Two mistakes
Party unity wrong: PM

With just a month left for the polls to the constituent assembly, Prime Minister GP Koirala is giving conflicting messages regarding the party unity and the citizenship issue. According to senior leaders of the Congress Party, Koirala has been confessing his two major ‘mistakes’- one against the interest of democracy and another against country’s sovereignty.

“Distributing citizenship to 24 lakh people in Madhesh without any proof to back-up the entitlement was a mistake as it will pose a threat to the national unity in the long-run,” Koirala is believed to have told some senior leaders of the party at his residence recently. The other mistake, “was to have united the two Congress party.” Koirala made the confession when senior party leaders mostly from western Nepal who were denied tickets, called on him separately.

Putting the entire blame for denial of certain ‘deserving candidates’ on Sher Bahadur Deuba (who headed the Congress-Democratic party till it was united with the one led by the Prime Minister) Koirala is believed to have said, “Deuba made it a prestige issue that some of the senior and deserving people did not get the ticket. I could not challenge him.” Among those who met him recently to express their unhappiness included Sushil Koirala was given a free hand to decide on his followers, PM Koirala himself accommodated some of the candidates who Sujata and Shekhar wanted. The candidates belonging to the Deuba faction have been complaining that since Koirala controls the purse, they are not getting money from the party’s central office, leaving it on Deuba to manage funds for them.

Koirala has been confessing his two major ‘mistakes’- one against the interest of democracy and another against country’s sovereignty.

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Yadav says no to GPK

The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) has declined to consider Prime Minister GP Koirala's request to withdraw its candidates in favour of his daughter Sujata Koirala and nephew Shekhar Koirala. PM Koirala's request was turned down by MJF leader Upendra Yadav and Bijay Gachchedhar who are contesting election to the constituent assembly from Sunsari and Morang against Sujata and Shekhar respectively. PM Koirala who was to return to Kathmandu from Biratnagar on March 10 sent feelers to the MJF leaders that they should not cause a situation where pro-democracy votes are eaten. "But the response was negative," a family source told newsfront.

With the prospect of the Congress declining by the day, "Koirala now seems reconciled to the fact that he may not be able to lead the government after the CA polls," a senior ability of the Congress who is very close to the PM said. MJF's rebuf has not only demoralised the PM, but is also posing a threat to the Congress party as a whole in around 120 constituencies in the Terai. With Maoist party either absent in most parts of Terai, or, the obvious advantage of the force conflict between the MJF and the Congress is likely to go to the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninists (CPN-UML). A senior leader of the United Madhesi Democratic Front (UMDF) said the PM himself was responsible for scuttling every possibility of understanding in the election. "He denied cooperation and an alliance with the Congress in the last 30 seats, but Koirala was not willing to concede to anything. "UMDF" does not have any candidates against Sujata and Shekhar Koirala was a direct result of that," the Front leader said. "The question of any alliance or understanding at this point is over. I will be meeting Koirala after I win the election," Gachchedhar told newsfront.

A year has lapsed after the government promised fool-proof security to the diplomats in the county. But the Norwegian ambassador was robbed, and a security guard wounded during an armed robbery at his residence in Bhanepatan early Sunday. Ambassador Torleif Toren was at his residence when the armed robbery took place, but he was lucky to escape unharmed. The robbers took away a personal laptop of the ambassador besides Rs. 40,000 and 90 Euro. An armed guard who put up some resistance was attacked by the robbers, police said.

The attack on the security staff of the ambassador and robbery at his house comes less than a year after Prime Minister GP Koirala and Foreign Affairs Minister, Sahana Pradhan had apologised for the attack on US Ambassador James Moriarty and Abraham Abraham, Representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, during their visit to Jhapa by the Young Communist League. Koirala had also personally apologised for the Moriarty during his farewell speech for the Norwegian American Embassy in July.

In response to a collective letter of concern by most of the diplomatic and UN missions in Nepal for their safety in the wake of these attacks, the government had promised to make all arrangements regarding this issue. The YCL activists had however been let off without any cases filed against them.

An official in Sital Niwas said what happened at the residence of the Norwegian ambassador was a reflection of the prevailing law and order situation in the country including the capital, and that, "it does not go without saying that targeting any diplomat." The robbery has received huge publicity and embarrasses the government very badly and "possibly the issue will go unnoticed by the government there," the official said.

Unsafe diplomats

How safe are the common people?

A phenomenal increase in the number of tourists coming to Nepal might be good news for the hotel and restaurant business as well as for the rickshawalas. And the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) cadre was divided. "The YCL activists who are divided. "But the response was negative," a family source told newsfront. In response to a collective letter of concern by most of the diplomatic and UN missions in Nepal for their safety in the wake of these attacks, the government had promised to make all arrangements regarding this issue. The YCL activists had however been let off without any cases filed against them.

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How to ensure safety of diplomats?

Breach

King's route leaked

In what appears as a major security breach, King Gyanaendra's visit to Pashupatinath and Guheshwori temple as a 'commoner' was leaked to the media. His visit to the temple was usual for security and status got into print in the media with details of the route and timing soon after it was conveyed by the Royal palace to the Prime Minister's house.

A source in Baluwatar confirmed that a senior palace official had conveyed to PM Koirala on the eve of the Shivriat that the king would like to go to the temple during "Aadi". The visit was planned with clearance from the PM, "But given last year's attack on the king and the security risk that he faces in the current political climate, security agencies at the top level had been informed to keep the route details a secret," sources said. The palace sources refused to comment on the issue.

