In what appears like a prelude to withdrawal from the election yet another time, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has decided not to send its chief Prachanda to campaign anywhere in the country as the crucial poll to the constituent assembly is less than two weeks away.

Prachanda cancelled his scheduled visit to Chitwan and Butwal on March 29, and all other future campaign programmes. The party sources cited lack of security as the sole reason for this. “Security situation is not good and we do not want him to risk his life,” a Maoist leader from Chitwan said. The abrupt withdrawal from the election campaign for the remaining period followed the claims by top Maoist leaders that there were threats on their lives.

Despite Maoists’ assertion that they would not back out of the poll at any cost, withdrawal of their ‘first future President’ and the star campaigner is not without significance.

Prachanda’s withdrawal from the election campaign becomes all the more mysterious as he along with his deputy, Baburam Bhattarai, have been stating that any defeat in the poll will not be acceptable for the party, and in that case, the CPN-M’s next move would be to capture the ‘power’ at any cost. Prachanda has claimed time and again that there is a wave of support for the Maoists across the country, and there is a conspiracy by the external forces, mainly the United States, to defeat the Maoists. The party also claims that its top leaders may be the target of ‘assassination attempt by the external and internal forces.”

“Arms are being imported on the eve of elections. The Congress and the UML are being backed by the international forces. We are fully alert about the emerging scenario,” said Baidya, adding, “We have grave doubts if meaningful elections can take place under these circumstances.”

The Maoists apparently are moving cautiously this time, as an abrupt withdrawal from the electoral race at this stage will mean ‘admission of defeat,’ and their failing the international community as well. However, launching the movement to capture power after ‘defeat’ or finding an excuse to back out now are the issues that Maoist senior leaders will have to settle within less than a week’s time.
In an act of sacrilege, unidentified criminals threw a powerful bomb inside a mosque, killing two people, wounding and hurting about a dozen others on March 29 at Sauruchiya in Biratnagar. The attack, apparently aimed at sabotaging the April 10 election, took place when Prime Minister Gordon Koirala was at his home town to instruct security chiefs of the region to ensure that elections took place at any cost.

At least two people, Feroze Khan and Parvez Ansari Ansari, both local residents, died on the way to the hospital where they were admitted for the hospital to treatment. The Nepal Defense Army (NDA) has owned responsibility for the incident, R.P. Mainali, a self-styled supreme commander of the NDA issued a statement soon after the explosion claiming responsibility for the mosque attack. However, there has been no independent verification.

The administration imposed curfew the immediate after the explosion, but was lifted after nine hours in the morning of March 30 PM G.P. Koirala who headed back to the capital appealed to the general people, especially the Muslims, to exercise maximum restraint and make polls a success.

However, there were worrying signs among the security agencies as it happened soon after Koirala instructed eastern region security chiefs belonging to the Army, Armed Police Force, and the Intelligence Department to ensure that no untoward incident should take place. The Prime Minister categorically told them that he would not want to hear any negative thing on the poll prepara-tion, silencing the officials.

Police said no arrest has been made within the first 20 hours of the incident, but they were investigating into it based on first hand account of the victims and some imme-sses. According to the information gathered by the police, at least two criminals had come on a motorcycle, and one of them was throwing the bomb targeting the mosque from outside its compound in the evening when more than four other people were offering Namaj inside.

Apparently, only one bomb went off. Ian Martin, Chief of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) condemned the incident which he said was a deliberate targeting of a place of religion. “Forces tempted to try to disrupt the election should recognise the backdrop this would provoke, and should respect the overwhelming desire of the people of Nepal, supported by the international community, to see the election as the democratic basis for determining the future of the nation,” he said.

News Brief
Denial
The government has denied the media reports that Chinese security authorities are inside the Nepal border in view of the unrest in Tibet. The denial of the Foreign Ministry has come as the Indian and western media have carried news to the effect that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have crossed over to Nepal side of the border and is keeping a watch on the activities. “The news are completely baseless and aimed at maligning Nepal’s image,” the ministry said.

The Chinese authorities had approached the government earlier suggesting that no ‘Free Tibet’ and anti-Chinese activities should be allowed from Nepali territory. Shital Nivas sources said that it is Nepal policy not to ‘let our territory’ used against any of our neighbours and that, “China is convinced of our intentions.”

Giving back arms
Maoists have returned three weapons to the Police in Rukum a week after they snatched it from the security personnel. Maoist district in-chARGE Punna Gharti handed over three set of revolvers and 38 rounds of bullets to the district police office-in-charge of media and human rights representatives. All these weapons had been snatched from the security personnel provided by the government to a UML candidate contesting the constituent assembly poll from the district.

Large hearted UNICEF
In a rare or rather exceptional gesture, the United Nations office in Kathmandu, dropped ten Terrific protestors to their homes in the UN vehicles, normally restricted for use by the UN employees. The protestors had trespassed into the UN office premises in Puchchow on March 27 to protest against what they called ‘repress- ion’ of the Tibetans by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese office asked the Nepali police not to let ‘our territory’ used against any of our neighbours and that, “China is convinced of our intentions.”

