In a ‘deal’ at the highest political level, the government of Nepal dispensed with even the minimal legal and official formality, and quietly handed over Dr. Amit Kumar, wanted in a clandestine kidney racket to Indian authorities.

Kumar was handed over to three CBI officials waiting in the Indian airlines aircraft in the evening on Feb 9, a senior officer of the Nepal Police said. AIG Hem Gurung was instructed by Inspector General of Police to ‘do the job quietly’. He took Kumar straight to the awaiting IC flight from the domestic airport.

The decision to handover Kumar was done at the instruction of Prime Minister GP Koirala. My understanding is that India’s foreign affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee had a talk with Koirala asking for urgent deportation," a cabinet minister said, admitting – “This will have serious implication in Nepal.”

The ‘deal’ has also demoralised the Nepal police which was all set to file a case in the district court on Feb 10 for the doctor being in possession of fake passport and foreign currencies in excess of the legal limit. Everything that was seized from Dr Kumar when he was arrested from a hotel room in Chitwan has been handed over to the Indian authorities, a police official said.

Dr. Kumar’s hand-over to the Indian authorities is different in the sense that in most such cases, the people wanted would be shown as having been arrested in India. The government had handed over Yakub Menon, wanted in the serial explosion in Bombay in 1993, to the Indian authorities in Gorakhpur after he was arrested at Tribhuvan International Airport a few months after the explosion.

But given the high publicity that Dr. Kumar’s case got in Nepal and the world over, there was noticeable degree of hesitation on the part of Nepali police to follow the precedence. They had suggested that he be handed over, after the minimal formalities like producing him in the court on other relatively minor cases, are done.

What Kumar said in the course of investigation here will remain only in the ‘police diary’ now. Police found him cooperative enough and appeared frank and forthright in sharing information. He told the officials that he was out of the kidney business for nearly two years, but got back into it as patients made a beeline with requests at his Gurgaon hospital. Apparently there was a dispute over a kidney donor and recipient over money, and one of them took the matter to the police. He is also reported to have admitted that he was once arrested, but was let off by the authorities in India. His regret was not to have moved to Turkey where a large number of his patients wanted him to set up a hospital and head it.

Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg who was in Nepal for a day to study climate change, pledged his support to Nepal’s development.
The mask of unity and togetherness of the Maoist Congress and the Maoists was blown off following a series of police raids in about a dozen private houses forcibly occupied by the Young Communist League activists in and around the capital.

The raids were jointly carried out by the Armed Police Force (APF) and the civil police on the express order of the Prime Minister KP Oli. This sent a message to the Maoists that they have to honour the 23-point agreement signed on December 23 failing which they have to face government action. Under the agreement, the Maoists are obliged to return all the property under illegal occupation within a few days.

As the raids continued simultaneously in a few places on February 4, Home Minister KP Oli told Maoist leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai that he had no hands in the whole episode. “This is done at the instance of the Minister without a portfolio,” ranted Prachanda the next day based on the briefing he had with Oli.

Balkwatkar sources however told newsfront that the raids were ordered by the PM following complaints from the security chiefs that Bhattarai had warned the APF and the police not to take any action against the YCL even if they were found committing any crime.

The only people who came to Sitaula’s rescue were the Maoists as almost all other parties including the UML supported the raids in subsequent attacks on Congress parliamentary, Dilendra Badh in the west and abduction of three college students from Nobel academy in the capital by the YCL the same day.

In yet another major political step, the Maoists revived the People’s Revolutionary Council (PRC), literally a parallel government, which had been dissolved after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had been signed in November 2005. “This is in clear violation of the CPA and goes against the spirit of election,” Ajay Narisingh KC, spokesperson of the Nepali Congress said.

Maoist ministers, Hishita Yami and Matrika Yadav joined furious YCL activists in railing against the government outside the house they had captured in Baisepat and established their illegal possession once again. “If they do not return all such houses within a month, they should be evicted by force,” said Congress working president Sushil Koirala.

Despite Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai trying to play down PRC’s revival as a step to facilitate polls to the constituent assembly in April, his sincerity for poll is being doubted from all sides.

Who dun it?

The visit of a high level team of the Indian National Congress (INC) is being taken as India’s realisation that something is wrong somewhere there has gone wrong in India’s policy on Nepal, and failure to address them on time will have serious consequences.

A seven member high level team headed by All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary, Digvijay Singh, takes place at a time when no less than India’s main opposition party – the Bharatiya Janata Party has charged that India’s Nepal policy is out-sourced to the CPI-M; and that the government of India, through its silence is endorsing ‘unconstitutional and undemocratic’ decisions taken by Nepal’s interim parliament ‘under dicta’ from the Maoists.

India, which was at the peak of its popularity in Nepal during the past two years following its mediation in bringing seven pro-democracy parties and the Maoists together through the 12-point agreement in Delhi, is now being seen almost as a failure, as it totally sided with the ruling alliance in every right and wrong. With law and order in shambles, and service delivery poor, the seven party alliance is only concentrating on bashing the monarchy to protect and preserve their radical and progressive image.

It is not yet known the extent of involvement of the Congress and the BJP in reformulating India’s post-2006 policy on Nepal. CPI-M which has represented the government of India in Nepal during the period many times, has given clear message that India’s long pursued two pillar theory is over. And no one during the past visits from the South have interacted with pro-monarchists to the extent that even the Indian embassy in Kathmandu has removed from its guest lists, senior palace functionaries and officials from its official functions.

During all these turbulence and change, the Congress party has only shown a limited involvement by being part of some delegations, but has never in the past sent any group or delegation of its own. The visit of the team led by Singh therefore, assumes more significance.

Interestingly, a mid-level functionary as well as an academic paid a visit to Kathmandu to make a pre-visit assessment. He met people from all sides including founder member of the Nepali Congress and former Prime Minister KP Bhattarai besides senior leaders like KB Gurung, Govinda Rai, Joshi, Khum Bahadur Khadka, Bijay Gachhadar, Sharad Singh Bhandari, Shyam Lai and Chiranjiv Wage who have been opposing GP Koirala’s “surrender to the Maoists and callousness towards Terai” policy.

