current parliament. These are not mere issues or dimensions of Nepal’s internal politics, but democracy can not be meaningfully restored without their being addressed.

In a message that signals a clear shift in the US policy towards Nepali Maoists, President Bush has appealed to the government and the Maoists to work together to ensure that the election is held by mid-April. All last, he must have had reasons to believe that the entry of the Maoists to the peace process was not a mere tactical move as the US had all along been saying: and that their oft repeated commitment to democracy is as genuine as that of the seven parties ruling the country at present.

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The appeal by Bush also comes in the wake of revelations by Prime Minister GP Koirala that he was involved in counterfeiting of the Indian currency notes and was tempted to get into gold and uranium smuggling, apart from his involvement in the hijacking of an aircraft during his years in exile. That confession will hardly make GP Koirala’s democratic credentials more preferable to the US, that of Prachanda. Moreover, US has reasons to hope that Koirala can still deliver, as his failure will be real miscalculation of the US in Nepal. In that sense, Koirala’s failure to lead the transition to democracy will also be seen as failure by the US to a large extent. After all, time is running out not only for Koirala, who is 84 and ailing, but also for Bush who shall be demitting his office as president in less than a year from now.

It was Bush, who initially supported the royal takeover in February 2005, and then went to the other extreme since his public criticism of the king. The major skips of the presidents include: rampant and willful persecution of the political opponents by the state and their selective victimisation on the basis of a political commission like the one headed by Krishnajung Rayamajhi; added control of judiciary by the executive and legislature; blatant misuse of government fund to manipulate electoral outcome in favour of the three major ruling parties, including the Maoists; and the appropriation of the authority and jurisdiction of the yet to be elected constituent assembly by the current parliament. These are not mere issues or dimensions of Nepal’s internal politics, but democracy can not be meaningfully restored without their being addressed.

In the past, the categorical position that the US took on election was that, a conducive atmosphere and improved law and order situation are the basic pre-conditions. Even former President Jimmy Carter laid some pre-conditions such as: improved law and order, ending parallel policing by the Young Communist League (YCL), and Maoists returning the property they confiscated during the years of conflict to the rightful owners. Nothing will make Nepalis happier if the appeal of the president does its magic on the Maoist leaders and changes their behaviour.

The US has, in the past two years or so, mainly gone along with India on Nepal’s peace process and supported Maoists entry into it with some riders. The US continued to put the Maoists on their terrorist list, and until Moriarty’s time, avoided meeting with the Maoist ministers. It quite often insisted that Maoists must hand-over its members responsible for the killing of two American guards. It has also openly commented on the YCL atrocities.

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The Fort – a symbol of unity

Roop Joshi

From the lofty ramparts of his fort, five hundred years ago, Man Singh Tomar looked down at the city. It was a city he had vanquished. From the lofty ramparts of this fort, Jahangir again looked down at the city. It was a city he had conquered. From the lofty ramparts of the same fort, the Marathas looked down at the city. From the lofty ramparts of this very fort, the current maharajah looks down at his city. It is a city of which he is now a part.

In democratic India, there lies a place, where the maharajah still addressed as such by his people though he has no semblance of official royalty, is revered by his people, where his actions, though he is Hindu, can stop Hindu-Muslim riots; where the people know he will always be there – a symbol of unity, someone with whom they can identify, someone who will always listen to their troubles. And he is himself a Member of Parliament and a Congress stalwart.

The fort looms over the city casting its protective shadow. Reputed to be one of the most invincible forts of India, it stands rock solid – a symbol of permanence, of continuity, of a glorious history and immutable values, all personified by its rulers. The fort houses a Sikh gurudwara, displays Hindu palace architecture, was influenced by Muslim influence and is guarded by a gigantic iron horse. This amalgam of religions speaks of historical changes of power, but more importantly, it is a testimony to the tolerance and respect displayed by the rulers.