Appointed
Kush Kumar Joshi has been ap-pointed President of the Federa-tion of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI). In an election held for a two-year tenure on March 27 Joshi secured 1468 votes, 120 more than his rival Chandra Prasad Dhakal. Dhakal had led the FNCCI for two terms.
leaders, and said, “that might warrant deployment of the Nepal army.” Speaking at an impressive election rally organised by the party in Ratra-Park on March 29, Nepal said Maoists were both ‘anarchic and tyrants’ the way they have been going around attacking their political opponents. “They must stop if they are in favour of a free and fair poll. If they continue with their violent activities, the army must be called in,” Nepal said. It was perhaps for the first time that Nepal also praised NA by saying, “like the ordinary people, the army is also keeping quiet despite Maoists’ excesses and provocations. If the Maoists’ unbridled behavior continues, the whole nation will turn against them.” He also praised the efforts of the NA and Nepal Police in the previous elections and said that bad-mouthing of the security personnel by any party will not be acceptable.

In the rally that had all the 15 candidates for the constituent assembly polls, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-UML) also took up the issue with UNMIN, the sole monitor of the Maoist combatants activities and their movement. A day after Prime Minister KP Oli and his Deputy Ram Chandra Poudel who is also in charge of the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry took up the issue with UNMIN, the Election Commission (EC) took an unprecedented step of calling the mission Chief Ian Martin in its office to express grave concern over mass desertion of the camps by the Maoist combatants.

About 200 combatants in their combat dress had left their cantonment without informing UNMIN and attended the election meeting addressed by Maoist Chief Prachanda at Rautahat, some 100-km from there. “The combatants cannot leave the camps in a group under any pretext,” Martin told the EC, promising that he would take up the matter with Maoist Chief Prachanda seriously.

The UNMIN was entrusted with the task of monitoring arms and armies of the Maoists and the Nepal army being mobilised for the deployment of the Nepal army.

The same fear was echoed by the UML also and its General Secretary Madhav Nepal praised Nepal Army for maintaining utmost restraint even on the face of provocations. As per the agreement reached by the government and the Maoists with UNMIN, Maoist combatants and Nepal Army would remain in the designated barracks or cantonments.

An EC source told ENS that Martin expressed his helplessness as UNMIN had neither the machinery nor the mandate to get back forcefully, those who deserted the camps. The success of the mission depended neither on the cooperation from the government and the Maoists besides strict adherence to the understandings from two sides, the source quoted Martin.

In addition to the Shaktikhor incident, Maoist combatants have deserted the camps temporarily to lodge their protest against one or other issues in many areas on different cantonments.

This is however, not the only way that the Maoists have bypassed UNMIN. Only recently, the money meant for distribution among the Maoist combatants in various cantonments as ‘monthly stipends’ was paid without UNMIN presence which is an essential condition as agreed by the government, Maoists and the UNMIN.

Earlier, Usha Nepal, a member of the election commission, had taken strong exception to desertion of the cantonment by the Maoist guerrillas in Surkhet, but neither UNMIN nor the government took the matter seriously.

With little over a week left for the constituent assembly polls, the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), aspiring to emerge as the largest party, has spoken in favour of Nepal army being mobilised for the election.

CPN-UML General Secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal and another senior leader, KP Oli said that given the praiseworthy and effective record of Nepal Army (NA) in previous elections, and in view of the worsening law and order situation in the country, “the army may have to be used.” Nepal was specially critical of the Maoist Chief Prachanda and his party, saying, “like the ordinary people, the army is also keeping quiet despite Maoists’ excesses and provocations. If the Maoists’ unbridled behavior continues, the whole nation will turn against them.” He also praised the efforts of the NA and Nepal Police in the previous elections and said that bad-mouthing of the security personnel by any party will not be acceptable.

In the rally that had all the 15 candidates from the valley on the dias along with senior leaders, most speakers criticised the Maoists for their activities of violence, mainly directed against the UML. “They are suffering from defeat syndrome, and are angry with the UML because we did not give them what they demanded. Their demands were unreasonable,” said Ishwar Pokhrel, one of the candidates and party’s central committee member.

KP Sharma OL, who was a victim of the Maoist attack in Jhapa recently said that Maoists were the biggest obstacle in favour of the left unity as they were still, “authoritarian and democratic in nature and character.”

The mass exodus of Maoist combatants from Shaktikhor cantonment in Chilwan district on March 27 has come not only as a violation of the election code of conduct by the Maoists, but has become an embarrass- ing event for the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), the sole monitor of the combatants activities and their movement.

A day after Prime Minister KP Oli and his Deputy Ram Chandra Poudel who is also in charge of the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry took up the issue with UNMIN, the Election Commission (EC) took an unprecedented step of calling the mission Chief Ian Martin in its office to express grave concern over mass desertion of the camps by the Maoist combatants.

