As the speculation about the number is over and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists fell far short of the simple majority mark, Prime Minister GP Koirala is quietly harbouring his ambition to continue in power.

"Nepal army, security agencies, bureaucracy and a section of the international community want me to continue," Koirala confided in a small group of loyalists. The issue is also being debated at different levels of the Congress party. Koirala gave his piece of mind recently after Prachanda made it clear that the CPN-M has not yet renounced their politics of violence.

Koirala has not yet conceded to Maoists’ victory. “Koirala now needs to act as Head of the State and prepare to call the first meeting of the constituent assembly which should be asked to explore the possibility of forming the government,” Chakra Bastola, Congress Working Committee member told newsfront.

Sources in the Prime Minister’s office said Koirala is going to issue an appeal soon to that effect. He is also expected to ask the political parties to make an objective assessment of the poll outcome without ‘misinterpreting’ it.

The CPN-M and the Congress are already engaged in a public debate, mostly from media, with each side staking claim to lead the new government. While the Maoists have said their emergence as the single largest party in the house is a mandate for them to lead the future government, the Congress is still harping on its larger acceptability, as the government has to run on the spirit of unity and coalition.

Koirala’s reluctance to give up and resign also follows fears that some members of the international community have raised about how Maoists would go about on the issue of integration of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) besides the issue of the independence of judiciary and media freedom.

"While the integration of PLA in the Nepal army is a major issue for us, the UN also has to think whether Maoist combatants will be acceptable if deployed as UN peace keeping force in other countries," Koirala is believed to have asked some diplomats recently.

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Radical changes

Prachanda said that Maoists will not be satisfied anything short of abolition of the 1950 treaty, lock stock and barrel. He said that the government led by the Maoists will also be reviewing other treaties. The 1950 treaty, according to Maoists, brings Nepal under the security umbrella of India. Prachanda has also said that the Gorkha recruitment in the British and Indian army also needs to be stopped immediately. India’s former Foreign Affairs Secretary Shyam Sharan who played a key role in bringing the Maoists together with the seven pro-Nepal and public speeches said the 1950 treaty can neither be scrapped with a year’s notice from either side, or remain as it is since there is no provision of the modification or amendment in it. The treaty is under a passive revision at the foreign secretary level of the two countries since 2001, with no progress so far.

Sood meets Koirala

In a departure from the diplomatic norm and practices, India’s ambassador Rakesh Sood chose to meet the Head of the government before submitting the letter of credentials. Sood who succeeds Shiv Shankar Muni, met Prime Minister KP Koirala who is also the Head of the State on April 26, barely 48 hours after he landed in Kathmandu.

Koirala said at his own request, a source in the PM’s office told newsfront, and added he had no idea about the content of the letter. "Neither did I have any idea about the meeting,” Sood told Koirala that it was purely a meeting on a personal level, “We know each other,” Koirala, the source said, had raised the issue of whether such a meeting was desirable as the ambassador was yet to submit his credentials.

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Journey of mistakes

Govinda Raj Joshi sets the political agenda

A senior Congress leader, Govinda Raj Joshi, has literally set the agenda for the Congress that is yet to recover from the disappointing poll outcome. Joshi, who lost the poll from Tanahun has asked the party leadership to snap alliance with the Maoists, who are “neither democrats nor nationalists.”

Giving his assessment for the election, he further said, “The party leadership was not prepared for elections, but the Maoists proved that they were”

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Shital Niwas is however a bit uncomfortable about the whole thing. "The first thing any diplomat or ambassador is told by the protocol division of the Foreign Ministry on arrival is that he/she should refrain from meeting top government officials before they present their credentials. And this is the practice followed everywhere," a foreign ministry official told newsfront on condition of anonymity.

"The message that this meeting has sent across the diplomatic community will be open to interpretation in the political circle as well as in the diplomatic circle,” he added. Sood, a career diplomat, who is currently the Joint rank officer of the Indian Foreign Service, was earlier posted as the Indian Ambassador in Kabul.

Kandamul hunting for survival

Prem Bahadur Chepang, a resident of Jawang, Chhaung, has decided to leave for the jungle. He is prepared to face every odds along the route as that is the only way he can save himself and his family from starvation. “I am neither going to poach wild animals nor will I fall any tree. This trip is just for collecting some wild food, preferably, 'Yam', he said. "Any Kandamul (wild berries and other edibles) will do, but ‘Yam’ is preferred,” he added. This is the condition of the entire Chepang community today. Poor and socially marginalised, the Chepangs have no land to cultivate. Some of them might have cleared small parts of forests and owned it, but that is too small and meagre for their survival. At the most, the yield could suffice for about six months.

Prem Bahadur is not alone in this mission against starvation. But what pains him and others is the apathy of the government towards their problem. Bir Bahadur Chepang said, “We have no other options but to go to the cities in search of work or to the jungles for search of food at least for six months in a year.”

The worst months are April, May and June. Most of the members go out for ‘Kandamul’ harvesting during the period. Thus, Chepang community in Nepal still continues with the aboriginal practice that take place in remote corners of some countries in Asia, Africa and America. Although collecting Kandamul is not an easy job, many Chepang tribesmen proved that the wild berries and other edibles are rich in calories and have high nutritional value. Recognising its nutritional value, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) emphasised the need to promote the traditional food materials, three decades ago. But promoting traditional food materials and having to go to the jungle for food hunting to keep alive are two different things.