KP Bhattarai, on the other hand, has been advocating that the party must not give up the policy of national reconciliation initiated by KP Koirala and General Koirala who favoured the constitutional monarchy and the democratic forces together. “I said that when the Indian Congress functionary called on me,” Bhattarai told newsfront, adding, “If India wants stability, peace and democracy in Nepal. It must encourage that line.”

Unmasked

PM ordered raids on YCL offices.

Sitauala challenged

Life is no longer pleasant for Home Minister KP Sitalu as he has been facing open challenges from his newly appointed Deputy Minister of State for Home, Ram Kumar Chaudhary, who has of late taken the reins of the department in his hands, and asked the police and Home Ministry bureaucracy to respond to the illegal activities of the Maoists, if necessary, with force.

Chaudhary is believed to have told Prime Minister Koirala that the morale of the security agencies needs to be boosted. The PM was seeking some clarification from the Minister of State after the Home Minister made complaints simultaneously to the top Maoist leaders and the PM that the raids on the YCL office was “uncalled for” and that he had no role in it.

“He should quit if he could not act as a Home Minister,” Chaudhary is believed to have told the PM on Feb 8. In fact, the raid on the YCL offices has triggered a polarisation in the Home Ministry and top bureaucracy.

Home Secretary Umesh Mainali who loyalty carried out ‘His Master’s voice’ when Sitaula enjoyed unchallenged freedom and power to run his ministry, is now lying low. Chaudhary even told his officials on their face that they should seek transfer elsewhere if they cannot improve the law and order situation and instill a sense of security in the country.

Sources in the PM’s office said that while Koirala supported Chaudhary’s argument that law and order has to be maintained, he asked the new Minister of State not to be seen as acting ‘Independently’. While Mainali and the Chiefs of the APF and the civil police have not made any complaints against Sitaula, a number of other top ranking officials are believed to have expressed their sentiments known to the new minister.

“Most of the police officials have been asked to report to the YCL in their respective areas,” a police official quoted a Deputy Inspector General as complaining to the Minister of State.

A tale of two hijacking

It may be mere coincidence that two Nepalis, one little known and another arguably the best known, are guilty of hijacking two aircrafts in a span of 26 years. Yusuf alias Gopal Man Dama, the little known Nepal has now been awarded life imprisonment by the Delhi based Patiala court and in jail. While GP Koirala, a self-confessed hijacker, is the country’s Prime Minister.

“Yusuf was involved in arranging fake passports for Pakistani hijackers, air tickets and accommodation in Kathmandu besides supplying them with arms in the Tribhuvan international Airport premises. The Indian Airlines plane IC-814 was hijacked in December 1999. India has quite often reiterated that the ISI, Pakistan’s intelligence outfit was allegedly behind the plot.

The previous hijacking in which Koirala himself was involved, was carried out after then Chief of RAW, Chief of India’s external intelligence outfit assured Koirala that he would not be arrested, if the Prime Minister’s revolution is to be trusted. Koirala’s group that hijacked the Royal Nepal Airlines’ aircraft on flight from Bishahar to Kathmandu, diverted the flight to Bihar’s Forbesbagh and decamped with Rs 40 lakhs.

The case that was filed in Araria district court in Bihar was lifted by the government of India after Koirala became the Prime Minister in 1991. It was yet another coincidence that Yusuf and two others, Abdus Lateef and Dilip Kumar, both Indian nationals, were given life term by the CBI court in Delhi when Koirala is the PM in Nepal. Yusuf was nabbed in Kathmandu soon after the hijacking while his two accomplices were arrested in Bombay.

The IC 814 which had taken off from Kathmandu for Delhi on the Christmas Eve in 1999 was hijacked by a group of Pakistanis, and then diverted to Kandahar in Afghanistan after refusing in India. Then Foreign Affairs Minister of India, Jaswant Singh, had personally lied the negotiation with militant groups, and agreed to free Pak ‘terrorists’ lodged in Indian jail as a barter for release of all the passengers and the crew in the aircraft. Rupen Kalyan on his way back home after a honeymoon trip to Nepal with his wife had been shot dead by the hijackers in the aircraft.
Expediton of its kind

In an attempt to bring climbing and climate change together for the first time, ECO Everest Expedition 2008 is being launched. As part of the expedition, Dawa Steven Sherpa of Asia Trekking will be climbing Mt Everest in the spring of 2008 in company of Ken Noguchi, the famous Japanese alpinist and conservationist. Noguchi is the senior advisor to ECO Everest 2008.

Speaking on behalf of International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and Asia Trekking, Communication Officer Nira Gurung said that the expedition will be used as a platform to draw maximum global attention to the issue of climate change and melting glaciers in the Himalayas, and the threats posed by glacial lake outburst floods to the local communities and environment in the Himalayan region. The occasion marks the silver jubilee celebration of ICIMOD which was established in 1983 with the emphasis on increasing awareness that the resilience and adaptation to climate change of the people in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas is an essential element for furthering regional sustainable development as a contribution to a peaceful world. ICIMOD is the main partner in the expedition initiative providing scientific input and technical help.

Promise breaker

The GP Koirala government, especially the minister for civil supplies, has turned into a promise-breaker. Minister SS Gupta failed to ensure smooth supplies, has turned into a promise-breaker. Minister SS Gupta failed to ensure smooth delivery of petroleum products including diesel to the consumers by February 9, the deadline he had set, after asking the transporters not to go on a general strike. As a result, almost all sectors of the society, and most visibly the schools have been hit hard. Many schools in Kathmandu were shut-down as their buses could not operate most visibly the schools have been hit hard. Many schools in Kathmandu were shut-down as their buses could not operate. As part of the expedition, Dawa Steven Sherpa of Asia Trekking will be climbing Mt Everest in the spring of 2008 in company of Ken Noguchi, the famous Japanese alpinist and conservationist. Noguchi is the senior advisor to ECO Everest 2008.

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“We are buying diesel for Rs 64 a litre against Rs. 56 fixed by the government as general rate in Kathmandu,” a senior hotel executive told newsfront.