About 200 combatants in their combat dress had left their cantonment without informing UNMIN and attended the election meeting addressed by Maoist Chief Prachanda at Rautahat, some 100-km from there. “The combatants cannot leave the camps in a group under any pretext,” Martin told the EC, promising that he would take up the matter with Maoist Chief Prachanda seriously.

The UNMIN was entrusted with the task of monitoring arms and armies of the Maoists and the Nepal army being mobilised for the election.

With little over a week left for the constituent assembly polls, the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), aspiring to emerge as the largest party, has spoken in favour of Nepal army being mobilised for the election.

CPN-UML General Secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal and another senior leader, KP Oli said that given the praiseworthy and effective record of Nepal Army (NA) in previous elections, and in view of the worsening law and order situation in the country, “the army may have to be used.” Nepal was specially critical of the Maoist Chief Prachanda and his party, saying, “like the ordinary people, the army is also keeping quiet despite Maoists’ excesses and provocations. If the Maoists’ unbridled behavior continues, the whole nation will turn against them.” He also praised the efforts of the NA and Nepal Police in the previous elections and said that bad-mouthing of the security personnel by any party will not be acceptable.

In the rally that had all the 15 candidates from the valley on the dias along with senior leaders, most speakers criticised the Maoists for their activities of violence, mainly directed against the UML. “They are suffering from defeat syndrome, and are angry with the UML because we did not give them what they demanded. Their demands were unreasonable,” said Ishwar Pokhrel, one of the candidates and party’s central committee member.

KP Sharma OL, who was a victim of the Maoist attack in Jhapa recently said that Maoists were the biggest obstacle in favour of the left unity as they were still, “authoritarian and democratic in nature and character.”
Editorial

Endorsing impunity

Not a day has passed without violent clashes among the political rivals taking place in the country as the historic poll to the constituent assembly draws nearer. Already, one candidate has lost his life, attacked by criminals. At least two candidates of the Nepali Congress and one from the UML had to be rushed to the hospital for treatment for the injuries they sustained in the Maoist attack. On the other hand, at least eight Maoist cadres have lost their lives, six of them in poll related violence.

Nearly 100, mainly belonging to the three parties - Nepali Congress, UML and the Maoists, have been wounded. Maoist combatants have deserted the camps and participated in the election meeting of the Maoists in brazen violation of its agreement with the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMION). And worse, Maoist Chief Prachanda heaped praises on Young Communist League cadres who made an attempt on the life of Bal Bahadur KC, a Congress candidate from Sankhu. Further, he has declared that his party would not accept the poll outcome if that goes against the poll.

The election commission as well as the international observers who are here in large numbers do not seem to have taken these incidents with the seriousness it deserved.

They have not even bothered to discuss the situation with people like senior politician and former Deputy Prime Minister KP Oli who is also a UML candidate from Jhapa to ask for details, if he has any, about his claim that Maoists are out to assassinate top politicians including Oli himself before the poll. Similar fears are being expressed by the Maoist leaders.

The EC, armed with sweeping powers, has a responsibility to act independently and fearlessly. It cannot work as an election unit of the government which is controlled by the three parties. But unfortunately, the EC and the observer community, through their silence or ineffective response, are only endorsing the culture of impunity being enjoyed by violators of election laws and the code of conduct.

It is not just any kind of election that the country is looking for. Nor is it a mere formally for the national and international observers to endorse and approve any kind of election conducted by the election commission in the given situation. A process, where people’s rights to vote in a free and fearless atmosphere are violated for the very basis and rationale of the poll, cannot and should not be endorsed as an acceptable model of poll. International observers will be failing in their duty if they refuse to understand this.

Not too long ago, this country under the royal regime, tried to enforce a fistful poll for the municipal elections under Keshav Rijalpant, a retired civil servant. He simply tried to toe the line - to step in his footstep or be different. People are much more sophisticated now. They recognize how a democracy is supposed to be - a participative, transparent, accountable process.

The EC, armed with sweeping powers, has a responsibility to work independently and fearlessly. It cannot be an election unit of the government which is controlled by the three parties. But unfortunately, the EC and the observer community, through their silence or ineffective response, are only endorsing the culture of impunity being enjoyed by violators of election laws and the code of conduct.

It is not just any kind of election that the country is looking for. Nor is it a mere formally for the national and international observers to endorse and approve any kind of election conducted by the election commission in the given situation. A process, where people’s rights to vote in a free and fearless atmosphere are violated, cannot and should not be endorsed as an acceptable model of poll. International observers will be failing in their duty if they refuse to understand this.
Hidden shocks for Nepal from inflation

China and India alone have fueled a massive demand for gold. Traditionally gold is seen as the ultimate store of value. We should expect to face difficulty in other commodities such as sugar, wheat, corn, rice, vegetables, which all matter as we are a net importer of such goods. The drain on our exchequer and reserves will increase further from the $930 million we change into INR to pay off various imports. The remittance of two billion we get from abroad will be worth less and less as inflation rises and the dollar drops. Also the incidence of inflation in other countries means that interest rates will rise to combat the effects. This implication for our neighbors is scary. If India increases costs, this further increases capital flight from Nepal, wreaking havoc on our banking system and economy.