However, despite the 'leakage' King Gyanaendra, accompanied by queen Komal, drove to Guheshwori temple and then to Pashupatinath spending more than an hour in Pashupati. PM Koirala who represented "secular Nepal" in the temple visited the temple just before the king and spent nearly ten minutes there. He had stopped the palace from getting involved in distribution of alms to the Sadhus assembled there from different parts of Nepal and India, asking the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PAĐT) to manage the entire affair this time around.

Some of the Sadhus from India however, declined to accept the alms, saying that the supply of logs for fire and other arrangements including the supply system was poor this year. An estimated 250,000 pilgrims visited the temple on the Mahashivratri this year. The figure which was far less compared to last year could be because of the unrest in Terai and shortage of fuel, a PAĐT source said.

Some people raised slogans in support of the king as he came out. King Gyanaendra smiled but chose not to respond to any of the queries of the media people present there.

Extermination list

From rickshawalas to hotels

A seven party probe panel belonging to the ruling alliance has concluded that the attack last month on Congress leader, Dilendra Prasad Badu in Darchula by the Maoist cadres, was done "with the intention of murdering him." The probe panel however, suggested that it was for the political party concerned, and not the government to take action against the cadres.

The probe panel headed by Shankar Poshkhum of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninists (CPN-UML) submitted its findings along with recommendations for actions to Peace and Reconstruction Minister, Ram Chandra Poudel on March 5. The 26-page report suggests that the Maoist leadership must take action against the people involved in the incident "which apparently started against Mr. Badu’s life.”

Badu, a radical pro-republican politician, was attacked during a Congress and someone considered close to the Maoists earlier, had jumped down from the third floor of his house after Maoists locked it outside and set it ablaze. He was discharged from the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu after nearly two weeks treatment for injuries and trauma that he sustained in the attack.

The all party panel had been asked to go into the incident involving attack on Badu besides the confron- tation between security forces and the Young Communist League in Kathmandu valley after Minister of State for Home, RK Chauthary, ordered the police to evict YCL from houses which they had forcibly captured.

The probe team has not blamed the police for the raids, and neither it maintained that YCL and Maoist cadres were still driven or guided by the war-time psychology. "All these clashes and attacks by the YCL are influenced by that," the report said. It has also held Maoist guilty for unilaterally attacking on a series of attacks on other party cadres in Balitadi, Sindhir and other parts of the country.

Instead, the panel saw no reason for the government to act on 'these crimes' by the Maoists as it simply asked the party to discipline its workers and take ‘internal actions’.

Narayan Sharma, a Maoist member in the probe panel, however, wrote a note of dissent suggesting that no action should be taken against his party cadres who, "may have acted in retribution.

But that does not fill their deep pocket. So they have issued fresh orders to the restaurants in Kathmandu to levy ten per cent additional amount from the customers. This ten per cent which has to be in cash, is over and above the ten per cent service charge added in the bill, meant for hotel unions controlled by the Maoists.

"This ten per cent is not meant for us, as a major part of it goes to the leaders of the hotel union that is under Maoist control," an employee working in a Lazimpat restaurant told newsfront.

Hotel owners complain that YCL and Maoist cadres have, "asked us to charge ten per cent more in cash and hand it over to them. They have also threatened that we will not be able to run our business if we do not comply with their orders." The new drive is supposed to be a way of collecting election money for the Maoists. While party candidates in the capital which among others include Party Chief Prachanda, Ministers Pampa Bhushal and Hishik Yami besides senior leaders Banshman Pran alias Anant and Hitman Shaha.

Another restaurant owner at Durbar Marg said he that he would rather close down the hotel than succumb to this 'day light political robbery' policy. He said the restaurant owners will be collectively opposing the move in a formal way, adding, "We will also approach the Election Commission against this terror tactics of the Maoists."
What will Nepal be like in 40 years when Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai will be approaching 100 years. If they survive that long? It will be one of the world’s most prosperous and advanced countries. But in 40 days Prachanda will be the first president of the ‘Republic Nepal.’ These are the promises that Maoists have made, a document of commitment released last week.

The manifesto that among other things promises 10,000 MW hydro-electricity generation within 10 years, almost 15 times increase in the per capita income of each Nepal and a revolutionary land-reform promising land to the tillers on domestic front, scraping of the 1950-treaty of peace and friendship with India, review of other unequal bilateral and multilateral relations, settlement of Susta and Kalapani issues on the basis of evidences and in ‘mutual interest’ on the external front. The manifesto also says that it will stop the 193-year old practice of recruitment of the Gorkha soldiers in the British and Indian army right away.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPNM) that has been led by communism coming from Khyen-Khas upper castes, claimed these castes for Nepal being relegated to the current state of economic and social position, but made no promise that the leadership will go outside the group. It insists that the country will be a Federal Democratic Republic divided into 11 provinces: two of them, Bheri-Sutri and Karnali-Mahakali, based on geography; and the rest based on caste and ethnicity. Each state will be autonomous and have the right to self determination. Despite Maoists’ present conduct and approach on the contrary, it guarantees that it will honour all the human and fundamental rights including right to property and right to religion besides freedom of the press.