The food of Chepang community appears to consist of mainly three varieties of Kandamul, Gilha, Yaviyar and Tarul. While the two last fall in the wild harvest category, Tarul (Yam) is cultivated in the fields. Chepang possess deep indigenous knowledge about the quality and distribution of Kandamul in their areas. The villagers can recognise a poisonous Kandamul easily. Bir Bahadur Chepang said, "It takes five to six hours of indigenous treatment to neutralise a poisonous Kandamul before it can be fit for human consumption.

But the continued harvesting pattern has its own ill effects. If the dependence on Kandamul continues on this scale, these varieties might become extinct. The only way to preserve them is to ensure supply of food materials to the community and reduce their dependence on the forest products.

There are some attempts already made in this direction. The ABC (Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation) program, which is sponsored by UNDP/GEF/SPG, also supports to conserve the traditional food technically and financially. The program is conducted by RIMS – Nepal. To fulfil the target of ABC program, different materials have been formed to promote the conservation activities in the community. Rishi Bastakoti, executive director of RIMS-Nepal said, “Literacy classes, integrated pest management training and capacity building training are incorporated in the ABC program. It is aimed that the effort will empower the local community.”

Koirala’s police nationalisation not aligned with the Maoists who are neither nationalists nor democrats. This alliance was the Maoists was largest the meeting. “But it must be very urgent as he was keen on the meeting,” Sood told Koirala that it was purely a meeting on a personal level, “Since we know each other,” Koirala, the source said, had raised the issue of whether such a meeting was desirable as the ambassador was yet to submit his credentials.

Shital Niwas is however a bit uncomfortable about the whole thing. “The first thing any diplomat or ambassador is told by the leadership’s silence on internal sabotage is the reversal that the party suffered. Arjun Narshing KC, another prominent leader of the Congress said that internal sabotage was one of the factors for the party’s poor showing. He said that the party suffered little interest over issues like deployment of the young communist league cadres in booths.

Joshi said the Congress is now left with only two options: wage the battle for existence or surrender to the Maoists. “They are still killing and harassing our members. They have not returned the property they confiscated, all this indicates that they do not want to be guided by the rule of law,” he said.

"It is not a system of rule of majority. Those in agreement with us must work together and safeguard democracy," Joshi added, asserting that under no circumstances should the Maoists be supported to lead the government. Instead, the government must start getting Maoists to return the property they confiscated as a proof that they respected the peace process.
Tibet to be linked with Nepal

China will be extending its railway service from Tibet to Khasa in Nepal, which will be yet another milestone in the bilateral relationship after the Kodari highway was built in the 60s. The extension of the railway service from China’s autonomous region to Khasa has already been included in the five year plan of the people’s republic of China. Al Ping, Director General of the International Department of the Communist Party of China told Prime Minister Pranab Mukherjee in the workshop that the plan has already become part of the 11th five year plan and it will be realised within the next five years. According to Aditya Baral, an India specialist, the 30-member delegation from Nepal that included leaders of the political parties and representatives of the media and civil society participated in the workshop.

Compensation

The government has decided to pay rupees one lakh each to the family of more than 13,000 people who lost their lives during the 11-year old insurgency led by the Maoists. The decision was taken by the political committee of the cabinet chaired by Ram Chandra Poudel who is in charge of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. The committee also recommended that children, up to three in numbers, from such families should be given scholarships for their studies. But there are no clear guidelines and machineries to have these decisions implemented.

Post active election commission

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked the government to investigate into major cases of human rights violation during the election. The instruction of the commission followed its meeting with the Chiefs of Security agencies of the government on April 25. The commission instructed that the murder of Rishi Kumar Sharma, UML the candidate from Surkhet and of seven Maoist cadres in Dang; and the bomb explosion in Raush that was probed and the guilty punished. The commission has neither given any deadline for the probe, nor has it instructed about who should be conducting it.

A House of 25

The 601-member constituent assembly will have its members from 25 different parties with the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists with the largest chunk of 220. It will be followed by Congress, exactly half the Maoists size and UML, a close third will have altogether 103 members. The Madheshi Janadikhtar Forum (MUF), a party grossly under-mined by analysts as well as India which showed substantial interest in the development in Terai, will be the biggest regional party with 52 members. Teral Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) that saw its leader Mahatn Thakur’s defeat will have only 20 members. Sadhhuwan, an ally of the TMLP will have nine members. The Rashtriyta Prajatantra Party led by Kamal Thapa that advocated for constitutional monarchy being retained has bagged four seats, although the party could not open its account under the first past the post system.

In the meantime, hectic lobbying has begun for the 26 seats that will be filled up by the ‘seven parties’ as per the interim constitution. The race in the among, others, include human rights leaders, Padma Ratnas Tuladhar and Damannah Dhungana.

Reactions to Maoists’ victory

India’s response to the Maoists victory and how the ‘red storm’ rising in Nepal would affect the largest democracy is also generating a lot of interest.

Maoist’s victory last month was no surprise, also in the United States and India. The media is now buzzing with experts and regular folks debating on the future of Nepal and its relationship with the two nations. On April 14th, Sean McCormack, spokesperson for the US State Department released a press statement congratulating people of Nepal on the ‘historic’ elections and also expressed concerns regarding the incidents of violence and intimidation that took place before the election and reports of voting irregularities.

The cautious press statement indicates America’s dilemma over the Maoists questions. Through an e-mail interview a State Department official responded to the question of US-Nepal future relations, economic and military in light of Maoists victory on April 24th, saying that “The United States congratulates the Nepali people on successful elections. Our focus now is to see that the newly elected constituent assembly fulfills its mandate to draft a constitution that reflects the will of the Nepali people. When provoked about US response to Maoists victory, the official said, “We are looking forward to the announcement of the final results. Once that announcement is made, we will work with whichever parties are elected to move our bilateral relationship forward.”