YCL’s new target

The Young Communist League which Prachanda said would be transformed into a constructive work force has shown its most inhumane face recently. A group of YCL activists beat up a 21-year old youth, a drug-addict and then threw him into the Bishnumati River as part of their campaign against ‘drug addiction.’ Tara Bahadur Lamichhane was taken into ‘custody’ by the YCL activists near Chhetrapati on February 5, taken to their office and later thrown into the river after he was severely beaten. YCL activists are believed to have rounded up many other drug users and let off after some physical punishment.

A group of NGOs working for drug users are likely to lodge a protest with the National Human Rights Commission and other international human rights groups against YCL behavior on drug users who are in need of counseling, care and rehabilitation facilities. YCL activists who beat up Lamichhane warned him that ‘more severe punishments would follow if he did not behave since drug users were burden to the society.’ Prayash, an organisation working for HIV positive, street children and drug users condemned YCL behavior and said they had no authority to punish drug users by taking law into their hands.

Kahane retires

Matthew Kahane, UN Resident Representative to Nepal, will be retiring from service on completion of his term in Nepal. Kahane is scheduled to leave the country on February 25 on completion of his nearly four year long tenure.

‘Deplorable’. “I condemn in the strongest term that violence,” UNMIN Chief IAN Martin said. “I emphasise again that it is the responsibility of the Maoist leadership and leadership of all political parties to instruct their activists that they must respect the rights of all registered parties to campaign freely.” Martin’s statement came when UNMIN and OHCHR was jointly investigating what exactly had happened.

According to Badu who is now under treatment in the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu had said that Young Communist League activists had locked the house he was in, and set-it on fire. “I jumped down to save myself,” he said.

“So far as parallel structures are concerned, what the Comprehensive Peace Accord and the Arms Monitoring Agreement say is there shouldn’t be parallel mechanisms in areas of the state or state machinery,” Martin said, adding he would seek further clarification on the subject with the Maoist leadership.

Renu resigns

Yet another member of the parliament from Terai has quit. Renu Yadav of the Rastriya Janashakti Party resigned from her parliamentary seat and announced that she will be joining the newly formed Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party.

Mrs. Yadav whose husband was killed by the Maoists during insurgency is the sixth member of the parliament from Terai to quit the House membership to join the new regional outfit.

Shailaja better

Senior Congress leader, Shailaja Acharya is much better ‘but still under treatment’ in the Teaching Hospital for depression and other ailments. Doctors said her condition has shown some improvement. Her appoint- ment as Ambassador to India had been annulled following her illness. A large number of her admirers, well wishers and friends visited her in the hospital in the past three weeks wishing her speedy recovery.
It was not entirely unexpected. The police raided half a dozen 'office-cum-residence' and the suspected torturer chamber of the Young Communist League in the capital recently. Maoist Chief Prachanda has accused Minister Sujata Koirala of having ordered the raids. By doing that, he absoluted his trusted lieutenant and Home Minister KP Sitaula of any kind of complicity in the crime.

Many crucial political developments preceded the raids. YCL made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of senior Congress leader and former Minister Dilendra Prasad Badu in western Nepal. The Maoist party reactivated the people's revolutionary council, a parallel government, ostensibly to address people's problems at the local level during elections. And YCL elected three students from a college in Kathmandu the same day.

Despite several assurances and public pledge by Prachanda that YCL will be transformed into a civilized force, their brutality was always on the increase. Worse, a senior leader of the party went to the extent of describing the attack on Badu as a 'minor' job of the peace process. This heinous crime and the feeble justification cannot be accepted as a way or means to transform the country. Giving YCL or any organised group to take law into their hands only means total abdication of its role and responsibility by the state.

The fact that UML leader Bamdev Gautam, who never tried to conceal his proximity with the Maoists, has started criticising the YCL while his party General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal went to the extent of praising the government for the raids, only proves that Maoists have crossed all the limits of political decency. At the same time, such criticism coming from the friendly parties gives an opportunity to the Maoists and the YCL to introspect and behave in a manner that could be accepted as 'political'.

Most of the houses where police conducted raids, are forcibly captured and occupied by the YCL. Under both the comprehensive peace agreement and the 23-point agreement, the Maoists were obliged return those to the rightful owners. Return of all confiscated property is the pre-condition for elections. But the Maoist party and the Home Minister have apparently joined hands to ensure that election should be forced under any circumstances without these property being returned.

Prachanda may have tactical reasons to defend Sitaula and to put the blame on Sujata for the raids. That only proves that Sitaula is hand-in-glove with the Maoists or the YCL in their activities which clearly violate the provisions of the CPA, the very basis for their entry into the peace process. Maoists do not want to be seen as sabotaging the election this time as they did in November. But from the revival of PRC to the incident in Darchula, this ill-planned idea to raid YCL headquarters has diverted the attention from Darchula. Now instead of an unconditional apology, Maoists are better positioned to criticise the government, PM Koirala who was infuriated by the mistreatment of a corrupt who stiphoned millions like Prasai by the YCL, is keeping quiet at the atrocities committed against his party men and a former minister. The reaction of UML and NC toward the incident in Darchula could be described as soft.

Leaders, pay attention

Sitaula's trick

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Point to Ponder

When men are most sure and arrogant, they are commonly most mistaken, giving views to passion without that proper deliberation which alone can secure them from the grossest absurdities.

- David Hume

Stalling election

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With 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages, a republican Nepal does not exist.

Every morning I walk by a machine workshop spilling out on to the local pavement. This morning, as I walked by, the tired eyes of one of the mechanics caught my eye. Those eyes and face were very familiar. This was my father’s favourite workshop and the mechanic I saw today was a young boy over three decades ago. He’s a good mechanic, usually full of humour, but this morning his eyes looked tired and listless.

Like so many of us perhaps, he is beginning to wonder who he is and if this land is his or just the personal property of the seven party alliance, the Maoists, and the Koirala coterie. Or perhaps it belongs to another set of people, another nation or organisation entirely, and all the anguish and despair we feel is providing a great deal of entertainment for some unseen devil with whom the SPAM (Seven Party Alliance and Maoists) have made a pact of the devil.

