



Concern Nepal

A publication of Canada Forum for Nepal

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On the occasion of Nepali New Year Eve, Canada Forum for Nepal has released the first issue of – Concern Nepal – a periodic publication of the Forum that is circulated electronically and posted in this website. We invite you to be part of the Forum by getting involved and contribute to Concern Nepal by sending news, views, op-ed writings and research articles.

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Editorial

Historical course of action taken by a nation largely determines where the country stands today. In this context, Nepal's current crisis is the making of its own. We may disagree on why Nepal is where it is today, but it is hard to deny the fact that the crisis has evolved in a country, where majority of Nepalese have been humiliated for too long, political exclusion has been daunting, economic deprivation is alarming, social injustice is heart-breaking and betrayals from ruling class are too frequent and colossal. This disturbing picture is not developed in a year or not even in a decade. They are the unfortunate but expected outcome of decades of wrong policies carried out by rulers – under undemocratic institutions – who did not have to be accountable no matter how monumental their mistakes were.

One unsettling question swirls in the minds of those who want to see Nepal as a land of dignity where opportunities for better future are available to all – including the deprived and the

disadvantaged: Why were policies with such devastating consequences continued for so long? Unless we have the right answer(s) to this question, a peaceful and democratic Nepal will be an illusion.

Nepal's traditional power structure, which has been detrimental for democratic development of the country and the prosperity of the majority, is the cause of this outcome. Tragically, Nepalese constitutions (four in all) have failed to shake enough the centuries old power structure of Nepal and have sustained the status quo by continuously marginalizing majority of Nepalese. Vast majority are still illiterate, new ideas are not allowed to flourish and right policies are not implemented. This political, economic and social deprivation of majority of citizens is fuelling the uprisings that are building up in Nepal today.

Amidst this background, we, Nepalese Diaspora and friends of Nepal, have decided to initiate dialogues, undertake research and organize programs on contemporary issues that affect the wellbeing of Nepal. To address concerns, both immediate (pressing issues of conflict, human rights violations, and social injustice) and long term, we have formed "Canada Forum for Nepal (henceforth, Forum), in February 2006 with a vision of "Peaceful, Democratic, Just and Prosperous Nepal". This newsletter – *Concern Nepal* – is a periodic publication of the Forum that is circulated electronically and posted in its website. We invite you to be part of the Forum by getting involved and contribute to *Concern Nepal* by sending news, views, op-ed writings and research articles. You can reach us by sending email at info@cfn.ca

Canada Forum for Nepal: Vision and Objectives

Nepal is a country in crossroad demanding urgent involvement of Nepalese Diaspora and its friends who believe in peace, democracy, human rights, social justice and economic development in Nepal. Realizing this responsibility, we have taken an initiative to establish an organization, *Canada Forum for Nepal* (CFFN), to pursue a vision of "peaceful, democratic, just and prosperous Nepal". To reach its vision, CFFN has set the following objectives:

1. Gather support of international public, policy makers, and organizations for the cause of peace, democracy, human rights, and social justice in Nepal;
2. Organize workshops, interaction programs, awareness forums and educational activities on contemporary issues in Nepal;
3. Contribute to conflict resolution and demilitarization of Nepal;
4. Disseminate information through publication of digests, articles, appeals and statements about Nepal;
5. Communicate, network and collaborate with concerned individuals and organizations; and
6. Conduct research on social, political, economic and environmental issues in Nepal.

Radio Interview

On 16 February 2006, CHUO 89.1 FM Radio Ottawa invited Pramod Dhakal, a CFFN committee member, for an interview. The radio host, Jack DeJong, presented questions related to recent suppressions of press, media and human rights in Nepal. Mr. Dhakal stressed that the 12-point memorandum-of-understanding signed by seven parties and the Maoists was a positive step. He added that king must respect the spirit of the MOU and permit the people to bring a democratic constitution through an election of a constitutional assembly – a most desired way to prevent further death and catastrophe in Nepal.

Panel Discussion

On 18 February 2006, CFFN and Harmony International jointly organized a panel discussion on “Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal” in Ottawa. The program was well attended by members of the Nepalese community and friends of Nepal. Four guest speakers from different backgrounds, highlighted social, political and economic factors that are contributing to the current crisis in Nepal. As a chief guest, Hon. Flora MacDonald, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Canada, expressed that Nepal is on the verge of being a failing state. She was critical of the government decision for not reciprocating the four-month long Maoists ceasefire. She raised concern about the difficulties that the ordinary people are facing in their daily life following the coup by the King using his military power. She criticized the recent municipal polls as not being reflective of the will of the people. Detailed press release of the panel discussion is posted at www.cffn.ca.