Perhaps the most poignant point to understand about inflation in our context is the relationship between inflation and the growth rate of the economy. As economists, we think in real terms. It basically means we adjust figures to take inflation into account, as it is a destroyer of value. If Nepal is growing at the officially given rate of 4%, and inflation as compiled by the central bank is at 5.4-6%, then in real terms we are not actually growing as an economy but in global terms declining by about 1.5-2% per year as an economy. This is based on the formal data. If informal data is taken into account the inflation rate is probably around 8%, and the growth rate about 2-2.5%, so we are actually growing at an annual rate of -4% a year. Does this make sense?

China and India have fueled a massive demand for gold. Traditionally gold is seen as the ultimate store of value. We should expect to face difficulty in other commodities such as sugar, wheat, corn, rice, vegetables, which all matter as we are a net importer of such goods. The drain on our exchequer and reserves will increase further from the $930 million we change into INR to pay off various imports. The remittance of two billion we get from abroad will be worth less and less as inflation rises and the dollar drops. Also the incidence of inflation in other countries means that interest rates will rise to combat the effects. This implication for our neighbors is scary. If India increases costs, this further increases capital flight from Nepal, wreaking havoc on our banking system and economy.

Perhaps the most poignant point to understand about inflation in our context is the relationship between inflation and the growth rate of the economy. As economists, we think in real terms. It basically means we adjust figures to take inflation into account, as it is a destroyer of value. If Nepal is growing at the officially given rate of 4%, and inflation as compiled by the central bank is at 5.4-6%, then in real terms we are not actually growing as an economy but in global terms declining by about 1.5-2% per year as an economy. This is based on the formal data. If informal data is taken into account the inflation rate is probably around 8%, and the growth rate about 2-2.5%, so we are actually growing at an annual rate of -4% a year. Does this make sense?

China and India alone have fueled a massive demand for gold. Traditionally gold is seen as the ultimate store of value. We should expect to face difficulty in other commodities such as sugar, wheat, corn, rice, vegetables, which all matter as we are a net importer of such goods. The drain on our exchequer and reserves will increase further from the $930 million we change into INR to pay off various imports. The remittance of two billion we get from abroad will be worth less and less as inflation rises and the dollar drops. Also the incidence of inflation in other countries means that interest rates will rise to combat the effects. This implication for our neighbors is scary. If India increases costs, this further increases capital flight from Nepal, wreaking havoc on our banking system and economy.

Perhaps the most poignant point to understand about inflation in our context is the relationship between inflation and the growth rate of the economy. As economists, we think in real terms. It basically means we adjust figures to take inflation into account, as it is a destroyer of value. If Nepal is growing at the officially given rate of 4%, and inflation as compiled by the central bank is at 5.4-6%, then in real terms we are not actually growing as an economy but in global terms declining by about 1.5-2% per year as an economy. This is based on the formal data. If informal data is taken into account the inflation rate is probably around 8%, and the growth rate about 2-2.5%, so we are actually growing at an annual rate of -4% a year. Does this make sense?
The meaning of this election

The new constitution needs to have the universal check and balance provision by ensuring the independence of judiciary, legislative and executive.

Binod P. Bista

The constituent assembly election for the people of Nepal is getting into high gear with the election manifestos made public. Though manifestos are defined as a policy or proposal or program, it is nevertheless a declaration of principles issued by a political party. It does contain constitution for a new Nepal acceptable to all (at least in theory).

The state of political, economic and social development has lagged behind so badly that Nepal could remain the only nation in South Asia as least developed, poor and unmanageable. In the present time the external interventions and influences have been so strong that the ruling elite has lost its standing and Nepal is in the verge of losing its identity as an independent and sovereign nation.

The forthcoming elections to the constituent assembly can be considered from two standpoints: critical assessment of the interim constitution, as amended, for finding the right path as truly desired by the Nepali people; prepare a new document (constitution) altogether and take the interim constitution as one of the several reference materials. The objective of either of these approaches is to come up with a new Nepal that will be agreeable system for accelerating development in a stable environment.

Debating development

Pave the right way for the elections

Amit Pyakurel

The political sphere in the country seems to have taken a great leap forward, following the recent agreement between the government and the two chief Madhesi groups. It is a hard-earned triumph, in view of some drastic demands by the Madhesi groups, which had shown almost no way-out to reconciliation. Through ostensible intercession by our southern neighbor, there was finally a mutual accord, with the promise to fulfill some core, politically righteous demands of Madhesi, with some flexibility from both the government and the Madhesi parties on the demand of “one Madhesi, one Pradesh.”

People’s grievances could be the budding ground of instability for the nation in the long run.

