

# What Is Messy About The Mass Movement 2006?

By DR BIPIN ADHIKARI

A columnist of Nepal National Weekly magazine recently described two op-ed contributing sociologists of the Himal Khabar Patrika as 'coward' for their reconciliatory overtones in the movement against the executive monarchy. An advocate of republican Nepal, the columnist thought people who feel otherwise are pursuing the campaign to minimise the aspiration of the Nepali people.

Unlike many other revolutionaries, these sociologists emphasized the utility of re-conciliation between King Gyanendra and democratic forces, despite the current vicissitudes, and the need for the king to revert back to democratic system in the interest of the country and its smooth transition from the ongoing conflict.

## A Culture of Violence

A culture of violence enforced by both the government and the Maoist opposition is about to eliminate the democratic centre of Nepal, and the conscience of the Nepali people is increasingly becoming hostage to the extremist dispensations.

The problem of institutionalization of democracy and empowerment of the people goes far beyond the issue of the restoration of the parliament, the elections to the constituent assembly, and drawing up of a new constitution acceptable to all. If some opinion makers think everything will be fine after the ongoing movement achieve these milestones, or the King is dethroned, or the Maoists are mainstreamed and power is handed over to the legitimate representatives of the people, they are not objective, and if the history of the world is any evidence, revolutions have frequently been successful to destroy the status quo, but not always to create and sustain a viable alternative regime. The later issue demands proper planning and clearly thought out strategies. An extremist culture based on violent parameters is, therefore, never helpful.

Change in Focus There is logic in the ongoing movement for the restoration of multiparty democracy. The continued denial of the King to handover power to the political parties, and help create an atmosphere to salvage democracy from the Maoist threat, was no doubt a crucial subject. But the logic alone does not answer all the questions that a credible movement might need to build on.

The movement started with the objective of restoring democracy, but now with the increasing tide of people, and surprisingly outstanding hits, the focus has been shifted to toppling monarchy straight away (than achieving the declared demands of the movement).

At this stage, the talk of toppling monarchy just appears either childish or lunatic. But assuming that it is possible for some reason, as of today, the nation is devoid of any non-state home-grown machinery to immediately fill up the vacuum in case the King quits the country, abdicates his throne or is toppled anyway. Unless the intention is to allow an alien force

to fit in the vacuum anyway, thereby creating a new ruler, the seven parties are not yet prepared for disastrous changes.

Nevertheless, the slogans on the streets have changed. The tendency of the mass to target the palace physically been frequently reported. This means more violent clashes, further bloodsheds and infiltration of armed Maoists in the peaceful movement. The politicians have not explained how they are going to protect the demonstrators from the wrath of the security forces.

As yet, the mass movement does not have an all-accepted leader, and the capacity of the seven-party coordinating body to monitor the movement and give it a political direction where needed seems to be frighteningly controversial. Movements are never eternal. They have a life cycle. Once created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist. The role of the leadership in mobilising this process to achieve the political is very crucial. The seven-party decision of April 22 to continue with the mass movement was taken simply because of the fear of the swelling mass, rather than any other thing. Thus, the perils of the upsurge are clear. What is not clear is how the politicians are going to revert back should they feel the need for it.

## Tackling the King

By this time, the king must have realised that he took a lot of time to take the right decision in harnessing new political relationship with the representative institutions. Whether October 4 or February 1, his approach to the problems of governance has been too simplistic, and often charged up with his personal ambitions.

Even from a purely selfish standpoint, the King should have tried to improve his approach faster than what has been the counter speed of the parties which had started to polarise. Improving oneself is a lot more gainful than trying to improve others. As such, at the end of the rat race one is still a rat.

Moreover, the King underscored the importance of prior consultation with the parties before making his offer public. While there are still many people who want the King to stay in a democratic set up, there is much change in their expectations from the monarchy due to the strength of education (the wider dissemination of political literature, the increased mobility of labour due to the increasing economic activities and urbanization, the freedom of expression, economic independence, and the unprecedented number and scope of various contemporary political and social movements.)

The result is, therefore, right before him. Although he has finally agreed to turn the reins of government over to a prime minister chosen by the country's main political parties, he has not been able to find receptive audience for him. Many politicians consider his offer too little and too late. Now they want more - the fulfilment of the two principal demands of the

seven agitating parties and those who have poured out onto the streets for the last three weeks - the demand for the restoration of the latest parliament and elections to a constituent assembly to frame a new constitution in due course. The first demand hits the ego of the King, and the second hits his future.

The agitating parties are only relying on the slogans of the liquid masses on the street to press upon the King. They need to understand that there is a change in the balance of power, but they are doing very little behind the curtain to negotiate what is possible in the new context.

**Positive Visions**

So far the movement is still building on the hatred against the King without offering positive visions to the King and the people about the restored House of Representatives, the functions of an interim government, and how they intend to pursue the elections to the constituent assembly in the best interest of the Nepali people. There is no vision of what the seven parties believe to be an alternative constitutional system.

Ideas about how the transition might work vary considerably, especially with respect to the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), the Nepal Police, the functioning bureaucracy, and other interim arrangements. As soon as the King is out of the scene, the challenge of dealing with the RNA will not be that easy.

There is also disagreement about how a constituent assembly might be brought about as a result of the unique opinions of the Maoists who are theorizing them within their broad Maoist genres. It is inconceivable that the political parties who have always lost with the Maoists, whether in the government or outside, and are conducting the mass movement with "borrowed hands" can strike out a constitutional image of their own.

**Harsh facts**

Whether the King runs the show, or the Maoists or the seven parties, Nepal will continue to remain the roof of the world, and its geopolitical realities will not change simply by shifting its status to a republican state.

Real democratic commitment is the function of the quality of relationships. If the King is to be thrown out because of his irresponsible exercise of power, there is absolutely no reason why the politicians who ruled (or misruled) this country with corruption, mismanagement and injustice during these awful years should be exempted from the same process. The Maoists, of course, are the principal assailant on the infant democracy, which had barely started to crawl. This holier-than-thou attitude does not serve the movement any more. The challenge is to recognise the weaknesses and leave them behind.

**Free rider problem**

Whether the King runs the show, or the Maoists or the seven parties, Nepal will continue to remain the roof of the world, and its geopolitical realities will not change simply by shifting its status to a republican state. Every movement in the past has cost the nation dearly. Sceptics can start counting what has Nepal lost since October 2002, and the list can surprise many. This is the harsh geo-political phenomenon. You solve

one and the other will come up. In this environment, the idea of a pure movement is just as illusory as the idea of an autonomous political process.

As the political parties are not clear about the specifics in the context of the three dimensions of power including decision-making, agenda-setting, and preference-shaping there is always a danger of outsiders reaping the benefits after their hard work. The general public may not be aware of what decisions are actually in their interest due to the power of invisible forces who work to distort their perceptions.

**Conclusion**

If there is any approach which has never proved wrong, it is the national reconciliation among all political stakeholders. With this approach, the great excitement of the future is that we can shape it, and all demands of the movement can be quickly realized. What the seven-party leaders need to do is to create not just a vision, as suggested above, but a vision with a meaning.

The country can be reinvented by developing a sense of connectedness among all political units, a sense of working together as part of a system, where each part of the system is affecting and is being affected by others, and where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. For this the King is as much necessary as the other political forces.

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