We need to consider the case of a particular mechanic, usually full of humour, but looking tired and listless this morning. The mechanic I saw was a young boy over three decades ago. He’s a good mechanic, usually full of humour, but this morning his eyes looked tired and listless.

Perhaps the angst is greatest among those of us who supported the changes of 1990. It seemed then for Nepal to move on to a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Those who weren’t around in 1990 might appreciate that, in fact, no matter the exaggerations of hindsight, it was not particularly violent. People were well disciplined for the most part and relied on the power of the pen, silent protest, and peaceful dissent. The latter days were heady and rough, but the optimism of change wiped away any regrets, for a while.

In retrospect it seems that Pandora’s Box was opened then. The way had been paved for certain individuals, with very little qualification and no real understanding of democratic norms, to govern and play havoc with the mandate they had been given. In parliament very little opposition took place by debate; it took the form of walking out when the house was in session, banging the speaker’s rostrum, or hiring unem- ployed youths or perpetual students to burn tyres and create mayhem on the streets.

There have been glimmers of hope. The first year was by and large successful under the stewardship of K.P. Bhattachar and a constitution was drafted which was accepted, the best in the world we were told. The premiership of Man Mohan Adhikari was a particular feature of mine because he had good ideas and he was, at the end of the day, leading the UML in the right direction.

Now we’re told that the 1990 constitution is rubbish and that a monarch, who by and large didn’t come on the scene as such until 2001 and the dreadful massacre, had been plotting against the people all along. Considering the airline’s scandals, a critical number of our elected politicians were not only her to, but also generations of; one wonders how they can be brass faced enough to make such ridiculous statements.

Those who fail look for scapegoats for their failures and this time around it’s the monarchy that has been chosen to be the whipping boy. Forget now the thousands killed by insurgents, property seized, and journalists ‘executed’: forget the wholesale selling off of public property in the privatisation endeavours of a socialist democratic government; and please forget the payoffs for choosing one dam site over another, the Pajoro gas guzzlers; and the laissez faire manner in which foreign NGOs have supped with their own devils, our politicians have decided in their wisdom who is to blame. At this point I must insist that the search for personal blamelessness is a peculiar trait of those in power. It’s not new to Nepal and it does exist elsewhere, only here it is nurtured by political sycophancy and cowardice. Where does that leave us, the people; not the imaginary people who agree with everything the dictatorship of SPAM decides, but the real people who believed we had a country until SPAM sold it off for cheap power?

With 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages, a republican Nepal does not exist. It is a conceit of mainly mountainous land that completes the subcontinent of South Asia and forms a bridge between it and the South-eastern lands of China and Indo China. It didn’t exist at the time of Buddha either and hence the mistaken assumption of the people to the south that the Lord of Peace was ‘an Indian prince.’

Nepal owes its existence to the armies and people who came together in the late 1700s and formed a nation state. It was fortunate that the British invention of India followed it rather than preceded it and kept it out of the mischievous inclination of the Raj to divide and rule. An inclination, it seems, that has been inherited by the scions of Delhi’s South Block.

Looking back, it seems that most people found this area, currently still called Nepal because even our politicians don’t have enough whitewash to wipe it out completely, a place of refuge: the Sherpas for the Armenians and the Himalaya; the restless in search of an identity, it seems, that has been opened then. The way had been paved for certain individuals, with very little qualification and no real understanding of democratic norms, to govern and play havoc with the mandate they had been given. In parliament very little opposition took place by debate; it took the form of walking out when the house was in session, banging the speaker’s rostrum, or hiring unemployed youths or perpetual students to burn tyres and create mayhem on the streets.

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How did you come to live in Baitadi?

I was born in Darjeeling during the Second World War. My mother was a Punjabi from Baitadi who ran away from the war and took refuge in Darjeeling. My father was a Chhetri army officer whose job was to distribute rations in the refugee camps. I was seven when my father died. It was hard for my mother, but she made sure we were educated.

When I was sixteen, I was forced to marry a Major in the army who was 22 years older than I was, and who already had a wife and children as old as I was. My husband was terribly jealous and beat me regularly for no reason. He took me to Hong Kong to live for two years and then to Singapore for two years. I went first on a ship, and later I flew on a plane. In Singapore, I worked as an assistant at a primary school.

My husband was fighting for the Sultan of Brunei. After he retired, we moved to Dharam. By then, I had two small sons and a baby daughter. We were living on my husband’s pension. Gradually, my husband’s fits of rage became more and more terrible. I got this big scar you see on my forehead, when he beat me with a bamboo pole. I was still a young woman, but I began to feel bitter. What had I done? Nothing. Didn’t I deserve to live? My desire to leave my husband was strengthened by a book which said that children are damaged if there is endless fighting between their parents.

But when I asked my husband for my share so the children and I could live separately, he refused to give me a single paisa. There was nothing I could do. My brother was still young and my mother was weak, there was nobody to care for me and fight for my rights. But she told me, “Your mother must be waiting for your return, and if I keep you here, I’ll have her tears on my conscience.” So we came back to Baitadi. And he was right. I suffered much worse.

What were conditions like in Baitadi when you got there?

The basic living conditions were very hard. We had to walk a great distance to get water; firewood was scarce, and there was grueling work to do all the time. Food was poor – there weren’t many vegetables besides onions. Things were terrible for women. There were almost no girls in schools. Even today, there are very few girls who have passed the SLC.

When I first went to Baitadi, brides were bought. My sister in law says, I was bought for 80 rupees. Mothers in law considered their daughters in law to be bought slaves, forgetting they too were paid for. Now women see it differently, realising that their fathers sold them like buffaloes. Girls were married very young. It was considered ideal to have them married before their first menstruation; and many died from giving birth too early, at the age of 13 or 14.

The practice of Chaupadi, strictly enforced, meant that women had to stay in the cowshed, in the cold, or on straw filled with dung, when they were menstruating or giving birth. This tradition continues. Women usually gave birth alone and cut the umbilical cord themselves with a sickle, and they didn’t get much to eat. Many died. Even now new mothers in Baitadi aren’t fed any meat.

How did you become an activist?