Amit Pyakurel

The upcoming elections to the constituent assembly have manifold tasks and responsibilities. While they need to check the rapid erosion of nation’s sovereignty immediately after the elections, they have to also see to it that the new constitution has the universal check and balance provision by ensuring the independence of judiciary, legislative and executive. It does not matter whether the system they choose as people’s representatives is based on a presidential system or a prime ministerial system but under a fully democratic set up so long as the system is workable and capable of producing desired results.

The key issues which have been stated and restated during all of the past two years and earlier, belong to distinct categories. Will Nepal become a republic or still choose to retain monarchy after the elections, they seem to have almost no way-out to reconciliation. Through ostensible intercession by our southern neighbor, there was finally a mutual accord, with the promise to fulfill some core, politically righteous demands of Madhesi, with some flexibility from both the government and the Madhesi parties on the demand of “one Madhesi, one Pradesh.”

Does Nepal need to follow positive discrimination to bring about inclusiveness of the left-out classes? What effect would it have in the overall development? Does Nepal need to compartmentalise its affairs by creating separate bureaucratic set ups for provinces and allowing the provincial language as the official one? What happens to the freedom of movement and employment within Nepal for Nepali citizens?

Since there are takers on both sides to these questions, it is of utmost necessity to give undivided attention to all issues even if there is one small group contesting majority views. That alone can safeguard the new constitution and democracy.

Most importantly, Nepal emerging from a serious internal conflict that claimed more than 13,000 lives and destroyed precious state infrastructure, must find a development path under an agreeable system for accelerating economic growth and development in a stable environment.

Any less would be betraying the trust of all Nepali people. The members of the constituent assembly must not fail this time.
USAID has been in Nepal for more than 50 years now. How do you view its involvement and achievement?

I think USAID has had a very strong and rich history in Nepal. USAID’s programs have always focused on assistance that responds to needs that the people of Nepal themselves consider the most important: health, education, and economic opportunity. Nepal has seen impressive progress in these areas. That’s not to say that there isn’t room for more progress – there certainly is. I think it’s important, though, to acknowledge the extraordinary successes that the Nepali people, with USAID’s support, have had in the last 50 years.

In 1961 the average life expectancy of a Nepali child was 33. Today it is 64. There has been an 81% reduction in infant mortality. In 1981 there were a total of 160 skilled doctors, nurses, and health workers in the entire country. Today, there are over 20,000. In the last fifty years the literacy rate went from 9% to 56%. Fifty years ago there was a total of 376 kms of road in the country. Today, there are over 17,000 kms of road.

In the last fifty years, there has also been a threefold increase in the number of students attending college. During the development progress that Nepal has made in the last 50 years, it has been phenomenal. While USAID – along with other international community – has provided important support, these achievements would simply not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the Nepali people.

How would you describe USAID’s contribution to Nepal in the area of health?

USAID’s program has always supported the improving health care in Nepal, and health continues to be our single largest portfolio. There has been considerable progress in the health status of the people of Nepal; however, research has shown that not all the Nepali people have benefited from this progress. USAID’s health program is now focusing on those segments of the population that are at highest risk of illness or mortality, and don’t have adequate access to quality health services. For example, USAID is supporting the Ministry of Health to improve maternal survival and community-based treatment of pneumonia and other childhood diseases.

Success in these areas is a main factor behind the astonishing 30% drop in child mortality in the past five years. USAID-supported semi-annual Vitamin A distribution alone has prevented about 15,000 child deaths and dramatic decrease in child mortality. There are still challenges that need to be addressed in order to reduce child mortality further. However, the progress made in this area is a testament to the efforts of the Nepali people, with USAID’s support, in working towards their goal of improving the health of their children.

As a donor agency how satisfied is USAID in its post-conflict reconstruction efforts?

This is a difficult question to answer. While a Peace Agreement has been signed between the main parties to the 1996-2006 conflict, until it is honored by all groups, it is difficult to say that the country is truly in a post-conflict stage. Bandits and threats of kidnapping and extortion and attempts at corruption result in the delay or cancellation of assistance projects, which ultimately hurts the Nepali people.

USAID supports reconstruction efforts through activities supporting the development of small rural economic infrastructure, and we have plans to increase this support. However, for the impact of these efforts to be maximized, there must be an environment that permits these efforts to succeed.

What would USAID’s reaction be if the elections do not take place?

It is difficult to predict. The U.S. has invested a lot in the CA election and wants them to happen peacefully on April 10. There is a folk saying in the U.S. that “the third time is a charm.” Let us hope this third try to CA elections in Nepal is a charm.

Is USAID planning to increase its aid volume or will it just focus on prioritizing the basic necessities?

I think USAID’s future program for Nepal will depend largely on a free and fair election and the successful formation and functioning of the Constituent Assembly. I would like to see Nepal take advantage of the entire range of the US Government’s foreign assistance options – not just USAID’s.

Is the USAID program intensifying its efforts to support women to have a greater voice in their local, provincial, national, and global governance?

