

Who is Falling from the Faith?

By BIPIN ADHIKARI

B. P. Koirala, the first elected Prime Minister of Nepal, who was illegally arrested and detained by King Mahendra for many years following the royal coup once recalled how he had complained to the King about his anti-government activities:

"He kept quite for a while and then said: "Look, it appears both of us cannot be contained in the same place. Either permit me to fade out and you run the show as you like, Or you get out and let me rule as I think best. Both of us cannot be at the same place together." Then I said: "Your Majesty, this is a terrible statement you have made. I represent the people, you represent continuity, an institution, and you have a certain political influence ... It is in the interest of the country that both of us combine like two joined hands. And because the task of modernization is beset with great difficulties I may humbly suggest, Your Majesty, even you should not be too confident. It would be a frightful boast on the part of Your Majesty that you can run it single-handed, without the cooperation of the people, and modernize Nepal. Of course, I cannot make that claim because it is a gigantic task, a national task which the nation as a whole has to fulfill." And then he got up and said: "Look, if you have any charge against me, do not give vent to that in public. You come here, see me and take off your shoes and beat me ..." I told him that the same thing applied to me. "If I do anything that you consider harmful, you can send for me and do whatever you like. But as the King you should not criticize your government in public."

Unfortunately, this understanding has never worked well in Nepal. The pressures from outside the political process has always been decisive in shifting balance of power in the country. The political crisis in Nepal shows no sign of resolution as King Gyanendra's hope of reshaping the political order is met by thousands of protesters shouting anti-monarchy slogans in Kathmandu and Maoist guerrillas attacking district headquarters in preparation for a final offensive. Protesters in Kathmandu are demanding that King Gyanendra restore the elected government that he scrapped in 2002 and replaced with his own handpicked royalist administration. They are continuing despite a ban on public gatherings of over five people. Maoists are fighting to liberate this country from the monarchy, which has shown its ambitions more than ever before. Hundreds of protesters are arrested everyday including several political-party leaders who have accused the King of trying to return to the days when Nepal's kings ruled like autocrats.

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Everybody including the King, the Maoists and the political parties know that what they are doing is hurting this ailing country, and making its life difficult. But nobody has time to see in retrospect and find out who is leading this triangular conflict? Maoists cannot take over monarchy. The monarch cannot eliminate political parties. The parties cannot keep the king in size. Neither can they join the Maoist agenda. There is a deadlock. Nobody wants to unfold this deadlock. All these forces are acting separately, candidly and determinedly to push the country to its dead-end. The triangular conflict is unlikely to gain any political result this way.

The King can continue to corner political parties. But that will neither help him nor the nation. A king is always a loser when there is a mass upsurge. He is always a loser when there are protests. This fact can be proved almost beyond controversy. Protestors need not be right. Whether spontaneous or manipulated, the upsurge of the scale that is going on in Kathmandu does not contribute to the well being of the monarchy. If the King is made to think to the contrary, there are already some serious lapses in the undemocratic machinery that advise him. What is happening these days never happened in Kathmandu in the past. If it is happening, then there must be some strong factors behind it.

Similarly, the political parties were never united in Nepal during the last thirteen years. They all are united now in their opposition to the King. If that is the

truth, there must be a very good reason behind it.

Meanwhile, India has already shown serious concern about the deteriorating security scenario in Nepal, where Maoist insurgents are steadily expanding their influence forcing panic-stricken Nepalese to flee across the border. In New Delhi's view, to quote an Indian newspaper, neither King Gyanendra nor the political parties have shown any urgency to reverse the rapid slide of the country towards chaos and anarchy. It thinks what happens in Nepal is of great concern to it because it will have a fallout in its border areas. The style in which these messages are being floated already speak louder than these words. Needless to mention, India is perhaps the only country with some relations with Nepal which has nothing to speak on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. ■

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