Responding to the confusion over the Maoists still being listed by the US as a terrorist organisation, the official said, “The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) / United People’s Front is not on the United States’ list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), it is however on two other lists, the Special Designated National List and the Terrorism Exclusion List. These fall under different conditions than the FTO designation. Thus, US government officials can work with members of the Maoist party in specific capacities when the Maoists are working for the Nepali government.”

India’s response to the Maoists victory and how the ‘red storm’ rising in Nepal would affect the largest democracy is also generating a lot of interest. At the Vancouver Sun, Jonathan Manthorpe discussed about the effect Maoists victory will have on the regional ‘great game’ of power between India and China. He says that the victory puts Prachanda in ‘serviable position, allowing him to pit China against India and push his agenda forward.

At The Times of India, Swapan Dasgupta, dismisses any attempts by the Indian government to have a working relationship with the Maoists. His reason? Not Prachanda’s decision to scrap the 1950 treaty with India, but, “Unfortunately, if history is anything to go by, the prospects of those who capture power professing Manism-Leninism transforming themselves instantly into honorable social-democrats, are extremely remote.”

Mian Ridge at the Christian Science Monitor, in trying to find answers to Maoist victory and relationship with India, included decidedly alarming views echoed by some Indian publications along with cautious reports from Outlook and India Today. A Mumbai newspaper is quoted recouping concerns raised by the India’s Border Security Force (BSF) over possible cooperation between the Indian Maoist group Naxalites and the Maoists in Nepal.
Constitution of convenience

The country hangs in a delicate balance as major political parties are busy interpreting and misinterpreting the people’s verdict, clearly a fractured one. The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists which has emerged as the single largest party sans simple majority has been interpreting the verdict as an endorsement of the party’s radical policies. Its chairman has been speaking, often contradicting himself, on issues mainly related with economy and investment. There are substantial fears that independence of judiciary and freedom of the press would be the biggest casualty in the Maoist rule. Prudence and political honesty demand that Maoists clearly spell out their approach on all these issues.

The radical tones of the Maoists on one hand and its continued attacks on its political opponent’s rivals even after the election results only indicate that it might use both the state machinery and its private outfits to silence dissent and dismantle any institution that might offer moral and organised resistance to the authoritarian exercise of the new regime.

The fear is equally rampant in the major political parties including the Nepali Congress and the UML. That is why, a powerful section of the Nepali Congress still wants G.P. Koirala to continue despite the poll reversal Nepal Congress suffered in the April 10 election. They are citing provisions of the interim constitution, a custaion of the seven parties, of the seven parties and by the seven parties, in favour of their argument.

In absence of a consensus (among the ruling seven parties) or at least a two thirds majority of the constituent assembly members in favour of a Prime Minister, it will require at least two thirds majority to have GP Koirala removed from the post.

Once King Gyanendra handed over the power to the seven parties, the neo-rulers said goodbye to the democratic norms and values by denying any space to opposition. Together, they wrote an interim constitution that made one single person as the head of the government and the head of the state.

Having an active politician as the head of the state, a position that demands political neutrality was the biggest compromise made on values of democracy. As a result, the Maoists not only extracted many concessions, both reasonable and unreasonable; and its cadres emerged as the new class enjoying all kind of impunity for every crime they committed.

A new culture of impunity practiced by the Maoists and silently watched by the government and tacitly endorsed by the international communities has undermined UN and UNCHR (r) has nourished it.

Democracy is not a simple label. It is a process that demands the impassable and irrefutable system by which the principle of accountability and transparency. But thanks largely to the interim constitution of the seven parties and authoritarianism that they have institutionalised, the responsibility to bring the constitutional accountability and transparency. But thanks largely to the interim constitution of the seven parties and authoritarianism that they have institutionalised, the responsibility to bring the constitutional accountability and transparency of every crime they committed.

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The state may not have manifestly been captured through the ‘barrel of the gun’, but it has certainly been secured under the shadow of the gun.

The cumulative thrust of these tactical and structural factors is that the temptation to grand schemes of ‘social engineering’ will be inevitable and overwhelming. However, pushing such an agenda forward will be difficult, if at all possible, for the Maoists, within the framework of the present distribution of seats within the CA and whatever the contours are of the new coalition Government. A united opposition from the other parties could exercise an overwhelming veto over any such schemes, and, given the history of the fractious democratic polity in the country, spoilers are certainly expected to play a disruptive, if not defining, role in any event, fulfilling their promises to their cadres and to the people of Nepal at large is not an immediate or realistic option either under the emergent framework of governance, or, indeed, the demographic and resource profile of the country. Ironically, the real choice that confronts the Maoists today is to be spectacular failures as statisticians, or to be spectacular failures as Stalinists or radicals.

With their engagement with democracy destined to yield rapid failures in the implementation of long-held promises, the temptation to totalitarianism – barely held in abeyance – will become overwhelming.

The world will do well not, too easily or too quickly, to forget that the party now ascending in Kathmandu is still designated a foreign terrorist organisation by the US Department of State, and that it has not, in a single statement, diluted its ideological commitment to its radical Maoist ideology, or renounced the option of a future resort to political violence.

(From the Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi)
Test of Maoist leadership

Hasty actions might do more harm to the nation in general and to the Maoists in particular.