Yes, our programs intensify its efforts to support women to have a greater voice in their future, and in their own lives.

The British and European counterparts emphasize security sector reform. Does USAID plan to get involved in it?

The US Foreign Assistance Act restricts USAID’s involvement in the security sector. As such, we maintain our focus on the sectors identified above. There are other USG agencies – particularly the U.S. State Department – that provide support in the area of security sector reform.

What is your background in relation to Nepal?

I was raised by parents that instilled in each of us children the belief that there wasn’t anything that we couldn’t do. My family placed a high value on education and not being educated was never an option. Outside the structure of my family, I would sometimes hear subtle and, sometimes not so subtle, messages that contradicted what my parents taught us at home about what girls could or couldn’t do. “… it’s not that I didn’t encounter gender discrimination or bias and I wasn’t that it didn’t sometimes dampen my spirit – my parents instilled in me such strong belief that I just never got it in my way…. I will admit, that for a long time I took for granted the freedom and opportunities that I had as a young woman. It wasn’t until I started working for USAID that I started to understand the difficulties and injustices that women in the generations before mine faced — and that many women still face all over the world today.”
Responsible banking
A country like Nepal cannot afford financial anarchy.

It is too much to expect that businesses will self-regulate out of a sense of moral responsibility. A few do, undoubtedly, but the majority of them don’t, and this has been proved time and again. External controls are needed to ensure that businesses don’t step across the line. The Bear Stearns debacle has revealed the need for more general regulation, one that cuts across the entire cross section of dubious business practices.

Some might argue that ‘excessive’ regulation might harm businesses. Sure, it might, but businesses could be harmed just as well by their own incompetence. Bear Stearns once again demonstrates this point. In any case, if certain businesses are net liabilities to society, why should we care whether they are harmed or not? In fact, it may be better for business as a whole if stricter regulations are enforced.

Those firms which are genuinely competent, which do not have to resort to dubious shenanigans will not be seriously affected by tougher regulations. In any case, there is no symmetry between the information businesses receive and those consumers receive. Corporations always know more about the consumers than vice-versa. Regulations are an attempt to level the playing field.

Thus, regulations should not be thought of as red tape. Those are two quite separate matters. Unfortunately, in our part of the world, people with political power have been known to use regulations to squeeze corporations. Unlike in the United States, in Nepal, businesses do not have that much power. In fact, an argument can be made that they have too little power. True, the sort of corporate-government nexus that exists in the US, with corporations being at least as powerful, does not exist here.

Politicians are generally thought of as being much more powerful, sometimes able to arm-twist businesses into doing what they want them to. But the reverse side of the coin is this: in Nepal businesses are often patronage rackets. True entrepreneurship has not been able to flourish because established businesses have used their connections to prevent new players from moving in. Thus, I believe that impartial regulation would certainly be beneficial to newcomers who have the right ideas. We could start by breaking up some of the monopolies.

Again as Bear Stearns demonstrated, old is not always gold. Compare it to a company like Apple, and one sees the difference. Apple indulges in no shady business practices, does not run afoul of regulations. It is only interested in providing cutting-edge technology with a ‘human’ face. True, it has seen some decent entrepreneurship in the IT sector, but what it needs are dynamic new corporations willing to penetrate ‘older’ markets. And that’s where effective laws and regulations are needed.

(The author is a political science graduate from Miami University, USA).
Gilani unveils coalition govt agenda

All black laws, including the Pemra Ordinance, promulgated after November 3, and Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in Fata would be done away with, declared Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani here on Saturday.

Spelling out the agenda of his government, after getting an unprecedented unanimous vote of confidence from the National Assembly, the prime minister also set a two-week deadline for the Army to call back its officers from civil institutions. The prime minister said, “war on terror is our own war”. He urged extremists to surrender and come to the negotiating table. “The elimination of the menace of terrorism from the country is our utmost priority,” he added.

Gilani also announced 40 per cent reduction in the budget of the Prime Minister’s House. He said that his own ministers would not use vehicles of more than 1600 cc and travel in economy class plus only. He said no one would light fire andPC would be arranged on public buildings on festivities and no money would be spent on the renovation of government buildings and residences. He said the NAB would cease to exist and cases would be heard by the judiciary. He said there would be no ban on trade and student unions. He said concurrent list would be abolished in a year. The prime minister also raised support price of wheat from Rs510 per 40 kg to Rs625 per 40 kg.

He also announced formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to alleviate the alienation of various segments of society. Gilani promised to restore the deposited judges and ensure independence of the judiciary according to the Charter of Democracy and the Munree Declaration.

The prime minister said that the new government had a vision, determination, commitment and zeal to serve the nation with the help of Almighty Allah. He said government would do its utmost for the development, progress, prosperity of the country, for ensuring rule of law and promoting democracy.

He said the government stood by the people and it would continue to stand by them in the hour of miseries and hardships. He announced an ambitious plan for rapid and sustainable development of the country and the people.

The prime minister said that the nation was facing grave challenges but terrorism and extremism were the major challenges that were threatening the national integrity.