The arrival of the South Korean team is a clear breach of code of conduct prescribed by the Election Commission (EC), who were locked in a bitter tussle with UNMIN officials and Nepali media. The Maoists tried to obstruct the election meeting of Rashtriyana Pratirtya Party (RPP) Chief Pushpa Kamal Thapa and Shumsher Rana at his constituency in Sindhupalchowk. According to the complaint lodged by Rana with the EC, the Young Communist League assaulted his supporters and tried to obstruct his election meeting on March 8. Political parties, international community and the EC are quietly pursuing a ‘verbal complaint’ that - Maoists have issued a secret circular to their party units in constituencies and districts to obstruct election meeting and use weapons if necessary, but without making it obvious that the have done it. The confident circular, sources say, also suggests that there were arms and ammunition supplied in different constituencies to face any eventually during the electioneering and polling.

Not so innovative
Perhaps nobody took it seriously when Maoist Chief Prachanda said his party would capture power through the polls. Now it shows he has the knack to copy electoral malpractices used elsewhere. It seems Maoists have fielded at least 16 candidates from Khatmandu constituency -10 as independent candidates. Although all of these seem tilted against Prachanda, the party’s official candidate, it is basically meant to use all resources including two vehicles each of which every candidate is entitled to while campaigning for Prachanda. The practice is quite common in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where either independent candidate is fielded by major party contestants so that the vehicles of the lesser candidates could be used for greater mobility of the greater one.

Moreover, each candidate gets to have two agents posted in each booth. As a result, Prachanda led Maoist party can have 38 agents in each booth and they can easily keep an eye on who is voting for which party. What could poor Election Commission do to defend such innovating and ‘hot-lag’ methods used in the election? But at least it has asked the Maoists to respond to the news that it has fielded 16 candidates to use their resources.

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Justifying plunder

It is a rare moment in the current context of Nepal that the Supreme Court (SC) musters enough courage to issue a show cause notice to the government on issues of public importance. It happened, belatedly though, that the SC at last mustered enough courage to ask the government not to discredit Rs. one lakh each to the sitting members of interim parliament which the finance ministry allocated. The allocation that was made on the eve of election process was clearly meant to bribe electorate in the name of carrying development activities.

A parliament that has rarely discussed and debated development issues in the House suddenly displaying its collective will and commitment to development is unbelievable to say the least. The SC which initially chose not to restrain the government from allocating the fund when a case was filed before it, however, felt compelled after the Election Commission (EC), issued orders to the government not to go ahead with the allocation. It would have been a matter of shame for the SC not to have taken cognisance of what the EC did, and if swiftly passed fresh instruction to the government conforming what the EC did.

For any sensible government, it would have been the right occasion to retreat and inform the government that it was not going to go ahead with the allocation. But the response from Prime Minister KP Oli, and Speaker Subash Nemawar have hinted before the SC clearly indicates that both have tried to justify the plunder and they have displayed deficiency of their character as well as moral bankruptcy.

They have tried to justify this heinous crime simply by stating that there was nothing wrong in it as it was just a continuation of what the previous government had done. Their reactions cannot be taken merely as individual opinion or the stance taken by Oli or Nemawar. This gives the impression that both the executive and the legislature are as corrupt institutions with no respect left for what the election Commission or the SC has desired.

The government has been mildly rebuked already by some members of the international community, although many of them, who were earlier vocal against institutionalised corruption during earlier regimes, seem to be in a condoning mood this time, through sheer silence. There are also reports that taking advantage of previous regimes, seem to be in a condoning mood this time, taking it seriously as they should be.

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Mother of all elections in a mortgaged nation

Without appropriate security and safety of the citizens, the voting booths may remain empty, foiling the very purpose of the elections.

The international community must have heaved a sigh of relief on this occasion as the Nepali leaders, particularly the government, had been making promises but hardly keeping them in the two failed attempts earlier. The people of Nepal, too, had been pushed on edge by the uncertainties surrounding the most important election of all times in Nepal. It was agreed by most during the 2006 April revolution that the constituent assembly would chart a new course for Nepal ushering into an era of prosperity and pride for all Nepalis.

Among others, the key issue revolved around the lack of inclusiveness of all people of Nepal owing to outdated and illegal practice of non-inclusion of the weak and vulnerable-class in the society and national affairs. While there was an overriding concern on Maoists’ action during and after the elections, lack of elections would have placed Nepal on a path to massive confrontation between the existing and emerging forces. The entire country could have been easily drawn into a civil war of unimaginable proportions. The future of all Nepals looked bleak. Fortunately for all, the catastrophe has been averted presently.

However, the government which has the responsibility of conducting the elections cannot remain compliant and not do everything in its power to make it a success. Since the government holds the state power and has legal authority within the bounds of Nepali constitution (which, however seems to be changing at the beck and call of seven parties) it must first provide the much-needed security in the country. Without appropriate security and safety of the citizens, the voting booths may remain empty, foiling the very purpose of the elections.

Moreover, nobody can imagine, much less feel, the ‘freeness and fairness’ of elections if every eligible voter is not allowed to vote.

Since the forthcoming election is the first of its kind in terms of marking the ballot as mixed system of direct and proportional representation is being planned, the voters need to be educated clearly on all options available to them. For example, if a voter likes a party but does not like a candidate can he still vote for the party without supporting the candidate? Does the voter have a choice of supporting a party and also vote for a candidate of another party?

Without clearly understanding these basics the entire exercise might turn into a farce. Wrong things done now would yield wrong results. Although it is the government’s responsibility to ensure a free and fair election for the sake of present and future Nepali generations, government efforts alone may not suffice to educate and prepare the voters for same.

