

Towards a compromise solution

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By **BIPIN ADHIKARI**

There is not a single example around the world where one group of insurgents alone decides the outcome of a civil war being participated by different forces. In fact, at least 25 countries in the world are now at war, down from a peak of more than 50 in the early 1990s. All these conflicts were sorted out on the basis of compromise between existing forces in the country, and in most of them, with the support of international community. Why should Nepal be taken as an exception?

Burundi is the latest example of a great compromise. There is no war of liberation anymore. Some 200,000 people died in a 10-year civil war that created hundreds of thousands of refugees and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

In the past year, however, with help from the United Nations and the international community, a Constitution has been approved, an election has been held, a democratically elected president has been sworn in and power is being transferred.

Armed hostilities continue between the rebels of National Liberation Forces (FNL) and the new government, with skirmishes occurring around the capital of Bujumbura. But the nature of the conflict and its intensity has changed. Success in Burundi shows what a conflict-torn people and their leaders can achieve when supported for the long haul by a region and the international community. Unfortunately, these steps were recognised as inevitable only after so much of the country and its people were destroyed. In our own case, the second month of the three-month ceasefire declared by

the Communist Party of Nepal on September 3 has passed quietly. A peaceful Dashai led to Tihar, and Tihar led to Chhath. Time sure flies when the people are having fun. But the third month is indeed crucial. The politics of compromise has not captured the scenario as many people would expect.

It is a time to remember that a statement issued by Prachanda, the Maoist chief, at that point had expressed the hope of the Maoist party that the ceasefire would create a conducive atmosphere for resolution of the problem for all political forces within the country as well as the United Nations. They had said they believed that their move of ceasefire would encourage both internal and external forces to take new initiatives to find a political way out for resolution of the conflict. Whatever may be the strategic reasons behind the unilateral ceasefire of the Maoists, the ceasefire had immediate positive effect on the psychology of the people in general and the status of human rights violations in the country in particular. It also had its impact on the market, economy and other conditions of life in this poor country.

True, the situation in Nepal is not without its risks and problems. There is no guarantee that the ceasefire will continue for the next three-month term. But the political forces in the country are doing little to engage the Maoists in finding a workable solution to the conflict. To put it crudely: start the process of killing innocent people - and you get attention. Start the prospect of peace and development - and you get virtually none. Both the Nepali Congress and Communist party of Nepal (UML), which have more responsibility in

this regard, continue to back up the anti-monarchical slogan and the republican threat to the King, vitiating an environment where an affordable political outcome could be negotiated. The people are not ready to buy what is being offered; and the parties are not able to modify their position. In turn, the King does not want to compromise with his newly acquired power to rule as an executive monarch. Nepal thus confronts the real possibility that the brutal insurgency keeps protracting further.

The longstanding political impasse between the King and the political parties, and infighting between and within the parties themselves, has seriously hampered political dialogue with the Maoists, in spite of the army's growing capability to militarily confront the insurgents. Maoists want to settle the matter as much as any other citizen in this country, but the king and parties are failing to have a common front to convince the Maoists that they have to rejoin the political mainstream instead of trying to sweep it away. They have never worked out what type of political leverage they are able to create for the Maoists in the changed political scenario.

Most conflicts in the world today, including the one that has just ended in Burundi, are 'uncivil' civil wars. Political principles finally fail and the common people start dissociating with the killers. It then becomes inevitable for the fighters to try to mobilize ethnic and religious hatreds to survive. They start killing each other, and the rights of the civilians disappear from the so called revolutions. It is only after losing hope they return to their conscience, and start recognizing that they are not all-in-all, and there are others in the society who think different-

ly, and who have the right to do so. This creates an environment for a compromise solution. Nepal already is in this phase. There are many examples where right interventions have worked. If the interest of the common people is held high, solutions come up on their own. East Timor in Asia and Sierra Leone in African are two perfect examples.

In Afghanistan, UN workers are helping to prepare for the first parliamentary elections since the overthrow of the Taliban regime. All factions in Ivory Coast are being negotiated to agree on presidential elections. Congo is preparing for national elections and militia groups in the east are on the run after robust military action by UN peacekeepers. The peace process has started in Sudan as well - which has always been a tough case for conflict practitioners. Even in the case of Darfur, there are good signs. It is this place where tens of thousands of people have been killed and more than two million forced from their homes in fighting since non-Arab rebels took up arms in early 2003 accusing the Arab-dominated central government of monopolizing wealth and power and marginalizing their region.

Far in Caribbean, Haiti is moving toward re-establishing a democratic government while UN peacekeepers help the authorities stabilize a dangerous and fragile situation. Liberia has just completed its presidential elections carried out by all-rebels transitional government. And half a world away, the Irish Republican Army has declared an end to its armed struggle.

The politics of compromise has a bright future everywhere. Why should not it have a future in Nepal.

(The writer is a lawyer)