

# STALEMATE

the same dilemma in their peace campaigns. They speak about human rights but don't condemn "inhuman wrongs." This confused group is yet to push hard for a durable peace process, an issue that has only been limited to table talks in hotels and restaurants.

The peace process is stuck

BY BIPIN ADHIKARI

**T**HE JAN. 13 DEADLINE GIVEN to the CPN-Maoist to negotiate an agreement with the government has passed. While the Maoists have rejected the call, the government has not yet explained what the next course will be and whether new moves, if any, will not just be a continuation of the ongoing military efforts to contain the Maoists. In the eyes of Nepalis, this constitutes a stalemate; but those who are doing business from the outside are doing it as effectively as ever.

The scenario is like this: Two beggars are sitting in a bench at Ratnapark. One is holding a replica of Pashupatinath and one a Star of David. Both are holding hats to collect contributions. People walk by, lift their noses at the man with the Star of David and drop money in the hat held by the man with the replica of Pashupatinath. Soon his hat is filled while that of the man with the Star of David is empty. A priest approaches the men. He turns to the man with the Star of David and says: "Young man. Don't you realize that this is a Hindu country? You'll never get any contributions holding the Star of David." The man with the Star of David turns to the man with the replica of the Pashupatinath and says, "Moishe, can you imagine? This guy is trying to tell us how to run our business?" This indeed is how the King, the parliamentary political parties and the Maoists are being manipulated in the conflict business.

It does not mean that local factors do not contribute to the conflict at all. Even if the Maoists are not taken in the fold, half of the Nepalis have some sort of Maoist/Leninist hangover that is difficult to explain. Furthermore, they are still not clear whether to cherish the Maoist victory or to condemn it as something that they differ with in terms of their political destiny under a communist party. Moreover, most civil society organizations—possibly about 95 percent of those that are funded by western donors—also have





That, however, is not all. The Maoist “people’s war” has never been a pressing issue for the Nepali Congress, which traditionally misconceives itself to be a nationalist and socialist movement. It has never condemned the violence and mayhem in the country. Very often its rank and file takes sadistic pleasure in the Maoist advances and eroding bases of the monarchy. While the Congress continues to keep itself busy with the fight against “regression,” something that has lost popular appeal, the political power that the King usurped from the parties in October 2002 has almost reached New Delhi quietly and under a planned process. This leaves the King in Nepal to contest with these parties and his own *fait accompli*. Yet Girija Prasad Koirala pretends he does not understand this “regression.” And the question remains (for him), who required the King to do it? And for what purpose? He also does not want to understand why the Indian media is now spewing poison against the King and why Indians are openly writing about directions they are giving to the King and the Royal Nepal Army and deciding the fate of Nepal in the murky rooms of New Delhi.

There is no doubt that the King has erred, but Koirala should have known by now to whom he should have protested. He must understand how he and his allied parties should have used their unspent energy, instead of wasting it on the histrionics he performs on the stage that has been set for him.

Even the Maoists never denounced the King the way he is being denounced by the parliamentary parties and the Indian outlets. The King of course is to be blamed for his undemocratic moves and not allowing the popular process to resume, but it is the parties which suffered most from the lack of a strategy to deal with the Maoist conflict. They never had a unified voice on this issue. They were united only once, and that was for the deployment of the Royal Nepal Army to counter the insurgency. One really wonders whether these parties, who authorized the Army to operate and need the Army’s protection for their own existence, can escape the responsibility to defend it or to dissociate themselves from the vices of military operations.

In fact, the Army is facing difficult times because the parties have failed to occupy the political space that the Army has created for



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them through their operations. It would be callous of them not to realize that the blood the Army has shed was to protect the remnants of the political system, which even at present has accorded them political freedoms. The Army’s operations definitely need to be monitored to make them comply with the rule of law, to safeguard human rights as well as to minimize collateral damage. In fact, when the Maoists confront the Army, they have strong reasons for doing so, because they are fighting with them. But when political parties confront the Army, it is just a lack of character. How can this appalling character help resolve the conflict?

The upheavals in Nepal over the last two years adequately show that the King abhors parties and, therefore, the prospect of peace. In essence, he has no alternative but to work with the political parties if he intends to transform the conflict from its current intensity to manageable proportions. He cannot afford to act alone. No matter how much he tries, he cannot find alternatives for Madhav Kumar Nepal, though his stand may be like the shifting sands, and Koirala, who can only speak for his coterie deputed around him and not for the nation. They and the parties around them are still the best available options, and they must work hand in hand with the King to map out the course of an elusive peace.

In his bid to corner the CPN-UML and the Nepali Congress, the King has robbed himself of the power and significance that is necessary to deal with the anti-Nepal conspiracy that has already torn apart all traditional and democratic forces in the country. Strangely, the degree to which India has been given access to the Army in recent times while marginalizing the political forces already indicates unpropitious days ahead. Under the current circumstances, it is difficult to wish the King good luck, because the country as a whole is suffering, and he is not the only one who will have to bear the brunt of it.

The Maoists want to engage in dialogue as much as any ordinary Nepali on

the street. They too are aware that what they fought as the “people’s war” is being used by outsiders to balkanize this country. They know that this is being done militarily and by sidelining the political forces. The weakening of the parties has been followed by the weakening of the King and the liquidation of political machinery that is at the disposal of the people. The utility of Maoists has indeed been finished to the “balkanizers” who are now effectively pursuing *sikkimization* with all trappings. But even with all these realizations, nobody should entertain the thought that the Maoists can be battered into submission, carved up into cantons and kept under control without any need to talk on their demands. Again, nobody should expect them to be foolish enough to surrender arms and compromise with the *purano satta* (the King, political parties and the national army) without ensuring sufficient political space for themselves.

Above all, it will be a disaster if the Maoists are compelled to change the “people’s war” to a war against *sikkimization*. Unfortunately, the state is not offering a politically powerful team that can represent all its constituencies in the peace process, nor does the government in its present makeup seem capable of effecting changes that may be promised to the Maoists at the negotiating table. What is clear, however, is that given the level of unholy intervention from outside, the Maoists can’t relinquish the demand for credible international mediation that can ensure a protected future for them and not endanger the independence of Nepal and its nationalist sentiments.

The peace process is stuck; the outcome of which has larger consequences. Despair has never been an effective agent for change, but hope can be. There is still time to understand each other and create that hope on the basis of consolidated efforts of all, including the Maoists. The Jan. 13 deadline stands too superficial for this purpose. ■

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