The political parties and their leaders, who are taking part in the election, must support the effort of the government. The reports received so far appear to be quite inadequate in the sense that neither the parties’ cadres have come in contact with the voters nor the voters are fully aware of the importance as well as the modality of the constituent assembly election. This creates a good opportunity for the Nepali civil society by enabling it to make its move quickly and efficiently. This task can be achieved, among others, with the help of media which is the only sector that has developed and expanded during the last one decade in Nepal.

Disregard to the code of conduct established by the election commission has become a norm rather than an exception. Illegal actions and activities of sister organisations of some of the parties contesting in the election have placed the rest in an awkward position. Some others are making unwarranted noises such as ‘seizing power by any means’ or ‘the party will resort to a force of massive resistance if confronted in the process of electioneering’.

All these remarks point to confrontation in-the-making. The government has remained virtually non-existent and condones everything in the name of furthering the peace process. So much so that some of the well-meaning leaders have taken a submissive attitude reflective in their statement that ‘if anything were to go wrong United States and India will take care of Nepal’. It seems to be a clear case of a mentality of a mortgaged nation.

Nepalis must wake up in time to get out of this mentality since a mortgaged nation can hardly find a firm ground much less stand tall on it. We all must be reminded of the courage, valor and pride of a free and independent nation, although impoverished.
Real obstacle for elections—the Maoists

I was aghast to read that Dr.Baburam Bhattarai, a senior Maoist leader declaring, “The Maoists would launch a new revolution if his party lost the elections,” during his election campaign rally in Bharatpur, Gorkha recently. Furthermore, Prachanda, the commander of the so called Peoples Liberation Army has been reported by Kantipur Daily to have reached some form of an agreement with the UML to secure his victory from constituency number 10 in Kathmandu. What this signifies is that the Maoists are caught in a serious dilemma about facing elections. Most importantly, the silence of the Maoists in the recent elections. Most importantly, the crisis fermenting in the Maoist camp. In a free and fair election, the Maoists stand no chance of securing a majority.

I remain very much a pessimist - I doubt the elections will happen. There are three things that need to go wrong for the elections not to happen and about 30 things that need to happen correctly if the elections are really to take place. First, the Maoist insurgency is not just a Nepal phenomenon but it’s a global and a regional phenomenon. The Maoists have been aided by international leftist organisations and of course the COMPOSA and the CPI-M in India. Having said this, the Maoists came into an agreement with the SPA as a tactical move to capture state power through the 12 Point Agreement. 

However, if the Maoists fail to secure a majority in forthcoming elections, the Maoist party will not be in a position to implement their revolutionary ideals. The whole purpose or the rationale of participating in the transitional phase and participating in the elections would prove futile if the Maoists can’t secure a majority and implement their outdated dogmatic ideals. So, in a perfect situation you will have elections that are semi free and fair and the Maoists will reject the results.

On the other hand, the Maoists will not want to be in a position where they are singled out for the deferral of the polls. Hence, they will participate in the polls but they will want to dictate the terms and the conditions of what they define as free and fair elections. In a free and fair election, the Maoists know they stand no chance of winning. Even Prachanda has been forced to negate an agreement with the UML to ensure his victory from Kathmandu where the UML have a strong base.

If the Maoists lose these elections, their revolution and of course the leadership will be in utter crisis. To secure a majority in the forthcoming elections, the Maoists would have to capture booths and hold farcical polls but then other political parties will either boycott or not agree to the results of such polls. In any event, the Maoists want to capture power - they have to or they face a crisis. This means such as abduction, intimidation and coercion.

Concurrently, the Maoists are also guilty of orchestrating some of the worst crimes that often resulted in unimaginable human rights abuses. The people in general are buoyed by the prospect of the polls and have given in into the intimidation of the Maoists for the sake of peace and democracy. However, the Maoists know that the longer they remain a part of the status quo their chances of getting exposed for who they actually stand for is higher. Hence, they need to capture power to avoid further embarrassing exposures.

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Born in Kathmandu in 1927, Kesar Lal Shrestha is one of Nepal’s most prolific writers, with over 100 articles and three dozen books to his name. His works include original poetry and stories; collections of the rich oral literature of this country; and English translations of works written in Newari and Nepali. His contribution to the literature of Nepal has been great.

Even so, he is a gentle person, unassuming and modest about his accomplishments. He likes to answer questions by telling a story, and can accomplish this by telling a story, and can tell us about his own life and of those around you.

Ellen Coon interviewed him recently for newsfront:

Tell us about your latest books.

There is Legends of the Kathmandu Valley, published by Nepal Bhasa Academy. This may be my last book about the legends of the valley. And then, my latest book is a slim book of poems, The God of Compassion. I have been writing on and off about Buddhist themes, very simple things like the Buddha meeting an old man, seeing a dead man, and then the night his son was born. And about my visits to Lumbini and Kathinagar – what those places mean to me personally. As another writer has said, I feel lucky to have been born in the same part of the world where Lord Buddha was born so many centuries ago.

How did you become a writer?

For as long as I can remember I wanted to write. I wrote my first story when I was 18. It was published in an Indian magazine called Pushpa, in the December 1945 issue. I tried to write what an Indian reader would expect, under the pen name Ashok Pal. I published about a dozen stories back then. My greatest achievement at that time was to write an article about Shivarrat that got published in the Statesman, in Calcutta. I didn’t use my pen name that time.

How did you start publishing folktales and legends?

I always looked back at things for me to write about. I am curious about everything. I wrote some Newar stories – one that in those days, every little boy and girl had heard, like Dronchalecha – sort of our Cinderella. I showed the stories to an American friend, and he thought that they should be published. So I got a loan for 400 rupees, and went down to Nagpur and got 500 copies printed on Nepali paper. That was in 1961. The book was called Lure and Legends of Nepal, and it is still in print.

