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Compulsions behind current conflict

By Dr Bipin Adhikari

- The ongoing conflict in Nepal at present has three fundamental compulsions that the international community inside the country and wellwishers watching the events from abroad hardly understand.

They are the compulsions of an intelligent King, who, knowing the increasing republican aspirations of the people and the enduring protests on the streets, is painfully watching erosion of his goodwill. Secondly, there are compulsions of the major parliamentary parties who only have a helpless King to scold, and keep a blind eye on the attacks – political, economic and social - that are being made on this country, and the full-fledged democracy that it had, from all quarters. Finally, there are compulsions of the Maoists who, knowing that they cannot win, are ready to go for extinction, rather than making compromise of a sort that could give legitimate space for every political force in the country that has the courage to testify before the people. These compulsions have resulted in an environment in which each of the respective faction is adding pressures on the others amidst their own fragile footing, and thereby allowing for the conflict to protract endlessly.

There is a fourth group, the group of intellectuals- journalists, lawyers, academicians, and other professional categories, which hardly knows its duty towards the state in this difficult situation. Take the human rights community of the country as a modest example.

The approximately eighty-thousand bonded labourers in western Nepal and thousands of other unemployed agricultural laborers in the

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Other unemployed agricultural laborers in the southern plains, could be provided full time jobs within three months, if the approximately 200,000 foreign labourers in the construction and related sector in the Kathmandu Valley alone are asked to take a dignified leave. All professional carpenters, barbers, cobblers, vegetable vendors and occupational groups of the Madhesh [plains bordering India] will have plenty of jobs in Nepal if those who have replaced them are asked to vacate for the bhumi putras.

A sad irony of eight years of conflict, foreigners now own approximately 70 percent of the shops and supplies in Kathmandu, making hundreds of thousands of other Nepalese dependent on this group. This is hardly considered as an issue by the activists in the human rights community. The government thinks there is nothing wrong, because it is there to safeguard the human rights of economic refugees from across the border, not of its own citizens. The compulsions are clear.

Another group with the compulsions is the press and electronic media. In a country, where a foreign ambassador does not shy from addressing a political forum of the Reporters Club, or float his opinion in the political process every other day, many of the journalists, instead of making it a question on our national pride, carry the news in mainstream media. Does it actually matter to them as citizens of this country whether Buddha belonged to Nepal or another country?

So much has been written about The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post dailies. But the real issues are left behind. Who compelled the government to approve the proposal for its registration? Was it an economically targeted investment at all? Or the purpose was altogether different? While every economic sector is failing, how come a newspaper like The Himalayan Times can start a price war, and then sustain it continuously, knowing that it has a very fragile footing? Should the authorities not ask them who are the benevolent financiers who don't care the risk of such investment in an insurgency-torn country? Who are the promoters, and can they sustain a loss of this magnitude? Do a couple of the respected Nepali senior journalists, who are associated with these papers, decide the contents that go to the people everyday? The

questions remain unanswered even by the media itself.

Let us not just accuse The Himalayan Times or Annapurna Post only. There are others as well. Does the local press have the legal entitlement to collect local news through foreign correspondents? Why not lift the corporate veil to see the real faces, since the law of the land has never been so poor not to allow it? Why should not they be brought on board?

While the whole state system is in limbo, the process of militarization is moving fast. There are decisions to link up Nepal with trains and trans-border buses and railways, more beggars, economic refugees, and population influx making the Nepali people a minority forever. Agreements and treaties are signed in hydropower and other sectors, giving upper hand to a foreign government without approbation (the parliament has been dissolved anyway). If such induced agreements are regularly signed in which Nepal always has a lower hand, the repercussions of such agreements can only be a gradual and eventual capitulation to external powers. In the present context, when the youth is withering away in the war, it is only the hungry, sick, unemployed common people, and the peasantry, who feel the brunt of the militarization that is falling heavy on them.

Very briefly said, the point is that empires go down, when they accumulate compulsions that they cannot endure for long. One individual, with dedication, persistence and clear thinking, can make an amazing difference. But then this country does not seem to have one such person in the power game – be it GP Koirala, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Baburam Bhattarai or King Gyanendra – who can take a lead in dismantling the compulsions, help unite together with a sense of responsibility, knock down the contradictions, and chart the vision for a strong and independent Nepal. While these leaders continue to live with compulsions because they want to stay in power by hook or by crook, they will continue to lag behind in establishing the foundation of a just and comprehensive peace.

(The author is a lawyer)