From this same fort, Maharani Lakshmi Bai graded her stallion to jump off the ramparts to her death below to escape British captors. Her courage is a testimony to the stirrings of Indian nationalism and to woman’s equality.

The city owes much to its maharajahs. Its industrial development, irrigation projects and education infrastructure were initiated by the then maharajah in the closing years of the 19th century. The legacy of the present maharajah’s father, whose political footsteps he follows, reminds all of what the father did for his city as well as for his country. A MP from his city in national parliament for 30 years, thrice a minister with various portfolios, he is credited, inter alia, with the modernisation of India’s railway system.

The city itself now has a literacy rate of 75%, 10% higher than the national average. It boasts at least 42 educational institutions of secondary and higher education. It is prominent for its hospitals and pharmaceutical and educational facilities with leading institutions of secondary and higher education. It is well connected by air, road and rail and it has placed Nepal into an intractable spiral of protests and counter protests.

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Karma is your own creation and you can change it yourself.

Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 42 years old, was born in Gorkha district of Nepal. He is the abbot of Ngesdon Osel Ling monastery in Kathmandu and of Geshe Gumpa in Tibet. He is the head of the Drupka heritage project, which works to preserve the literature of the Kagyu lineage. He has been offering teachings in Nepal, India, Britain, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Denmark and the US. His father was the renowned Dzogchen master, late Kyabje Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. Tsoknyi Rinpoche is known internationally for his open attitude and style of teaching that is full of humour. Extracts from his conversation with Sushma Amaty:

Who were your teachers and when did you start teaching?

I was recognised as Rinpoche at the age of eight. From the age of 13 to 24, I studied in India. Along with my father, I had other teachers like Kyabje Dilo Khentri Rinpoche, Adh-Inri Rinpoche of Nangchen, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche and Khambut Rinpoche, who brought me up.

At the age of 24, when I was in Bodhgaya, some people asked me to teach and from there I started. It happened naturally. I teach five hours a day. I think teaching is the best practice. You have to prepare, meditate, you have to understand students’ questions, and you have to have the meditation mood to teach.

Why is humour important in teaching?

I don’t try it intentionally; I think it’s the way I teach. Humour is a part of human nature. It comes naturally to me. And it’s useful at this age and day when people have such a short attention span.

Is it difficult to teach modern people?

No. I think I’m prepared to teach modern people because their minds are quite open. They receive Buddhist teachings easily. If I use the old methods, they don’t work so well in this century.

What is your inspiration?

I want to share Buddha’s teachings, which is peace, wisdom and compassion. These are very necessary for humanity where a lot of people are suffering because of ignorance and selfishness. The teachings help draw out negatives from our minds. The fact that things are always changing helps us keep our perspective on the right track. If we think everything around us is solid and permanent, it leads to suffering.

Changes you have seen in your students?

Most of them were very happy when they came to me. I think many see some kind of Dharma but no path. They want to practice some path and when they receive this traditional path, they become happy and peaceful. The changes are amazing to see. All their anxiety, distrust, inability to love changes into peace and happiness.

Are there drop outs?

Some. In the beginning all are enthusiastic but you progress you have a certain system you need to follow and they feel they are being tied down and so they remain as beginners. They don’t want to go all the way.

Differences between Nepali and western students?

The basic human nature is the same in everybody. The five poisons like attachment, jealousy, anger, ignorance, pride are the same – from the president of US to a cow here. But cultural differences are vast. Family situations, psychological patterns are different. For example, we have a lot of problem with mother in law, they don’t. We have a lot of love inside our family but we don’t have as much freedom. They have a lot of freedom but not enough warmth, love. When someone cares for you, you lose some of your freedom. They want the freedom and also love.

There are different ways to address those problems using the same message but the approach is different. It’s like using the same cloth but with different designs. I try and understand my student’s roots and speak in their language. I do have people in the west who advise me how to address the cultural and psychological aspects.

Do you accept everybody who seeks your teaching?