Lauding the decision of the Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani to withdraw Army officers from the civil institutions, he hoped that it would boost the image of the armed forces. He added, however, those Army officers whose presence in these institutions was imperative would continue to work.

He said that every institution must work in its prescribed parameters and it was the people who had the right to govern the country. He called for withdrawal of Army officers from the civil departments within two weeks.

Gilani said there was a need for coordinated reforms for the development of tribal areas. He said to overcome terrorist activities the whole government should announce a special package for the socio-economic development of these areas. He said the people were facing challenges of price hike, unemployment and poverty and the government was determined to resolve these issues on priority.

From the region

Diaspora

Nepal is being criticised for the way police violently shut down peaceful demonstrations by Tibetan monks and refugees in capital Kathmandu.

Bhumika Ghimire in USA

The volatile situation in Tibet and some of the surrounding provinces has turned out to be a major headache for the Chinese government. On March 27th during Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang’s regular press conference, the focus stayed firmly on disturbances in Tibet and subsequent world reaction.

On March 26th Mr. Gang commented on various French officials’ statement on situation on Tibet which essentially blamed China. He said that the Lhasa incident is a separatist act of violence carefully planned and deliberately provoked by the Dalai clique. The Chinese government took measures according to law and has restored social stability in Lhasa and other areas. Any country upholding objectiveness and justice will understand and support the lawful and necessary measures taken by China.

There is no doubt that Chinese government has been trying very hard to make sure that the next flap does not get out of hand. Regular press briefings and statements on the issue, and now allowing journalists access to Tibet; all designed to end negative international attention.

All the efforts by Beijing, the sharp reaction to China’s response to violence in Tibet is still unfolding. Now even China’s neighbor Nepal is being criticised for the way police violently shut down peaceful demonstrations by Tibetan monks and refugees in capital Kathmandu.

Linda Mandani of the Boston Tibet Network said that Nepal police’s brutal handling of the Tibetan protesters shocked her. It dismayed to see the Nepalese government showing no respect for the Tibetans’ right to free speech and peaceful demonstration. Karma Tsewang of Tibetan Youth Congress of New York and New Jersey also expressed concern that at way Nepal police handled the Tibetans protestors.

A more pointed reaction on Nepali police’s action came from Giovanni Vassallo who is with Committee of 100 for Tibet. He said that for a country like Nepal, which itself is going through profound changes to install meaningful democratic system, to engage in violent crackdown against peaceful demonstrator is extremely dishheartening.

Mr. Vassallo, who has spent some time in Siwamybhu Gumba as a student, asked the Nepali people to remember teaching of Buddha and support peace and justice. He also asked the Chinese government to begin negotiation with the Tibetans as early as possible.

We tried to get reaction from Chinese and Chinese Americans but majority of the respon- dents did not wish to comment. A Chinese university student, who is also president of local Chinese student’s association, said that she cannot comment because she is concerned about the reaction from her friends.

Despite the seeming international outcry of support for Tibet and criticism of Nepal and China, not everyone is on the side. Even in the United States, which has expressed concerns over situation in Tibet and continues to roll the red carpet to Beijing’s officials like the Dalai Lama, has refrained from saying or doing anything substanti-
This kind of insight gained by remembering one’s own past lives or the past lives of others is a prominent feature of Buddhist literature. It is illustrated as I said in the Jatakas and the life stories of the Buddhist Arhats, Mahasiddhas and lineage masters. Memory of past life can also be achieved by other techniques, one of which is past life regression through hypnosis and the other is a technique called Jati smarana gyana. This is the technique of tracing events backwards. One tries to trace back the events of the day and then slowly extend it to two, three hundred days, one year, ten years, 20 years and back to birth and onwards to next life. This method can be used without attaining samadhis.

Certain individuals, generally children remember their past lives, but generally such remembrances are feeble and sometimes not fully accurate and they also tend to fade away. Dr. Ian Stevenson (MD), the Head of the Department of Parapsychology of Virginia University has four huge volumes of records of such children from all over the world – from Alaska to Lebanon to Turkey to India, Sri Lanka etc. etc. And as I said before these are well researched, scientifically shifted materials that cannot be denied easily, as the research method applied by Dr. Ian Stevenson (MD) is impeccable. (To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)
It’s time for Nepal’s political parties to take control and remind the Maoists that being in government is a privilege, not a right.

We are embarrassed to acknowledge bad parents when we see them, especially ones clearly doing their best, whose flaws come from exhaustion and a lack of imagination, not cruelty. There is no arguing that the NC and the UML did not do the best job in the 1990s, even though according to the UN the country did improve a lot. But they are reasonably decent people, as politicians go.

Corrupt, some of them, yes, but not disinterested in the future of the country. Cowards; but they’re doing the wrong thing from a fear of worse consequences, not ill-will. But those of us watching this political delinquency do Nepal no favors by staying silent. The sort of advice we offer—“there there, it’s just a phase he’s going through”—just encourages the parents to deny they have a problem on their hands.