Formation of Ad-hoc Committee

An eight member ad-hoc committee of CFFN was formed on 26 February 2006 comprising of Alys Mucart, Bishwa Adhikari, Faruq Faisal, Kalidas Subedi, Krishnahari Gautam, Pradeep Sharma, Pramod Dhakal and Ram Acharya. The committee will execute CFFN’s activities until the organization is broadened, membership is expanded, and a full fledged executive committee is formed.

Creation of a Website

CFFN has launched a website of www.cffn.ca which will be used as one of the tools for communication. We hope to enrich it through the publication of articles, activities, petitions and digests that address pressing issues in Nepal.

The Political Deadlock in Nepal: Dream vs. Demon

The situation in Nepal is grim; the conflict is sharpening and the crisis is looming larger. The country is completely polarized – all major political parties and the Maoists are asking for an election of a constitutional assembly to write a new constitution whereas an unyielding king is ruling unconstitutionally. Simply put, Nepal's conflict revolves around the question of whether Nepal should be governed by a constitution written by peoples' representatives where king may have a role or ruled by an absolute monarch where all legislative, executive and judicial rights emanate from the King as was the case in pre-1990 Nepal. The king and his government are crushing people's aspirations whereas people are bravely advancing a movement to gain their intrinsic rights – and there is a deadlock. It is a stalemate between the king's pursuit to become an absolute monarch with the support of his army and people's dream for exercising their fundamental rights.

The autocratic regime has reached its limit in suppressing democratic aspirations. On the other hand, people look determined to break the power structure and become masters of their nation's destiny. So, the nation has stood in a defining phase with stark choices: further derail the nation for the benefit of a handful of undemocratic elements who do not consider Nepalese people worthy as "citizens" or change political, social and economic order to build a beautiful Nepal. At a time when people in peaceful protests have met with bullets, remaining "indifferent" amounts to an implicit support to the atrocities perpetuated by the regime. Consider the tragically asymmetric situation. People are deprived of their basic rights and are asking for peaceful resolution whereas the regime is mobilizing army to cement an absolute power. Every move by the king and his government has been provocative and confrontational. Hence, support to the king and his government is not only a blow to people's hope for democracy but also an approval for civil war. The faster we condemn the power takeover by the king and do that forcefully, the faster the nation is going to see peace and democracy.

The 12-point memorandum of understanding reached between the Seven Party Alliance (that represents 95% of the seats in the last elected parliament) and the Maoists (who control most of the rural area) has been a ray of hope for peaceful solution. The mutual understanding between these two forces has not only boosted the morale of democratic forces, it has also created historic time to reshape Nepal's political structure for better future. Despite some pressure against the understanding, the parties and the Maoist have recently reiterated their commitment to the MOU. This is an encouraging development and should be strengthened further. In this context, the role of civil societies, professional organizations, and many individuals is commendable.

It's sad though the king's calculation that he can ignore the international community has not proved wrong. Even in such a violation of human rights by regime, the message from the international community has not been that forceful; rather sometime it has been confusing and mixed. In contrast to the Nepalese people's desire that the political parties and the Maoists should work together for paving road to the election of a constitutional assembly, there has been a lot of media coverage saying that constitutional forces should unite with constitutional king.

However, those who are familiar with king's misdeed find the present king and constitutional-force as oxymoron. This is the king who has torn apart the constitution and has ruled by decrees of his choosing. What else is left for the king to do in order to become unconstitutional? More to the point, who should decide what is constitutional in Nepal, the people of Nepal or some body else?

The crisis in Nepal demands a fair and straight forward opinion from the national and international community. It is clear that the outlet from the military, political and social crisis and economic stagnation is in the dismantling of the old power structure and establishment of constitution that asserts peoples' sovereignty. The peoples' sacrifice and bravery seen in recent days are signs that the deadlock may not last long.

Enduring the Crisis

Every nation undergoes critical phases in the history of its evolution and Nepal is no exception. A popular movement is emerging in Nepal that is destined to bring transformative changes in that country. This movement is composed of a spectrum of approaches that range from peaceful civil movements to organized armed rebellion. Although a movement to free the country from centuries old injustices was long overdue, it has also presented a predicament: amount of suffering versus lasting outcome. The country has already suffered horrific human tragedy and socioeconomic hardships; the ordinary people – especially from remote and rural areas – have suffered the most. At the same time, majority of people believe that the current social and political movement in Nepal is warranted and could lead to achieving its highest goal of permanent and sustainable peace and democracy in Nepal. The question is: for how long these people can sustain this suffering? As the political movement in Nepal is taking its momentum, there are growing fears and concerns that conspirators from the royal palace and outside players, as always, will put their utmost efforts to make the Nepalese popular movement a failure. The movement aborted by a pre-mature compromise will only squander the sacrifice made by Nepalese people. Hence, political leaders and civil society should take extra vigilance, and respect the feelings of Nepalese people who want to see a genuine change. The lesson learned from the past betrayals from the palace is that without a direct say from the people, there will never be a democratic constitution in Nepal.