I never reject. In Dharma you cannot reject, unless there are some critical problems. I try but sometimes it’s very hard.

How do you deal with attachment from female students?

I’m married already and that is a barrier and so I don’t have such problems. I have heard of such problems and am quite aware of it and create my own barrier. Students love you but you don’t know what they are thinking sometimes; but if you have your point of view clear, that is not a problem.

Are you hopeful that Buddhist teaching will flourish in this materialistic world?

I divide Buddha’s teaching into two parts – one is psychological and the other one is physical. You have to be the first part for people who want to make their lives better. By following and less, they become more peaceful, kind, tolerant; it helps your blood pressure go down, your health improves and lives improve. This part of teaching is successful. But the real teaching that is renouncing the world and becoming completely free from the five poisons – that takes time. That part of teaching will shrink more. But I think if Buddhism can contribute something to the world in whatever form, then why not.

Obviously less people are seeking enlightenment.

That is true. More people are seeking spirituality to improve their current lives. A businessman will not give up his business but practicing dharma will improve his business. If anything will help improve their lives, people will take it. There is a lot in Buddhism that will help their minds and emotions and so I think people will take it. There is less and less dogmatism in people today. Most of them will not reject anything that is good for them just because it’s Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism.

How does one find a balance between spiritual life and worldly life?

You have to organise your life, find some time for spiritual practice – may be one or two hours a day. At the end of the year, there is some achievement and then slowly you can put it together. Or you can go for a retreat, a seminar and then practice at home. To be engaged from morning till night completely in materialistic pursuit creates a lot of imbalance. There is a saying in Tibet that if you want to go to toilet, you have to build a toilet first. There should be some preparation in your life.

What one piece of advice would you give to serious practitioners?

You have to lead your life very simply. You have to be rich in mind, not so much materially. When you engage so much in material life, it does not give you enough time. Time is important. If you have a simple lifestyle, the time you have can be used for practice. But sadly for many people, the issue boils down to money and they don’t have any time. First thing would be to fix your basic livelihood. But if you are lucky, and have family support, then go for the dharma.

Is fatalistic approach an obstacle to dharma?

Some people blame it all on karma, on pre-programming but that is not right. You have to think both of cause and conditions. 50 percent might be karma so you can change the other 50 percent. If it was all karma then there would be no point in doing anything. Karma is your own creation and you can change Karma. If you plant a rice seed, you will get a nice sapling but the conditions too are important like fertile soil and right weather conditions. It all is interdependent.

Please explain interdependency.

When you make tea, you have to put so many things together to create tea. Similarly, you are a combination of cause and conditions, interdependent things. Buddhism says it is possible to attain enlightenment based on cause and conditions. In Nepal now, life is very difficult. If you want to change it, you have to look at the interdependent conditions. Take things out that have negative impact and bring in those things that create happy conditions. In a family, if father is happy, mother is happy and then the children are happy. If one parent is not happy, the whole family becomes unhappy. It is all interlinked.

You may be a good person, your family is good but some misunderstandings arise and the whole family is on fire. You are the same but there is so much anger around you. The problem there is not you but the delusions. Then, comes the investigation part when you should start examining why, how, where, and you come to a realisation that it was all a misunderstanding. Without this, if you allow the situation to go unchecked, you might end up burning everything.

How is ‘samsara’ and ‘nirvana’ the same?

In reality it is the same but from a deluded viewpoint it is not same. If a cup is covered by mud and I say, it is the same cup but it does not change you. If you take the mud of ignorance out, you see the cup. But the cup remains the cup. It is all in our mind how we see it. Purify our delusion, then, there is no suffering.

You lead many retreats. Why is retreat important?