After I gave birth to my son, I was so hungry, I had to work. I walked to a school nearby and worked as a volunteer. I didn’t know how to cut grass and carry heavy loads. Then the villagers started to criticise me. They said, she’s not really educated but is just pretending. If she were educated, why should she ever have come to Baitadi? I then went to the education office and met Lukendra Bahadur Chand, who was the district representative. He heard the way I spoke Nepali, and maybe he saw that I was different from other people there. He said, “You go teach in the school nearest to your home, and I will send your appointment letter.” That’s how I became a teacher.

The school was two hours walk from my home. It really was hard. I used to wash my children’s clothes during lunch break in a nearby stream and spread them out to dry. Sometimes cows ate the clothes while I was back inside teaching, and I would burst into tears. My in-laws still expected me to collect my share of firewood. I didn’t know how, so I would buy some of my students a copy or a bar of soap in exchange for their help. Gradually, people started to trust me.

My students would come to school in winter wearing just a shirt with all the buttons gone. To try to keep their chests warm, I would have them put on their shirts backwards and then sew up the back with needle and thread. I had to walk two days to the district office to collect my pay, and while I was there I would go to the health post and get simple medicines like Gentian Violet and Cetamol. When the villagers were sick I would treat them with the medicines.

At one point, an education officer, Sushil Pandey, urged me to participate in all local groups like girl scouts and the forest groups and he made me a member of the District Educational Board.

In the beginning I was shocked by how hard my life was. But then I thought about it. When I had to toil at all the hard work, I remembered that in Hong Kong and in Singapore, a Chinese woman had done all my household chores for just 40 local dollars per month. When I was living that luxurious life, I was suffering in a different way. So, there must be a reason why I was here. I had seen a more advanced society, and I could see what was making people suffer in Baitadi, all its weak points.

I became an activist automatically. I knew it was not right to sell one’s daughter. I knew sick people should go to hospital. By saying these things, I could try to make things a little better.

What were some of the major turning points for you?

Attending the 1996 Beijing Conference on Women changed my life. There was a local NGO called Laligurans which had established a library two hours walk from my home. Another
NGO called READ had provided them with books. I had joined in order to be able to borrow books. I went to look for a new book to read, and when I got there, they said, jokingly, “A letter has arrived, will you go to Beijing?”

I told them that I would go, and everybody laughed at me. They said, “You are already old, it is not good to be in Beijing.”

But they didn’t find anyone else who was willing to go. I came to Kathmandu. Where we were staying there were 300 women from all 75 districts of Nepal. Everybody was different, and at night, we all started to sing and dance together.

There I met Anjana Shakya to whom I told my story. In those days, I always sat with my head bent down and my hands wrapped together, thinking I am such a bad person, I am a mother who left her children. But Anjana said, “You left the house of a rich man and went to Baitadi where there was nothing to eat, and you stuck it out. Before, you were recognised as the wife of a Major Colonel. But now, you have recognised as yourself – as Krishna. You have become a Major Colonel.”

After that, I felt transformed. I felt so good! Sometimes we need someone to help us realise who we really are, isn’t that so?

I will never forget the women who had AIDS at the Beijing Conference. They were singing and dancing with so much joy. They were singing, “Are we the only ones who are going to die? Doesn’t anyone else die?”

What did you do after that?

After returning from Beijing, I felt that I could tackle any sort of problem. Anjana kept inviting me to Kathmandu for different workshops. Each time I attended a workshop, I learned new things and was exposed to new ideas. Then I go back to my village and share it with the people and try to put it into practice.

One of the obstacles to education in my village is that schools are too far away for many children. There are landslides and rivers to cross, so parents don’t send their children until they are much older. Then the children feel inferior to the younger kids in their class who are lucky enough to live close to the school.

Anjana helped me raise funds to build two pre-primary schools. Global Fund for Women and DFID gave me funds to build more. We have over ten schools now. The idea behind it is that mothers can leave their kids at school when they are working. When children get into the habit of going to school very young, they don’t drop out later. It is working. Girls are going to school. We built the schools and the government is paying the teachers’ salaries.

Another hindrance to education has been water. Girl students were coming to school late because they had to walk far to fetch water. After they got home, they have to fetch water again so they get too tired to do their homework. So I submitted a proposal to the Australian Embassy and they paid for six drinking water taps. This has made a great difference. They are even growing fresh greens to eat now.

An NGO called TÉWA gave me money to help poor women who were trying to educate their daughters. We bought 18 goats with the money and divided them between eight groups of women. The idea was that as the goats had offspring, we would give one to each woman who was educating a daughter.

Through Anjana I have met many other people who have helped me. I met the Director of the Mountain Institute, Brian Peinestin, who helped me submit a peace-building proposal to the Asia Foundation. We have gathered people from different villages to make a plan for sharing water, and for building a road without causing erosion. Now we are going to try to raise awareness to stop the practice of Chaupadi, with help from CORE, an NGO started by Frances Katzeli.

What are some of the difficulties?

People here in Kathmandu haven’t seen how it is over there. I’ve tried to explain it. I don’t know the techniques for writing proposals. I just write what I know in Nepali. Raising funds is terribly hard. I feel like a beggar walking around holding out a begging bowl. Sometimes I think I can’t stand it anymore and I am just going to quit.

Then I realise I am the only one going back and forth between here and the village, so at least let me try to do one or two things. It takes me two full days to get here on the bus, 1500 rupees each way. When I get here, I move from house to house so I do not wear out my welcome anywhere, but it is so tiring!

When I get back to the village, everyone has their hand out, “Here is Krishna, what has she brought for us!” My desk is piled a foot high with requests for new schools. What can I do?

At one of our peace-building gatherings I scolded people saying that this money is precious. The money that was donated by the Australians was collected from individuals and even small children who earned it by polishing shoes. So can’t we even share water with each other?

Not everything works. Only a few of the goats that TÉWA provided are left because of the Maoist conflict. Some of the goats were eaten. Some killed by tigers. So many people have fled to India or to the Tarai, leaving everything behind, because of the conflict.

Does development mix with politics?