You have published many books of folktales, but not just Newari stories. You have trekked all over Nepal collecting stories.

I have always liked three things: writing, trekking and travelling, and photography, when I could afford it. I have always felt at home in limosine places, in the wild, with nature. As soon as I am inside the borders of Nepal, I feel comfortable, whether in the Tarai or in the mountains.

In those days, almost everybody knew a story or two, but now people don’t hear those stories anymore. So I decided to collect as many stories as I can. Wherever I went, I would ask people to tell me a story from their own ethnic background. I found it worked best if I told a story first. I would tell them a Newari story, or a Japanese story, or a story from Grimm’s Fairy Tales – and then ask them for a story in return. I have also translated some stories I found in writing. I am about to bring out a book of Rai-Kirati Lumbi folktales, based on a book published by Shiva Kumar Shrestha from Kathmandu College.

Your translation into English of Chittadar Hridaya’s Letters of a Lhassa Merchant to his Wife is one of my favorite books. Was the book a part of the Newari literary movement?

Chittadar Hridaya was a real initiator of that movement. He was a Tuladhar, who had been in Tibet for many years. He also set it up on the banks of the Manohara, Patan, Jamal – in various places. One day, he saw Chittadar Hridaya walking in the street and said, oh, this looks like a wonderful man, let’s take a photograph. Because I knew him personally, Hridaya said yes. There was a carved wooden window above us, very ornate, and I asked the house owner if I could use the window for a photograph. He said yes, so Hridaya and I went upstairs, and Irving Penn took a photograph of us looking out of the window together. I treasure that photograph.

You grew up in Masangalli, near Asan. Was it an interesting place?

For me the most interesting place in the area was the Banga Chen, the old Customs House. I still don’t know how the paying of the customs duty on Tibet trade worked, but it was there. The house belonged to a Kansakar family who had been in Tibet for many years. Lots of Tibetans from Kyirong and Kuli would come for two or three months in the winter time and camp out in the courtyard, so I knew about Tibet.

Is there a Newar Buddhism that is distinct and special?

What I think is that for 2500 years Buddhism has been a pacifist religion, of compassion and wisdom, and they have been trying to protect themselves as best they could. But the Buddha developed into a kind of armor designed to protect Buddhist’s soft and simple essential core. That explains the emphasis on secrecy, and how the priests became more Brahmin than the Brahmins. It became quite something else. It is not what it used to be; they are just trying to survive.

How is it that someone educated before 1945 knows such good English?

Schooling in those days was very rare. My father was my teacher, and he taught me to read in English. I read constantly. But I never went to school.

Who were the other members of the Newar literary movement?

Chittadar Hridaya had a guru called Jog Bir Singh Kansakar. He was a Tuladhar who had a cloth shop in Kel Til, a poet who wrote in Newari, and he had literary friends. One of the friends was Siddhakar Amaty. He printed a book of verses on how to live a virtuous life, in Newari, but because he was very poor he was only able to get that one book printed. You did the bulk of your writing while holding down full time jobs. You worked with both BP and MP Koirala, and then with the US Mission to Nepal.

I worked first for BP Koirala in 1951-52, as a typist. Then, when he resigned, I went to work for his brother, MP Koirala, who became Prime Minister. After he was not the PM anymore, I went back to my old job that was always open to me, working in a friend’s drugstore. Then when MP became PM again, I worked for him again.

On the last day that MP Koirala was in office, he was in a meeting of what was called the Defense Committees in Singha Darbar. Keshar Shumsher was the Defense Minister, and there were a couple of Foreign Ministers. I was at the residence across the bridge. A man came galloping on horseback with a letter from the palace. It was marked Very Urgent and Top Secret. So I took the letter and got a driver to take me in a jeep to Singha Darbar. The ADC gave the PM the letter, and he immediately came out. I didn’t realise what had happened until he told the driver not to uncover the flag on the car. Then I realised that from that moment he was not the PM any longer. That was the first period of democracy.

Was it then that you began working for the US Mission?

After that, I had nothing to do for a couple of days. By chance, I met a friend who was working at USAD. I met him at Tribhuvan’s statue. He said, why not try USAID? So I went back to MP Koirala, and told him about it, and then and there I typed out a letter of recommendation to Paul Rose, and MP signed it. I went to Rabi Bhawan the next morning, and within a few minutes I was hired. I was supposed to come to work the next day, but King Tribhuvan passed away that very day, so the office was closed for 13 days. I reported to the 14th day. I went over to the US Embassy once it was established in 1990, and stayed on until my retirement in 1985.

Are you going to do more translations? What are your next projects?

I am interested in modern Newar short stories, and so far I have translated about fifty of them. And I have published one book about the Newar merchants in Lhasa, but there is a lot of material for another book about Newars and their relationship with Tibet. Also, I’d like to publish a book about my treks and travels.

Do you have any advice for young writers?

You have to love life – both your own life and of those around you. Be interested in people, whatever they are. Don’t get caught up in big ideas, but focus observantly on the little things around you. And don’t waste time. Once there was a boy who dreamed, and a man passing by jumped in and saved him. The boy thanked the man, and the man asked, what for? For saving my life, the boy replied. The man said, then make sure that your life is worth saving.
Nepali people will not see any difference in forthcoming elections with the ‘old faces and old leaders’ being nominated in both the direct and closed list for proportional represented based election. Considering the current list of dysfunctional candidates that the parties have prepared, Nepal politics may once again fail to live up to the expectations, aspirations and dreams of many Nepalis, especially of the young people.