Binod P Bista

Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist has been successful in establishing its dominance in Nepali politics from the recently held constituent assembly elections. It has acquired the necessary mandate of the people to lead the country now and the seven political parties to frame a new constitution for a new Nepal.

The major objectives cited in the ‘commitment paper’ the Maoists refer to, as distempering of centralised feudal management system and oppression from external expansionist powers, though noble are difficult to attain hastily.

Since the Maoists are trying to project a new ideology ‘Panchandapati’ yet unsettled as a viable system of governance, Nepal as well as the whole world are naturally apprehensive about its success. Current mandate given by the people to the Maoists can thus be related to the desire of all Nepal to continue the peace process and also receive convincing answers on the rationale and workability of the new concept.

This task can be achieved only by discussing every aspect of new nation building such as governance, economic, social, cultural issues with eagle eyes. And yet, it is little wonder that the Maoists have spoken.

It is common knowledge that there has been wholesale pre-election intimidation by the Maoists. Leaders of rival political parties and their supporters have faced the wrath of the Young Communist League (YCL) mercilessly. Voters have been threatened, especially in the rural areas. Many voters were given a choice between voting for the Maoists or an end to peace. They chose peace. Even on the morning of election day, polling booths in Goda, Sidhpur, Ramchep and Bhujor districts, to name a few, were captured by Maoist cadres and supporters of rival parties were barred from casting votes.

Irregularities in numerous voting stations have also occurred. As an example, at one station in Kavre district only a couple of hours due to the night, voters cast their ballots repeatedly. The polling officers and the police security, all known well to the voters, simply turned the other way. A couple of international observers visited the station briefly, and all nefarious activities were put on hold. Once they left, the comedy continued.

Celebrity observers, such as Jimmy Carter, stayed in the capital, and addressed the famed cheers of the elections. They did not do any service at all to democracy in Nepal. It is little wonder that the Election Commission has instructed re-polling to be carried out in 106 voting centers which did not meet the code of conduct of the Commission, covering 21 constituencies. This makes up almost 4% of the 2,888 voting centers.

Another issue is whether the majority of voters know the nuances of a communist party. Dictatorship of the proletariat, class struggle, the bourgeoisie — these are but a few of the concepts that those who adhere to doctrinaire Marxism-Leninism use with grace and glee.

Would an illiterate voter, threatened and thoroughly intimidated, know that democracy has no great value in the communist lexicon? Notwithstanding the aforementioned negative reasons for the Maoist victory, there are other factors at play. The demographics cannot be ignored. About 50% of the voters were under the age of 35. Most of these youths have no strong ties or allegiance to the traditional political parties or their leaders. In 1990, when a multi-party democratic system was instituted in Nepal, a youth who is now 35 would have been just 17 years old, too young to vote.

The complacency of the other political parties, especially the Nepali Congress (NC) and the United Marxist Laiminist (UML), cannot be over-emphasized. The UML, the one of ‘the three big parties’ the current government along with the NC and the Maoists — as well as the leaders of the Rastriya Prajatastra Party (RPP), RPP (Nepal) and Rastriya Janashakti Party (RJP) — all lost in the elections. The Maoists were supposed to obtain a maximum of 20 seats in the CA. Even before the PR results, they already have over a hundred! Someone miscalculated.

Besides the leaders, most of the senior stalwarts of the NC and UML have also lost. Finally, the voters did want change. Since the advent of multi-party democracy in 1990, the NC and UML have held sway, for the most part, over the political throne. Their achievements have been dismal. In a stroke of enlightened public relations, and just before the election, the Maoists came up with the slogan ‘The others have been given their chance — now give us a chance.’

The importance of this campaign can be seen in the words of Prime Minister and ministers from their official residences in order to make necessary forward arrangements, the question of moving out by a monarch from a palace, whose ancestors lived there for generations for over 240 years, would be a sizable project in itself. The moving out would not only require the physical relocation of the king and family but also all household staff and other paraphernalia.

It is hoped that ultimately wisdom would prevail and the Maoists would prove worthy of the trust bestowed on them by the majority.

Roop Joshi

Choosing peace?

The Maoist victory is really a challenge, a challenge by the people to the Maoists’ commitment to peace and stability.

The Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara with businessmen.

Have the people of Nepal spoken? It is for the Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara to answer.

The Maoists, after fifteen years of guerrilla activities, have come into national power via the ballot box. The Maoists were supposed to do without. The Maoists have only one pair of eyes, and they are eagle eyes. And yet, it is little wonder that the Maoists have spoken.

This task can be achieved only by discussing every aspect of new nation building such as governance, economic, social, cultural issues with eagle eyes. And yet, it is little wonder that the Maoists have spoken.

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Interview

Amatya, a charming lady from Nepal, shared her experiences about teaching and education. She taught adults and children over the years and is a substitute teacher in Korea.

Amatya: “In Nepal, I remember people telling me, ‘Only a donkey teaches! Why did you become a teacher even after studying so much?’ Now, I know how wrong those voices were!”

Amatya has taught in Nepal for 12 years and now works as a substitute teacher in Korea. She enjoys her teaching work and the opportunity to help children learn and grow.

Amatya: “Handling an aggressive child: As a teacher, you have to constantly think how to handle such cases. We tell parents to be patient and help the child improve. He agreed and the tone we set in the morning is so important for the whole day. And we have to believe that each child behaves according to his own pace and time with a lot of support from the teachers. Responsive classroom is a new way of disciplining children. Treat the child in the best way throughout the whole year and by the end of the year, the child will think that he is the best and will do his best. There was a child from a complicated family background, who was very aggressive. I prayed a lot and kept showing him that no matter what you have done, I love you and you are the best child to me. Slowly, I began seeing changes in him and he even began to try to please me.”