Retreat is very important to Buddhist practice because once you know what you are doing, you need to work with that knowledge and not leave it only on the intellectual level. You have to put it into practice. Once you have a map, you need to set aside time to do that and you need a place that is conducive and safe. First you learn from a good teacher, and then you develop that learning and understanding in retreat. The experience of retreat is of great value.
remain highly alert all the time. Kathmandu residents and visitors day, any moment. It is advisable that long the newfound calm will last. The hike, nobody can tell exactly how much the country contributes to the US energy demands. Although on how much the country contributes to the US energy demands. It is common knowledge that the oil issue, despite its urgency, is not the top priority for the Korala government now. It has no time to see how many hours people spend queuing in front of petrol pumps to get a few litres of fuel. It has to make a last desperate push to hold elections to the Constituent Assembly in April this year. Third postponement of elections would eliminate any remaining legitimacy of the government and interim parliament. That would seriously erode public confidence on the ruling parties. So, elections are a do-or-die issue for the parties. Already serious doubts are being raised about the possibility of April elections. There are many issues to be addressed in a very short period to ensure free and fair elections. Tel Andolan helped fuel scepticism about holding elections on time. If the government is unable to maintain peace in the capital town, how could anyone trust it to restore order in the increasingly troubled nation? Why did the government advise the parties calling the strikes to take to the streets and inflame the situation, instead of talking directly to their leaders in power concerning the issues? Do they not have any access to their main party leadership? What is the nature of relations between the parties and their wing organisations? Or were the parties playing the double game? The sincerity and integrity of the parties in power are in question. It is hard for common people to see the games involved. Whatever the motives, the government and the parties must have realised that the strikes were counterproductive.

The government should not linger on issues like this. There should be serious discussions and debates involving the prominent economists and others on how to solve the problem once and for all. The agreed short-term and long-term strategies should be developed to meet the oil needs over at least another five years. A proper policy should guide the import and distribution of petroleum products.

This is one of the relatively non-controversial and easier areas for the government to deliver. And it could perhaps start by properly investigating the oil and its value within Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC). If NOC proves useless, private companies should be allowed to bring in and distribute petroleum goods. Government can focus only on the policy issues. It probably has far more important jobs to do instead of distributing fuel.

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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Timeless lessons**

**Birat Singh**

It is heartening to read a well composed novel about three generations of Sherpa women in the highlands of Nepal, set in the 1930s. The author, foreign-born, has used her experience of over 30 years of living in Nepal, married to a Nepali, to produce an excellent read. Set in the "harsh tough land" (of the Sherpas in northern Nepal) where only the fittest survived, "this story about women -- interspersed with keen insights into the human condition especially the needs of women -- has many messages relevant to the present.

Nima Tsering, the beautiful woman from Helam, dealing with her Sodomtumbu husband's unfaithful- ness; her daughter, Ang Maya, living with the fruits of her illicit affair with the respected monk from Tibet, Rinzi Sonam, Ang Maya's daughter, Diksun's naïve relations with a Rana aristocrat and how she saves herself. With exotic names in an exotic setting, vivid descriptions of Buddhist rites and festivals, this story takes the reader to the past. It also allows the reader to see how much, or how little, things have changed in the last 70 plus years.

The concept of 'sonam' (merit) is woven throughout the story. There is constant harkening for the need to collect enough merit in life, to outweigh our misdeeds so that we are not chained to the wheel of life forever. Two of the most profound themes in this book crop up when Nima tells Ang Maya that "...marriage is a family thing; love has often nothing at all to do with marriage," and when a poor couple expecting a son's birth is disappointed by a baby girl referred to by the author as "a child who within minutes of her birth had a changed status -- from wanted to unwanted -- because she was a girl."

Guilt, supposedly the original sin, begins the story with the monk Rinzi Sonam contemplating his one lapse into carnal passion. Yet, his superior the abbot releases him of any responsibility dismissing him with the words, "Oh come come. You are not the first who has erred after taking the cloth...We must learn to accept these things and not become so attached and chained by them. It is Left, my son. What is written cannot be erased." Rinzi Sonam is the 'chosen one' to succeed the abbot and that remains his destiny.