In analysing the process of conflict transformation of Northern Ireland and South Africa Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999) said that, “Conflict is directly relational to the transformation of the actors involved. And such transformations may take the form of ‘a change of character, a change of leadership, a change in the constituency of the leader or adoption of its goals, values, or beliefs.’”

The hierarchical and traditional structures and processes of political party leadership has once again resisted change; change not only of leadership but of ideas and ideologies that are contemporary in outlook. It has deterred the role of young political leaders who played an important role in every democratic struggle, in bringing social and political change either by participating in the democratic struggle directly or indirectly. The political parties’ nomination has signified that the ‘old age’ leadership is still fighting against young catalysts of their own party structures. Once again they youth leaders became dictated and misused by the party leadership and are left out from giving any meaningful role or position.

Even the mainstream parties like Nepali Congress and CPN-UML are neglecting the sentiments of the youth, which consist more than 50% of nation total population (Nepal Population Census, 2001) and 50% of parties vote bank filed nomination of only handful of young candidates. This has slashed the enthusiasm of young Nepalis and increased apathy and cynicism among many young voters. Mere jargons for good governance, end to corruption, hunger, lawlessness, power cuts, water shortage, unemployment, bad roads will not attract young voters.

Currently none of the candidates nominated by the parties for the election can claim to represent the interests, values and aspirations of the young people. All around the world political players have realised the strength of youth and brought young new faces in the government and in the parties to meet the challenges of 21st century. Gordon Brown in Britain slashed the average age of the Cabinet to under 50, by appointing young people in his cabinet and appointing the youngest foreign secretary in 30 years in the world’s biggest government.

China transferred leadership roles to the younger next generation and brought in younger people. The exit polls of Super Tuesday in America also showed that in almost every state, youth voter turnout increased significantly from 2000 and 2004, three millions voters under the age of 30 were seen flooding in the polls. The reason for these young American being active in the voting process was the hope and urgency to change things and they saw the opportunity to effect change in the spirit of fresh and young candidate like Barrack Obama, with whom they can identify with.

The aim of any election is to see change in the leadership. Nepal needs to respond to the reform needed in the political, legal, social, educational and health sectors. There is a need for a new crop of politicians who are different from their older counterparts; those who are technocratic, more global in outlook, more comfortable with technology, more idealistic and yet less ideological and less invested in old debates.

The change today is desired by all the sections is possible only through the overhaul in terms of leadership, leadership which wants to understand and do something for the country, for themselves and for the future generation. There is still a chance for the mainstream political parties to regain their credibility among the young voters by bringing in younger faces with more commitment, clearer vision and better capabilities.
Will Clinton-Obama fight injure Dems?

WASHINGTON — Let Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama rip each other apart. It's really no problem for the Democratic Party, veteran California Democrat strategists Bob Muirhead said.

"This is not a debate about ideology or war," he said. "This is about which one we Democrats love the most."

That's the line most Democratic activists are using these days as they watch the two presidential hopefuls engage in an increasingly bitter battle for the nomination, a war that, at least theoretically, threatens to open wounds that could be tough to heal.

"This could be a serious problem," said Shirley Anne Warshaw, a presidential scholar at Gettysburg College.

The past offers some worrisome lessons. In 1980, President Carter and Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy fought up to and during the convention, and Carter never got the enthusiastic support of his party that fall. He lost.

Twelve years later, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan's supporters remained wary of President George H.W. Bush, and analysts think that a lot of them stayed home rather than vote for the man who broke his "read my lips, no new taxes" pledge. He lost, too.

Concerns are starting to grow that this year's Clinton-Obama contest could fracture the Democratic Party. African-American turnout has exploded, and Obama usually rolls up 9 to 1 ratios among black voters. He also does well among upper-income voters of all races.

But if he loses the nomination — particularly if the decision turns on some insider maneuver such as last-minute superdelegate switches or a convention credentials committee ruling on disputed Florida and Michigan delegates — would they back Clinton in the fall? Clinton backers, notably the older women who've routinely given her 2 to 1 majorities in primaries, come out for Obama?

Most experts give a qualified yes to both those questions. "Everyone knows that winning the presidency is the ultimate goal," said Leo Lalonde, a veteran Michigan Democratic activist. "And would Clinton backers, notably the older women who've routinely given her 2 to 1 majorities in primaries, come out for Obama?"

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From the region

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Special Olympic trains in China

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(Shaheen Times)

Musharraf trying to sabotage people’s mandate

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Special Olympic trains in China

Workers labor on the interior of the Bird’s Nest National Stadium in Beijing, Thursday, March 6, 2008.

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(Xinhua)
Lucille Bulduc

What Dr. Bhattarai’s favorite philosopher, Karl Marx, described as the ‘feudal mode of production’ is fading away in the thin air of the Himalayan foothills. Neal is racing, in the space of decades, from the medieval to the modern world. But in that race one element has been forgotten, and, as the country heads to elections on April 10, it will cripple the country, unless addressed.

The country has its flawed Magna Carta, in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; we have addressed.

Fast forward to the ineffectual government of self-appointed aristocrats, with Congress as the House of Lords, complete with blood feuds. Prime Minister Koirala, living on imported oxygen and borrowed time, is King George III, wondering what happened to his empire.