Amatya believes that good education plays an important role in the lives of children and parents. She feels that every child should be given respect and their views about the responsibilities and challenges of being a teacher in this day and age, and the paramount importance that good education plays in all children’s lives.

Amatya’s sharp insights into what makes a great teacher are valuable for educators.

Amatya: “For the bright, articulate and charming Meekha Mathema, teaching is not a mere profession but a life-long passion. She has taught in private and public schools in the US where she lives. She shared with Sushma Amatya, her sharp insights into what education really means and ought to mean for all children, parents and teachers. Meekha expressed her views about the responsibilities and challenges of being a teacher in this day and age, and the paramount importance that good education plays in all children’s lives.”

Amatya: “After getting married, I stayed home for some time, rearing children, doing some small home business, correspondence courses; and then later taught first grade, 4th and 6th grade. Then I went for some time, rearing children, doing a year and half; during which time I had education in college in the US. After that, I took up teaching. I understand the paramount importance that good education plays in a child’s life and by the end of the year, the child will think that he is the best and will do his best. There was a child from a complicated family background, who was very aggressive. I prayed a lot and kept showing him that no matter what you have done, I love you and you are the best child to me. Slowly, I began seeing changes in him and he even began to try to please me.”

Amatya: “There are lots of opportunities to become independent thinkers. In ancient times, gurus were highly respected. Down the ages, the respect has vanished completely. Teachers need to be given respect and their dignity safeguarded.”

Amatya: “The internet has helped us extremely. We can download lesson plans, axes, all for free. Any teacher can be the best teacher if one is working hard, also in Nepal. Maybe they have not been taught in teaching schools that this whole new world has opened up for them, that is just at the tip of their fingers. It has been a blessing for me to get all these resources through the internet.”

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Amatya: “About parent-teacher communication: Parent teacher communication is vital. If a child has a problem, you need to know what made the child behave this way and only parents can help us there. Getting to know a child in the beginning of the year is so important. I had an attention deficient child who I knew respected his father very much. I called his father and told him that his classroom respects you very much and need you to help him improve. He agreed and the reward system we set up for the child was based at McDonald’s. He did it. Going to McDonald’s was a big deal for him and getting attention of his dad even more so!”

Amatya: “Handling an aggressive child: An aggressive child is usually the one who is very hurt - mentally, emotionally or physically. This situation should not be dealt with aggressively. If you deal with an aggressive situation, it becomes more aggressive. In such cases we tell parents to be sensitive, deal with it democratically and get help from teachers and counsellors.”

Amatya: “Biggest challenge to a teacher: To get a child’s attention! How do you challenge them to do their homework? Even intelligent student needs to do something to vibrate in their homework, so that their grades do not go down. We have hyperlinks related to the subject we are teaching, so that a child can learn a work faster, can use his doing the research, present it to the class, sometimes even before the teacher does it.”

Amatya: “About democratic way of teaching: You have to talk less, act more as facilitators, encourage students to learn independently and answer questions for themselves and the class.”

Amatya: “Five years down the line: I’d like to teach elementary levels, where the children are just old enough to ‘hug’ me. I have so many teachers Zombies and they are fine. If a child complains about anything, they can sue us. We can say the school system has improved but there is us and we have to have the union to protect us and we support us. We are very strong on teachers’ union.”

Amatya: “Your comments on schools in Nepal? In rural areas of Nepal they lack even a proper structure for a school. There are no rooftops, no windows. It is still one room school in many places. And it is hard for teachers who do not have any training to deal with the children. Most teachers are not well educated. Every day, many girls are sent not to school. To change this, we have to change the parents’ way of thinking. It has improved but it is still a long way to go. Girls definitely need more support in our society and there are no materials in classroom. Most of these have schoolbooks only. Even in urban areas, story book and other books are hardly accessible to children, esp. for those from poor background. We have a good system of funding and supporting schools all over the country is essential. Finally, good education is the way to be the independent thinkers. What need is in Nepal is education for overall development.”

Amatya can be contacted at: Shalom1732@hotmail.com
What kind of change?
Shirish Ranabhat

Balkids are powerful. Nepali people have spoken, loud and clear, for their aspirations for a change in the existing political set up. Nepal Congress (NC), the grand old party, is turning out to be a distant second largest party with a humiliating number of elected members in the Constituent Assembly (CA). Whether it was anti- Rana movement or fight against Panchayat autocracy, or even post-1990 democratic era, Nepali people have always been up for change. Sixty years after NC’s inception, this party congregated a shameful defeat in the CA elections.

Political pundits’ predictions regarding the election outcome failed measurably. Even the Indian and US intelligence, who interface in Nepal politics from time to time and have a great deal of influence over almost all Nepali political leaders, could not correctly measure the strong winds of change.

One can argue that the Nepali people might have been attracted to the Maoists’ agendas of abolishing monarchy, including democracy, federalism, republic and socio-economic transformation in the by lawlessness, poor governance and crisis of leadership in GP Koirala’s interim government. Fortunately, the acute price rise, many hours of power cuts every day, shortage of petroleum products and uncertainties of lives and livelihood have ruled the order of Nepali people.

Furthermore, Maoists’ influence and control over the government including the Prime Minister, administration, police forces, judiciary, arts and culture, all government policies have very much helped demobilising the NC cadres. Instead of leading the country efficiently in difficult times, the NC-led government and several inert NC ministers directly and indirectly helped pro-Maoists activities that heightened the despair on voters.

