

Efforts to deal with insurgency

By DR BIPIN ADHIKARI

According to a commentator, Yasser Arafat, who founded and currently heads the Palestine Liberation Organization, is described as a Palestinian patriot, a murderer, a liar, a Nobel laureate, a terrorist, a thug, and so on. But he never was and never will be a peacemaker.

A Nepali analyst, without having an in-depth knowledge of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, may not be able to give a sharp opinion on the veracity of this commentator's claim, but when it comes to the role of India in the much-talked peace process in Nepal, it is crystal clear from the beginning that India cannot contribute to the cause of peace in Nepal. To say that it wants peace in Nepal is a lie for many educated Nepali commoners. Peace in Nepal means withdrawal of almost all ongoing Indian interference, exploitation and high-handedness; and this is something that India will never think or do. This much of its behavior has always been predictable.

The role of India in the Maoist conflict is known to all. All conscious Nepalis have seen how careful India has been in its approach. The most urgent item on the agenda of ailing Nepal is the resolution of the Maoist conflict. But this is something that India does not want to contribute to in any way. This is not an impossible issue. Whatever the Maoists talked and decried in the past, they are now speaking about a multiparty system, further democratic consolidation of its procedures and an all-inclusive political structure for the new Nepal. They know that they cannot topple monarchy by the inherent weaknesses that they have in the nature of their struggle. There can always be a compromise on the rest of the issues. Unfortunately, these issues have never been explored, and the whole focus is on contributing to the conflict – militarily, economically and politically.

India can always demoralize a government in Nepal and manipulate its activities in multifarious ways. It can easily force a Prime Minister to come to New Delhi, accompanied by a 66-member entourage, compel him to read the speech that it wants to hear, and organize a show which is very different than what it is playing, and misguiding the world about its strategies. It can also continue buying the loyalty of the Nepali press and electronic media, misguide all Nepal's well-wishers, and its western trading partners. This country has also seen the destructive power of the Indian media. However, an overt exploitation of the political economy of Nepal, with all these dirty ways and means, will not protect Indian interest in Nepal.

If Nepal is not safe, with all its independence and nationalist flavor, India is not safe either, no matter how strongly Indian presence in Nepal is enforced. It must not have forgotten its bad experience in 1987-90, when it had to make an exit in ignominy from Sri Lanka only to withdraw after President Premadasa gave it an ultimatum to quit by a particular date.

If the joint press statement issued at the end of the five-day official tour of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to India gives any indication, India will act more visibly in Nepal in the future to combat "the scourge of terrorism", further intensifying joint cooperation that already exists in this front with Nepal. What is ignored altogether are the efforts made by other friendly countries towards the peace process in Nepal. In the reinvented spirit of camaraderie, an Indian newspaper wrote, the Prime Minister of Nepal has already assured of consulting the Indian government on all "third party representatives" who seek a role in the resolution of the Maoist crisis on behalf of their governments.

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It is not clear how China will react to the new overtures from New Delhi, both official and unofficial, but it is clear why the Prime Minister was forced to go to Delhi while the situation back home was so heartbreaking. Bad timing is bad diplomacy. And bad diplomacy carries larger consequences. Nobody should ignore that the part of the Maoist problem in Nepal has a history: The history of attack on Nepal's independence and nationalism, the internal colonization of politics, business and industries, the subjugation of the economy, and breaking of all traditional vestiges, that sustained Nepal since hundreds of years. Nepalis have become destitute in their own country; the mass has not benefited from its political and economic development.

It is true that understanding, cooperation and assistance from India can have a critical bearing on Nepal's fight against its problems, but there has always been credibility gaps be-

tween what India has said (for Western consumption) and what it has done. The ability of the politicians of Nepal to deal with India has also been questionable. Even now what Nepal needs is not the supplies including that of a multi-role light helicopter, as they say it, or the arms or ammunition, but helping create environment in which both the parties to the conflict, can sort out the program ahead. Instead of playing one against another, and contributing to the ongoing madness, attempts should have been made to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. But that obviously was not on the agenda of a country which wants to see Nepal in its security umbrella.

Nepali people want an end to the conflict, but not by establishing India in Nepal. Three significant developments in the peace process in Nepal are carefully being cornered. The first is the willingness of the Western countries to provide, courtesy Sir Jeffrey James, Britain's special envoy to Nepal, to deal with the Maoist conflict and help Nepal in its difficult days.

James could have played a very productive role in the peace negotiation process and could have been a blessing in disguise. The mediocre political lot of Nepal, both in the Maoist and multiparty fronts, could not create a proper environment for him. Secondly, this development has also cornered a very strong possibility of the United Nations to give Nepal a negotiated settlement.

James could have helped with this process as well. Thirdly, the United States, which had played a key role in the supply of military hardware to Nepal, has also been hinted how it is being perceived.

Dubbing the Maoist problem a "common security challenge" for both the countries, India assured visiting Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba of all possible assistance in dealing with the insurgency. The Maoists are also bewildered at the turn of events. Their press release of September 1, 2004, issued after the completion of their central committee meeting, gives enough indication of the future. After eight years of bloodbath, and various ups and downs in their internal relationships, the party has again picked up the original issues involving the ongoing "procedures of expansionist intervention of the reactionary ruling elite of India against Nepal's nationalism, territorial indivisibility, economic self sufficiency, and the political and cultural freedoms." They have also warned of changing the whole kingdom on the war front, militarizing the common people, and revamping the strategies of the "people's war" to counter the hegemonies in Nepal.

It is unfortunate that the politicians of this country are still talking about how to pull down the government and create another coalition.