The author prefaced her book with a touching poem and the eternal Buddhist Sharanam Gacchami. The lessons from this book are timeless. This beautiful romance by Greta Rana will hopefully also be translated into a movie. After all, it has already undergone its third edition with its German translation published in Munich in 1999. 

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**”...Marriage is a family thing; love has often nothing at all to do with marriage.” by Greta Rana, Pilgrims Publishing, 2006, 346 pages**
Polarised vote in Obama sweep

The electoral victory of Barack Obama in South Carolina has revealed a Democratic electorate divided by race, gender and age. Mr Obama swept the black vote, which makes up more than half of those voting in this Democratic bastion, although only 28% of the state’s population.

Hillary Clinton maintained her strengths, especially among women and older voters, that have been evident in previous primaries. And former Senator John Edwards, running as a southerner from South Carolina, had a solid base among swinging, and did particularly well among white men.

Racial divide

Mr Obama’s victory was based on his overwhelming support among the black community, which voted 80% in his favour, while less than one-quarter of white Democrats backed his presidential bid.

In South Carolina, African-Americans made up 53% of Democratic primary voters.

In contrast, Senator Clinton and John Edwards split the white vote, with each gaining just under 40%.

Mrs Clinton’s slender margin of victory over Mr Edwards was provided by the 18% of blacks who voted for her. Only 2% of the black vote went to Mr Edwards.

Among black voters, Mrs Clinton had more appeal to older women and voters, but the effect was not as marked as among white voters. And in another measure of racial polarisation, the quarter of voters who said they thought the country was not ready for a black president gave Mrs Clinton a majority of votes, while 77% of those who believed the country was definitely ready for a black president voted for Mr Obama.

Age divide

There was clear evidence of a generational divide, with Mr Obama winning 70% of the votes of those between 25 and 29, but only 51% of those between 50 and 65.

Mrs Clinton, in fact, won more votes - 40% - among retired people over 65 than Mr Obama.

And among older white voters, over 60, Mr Obama only received 15% of the vote.

In contrast, Mr Obama ran most strongly among new voters who had never voted before.

Gender split

Among white voters, women and men voted quite differently.

John Edwards had a lead among male voters, by 43% to 29% for Mrs Clinton, with 27% of white men voting for Mr Obama.

However, among white women, Hillary Clinton was ahead, with 64% of their votes, compared to 34% for Mr Edwards and 22% for Mr Obama.

Mrs Clinton also did equally well among married women and unmarried women. In the past, she has sometimes received more votes from single women.

Electionability

As in past primaries, Mr Obama appealed about the Iraq war than those who were most worried about the economy, but the effect was less marked than in previous contests.

More than half of Democratic voters thought the economy was the most important issue, while only 19% cited the Iraq war, third behind health care.

And among black voters, who are much more prone than whites in South Carolina, the economy was clearly the most important issue.

However, Mrs Clinton got a higher percentage of the vote among those who thought national economic conditions were poor than among those who thought that they were good.

Mr Obama got the strongest support among voters who wanted an immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq, while Mr Edwards won strongest support among those who wanted the troops to stay, suggesting that he was also benefiting from a cross-over vote among Republicans who were also eligible to vote in this primary.

Perceptions about the candidates’ relative strengths and weaknesses played a bigger role in the election.

Ex-dictator Suharto dies

Former dictator Suharto, the army general who crushed Indonesia’s Communist movement and pushed its founding father to usher in 32 years of brutal rule, has died.

The 86-year-old’s health has been in intensive care with lung, heart and kidney failure since he was admitted to the hospital on January 4. Over the past week his health has rapidly deteriorated.

Suharto, who led a regime widely regarded as one of the 20th century’s most brutal and corrupt, has lived a reclusive life in a comfortable villa in central Jakarta for the past decade.

He had been in and out of the hospital several times for heart problems and internal bleeding since being toppled by a pro-democracy uprising during the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis.

Historians say up to 800,000 alleged Communist sympathisers were killed during Suharto’s rise to power from 1965 to 1998.