The most plausible way to solve Nepal's problem once and for all is to create a situation for a free and fair election of a constitutional assembly and materialize the spirits of MOU signed by the seven parliamentary parties and the Maoists. Understanding the intrinsic strength of MOU, the King and his allies are working strenuously to bring split among its signatories. To this front, parliamentary political parties and the Maoist have to move cautiously maintaining their commitments towards MOU, and not to disappoint Nepali people by breaching their promises.

International Mission Concerns on the Freedom of Expression in Nepal

The situation of press freedom in Nepal is nationally and internationally criticised. In response to continued violations of press freedom and freedom of expression in Nepal, twelve international organisations including the International Press Institute, South Asia Press Commission and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation – UNESCO, made a joint mission to Nepal from 20 to 25 March 2006.

In a press statement, eminent south Asian personalities including the former Prime Minister of India I.K. Gujral, senior media columnist and former Member of Parliament of India, Kuldip Nayer, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, lawyer and human rights activist Asma Jahangir, and editor of Daily Times in Pakistan, Najam Sethi have written endorsements supporting democracy and press freedom in Nepal and expressed their full trust and endorsed the “International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal.” Mr. Gujral took a serious note of the King’s attitude in refusing to listen to the dissenting voices for press freedom in Nepal from all parts of the world, and called the administrative policies “ruthless and suppressive”. He appreciated the role of Nepalese media in the fight for press freedom and freedom of expression and also valued its role in advocating journalists’ rights. He also gave a clarion call to all the South Asian countries saying, “I join the media of Nepal and the other South Asian countries to protest against the suppressive and anti-democratic policies of the Nepal administration”.

Wrapping up its week long Nepal visit on March 25, the media mission said, “Of particular concern is the increasing involvement of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) and armed police forces in press freedom and freedom of expression violations, as well as interference in the media sphere.”

Nepalese Journalist Speaks in Toronto

On 4 March 2006, University of Toronto’s Nepal Group organized a public talk program led by Deepak Thapa, a Nepalese journalist and a visiting fellow at Columbia University. Mr. Thapa contended that the true source of Nepal’s conflict is in the historical injustices that occurred through long and absolute monarchical rule. He also blamed the ruling political parties of 1990s for not hearing the genuine grievances of the people and argued that the dismissal of the democratic and social reforms demanded by smaller political parties, including those put forward by the group that evolved into CPN (Maoist) was a blunder. He stressed that the geographic and ethnic disparities are the big contributors to Nepal’s current crisis. He was of the opinion that the present armed rebellion in Nepal is different than the past ones in a sense that past rebellions were led by young people who had not established themselves as seasoned politicians, whereas the present one is launched by people with political expertise and intellectual capability to capitalize the prevailing social and economic injustices.

Mr. Thapa said that with the rise of Maoist movement, the previously ignored social groups including Dalits (untouchables) have become increasingly conscious of their social and political rights. As this group is the primary force behind Maoist movement, Nepal cannot go back to its old cast-based social order. At the same time, powerful groups, who have been gaining from the old social structure and economic conditions, are rallying behind the king to prolong his autocratic rule. However small it may be in number, this group is powerful because of their control over the army and the influence of this English speaking group over the cocktail-circle of foreign diplomats and visitors. Although the views of this group do not reflect those of the majority of Nepali, most foreigners do not get to understand the views of the population at large. The foreign view that monarchy is essential for Nepal's political stability originates from this cocktail circle.

Mr. Thapa said Nepal's governing regime is standing against the aspirations of people and blatantly abusing human rights. At the same time, despite having people centric political demands and political rhetoric, the Maoists are also severely violating human rights. Between the two guns are the ordinary people, who see no end in sight to the conflict and are desperate for a peaceful change. Mr. Thapa believes that there cannot be a military solution to the present crisis. He concluded that the future of Nepal cannot be bright as long as it remains in the grip of a monarchy, and the international community should stand behind the aspiration of Nepalese people for a just and democratic Nepal. He also said that it is an utmost necessity for Nepal to bring the Maoists in mainstream by writing a constitution that can address their grievances.

After the talk, a documentary film, *Schools in the Crossfire* was screened. The documentary exposes the atrocities committed by the royal army and the rebels as part of their political strategies.

To see Peaceful, Democratic, Just and Prosperous Nepal!

By coincidence or by choice,
we have released the first issue of Concern Nepal on Nepali New Year Eve.
Friends **from Canada Forum for Nepal** wish you a

Happy New Year 2063
and
wish that Nepalese people see a lasting peace and justice!