



# Concern Nepal

A Newsletter of the Canada Forum for Nepal (CFFN)

(This special issue of the Concern Nepal contains a summary article on the current political development in Nepal-CFFN).

## Nepalese Political Scenario: A Commentary

*By Faruq Faisal*

Today, Nepal is going through a transformation, which appears to be positive. The seven main political parties have formed a new government in April 2006. These parties, as well as the Maoists had spearheaded nationwide mass protests to end a direct rule by King Gyanendra.

In 1990, the first People's Movement overthrew thirty years of autocratic Panchayet rule. A tripartite agreement led to a new constitution. After the first 3 years of stability from 1991-1994, Nepal engulfed in a cycle of short-lived weak governments. Corruption and nepotism swallowed the governance structure. The Maoist insurgents entered the political stage of Nepal in 1996.

By 2000, the Maoists had successfully taken over the control of almost 75% of rural Nepal. As this was occurring, the parties and the monarch who were busy with their own games and acquiring resources through corruption dominated national politics.

In June 2001 the former King Birendra and his family was massacred. King, Gyanendra, who is always considered as a shady character in Nepal, ascended to the throne. Within a year of coming to power, the new King managed to engineer a split in the Nepali Congress party over the issue of emergency rule. The splinter

Congress, led by Sher Bahadur Deuba was invited by the King to form the government. Later on, with no parliament to challenge him, the King summarily dismissed the Deuba government in October 2002 through his first coup.

In February 2005, the King staged his second and hopefully the final coup. A severe crackdown on political parties, the media, human rights activists and civil society quickly followed the coup. At the end, the king's unacceptable actions pushed the political parties into a formal alliance with the Maoists. Once again, Nepal witnessed a 19 days long "People's Movement" in April 2006, after 16 years of the first one. Street protests in Kathmandu and other towns all over the country pushed the king back to his own cage.

Nepal now has a resurrected parliament, a party-led government, and a fledgling cease-fire and new peace process. The proclamation of the House of Representatives on May 18 severely crippled the King's power. It has also declared Nepal as a secular state, renamed His Majesty's government as the Nepal government and the Royal Nepal Army as the Nepali Army, put the Army under parliamentary control and declared that the House would be sovereign for the exercise of all rights until another constitutional arrangement is made. The new parliament also took few more very strong decisions. Women's equal rights have been recognized and untouchability has been declared illegal.

On May 26, the preliminary talks between the government and the Maoists have commenced. Both parties have agreed on a 25 points code of conduct, which has been welcomed by civil

society, politicians and professional organizations. Both sides have expressed to honor the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international humanitarian laws and the rule of law and to work within the framework of competitive multiparty democracy. This followed by the decision of inviting the UN to manage the arms from both sides, the Army and the Maoists.

With all these positive developments in the background, Nepal still faces immense challenges. The country is trying to simultaneously manage a fragile coalition government, navigate a three-way peace process, provide sufficient security that elections can be held and politicians can operate openly – all the while managing an inclusive, sweeping and entirely new process for rewriting the constitution. Some of the immediate challenges are listed as below:

**Counter Revolution:** Though the parliament has crippled the wings of the king severely, the fact remains that he is physically present in the country. He has followers, even limited in numbers. It appears that his followers are waiting to see conflict between the interim governments as well as between the ruling seven party alliances. If that happens at any time soon, the king and his followers might attempt to recover the power of monarch.

There is also a threat from the right-wing Hindu groups. They are organizing themselves in the wake of the proclamation of Nepal as a secular state. They have termed the decision as "illegal and undemocratic". These groups have organized protests in Birgunj and other southern towns. The Hindu fundamentalist groups derive their influence from connections with the King and cross-border ties with the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP). Nepal needs to undertake some public awareness campaign at the grassroots level to popularize the notion of the

secular state and defuse the Hindu fundamentalist movements.

**International Monitoring:** International groups, those were supporting the democratic movement in Nepal, need to keep Nepal on their radars for next several months. The country is not out of danger yet. As mentioned above, there is an immediate threat of counter revolution. There is also a need to monitor the peace process. In 2003 the ceasefire between the army and Maoists crumbled under the weight of suspicion, distrust and mutual provocation.

**Security Sector Reform:** One of the core demands through the People's Movement was the need to transform the army fundamentally and shake up the top army brass, which was completely beholden to the king and was implicitly involved in gross human rights violations. It goes about the Armed Police Force and Civilian Police Force. A total Security Sector Reform initiative is important and necessary and important.

**Disarmament:** It is a positive sign that the UN has been invited to monitor the arms management of both sides. However, Nepal will need a plan and capacity to implement a total DDR blue print. During the disarmament process, the UN should not forget the third party- vigilantes- who been armed by the monarch to counter the Maoists and then the political upraise. In addition, during the rehabilitation of the armed combatants, the issue of the women combatants should be kept in the fore front.

**Internally Displaced People:** Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) throughout Nepal are not yet ready to return to their homes in large numbers despite the bilateral ceasefire and peace talks between the new government and Maoist rebels. The insurgency has resulted in widespread displacement. The ceasefire has led to a trickle of returns as some villagers have

taken the opportunity to reclaim property and livestock. However, most IDPs are watching and waiting, aware that there have been many false dawns in Nepal's volatile recent history.

IDPs also need compensation for assets seized or destroyed by both sides in the conflict, as well as their immediate livelihood when they return to their villages. Single women, who have lost their breadwinners during the conflict, as well as orphaned children, will need support.

**Institution Building:** Nepal will need international support to build up its institutional capacity to sustain the democratic process, as well as guarantee people's participation in good governance. Institutions like the Election Commission, Human Rights Commission and Women's Commission need major restructuring.

**Development Policy:** Nepal needs a new development strategy to alleviate poverty and to ensure sustainability. Socioeconomic development philosophy and policies including institutional reforms are necessary to alleviate rural poverty. Villages have been relegated to the bottom in terms of availability of socioeconomic development institutions as well as resources where the crux of problems exists. This needs to be reversed in order to sustain the village economy and to reduce the level of poverty.

Nepal ought to address the social sustainability, enrich the human capital, and enhance our social capital along with ecological sustainability to complement sustainable economic development.

Recently, parliament has empowered itself with exclusive rights, responsibility, and accountability, so do need local government bodies with a coherent system of accountability, institutional and financial decentralization, ecological, and economic rights along with civil liberties.”

**Marginalized Groups:** Though the parliament has declared untouchability as illegal and acknowledged women's equal rights, the country needs a structure, framework and social movement to make these decisions into reality. Nepal also needs a clear plan of action on how to improve the quality of lives of dalits, Tharus and other ethnic groups who have been marginalized in Nepal for centuries. The government should also bring the debate around *Madheshi* rights in the forefront.

**Support for Trauma Survivors:** Often in a post-conflict situation, there is a tendency of forgetting the trauma that the population goes through during the period of insurgency and conflict. Nepali population, specially women and children will need support to address the trauma that they have gone through during the last sixteen years. Rehabilitation of the child soldiers should also be given priority.

*(The author is a media and communication specialist, who has visited Nepal several times and was present during the period of people's movement in April 2006).*

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