His troops killed another 300,000 in military operations against independence movements in Papua, Aceh and East Timor.

Suharto’s poor health has kept him from facing trial and no-one has been punished for the killings.

Corruption watchdog Transparency International said Suharto and his family amassed billions in stolen state funds, allegations the family is fighting in court.

(Democratic presidential candidate Senator Hillary Clinton holds five month-old Jaren Chisholm in the air during a visit to a Shoney’s Restaurant in Columbia, South Carolina January 26, 2008. (Reuters))

Ex-dictator Suharto dies

Democrat presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama and his wife Michelle arrive on stage at his South Carolina primary night rally in Columbia, South Carolina, January 26, 2008. (AFP)

Pakistan nuclear sites on alert

Pakistan has raised the state of alert around its nuclear facilities amid concerns they could be targeted by Islamist militants.

But a senior Pakistani military official said there had been no specific threat to the sites, and insisted that safeguards in place were foolproof.

The official was speaking in a rare press briefing on the issue.

It followed Western media reports warning that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of the Taleban or al-Qaeda, who could be a serious threat to the country’s nuclear facilities.

The senior military official briefing foreign journalists said that the weapons were protected by an elaborate command and control system, and multiple levels of security.

He acknowledged that Islamic militants had begun to attack army personnel in recent months, and that nuclear sites may also become a target. He said the state of alert around nuclear facilities had increased, but there had been no specific threats against them.

The official said there was no way the Taleban or al-Qaeda could take over Pakistan’s estimated 50 nuclear warheads.

And he dismissed the possibility of collusion from within the system, saying all personnel dealing with sensitive material had been carefully monitored.

Despite fears raised by US media and politicians, the official said the US administration had not shown any recent concern about the safety of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. He also said any foreign intervention into the issue would be disastrous for the intruder.

(BBC)
In the Abhidharma we find the psychic power or psi phenomena divided into five categories. These are called Abhigyas which mean high knowledge or higher knowing or higher cognitions. Abhi means special/higher and Gya means knowing. Firstly, the Riddhi-Siddhis: These are manifestations in the outside world and are different from the other Abhigyas. Riddhi-Siddhis imply controlling power over the subjective and the objective and it manifests by controlling both mind and matter, whereas the other four Abhigyas are related only with the subjective power of the mind. As this is a bigger topic we shall go into details of the Riddhi-Siddhis after we finish studying the other four Abhigyas first.

The second Abhigya (Abhiyya in Pali) is known as Dibya Srota Dhatu, i.e. divine ear element. It is said that with a concentrated mind applied to Dibya Srota Dhatu, the purified hearing which surpasses human hearing is attained. And one can hear sounds of humans or Devas, whether far or near. The ability to hear sounds far away beyond normal human range within the human world or to even hear the sounds and voices etc. of Devas in various Deva Lokas and Brahma Lokas is what is meant by the Abhigya Dibya Srota Dhatu.

This is the hearing capacity of the Devas that is why it is called Dibya Srota Dhatu. It is made possible by good karmas and a mind freed from lower mental impurities through practices of Samatha etc.

This Abhigya cannot be gained by those who do not already have Dibya Srota Dhatu. This Abhigya can also be called Dibya Chakshu, i.e. divine eyes, or like the eyes of the Devas of various Devalokas.

(The above explanation makes it clear.

This Abhigya cannot be gained by those who do not already have Dibya Srota Dhatu. This Abhigya can also be called Dibya Chakshu, i.e. divine eyes, or like the eyes of the Devas of various Devalokas.)
A nation gone astray

Of late, the dust and smoke in the streets of Kathmandu has earned more name than its clean Himalayan air. The polity continues to roll its chariots on flames of the burning tyres and helplessness of its civilians, as if there’s no other option left to sort out strategies to develop-ment and good governance.