No! They are best kept separate. During the peak of the Maoist conflict, DFID informed me that they would provide funds for eight schools. I went directly to the area commander of the Maoists and informed him of my plans. I said “What should I do? If you are going to bother me then I’m not going to build these schools. I’m only going to build them if you give me permission.” He gave me permission, but not in writing.

The Maoists were constantly transferred from place to place. Once we started construction, the Maoist cadres started harassing us. They kept demanding to see all the documents but actually, they wanted some of the money. I told them, “If I were afraid of you, I would be building right next to the army, at the district headquarters, but the people right here need these schools.” Eventually they gave up.

The Panchayat times cannot be compared with today’s politics. Back then, it was “Aafo Manche.” But today, murder goes unpunished. If a member of a political party commits a crime then he will be saved from consequences by a minister of that same party. Our villagers are not much into politics. I would say that in previous elections, and now, votes can be bought in large blocks. We should not mix development with this.

What are the gifts of age?

I may be old but my courage is not. I still have the desire to do something for my village. Look, because I’m old, I’m not afraid of men anymore. I can sleep on the bus, I can go anywhere I want. And because I’m retired, I can say whatever I want to, I’m not afraid of being fired. I’m the first and the only lady teacher from Baitadi living on a pension. Whatever happens is for the best, isn’t it? Every life contains suffering and happiness – for rich as well as the poor. After all I’ve gone through, I’ve finally found satisfaction. I have found myself.
Since January 2007, the political landscape of Terai had undergone a change. The Madhes movement has altered not only the political equation in the Terai, but also brought a changed mindset within Terai as well as in the country as a whole. Many among the Madhesis (democratic forces as well as radical armed groups) still believe that in the post-Madhes movement period, the state has not adequately responded to the grievances of the Madhesi people. Although there definitely is certain grain of truth in what they say, the contention is not entirely correct.

Needless to elaborate, but much of the present situation arose mainly due to unnecessary delay in talking to the Madhesis by the government, reportedly at the instance of the Maoists. But the lingering issue does not necessarily mean that nothing positive happened since January 2007. Some of the notable encouraging signals are: the in-principle acceptance for a federal structure, the in-principle acceptance for Madhesi people. But the fact that it is being discussed itself is a positive sign. It is an acknowledgement that the problem does exist, and that a solution needs to be found. Therefore, the agitating parties must not take a rigid posturing that nothing has happened in their favour during the last one year. Instead they must try and find ways and means of carrying these debates through so that it leads to a meaningful conclusion. They must decide whether the fight must continue from the street, or take it to parliament by participating in the CA-election. The faster they do this, the better would it be for the country and the Madhesis people.

The Madhesi political parties must not forget to keep abreast with the fast changing political scenario. They must take into account that, in the first week of January, election seemed impossible. But by the first week of February, election appears very much a possibility. Those elected would be legitimately recognised as representatives of the people, and hence all the decision they take would be considered valid. Are the Madhesis politicians prepared to really miss out on their election bus, and continue fighting from the streets?

The general perception among Madhesis is that the problem of this community is not getting the right kind of attention from national and international media, which again is not entirely correct. However, even with the presumption that such is the case, it would not be the case anymore when Madhesis representatives speak from the Floor of the parliament. They would not only be heard, but would be reported, debated and analysed. And most importantly, such speeches would be would remain as valuable documents of history on Madhesis’ fight for their rights. The parliament therefore, would always be a better bet than the streets for the Madhesis.

Despite the ugly incidents of Janakpur and Birgunj Seven Party Alliance meetings, the Nepali Congress’s effort to create an election atmosphere in the Terai seems to be complimented. Sher Bahadur Deuba did not get deterred by bomb blasts becoming the feature of every meeting he attended. This too deserves greater appreciation. However, his utterances in the meeting were flawed by an ill-timed passionate appeal to the Madhesi people from Deuba, would perhaps have had a better effect and impact not only for his party, but for those who believe in election as the cornerstone of democracy.

(Chandrakishore_jha@yahoo.com)
Burma polls in 2010

Burma said on Saturday it would hold a national election in two years. Critics said it was a public relations move, and noted that no mention was made of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. “We have achieved success in economic, social and other sectors and in restoring peace and stability,” said a junta announcement read on state TV. “Therefore multi-party, democratic elections will be held in 2010.” “The time has now come to change from military rule to democratic civilian rule.” The statement was read in the name of so-called “Secretary Number One” of the ruling junta, Li-Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo. Critics immediately jumped on the statement.

The military dictators are simply trying to deflect the criticism of last year’s murderous crackdown on democratic protestors, said Burma Campaign UK, a pro-democracy group. “It has nothing to do with democracy.” There was no mention of Mrs Suu Kyi, or of her National League for Democracy, which won the last “election” in 1999. The Burmese constitution, being written in a 14-year exercise by a military-supervised national congress, specifically bars Mrs Suu Kyi from running in any election because she was married to a foreigner. Her husband, British academic Michael Aris, died in 1999, but that does not matter. The 2010 election is to be preceded, in May of this year, by a national referendum to rubber-stamp the regime’s constitution. This is what the generals call their “road map to democracy.” Critics have denounced the constitutional convention process as a farce because the military hand-picked most delegates and Suu Kyi could not attend.

Mrs Suu Kyi’s spokesman Nyan Win. “Before knowing the results of the referendum, the government has already announced that elections will be held in 2010,” he noted. This means the generals already know the result of the referendum.

Britain, one of the military’s regime’s harshest critics, noted that Suu Kyi and other independent political leaders had not been consulted about the constitution or the election process. “A genuine and inclusive process of national reconiliation” is necessary for (Burma’s) transition to democracy, Britain’s Foreign Office said, calling for the release of Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Pakistan

A new deal?