4. Political and legal commitment to provincial autonomy
NC’s lack of clear policy towards republicanim and federalism, and the leadership’s unwillingness to explain and clarify to Nepali people regarding the same affected a large population. Instead of sticking to its centrist stand, the NC stood up for Maoists agenda of political and legal commitment to provincial autonomy with the rights of self-governance and decentralisation determined on the basis of caste, race, language and sectors.

5. Deviation from ideology
NC abandoned six-decade long, nationally and internationally recognised ideology and principles of the party, policies of national unity and reconciliation established by BP Koirala, without discussing among party cadres. The NC lost its identity, history and deep rooted popularity of the party and thus the traditional votes for abandoning the path of BP Koirala. The abrupt adoption of the republican agenda and party leadership’s unresponsiveness with the feelings, suggestions and recommendations of the grass root workers created a negative impression on voters that hindered securing votes. Furthermore, current NC leadership’s disrespectful and ungrateful attitude towards the great leaders like BP Koirala, GM Singh and KP Bhattarai fueled the disgust in the NC supporters that increased the reluctance to vote for the NC.

6. Lack of true information and unawareness of ground realities
The NC leadership failed to get the information regarding the true situation, and the party’s status in the constituencies. They were also unaware of the ground realities of shifting the wind from the party’s side. When the Maoists’ cadres were prominent in and around all the constituencies of the country for the elections campaign, the NC leaders were busy dreaming of their victory.

Other leaders from within the NC visited the constituencies until the last hour. Also, GP Koirala’s dependency on selfish, narrow minded, violets and fascist cultural advisors, believed in the bogue reports regarding the country’s situation and ground realities hindered, to a great extent, the effective mobilisation of parliamentary cadres.

7. Selection of CA candidates
One of the reasons behind the defeat of the NC in the CA elections was the candidate selection. Leadership was imperative to the image, character, popularity, and efficiency of the candidate. The NC leadership completely ignored the devotion and commitment of capable and genuine leaders, who are more effective and strong candidates than the selected ones. Many leaders who won the previous elections were denied the tickets. Young generation was completely ignored.

8. Disorganised election campaign
The NC could have done lot better if the election campaigns were well organised and managed socially, politically and scientifically. The NC leaders, who were in charge of the campaigning, had failed measurably. Ignorant leadership never showed willingness to efficiently organise its cadres. Moreover, party president and the Prime Minister GP Koirala’s decision of not contesting first past the post elections demoralised the enthusiasm of the party workers.

9. PM GP Koirala’s ambitions to control NC with Koirala clan
A major contribution to the NC’s disgraceful performance in the CA elections was courtesy of the ambitions of the PM GP Koirala to take control of the NC with Koirala clan and his relatives. Koirala focused chiefly on the advancement of the Koirala clan. All NC leaders are loitering in a crisis of party control, behaviour, and reconciliation, policies of national unity and internationally.

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link

The NC can learn so many lessons from these events. The CA election outcomes proved the old leadership is outdated. The traditional organisational techniques and styles have failed. The NC should develop a new relationship with organisation with modern, liberal, and scientific visions. It should maintain programs and agendas to address and attract the uneducated, downtrodden, unemployed Nepali people, who have a dream of peaceful, secured and prosperous future for themselves and their generations to come.

All NC leaders are listening in a crisis of confidence. They should be unprejudiced and create national unity of good will and faith among themselves. Above all, they should not forget their responsibilities to safeguard the sovereignty, legality, integrity, independence, and national unity of the country. They should march ahead with a confidence under collective leadership.

(Author, a Ph.D, is a member of the Janasamparka Samiti in USA.)
Karzai escapes Kabul parade attack

Automatic gunfire has broken out at a ceremony marking the defeat of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, forcing Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan’s president, to take cover. Hundreds of people, including government ministers and foreign dignitaries, fled the celebration in chaos as shots rang out near the presidential palace on Sunday.

Gunfire and explosions erupted after Karzai had taken the stage following an inspection of troops in what was meant to have been the largest annual parade of Afghanistan’s military. A live TV broadcast of the event was quickly cut but sounds of gun fire could be still heard.

Afghanistan’s Taliban movement claimed responsibility for the attack. “We carried out the attack. We fired rockets at the scene of the celebration,” Zabihullah Mujahed, a spokesman for the group, said. “We had planned six personnel in the area,” he said. “Three of our men have been wounded,” General Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the defence ministry spokesman, said. “An official at Karzai’s palace said the president was safe and back in the presidential palace.”

“I heard two parliamentarians are wounded,” General Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the defence ministry spokesman, said. An official at Karzai’s palace said the president was safe and back in the presidential palace.

“It is not clear at this stage what exactly happened but the president and other dignitaries are safe,” the official said on condition of anonymity. Al Jazeera’s Zeina Khodr said that there was a very tight security around the venue of the military parade and they managed to infiltrate the presidential palace.

“There have been reports that the government has not been able to control even 30 per cent of the Afghan territory and now with this attack it is not clear how the Taliban managed to infiltrate the security guards of the President,” said Al Jazeera.

Karzai escapes Kabul parade attack

Olympic torch relay kicks off in Seoul

The Olympic torch relay in Seoul, the 17th leg of the Olympic Flame’s global tour, started Sunday in the Olympic Park after a launching ceremony at the Olympic Park.