And it is not a problem to be underestimated. Every day the Maoists are attacking party rallies, cadres, and candidates; party offices are burned down, and the public is being threatened. And you can’t blame the CPN-M; violence is part of their ideology and every day their ideology is strengthened by success: Nepal has shown that the Maoists were right, violence does produce results. Breaking this pattern will not be easy. It could push the Maoists out of the peace process; that is not desirable. Despite the fond hopes of monarchists and goose-stepping BJP cadres the country can no longer choose between kings and revolutions; there must be negotiations, disarmament, peace, and democracy. But that process will not start unless the Maoists are put back into their place. And that place is on the opposite side of the negotiating table, not part of the government. Not their current behavior continues.

The NC and the UML need to stand together and recognize they have more in common than either admits. Take control. Spell out changes the Maoists must make, no excuses, including implementing UNMIN’s March 22 recommendations. If the Maoists continue to confuse ballots and bullets give them a list of demands, deadlines, and consequences. Before the charter members of the ‘Munich in the Himalayas’ club lay into me: I am not advocating an extreme position; concessions for peace are appropriate. If the Maoists say they need three days, not one, to return the PLA to cantonments, then that’s fine. But if the cadres are still roaming the countryside a week later, there have to be costs.

Being part of government is not a burden a party accepts with a sneer; it is an honor and a responsibility. If the Maoists refuse to behave, throw them out. Make it clear they can only remain if they behave. Repeat as necessary. At worst we discover the Maoists didn’t want peace, at best firmer foundations are laid for a genuine settlement. It is time Nepal’s weak, divided, outgunned political parties reminded the country’s armies that, under the democracy the people said they wanted two years ago, they are in control. But the parties can’t look to UNMIN, India, or the Election Commission for leadership. This is their moment, and they can either take control, or be swept away. In the next week, we’ll see their choice, and live with the consequences.
The Trojan Horse

This is simple parasitism, exortion by those who are too damned idle to work when it’s so easy to live off another person’s labour.

In the spring of 2006, when ‘Priam’ Minister Koirala formed the coalition for peace affectionately known as SPAM, he led all by the nose right down the garden path. The general belief was that a period of peace and reconciliation had been ushered in: Nepal had achieved a historical breakthrough and it was the end of the People’s War.

Think again. Until this point those who could tell the wheelers and dealers in Kathmandu about the realities of that war were out of sight, on a back burner somewhere in our deepest conscience, whether victims of the People’s Liberation Army (smart quotes intentional) or of the state security forces. Hence, Kathmandu, a city as gullible, indolent, and as prone to ever-widening and ever more exaggerated rumours as ancient Troy, heaved a sigh of relief.

In retrospect ‘Priam’ Minister Koirala and his associates, foreign pals, and sycophants have behaved injudiciously. Like late king Priam of Troy, heaved a sigh of relief.

Think again. Until this point those who could tell the wheelers and dealers in Kathmandu about the realities of that war were out of sight, on a back burner somewhere in our deepest conscience, whether victims of the People’s Liberation Army (smart quotes intentional) or of the state security forces. Hence, Kathmandu, a city as gullible, indolent, and as prone to ever-widening and ever more exaggerated rumours as ancient Troy, heaved a sigh of relief.

In retrospect ‘Priam’ Minister Koirala and his associates, foreign pals, and sycophants have behaved injudiciously. Like late king Priam of Troy, heaved a sigh of relief.

But he wasn’t the only one that valued labour. Almost, at the same time, a kind of social capitalism was forming, a social capitalism that was eventually to extend into the epoch of the welfare states. Housing, clinics, and schools were built for workers and their families, and they were given shares in the factories—Rowntrees, Cadburys, and Titus Salt—readily apparent to the peasantry and workers and bring about social justice? Interestingly, on first entering Kathmandu, the YCL comrades were like Reas on the proverbial cow dung going from factory to factory, hotel to hotel forming unions “for the benefit of the workers”. While threat and force were not explicit in making the workers sign up, they were implicit. Frankly, many of the workers would have been better off with their bourgeois managers who, for the most part, today realise that the wellbeing of workers and their families is in their best interests. Yes, even in Nepal.

What do the YCL care? They are now busy demanding 10% of hotel workers’ service gratuities. How does this liberate workers or ensure the wellbeing of their families? This is simple parasitism, exortion by those who are too damned idle to work when it’s so easy to live off another person’s labour. But wait, isn’t that what the YCL claim bourgeois capitalists do?

Somewhere, someone has it wrong. Unions are for workers, and union money is for their welfare, not for political parties. Unions can support any party they like or none at all. It is up to workers to vote on such issues.

The YCL are not only making it difficult for workers to vote and decide for themselves but also for the rest of the country to vote and decide for themselves. It is time their dialectic is brought to bear upon them in a simple call: “Working people of Nepal unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains”.

And please, Priam Minister Koirala, no more Trojan horses!