The indications that the government has opted for another peace agreement with Balouchistan – particularly given the failure of two previous attempts to strike a deal with Baluchistan militant and his forces in South Waziristan. The unexpected unilateral ceasefire declared by Mehsud, followed within hours by the announce-ment of a ‘grand jirga’ which the interior minister says the government has decided to convene, seem to be too much of a coincidence to be entirely unrelated to each other. It is quite extraordinary that the authorities should see it fit to enter into any accord with militants headed by a man who they themselves say is behind the death of a major national leader, and of many others. Baluchistan is the amir of the Taliban in Pakistan, and an instrumental figure behind the setting up in December of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TIP), a group that aims to unite various militant units operating in Pakistan. Since the end of last year, the government has consistently stated he is the man behind the murder of Benazir Bhutto and the staging of many of the recent suicide attacks that have rippled through Pakistan. The fact that it is now attempting what seems like yet another deal with a man who not only has a long criminal past but, quite evidently, suffers from some level of derangement. After all, no sane person could kill so many people, almost all of them fellow Muslims, and yet maintain that such policies are just.

Whereas the government has held that it is in a position of strength, has “convinced” militant forces and is now confident it can use a ‘jirga’ comprising tribal leaders and political representa-tives to bring peace, these claims cannot be accepted at face value. The fact is that in the past too authorities have stated deals entered into with militants would bring calm. This has not happened, with the lulls in fighting apparently providing an opportunity for the militants to re-group and develop new strategies for operations against state forces. There has also been little display of truthworthi-ness, with militants apparently showing no hesitation in violating the terms of peace accords. Perhaps for men so strong in their conviction of the justice of their cause – to enforce their ‘terms of peace accords.’

The man, whom the Father of the Nation had called abhay sadhak (fearless), passed away at 4.15 in the morning, leaving behind his two sons and thousands of leprosy-affected people who revered him as a saint.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who described Baba Amte as a “legend” and a “true Gandhian”, cut short a trip to Punjab as a mark of respect and returned to Delhi. The Maharashtra government has “decided to give Baba Amte a state funeral” tomorrow, minister Anies Ahmed told PTI. Ahmed, who looks after Chandrapur district where the Magaspay award winner’s ashram Anandwan is situated, said the social activist would be buried tomorrow.

Born on December 26, 1914, in Maharashtra’s Wardha district, Baba Amte, whose real name was Murlidhar Devidas, trained as a lawyer and took part in the freedom struggle. “I have never been frightened of anything. Because I fought British. Temoes to save the honor of an Indian lady, Gandhiji called me abhay sadhak”, a fearless seeker of truth…. But the same person… quivered in fright when he saw the living corpse of Tulsiram, no fingers, no clothes, with maggots all over,” Baba Amte had said, recalling his encounter with the dying man.

Terified, the young Devidas had run away, but forced himself to return and feed the man. He also put up a bamboo shed to protect him from the rain. Tulsiram died under his care and the incident changed the young man’s life.

In 1949, Baba Amte went to the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine to learn more about leprosy. Armed with a wonder drug, he started Andanwad, which soon became the centre of his crusade — helping leprosy patients become self-confident and “productive.”

He also once allowed bacilli from a leprosy patient to be injected into him for tests. In 1963, he was awarded the Damien-Dubinaward, consid-ered the highest in the field of leprosy.

He also spoke out against caste and religious violence and, in December 1985, went on a Bharat Jodo (unite India) march from Kanyakumari to Jammu. Asked whether he saw himself as a messiah or a social worker, Baba Amte had said he couldn’t carry the “heavy load of that cross” carried by Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Father Damien, a 19th-century Belgian priest who worked among leprosy patients and died of the disease.

“Can’t I walk in the shadow, in the purview of that cross?” (News & Analysis)
The capacity of the Buddhas is unlimited.

Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

...vi) Pratyekabuddhas are more advanced than the Sravakas. They appear only when the teaching of the Buddha has been completely lost. But they are below the levels of a Samyak Sambuddha (the fully enlightened Buddha). As Sakyamuni’s dispensation still exists strongly, there are no Pratyekabuddhas.

v) The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The capacity to see far becomes more refined through the kalpas of practice. So how can we now expect ordinary yogis to have the same power as the Buddha. Not even the Devas in any realm of existence can come anywhere near the Buddha.

There are special exercises in various texts to develop the power of purvanivas (ausadhi) and mantras too but the strength of such remembrance and the distance in past time will be far beyond those who have attained it through samadhis and also they will be less permanent in the case of drugs.

This is the proof of rebirth within Buddhism. The Buddha’s past life has given by the Buddha himself is recorded in the Jatakas. The stories of the Jatakas seem to have influenced the making of similar genre literature in almost all religious systems of the Indian subcontinents and further on.

(To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)
“Does the huge bell still ring to wake people out of their dreams?”

Yuyutsu RD Sharma

The World Book Fair at New Delhi opened with ominous speeches from dignitaries and writers. Most of the speakers including Professor Vipan Chandra unleashed their fears of communal strife taking hold of the country, and books as the only weapon left to save the state from the situation. Soon after, an overcast sky over Pragati Maidan where the fair was held succeeded in keeping the book lovers away from the world’s largest book buzzle.

Russia remained the guest of honor this year and the over 23 countries are participating in the fair. There was also an international rights exhibition featuring works on and by Mahatma Gandhi, in the 50th year of his martyrdom. Titled “In Words and In Deeds,” the exhibition displayed 1,000 titles in Indian languages. There were also some published in French, German, Finnish, Spanish and Brazilian.

But as the week moved on, one saw a strange indifference coming from the general public. Was it from the onslaught of electronic media or simply the transition that the subcontinent seems to be passing through?

As a regular visitor over the last two decades, I noticed a change in the behavior of audiences that flocked in great numbers to the fair. Have the organisers not really sensed the mood of the public or have books become obsolete? The school exams in India and Nepal are forthcoming, that could be another reason of not many families coming to the fair grounds. There is so much in the Internet and other new mediums of cyber space keeping the needs of average readers fulfilled.

Although in the West it has not been the case. The book industry seems to be growing and during Christmas time you see people lining up before bookshops the same way we here line up at petrol stations. At the White Lotus book stall, I saw a change in people’s interest in searching books from Nepal. Over the past decades, Nepal has remained a great mystery kingdom, a hidden Hindu. Shangri-la for the Indian readers.

But this time most of the inquiries were centered on the political turbulence of the nation in transition. There is still nostalgia in the minds of some Indian and foreign readers and they refuse to see the new avatar of a nation trying to come in grips of its destiny. The books on the Maoist insurgency also were not in great demand.