Li Binghua, vice executive president of the Beijing Organizing Committee of Olympic Games (BOG), handed over the torch kindled with the sacred Olympic flame from ancient Olympia of Greece to Rahn-Jin-koodeputy mayor of Seoul. Kim Jong-Ki, chairman of South Korea’s Olympic Committee, received the torch from Rahn-kicking off the torch relay as the first runner at 2:18 pm local time (0518 GMT). “I feel greatly honored to be the first runner of the torch relay,” Kim told reporters. “During the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, many of the games were held at the stadiums in the Olympic Park. The Olympic flame relay starts from the very place which has more symbolic significance,” said Kim.

In the launching ceremony, Roh Jong-Ki, chairman of South Korea’s Olympic Committee, received the torch from ancient Olympia of Greece to be taking place because they are not safe and we have to point out that there was a very light security around the venue of the military parade and they managed to infiltrate the presidential palace.

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Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

Now there is also a sixth Abhigya which is considered the last and the highest Abhigya but not part of the five we have talked about so far.

All the above five Abhigyas are lower Abhigyas and are considered lowly in all forms of Buddhism. But this last Abhigya, called Asrava Chaya Gyana (knowledge of the extinction of the outflows) is considered the real Abhigya (or Siddhi – Riddhi) in Buddhism.

Asrava means the outflow of mental defilements (emotional and conceptual defilements). When we have emotional and conceptual defilements they are always flowing out from our subconscious mind through verbal or non – verbal expression. These Asravas remain even in yogis who have attained high Samadhis and various Riddhi Siddhis Praatiharyas.

This is the major reason why Buddhism does not consider a yogi with mighty powers equal to an Arhat or a Bodhisatwa or a Buddha. Even such a yogi, no matter how charismatic and mind boggling, still has not destroyed the Asravas. Only an Arhat, an 8th Bhumi (level/stage) Bodhisatwa and above, and the Buddha who is even above a tenth Bhumi, has totally destroyed all Asravas.

This brings us to the big question, how are the Asravas totally destroyed? This brings us to a very important issue within Buddhism which is missing in non – Buddhist systems or at least it is not clear enough.

According to Buddhism there are two major types of meditation systems and they do not produce the same results. One of them, which usually comes first in the Buddhist texts, is Samatha – meditation and the other is Vipasyana meditation also called Vidyadhara meditation.

To understand Buddhism and its correct view, it is of utmost importance to understand these two types of meditations very clearly and to be able to distinguish between these two. Vipashyana is the Sanskrit word used in the Sarnastvad and Mahayana – Vajrayana schools while Vipassana is the Pali word used in the Theravadin School and it is closely linked with what is called mindfulness – meditation but is not limited to that. Mindfulness is called Smrityupasthan in Mahayana and Sarvastivadin texts while it is called Satipatthan in the Pali Canons of the Theravadin.

We shall go into greater details with Samatha and Vipasyana later on but here we shall deal with them in short as the occasion demands it.
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)
You’re still in the bubble, boys!

Lucille Bolduc

Well, that was a hysterical two weeks! Within hours of the polls closing the press was filled with stories about the huge turnout, and the Maoists winning a two-thirds majority. International observers jumped on the bandwagon, each outdoing the other in an effort to praise the elections. Peaceful, credible, remarkable, the compliments flowed like Raksi at an NC rally.

Soon the country’s self-styled intellectuals weighed in: hmmm, the Kathmandu bubble has finally burst... We had no idea the Maoists were so popular... Here is more evidence of the nobility and wisdom of the people. Not that we’ve talked to them, of course, or listened to them. But here is an expression of their will, written on ballot papers, a massive rejection of the Maoists, or stayed home.

But then the story falls apart. The turnout for these elections was the lowest ever, at around 60%. Why? No one could vote freely, without intimidation, because on early April nights Maoist cadres visited their homes, and made it clear their votes were not secret, and they did not have a choice.

Could the same be said for the Congress, UML and, RPP voters? If not, then how many were intimidated into staying home? How many voted for the Maoists out of fear of the consequences should they lose? And how many voted because of direct intimidation, because on early April rights Maoist cadres visited their homes, and made it clear their votes were not secret, and they did not have a choice?

Let me be conservative and ignore the booth capturing (invented by the Maoists this time around), the intimidation of polling officials and non-Maoist polling agents, the problems in counting centers where only Maoist agents watched the election officials. This sort of quiet pressure made the polling process look calm and well-organised, so international observers went away happy. There’s nothing like fear to make people behave.

But let us say all these threats, combined, only changed the behavior of one in ten citizens. That equals half the Maoists’ total vote. Do the math. So, when the Kathmandu babblers start navel-gazing, talking about the message from the countryside, do they believe them? They were trapped in a bubble before, and they’re trapped in one now. The Maoists have given Nepal’s elite the excuse they needed to bow down before a new class of masters, and to feel good about it. They now talk knowingly about underestimating the people, that mass of unpleasant peasants, heaving away somewhere outside the Ring Road. As if acknowledging past analytical failures somehow makes them better students of the future.

I’ll give them one thing: the Maoists know Nepal, and the weakness of its elite. They spent two years running rings around Kathmandu while consolidating their hold on the countryside. They rigged an election while no one was paying attention, and now they’re back to the same games, talking coalition government and economic miracles. The SPA, the Election Commission, the international observers and the donors, they all traded justice for the people for a promise of peace.