We have our peasants’ revolt. Quickiy we moved from the middle ages and arrived in 1917 Saint Petersburg. Nepal is counterpoint to the United States, countries born within a decade of each other. Where the Americans distiled the values of 18th century Britain, of the individual and the citizen, Nepal adopted the symbols and rituals. Where America evolved politically, Nepal devolved: instead of competitive elections, hereditary prime ministers.

But Nepal’s democrats and revolutionaries, with their affection for the form over the substance of western ideas, ignored one element that cannot be faked. They forgot the robes of democracy are not only elections, but citizens: people with a sense of their rights and obligations who believe that they own their government.

Fast forward without clear vision...Robes of democracy are not only elections, but citizens: people with a sense of their rights and obligations who believe that they own their government.

Czar Putin passed the scepter to his heir, with an election as a coronation ceremony. And in Nepal the subjects of the state prepare to do as they are told, in elections that may or may not happen a month from now.

Just as wars used to be fought over the often-imaginary need for new territory, Nepal’s parties today battle over dead ideologies. But the people doing the fighting do not have a say. And they won’t get one, not with foreign governments applauding today’s feudal lords as heroes of democracy and donor money lifting up the most obscene examples of neglect, allowing the leaders in Kathmandu to play their games unhindered.

Nepal will not step out of the looking glass and become a nascent modern state until at least one party embraces the idea of citizenship as the goal of development, not a result of it. New Nepal will not be created from words, donor money, or kilometers of asphalt. Education does not mean building concrete huts, printing textbooks, or hiring party drones to work as teachers. It requires a leader or a party driven to change the people of Nepal, not by building donor-funded hospitals or Indian-subsidised dams, not by blowing them up, but by changing the way the people think, and giving them the intellectual tools to expect more.

If the state cannot teach people to read and write, that political party must. If the state cannot teach people critical thinking; that party must help. Well-educated people in Kathmandu talk about feudalism in coffee shops, but act as though people in bondage will somehow free themselves. Today’s political parties pretend the people have freed themselves already; so their easily guided cadres can be passed off as citizens’ armies. An educated citizenry can be created in five years, and every free and wealthy country in the world stands as testimony to the need, and to the benefits, of swift action. But first Nepal’s rulers must accept this goal as their driving purpose: to stop talking about what the people want and start offering them something real, in the form of an education in critical thinking.

Quotas, deals among rich men, no matter what family, clan, or caste they are from, will not make a prosperous federal republic. Only a state of citizens can do that, and citizens are made, not born. There is no more time for excuses, or study missions, or five year plans: this is a country waiting for the liberation of its minds. Once that begins, everything becomes possible. Until that begins, nothing is worth trying.
Buddhism is not Nastik

Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

We do not need a being of any kind to create gravity. It is the law of nature that wherever there is some mass there is gravity. This is what Niyam means in Buddhism. Everything arises through causes and conditions; including those causes and conditions themselves arise through other causes and conditions. Because of this there can be no beginning. Therefore there can be no creation ‘in the beginning’. About this there are no two minds within any form of Buddhism. Any system that believes in a beginning (and thus a creator) cannot subscribe to the principle that all things arise from causes and conditions. And without that, that system of thought does not and cannot fall within the paradigm of Buddhism.

Many people get confused because many systems of meditation also use the word non- dual. This is a complex topic we shall deal with later.

Let it be said that whereas most other religious systems are theistic (Taoism being the only exception), Buddhism is non- theistic. Non- theistic does not mean here not believing in gods and goddesses and other realms of existence where they exist. That would be atheistic. Non – theistic here means, not believing in a single creator or any creator as such for that matter. In Sanskrit, we use the word Unshwaravadin. swarav meaning the creator, God.

However, Buddhism is not ‘Nastik’/non-believer as some misread and unred Hindi would like to believe. Astik comes from the word ‘Astita’ which means belief. So Astik would mean ‘believer’ as opposed to ‘Nastik’ which would mean ‘non – believer’. While Buddhism does not accept the Vedas or any other scriptures and whatever comes within their paradigm, it does believe that man can be free from suffering and thus attain Mokhyana or Mukti. It does believe in karma and the cycle of existence, it does believe in other realms of existence; it does believe that man can attain enlightenment. Thus it is an ‘Astik’ system. In a sense, all systems believe in their own tenets and thus are ‘Astik’.

But Buddhism is a paradigm shift from all other theistic systems, be they monothestic or polytheistic. With this background now let us take up what the Abhidharma has to say about the psi phenomena. (To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

March Hare Festival

Yuyutsu RD Sharma

The arrival at Canada’s New Found Land is reminiscent of Nepal in every possible way - the landscape, the strategic position of the Canadian island and the gusto of the people here at the Annual March Hare festival. The March Hare is Atlantic Canada’s largest poetry festival. It began as an evening of poetry and entertainment in Conter Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, and has evolved into an annual island-wide celebration of words and music.

Associated with Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, it takes place in March of each year. It invited poets, authors, musicians and storytellers, featuring in recent years Michael Ondaatje, Alissar MacLeod, Paul Durcan, Lorna Crozier, Susan Mugrave, Stephen Reid, Eileen Nic Chuilleanain, Wayne Johnston, Stan Dragland, Ron Hynes, and others. The festival was made possible in the past with the collective efforts of Al Pitman, John Steffler, Randall Maggs, Rex Brown, Adrian Fowler, David “Smoky” Elliott, Des Walsh, Clyde Rose, Nick Avis, and Pamela Morgan.