Opposite my stall, an American couple from Urdhara Book Fellowship and Uversa Press, Colorado kept asking me questions about the Nepali that was. They asked me about Nepal streets and Chai shops? They had come to Nepal in the sixties and enjoyed the silence of the Himalayan capital? “Do you still have ‘Chai and Pie Shop’ in Freak Street?” Does the huge bell still ring to wake people out of their dreams?

I kept smiling sadly, hearing in my mind the sirens of the emergency vans hooting through smoke blinded streets of the Himalayan capital. (writer@yuyutsu.de)

Immigration reform is a major issue for the Nepali immigrants in the US.

Bhumika Ghimire in USA

The Democrats will decide who will be their candidate for November presidential elections during their national convention (August 25-28, Denver, Colorado). Hillary Clinton, who until recently was thought to be the front runner and ‘most likely’ to get the nomination is now forced to re-think her campaign after fast gains made by Barack Obama.

On Thursday, CNN reported that in late January Clinton campaign faced cash crunch and the candidate lent $5 million to her campaign and that some senior members of her campaign staff have agreed to work without pay for a month. Added to the finance issue is her not so great performance at the Super Tuesday primaries. She won in eight states versus Obama’s 11 and she is also closely followed by Obama on delegate count. According to The New York Times (Feb 5, 2008), Clinton has 912 delegates and Obama has 741 with primaries in more than 23 still to go.

Now Hillary is trying to add some momentum into her campaign by appealing to those who have stayed loyal to her despite the troubles- the immigrants. Clinton is actively courting the large Hispanic-Latino voting block. During the primaries in California, according to various reports, it is their votes that made all the difference for Hillary and she won the state.

Her campaign is also looking at Indian Americans for support. Right before the February 5th Super Tuesday primaries, Clinton wrote an op-ed for India Abroad titled “US-Indian Relations. A New Era” and pledged to work for better US-India ties in an effort to woo the large number of Indian American voters in key states like New York, California and New Jersey. Compared to Indian Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Nepalis are a small minority group and no major candidate including Clinton is actually courting them. Still they are keenly observing the candidates and looking into the issues.

In Hillary’s home state of New York, there is support for her among the Nepal community. Immigration reform is a major issue for them. A majority of those I talked to are looking at Hillary with hopes that she will fix the system and make things easier for immigrants who are already here and those who want to come here. Mohan Gyawali, President of Ridgewood Nepalese Society says that he supports Senator Clinton because of her immigration policy.

He also said that her staff has always been open to local immigrant community and listened to their concerns. He hopes the Senator’s experience of working through Washington would help her get something done about the immigration mess in the country. New York Nepali Times has officially endorsed Senator Clinton. Bed Kharel editor of Nepalnewusa.com said that his organization has no plans of endorsing any candidate but on a personal level he is behind Hillary. The reason: like Mr. Gyawali Mr. Kharel also supports Sen. Clinton’s immigration policy and hopes that she will continue President Bill Clinton’s policy on international relations.

Luna Ranjit, a Nepali immigrant rights activist in New York holds quite different view in her opinion none of the candidates including Hillary are committed to what immigrant rights advocates are championing.

On Clinton’s approach to immigration, her campaign website says, “Hillary has consistently called for comprehensive immigration reform that respects our immigrant heritage and honors the rule of law. She believes comprehensive reform must have as essential ingredients a strengthening of our borders, greater cross-cooperation with our neighbors, strict fair enforcement of our laws, federal assistance to our state and local governments, strict penalties for those who exploit undocumented workers, and a path to earned legal status for those who are here, working hard, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to meet a high bar.”

Even though her stance on immigration is attracting support from various immigrants groups including Nepalis, whether she can actually deliver on those promises is debatable. Conservatives have long railed against the “comprehensive immigration reform” Hillary and other democrats support. They see it as a set-out and have mounted strong opposition. President Bush tried to pass an immigration reform bill last year but had to withdraw because of pressure from conservatives.
The month of November bears a special significance for Terai dwellers in Nepal. Usually regarded as the month of harvest, it brings with it loads of joy to all. The fields, villages and streets are all filled with the aroma of freshly cut paddy. The granaries are usually full with newly harvested rice and the aroma of new rice wafts from every kitchen in the villages.

The children await the harvest with much eagerness. After school hours or taking turns to herd the cattle and goats, they glean rice from the fields. Scouring the fields they search the rice stalks missed by the reapers. The collected rice is bartered with petty sellers offering local delicacies. The rice is often sold in shops and the money saved to spend in the village fêtes and markets.

Meanwhile the farmers prepare jhuttis – artistic form of rice stalk sheaf weaving. Especially, the Tharus prepare jhuttis for each variety of rice they harvest. The jhuttis are hung high on the meh (the bamboo pole to which the oxen are tethered while threshing rice). Even the meh is erected performing traditional religious rites.

Jhuttis are of different shapes and sizes. They are inspired by the nature and things around like, kauwa tholi – the crow's beak, patiya – the mat, kakahi – the comb, jhunjhuna – the baby's toy, bena – the fan, bakhti – the granary, maur – the turban a bridegroom wears in Terai.

The belief is that, after the rice is harvested, there remains nothing for the birds to peck on. Hence, the tradition started, of keeping a jhutti of each species of rice harvested. The jhuttis thus hung, provide food for the birds. It shows love for nature and conservation among the Tharus.

“Our ancestors loved and worshipped the nature,” says Chandra Kishore Kalyan, President of Tharu Welfare Society, Siraha. “They weaved jhuttis so that the birds didn’t die of hunger after the harvest.”

The Tharus believe that jhutti rice is a cure for nausea. Nathar Tharu of Sishwani village has a collection of 20-25 years old rice. He provides the rice for free to the people suffering from nausea.

The month of November is special to Tharu women. It is the time to show their creativity. They weave the jhuttis in their leisure time and the young girls learn the trick while herding the goats and cattle. Playing with the rice sheaf they come up with the beautiful shapes and sizes, as shown in the photographs.