The Maoists took the challenge, and took power. Once again the country is left with a single, frayed, thread of hope that, having been offered Nepal as a banquet meal, the Maoists appetite will now, finally, be satisfied, and they will settle into sated respectability. You might as well wish for a well-fed shark to turn vegetarian. Let the feeding frenzy begin.
Belling the cat: The paradox of polls

The paradox of polls

Reading the different dailies and weeklies in Nepal and English over the last two weeks since that fateful day when the polling stations opened to receive our offerings, one is confronted with a whole flurry of contradictions. President Carter, who is strangely honoured for being a President, who was weak when it came to ‘biting the bullet’ during crises that demanded strength of will; declared them peaceful and fair.

This observation was based no doubt on his fleeting visits to places within the valley. Not understanding the Nepali language and not being privy to all the tricks and connivances our various political parties have perfected over the years, how would he know?

One much cited survey has declared that people were prevented from campaigning in 40% of the country. There were 241 cases of poll-related violence in 51 districts, 33 people were killed, 81 kidnapped and 890 injured in a poor security environment. The same reputable survey (DEAN2008) said there were numerous incidences of irregularities, ill-managed booths (ours was one of them), and booth capturing. The researchers also observed incidences of kids voting and the same person voting numerous times, and people showing up with voter ID cards.

Infringements of citizens’ rights. Now if this is what President Carter or any other international observer calls free and fair then I think we speak a different language when we speak about democracy. Then, again, I believe, but may be mistaken, that it was President Carter who, elections ago, declared one of President Mugabe’s ‘winks’ free and fair.

Those who did intimidate and rig votes are luckily they live in Nepal among a population terrorised by memories of doublefaced ‘liberation’. In a stilted democracy they would have been shown the door. But who is going to bell the cat and tell it like it is?

The system used initially or for 50% of the votes in Nepal’s case is one that many nations still using if it has debated reforming for a number of years now. It’s a paradoxical system in that even a discerning voter can be compelled to vote for a candidate even if they don’t really want to because they know voting for any other candidate is a wasted vote since he/she won’t get in. The Election Commission’s calculation of wasted votes by no means corresponds to the oddities of the First Past the Post (FPP) system.

In FPP the fact is that you can theoretically have 12,000 voters and two candidates: one gets 6,001 votes and the other 5,999. Now is it just that almost half the voters are stuck with a candidate they didn’t vote for? In Nepal’s case it is even more unfair.

Look at the number of parties (I counted 55 on my ballot slips). Wasted votes are usually calculated as those cast for a losing candidate, those cast in excess of the number needed for one candidate to win, and those cast for ‘spoilers’.

Of course in these neat calculations no-one has included votes cast in the name of hundreds of thousands who are absent from the country; votes cast in the name of people who don’t exist (made possible by the EC’s rather lax acceptance of voters without proper voter ID cards); and votes cast in the name of many people who have already departed for the heavenly abode. In Europe it’s called ‘Corssy voting’. First Past the Post encourages voting against someone rather than for someone. What Nepal experienced was a magnified of ‘spoilers’.

Now if this is what President Carter or any other international observer calls ‘free and fair’ then I think we speak a different language when we speak about democracy.

Sacked and in desperate need of strength of will to face such a situation is the President, who was weak when it came to ‘biting the bullet’ during crises that demanded strength of will; declared them peaceful and fair.

There were 241 cases of poll-related violence in 51 districts, 33 people were killed, 81 kidnapped and 890 injured in a poor security environment. The same reputable survey (DEAN2008) said there were numerous incidences of irregularities, ill-managed booths (ours was one of them), and booth capturing. The researchers also observed incidences of kids voting and the same person voting numerous times, and people showing up with voter ID cards.

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that is candidates and parties that didn’t have a hope of getting a seat or a significant number of votes. Their presence were meant votes that were diverted from meaningful contenders. In Nepal’s case the establishment has managed to help themselves by coming up with cowardly policies that simply knew to Masoud threats and rhetoric. They deprived the people of a choice, and many people, weary with conflict, voted for the lot that was more ‘persuasive’.

Of course there was rigging, of course it’s unfair, of course it’s undemocratic but now, of course, the people are going to have to put up with it until the lack lustre parties in the alliance suddenly wake up, become inspired, and ensure that people get a fair deal. When all parties have the same policy, votes are merely cast in dissent against parties they see as falling in the past; give new blood a chance. It is a good intention but then let’s hope it doesn’t lead down the road to hell, from where there is no return.

Chances are in a truly fair democratic system where there are only a couple of main parties, you will return a party with a majority that gives them the mandate to govern from 75-80% of the time. That means the party in question will have received 50% or more than 50% of the votes. That is what a party needs to start calling the shots. It’s not the number of seats that finally determine whether a party has the strength to govern as single party or not, it actually is the number of votes. If a party doesn’t have a real majority, it is treading on thin ice to presume it has.

Here in Nepal we have a party that received a little less than a third of the votes. More than any other party but all the same it means that the majority of voters did not vote for the CPNM, they voted for some other party. They wasted their votes in doing so but the CPNM would do well to remember two things.

The first is that this was not a general election to change from the alliance to a single party, it was an election to select members of the constituent assembly, any decisions about ministerial posts and so forth still needs the consensus of the alliance. When a constitution is drawn, a general election has to be fought and then structural and other changes will be legal in a democracy.

Secondly, the Pancypriatidae did some rigging in 1980 and too came back as a minority government, although having a substantially larger proportion of the total than the one third that is now the case. It was a case of another totalitarian form of government determining that it will take power no matter what the cost.

You can of course, as they say, fodder some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time; and we will be watching you, that’s what the fourth estate is for!