Violence seems to make a permanent home in the corridors of national polity and a slightest provocation can send the life on the streets into a chaos. No matter what its cost in terms of human loss or financial crisis may be, the dragons of anarchy continue to rock this once a Himalayan haven.

The streets of Thamel, the hub of country’s major industry, appears dark from the soot. Couldn’t the government have sorted out a timely strategy to quell the smoke in the streets? Is dust and smoke the ultimate fate of people of Nepal?

The colors of a nation’s democratic set-up are crucial to its people. The major players of the polity have to discover the colors hidden in the dreams of the people’s lives and the landscape. This alone could be a major achievement for any political party to come to prominence in the national life that they so desperately seem to lust for, with all fair or vicious means.

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Only a writer or an artist can unleash the true colors of a nation’s rainbow. It’s in the blind streets of smoke he/she visualises the shimmering daggers of snow that continue to gawk helplessly from the valley’s rim. The colors of the rhododendrons of people’s destinies ablaze in the sunny scenario, that’s what our politicians and policy makers need to dream of often.

This might sound fancy talk to some, a proverbial poet’s talk. But there are nations in the world like Ireland that take immense pride in producing poets and writers. Just like other industrial nations who take pride in manufacturing hi-profile consumer goods, electronic gadgets, or even nuclear weapons.

That’s where I find Ireland and Nepal similar. Both countries in the past have taken immense pride in producing poets and writers. Especially Nepal is a country born out of the breath of poets’ translator like Bhaubhakta Acharya. No ruler, no matter how powerful, could have formed a nation without the poet giving it its tongue. Now once again there is a need for this nation to find its true colors and ultimate destiny.

Could any political party or leader discover the withering flowers of this turbulent nation without appreciating the spectrum of its lost colors? The question a poet flings at the makers of its destiny. Maybe there’s someone listening, a humble human being, someone with a Buddha face holding Gandhi’s helpless, feeble cane.

The album, as Dahal put it, tries to include the essence of Buddhism in it. Dahal said that in course of her mediation, her thoughts wandered in creation of songs not only in Nepali, but also Hindi, Rajasthani, Sanskrit and English language as well. “Free clouds do not follow any directives. Those who do not understand it, call it mad,” and thus the album is based on this theme.

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Sanchita Sinha Roy, 44, a painter and writer passed away on 26 Jan 08 in New Delhi after a prolonged illness. She was not only a gifted artist, a wonderful teacher but an extraordinary person with a large heart that welcomed everyone she met with unconditional love. For reasons unknown, despite all the riches she was endowed with in her mind and heart, and her outstanding talent; she suffered a lot physically and materially and lady luck always seemed to elude her.

We used to joke saying that perhaps her paintings would start selling well only after she leaves the world, as it has happened in the lives of some world renowned artists. Little did we know death was soon to step in and take her away from us. In spite of the hardships that life threw at her, she maintained an unflinching positive attitude and her courage almost till the very end; and we admire her deeply for her resilience, patience and power to tolerate human weaknesses around her. She was like that as a teenager when I met her two decades ago. Her qualities were enduring and consistent all through the years that followed when we managed to keep in touch across long distances and gaps of time.

She has taken away with her a meaningful presence that embraced everybody that came in touch with it. Her life always overflowed with giving, caring, sharing and cheering up others around her. Her joyful laughter and sophisticated sense of humour could brighten up morose moods in no time. Although blessed with a sharp intelligence, she never showed it off, but it was there for us to spar with, when we wanted to.

Her friends and fans range from all walks of life and all whom I know who met her have gained something precious, something indescribable from her; and that something will now enrich our lives, for death has the power to drive home the truth in a second, that years of association often does not. For us who were very close to her. Sanchita was a special being who came down to earth to work out her leftover karma through intense physical suffering. She now is free of the burden and we pray that she goes to light up some other realms that deserves her truly.

(Sanchita contributed her paintings and writing to newsfront for some time. Newsfront offers its heartfelt condolences to her family and friends.)