St. John’s where the festival began yesterday takes place in March of each year. It invited poets, authors, musicians and storytellers, featuring in recent years Michael Ondaatje, Alissar MacLeod, Paul Durcan, Lorna Crozier, Susan Mugrave, Stephen Reid, Eileen Nic Chuilleanain, Wayne Johnston, Stan Dragland, Ron Hynes, and others. The festival was made possible in the past with the collective efforts of Al Pitman, John Steffler, Randall Maggs, Rex Brown, Adrian Fowler, David “Smoky” Elliott, Des Walsh, Clyde Rose, Nick Avis, and Pamela Morgan.

As I am working on my Helumbo poems, a drive from St. John’s to Gander tells me how alarmingly similar the alpine landscape here is to the Himalayan high hills with juniper, fir, and frozen lakes.

The visit to the Canadian island also exemplifies the forging of international friendship possible with the modern-day travels and technological revolution of cyber space. Now I am reading here as guest poet and there is a possibility of Canadian poetry coming to the Himalayan kingdom in Nepal translation.

(writer@yuyutsu.de)
We have the tiresome repetitions by the CPN-M and its leaders on how they are fighting for the ‘people,’ while the people seem unaware of this uncalled for championing on their behalf.

Bhashwor Ojha
comrades.

communists in the SPA. since this term has been endorsed by the
haphazardly, already has a built-in contradiction
Republic of Nepal,’ is being bandied about so
Consequently, the term ‘Federal Democratic
transform the country into its own image.

Roop Joshi

“All men are enemies. All animals are
comrades.” - George Orwell, Animal Farm
A discerning political analyst friend, P.S.
Kunwar, recently suggested to me that there is a
lot of confusion in political discussions in Nepal
these days due to the unfortunate fact that the
same words have different meanings for
democrats and communists. Right off, this
statement implies that a communist is not a
democrat.

In fact, our communists consider Jana
Andolan II as only a ‘democratic revolution’
which is to be followed by the real revolution on
10 April 2008 when the CPN-M will win and
transform the country into its own image.

Consequently, the term ‘Federal Democratic
Republic of Nepal,’ is being bandaged about so
haphazardly, already has a built-in contradiction
since this term has been endorsed by the
communists in the SPA. ‘Democracy,’ to democrats, stands for a
pluralistic form of governance where all views
have the chance to be endorsed or rejected
through elections by the majority and, once
accepted or rejected, is binding to all. To
communists, democracy is a tactical move
leading to a form of governance whereby a
communist party, which is supposed to repre-
sent the voice of the ‘people’s’ rules.

Hence we have the tiresome repetitions by
the CPN-M and its leaders on how they are
fighting for the ‘people,’ while the people seem
unaware of this uncalled for championing on
their behalf. This is inevitable since, to commu-
nists, people are the recipients of the party’s
benevolence who need to be directed and
represented. This is inevitable since, to commu-

nists, people are the recipients of the party’s
benevolence who need to be directed and
taught. Democrats consider people as the
ultimate deciders of the direction of the State.
The State, to democrats, is a permanent
framework that governs society, and the parties
which have won popular approval can steer the
state for a limited time. It is an instrument of the
party for communists. If the state does not follow
party lines then parallel institutions will be
created. We in Nepal are very familiar with this
paradigm. There is a dichotomy even on the
definition of ‘political parties.’ Is it a vehicle to
formulate and articulate views or, as the
communists would have it, a vehicle to usurp
and maintain power?

The CA elections are only about a month
away. Democrats consider ‘elections’ a periodic
impartial event. For communists, it is an event
which endorses the rule of the Communist
Party. That is why we have these events - the
proclamation that 203 YCL cadres will be
present at each voting booth; the statement by a
top Maoist leader that should the CPN-M not win
the election it will not be an election; and the
numerous instances of YCL ruffians employing
scare tactics to prevent candidates from rival
parties from campaigning.

It should also be increasingly apparent that
parliamentary democracy is anathema to
communists, parliament, to democrats, is an
effective arm of governance providing checks
and balance to the executive. Communists
consider parliament an instrument to rubber-
stamp the activities of the executive.

Equality to democrats is equality of opportu-
nity while, to communists, it is equality of
outcomes. How the outcomes are achieved is
up to the wisdom of the Communist Party, with
all ends justifying the means. Simplistic defini-
tions mired in outdated doctrines are also the
monopoly of the communists. For them,
derunderdevelopment is caused by the oppression
by the feudal classes. Democrats see underde-
velopment as being caused by a myriad of
socio-political, economic, domestic as well as
international factors.

The SPA has just agreed in principle to the
autonomy of Madhesh, to be endorsed by the
CA. It will be interesting to see what happens,
since the communists view ‘autonomy’ as the
principle of divide and rule with de facto
centralisation through the Communist Party,
while to democrats, autonomy is the principle
of decisions being most effective if they are taken
closer to the ground. Again, social harmony, to
democrats, means that no group or segment of
the population is left unfairly behind. To
communists, it is the elimination (physically in
most cases) of all ‘anti-people’ elements.

Development’ has largely been ignored in
Nepal while a divided government is preoccu-
pied with power. Even here, democrats
consider that the establishment of a framework
and conditions for all to prosper leads to
development. Communists want to achieve
development by allocating resources as per
political needs. Finally, and most strikingly,
‘history,’ to democrats, is facts from the past
while to communists it is interpretation for the
future. Of course, the interpretation is the
purview of the communist leadership.

So we stumble on with two groups speaking
two different languages yet telling us Nepalis
that they are united. The question is for how
long are we going to be fooled? ■