

# **The challenge of shaping a new Nepal begins now...**

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The outcome of the April 10 elections in Nepal goes far beyond signalling the eventual end of the country's 240-year-old monarchy. The fate of the monarchy was more or less decided before the elections when all parties had agreed to pass a resolution proclaiming Nepal a republic in the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly. It is the new balance of political forces in post-poll Nepal which has taken everybody by surprise.

The Maoists of Nepal, still listed as a terrorist outfit by the Bush administration, have emerged as the biggest political component in the Constituent Assembly. They have bagged half of the directly elected seats and more than a third of the popular vote in the proportional representation system. The Nepali Congress and the CPN(UML), the two big parties that dominated the parliamentary arena since the 1990 restoration of parliament, find themselves lagging far behind the Maoists. Meanwhile, the terai region of Nepal has witnessed the rise of a powerful Madhesi factor, with the two leading organisations representing the Madhesi identity having a combined tally that places them almost at par with the NC or the UML.

The rise of the Maoists as the leading current in the Constituent Assembly provides an interesting case study of a communist movement in a feudal-monarchist setting. During the 1990 movement for restoration of democracy, the Maoists were present as a minor tendency within the communist spectrum while the CPN(UML) emerged as the leading communist trend. As the [twin pillars' experiment of running a constitutional democracy within a monarchist framework tumbled from one crisis to another](#), the Maoists took to the path of armed struggle and gradually stepped up their campaign for a full-fledged republic. With the monarchy rapidly losing its prestige and authority in the wake of the infamous palace massacre, the idea of a republic caught the imagination of the people. The victory of the Maoists at the hustings must primarily be attributed to their success in setting the republican agenda. [The communist-led surge of republicanism in Nepal has rebuffed the arrogant designs of the world's greatest exporter](#) of democracy. The US backed the King all through, branding the Maoist campaign for a republic as terrorism. The foreign policy strategists in New Delhi who increasingly look at the world and even themselves through the US prism saw the monarchy as the anchor for the stability of Nepal. Now that the ballots have sealed the fate of Nepal's moribund monarchy, these strategists have become jittery about the possibility of republican Nepal pursuing an independent foreign policy and seeking a new balance between India and China.

As far as the US is concerned, containing and encircling China is clearly one of its foremost foreign policy objectives. It is on this basis that the US seeks strategic partnership with India and would also like to use Nepal both as a base and buffer between India and China. As far as India is concerned, Nepal is the closest northern neighbour with a long history of shared multifarious ties. Instead of toeing the US line on Nepal, India must honour the verdict of the Nepali people and sympathetically address the concerns of the emerging Himalayan republic. If we cannot do that, our foreign policy will also prove as anachronistic as the moribund monarchy in Nepal.

While the Sangh Parivar is destined to miss the dynastic head of the erstwhile Himalayan Hindu Kingdom, all progressive people in India should wholeheartedly welcome Nepal's transition to a constitutional republic. In India too, a republican constitution was won only through a determined battle against the British colonialists and their numerous 'royal' partners. And for revolutionary communists, it is of course most heartening to note that communists have been at the forefront of the popular quest for a modern democratic and republican Nepal. The composition of the emerging Constituent Assembly also reflects this reality with communists and Left forces of different shades having a clear majority over the political representatives of the nascent Nepali bourgeoisie who have always betrayed the democratic aspirations of the people. The real challenge of writing a democratic constitution and shaping a new Nepal begins now and on behalf of the revolutionary communists and democrats of India we convey our warmest wishes to the communists and fighting people of Nepal at this critical hour of change.

## **Liberation** (Editorial)

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### **Democracy in South Asia**

*(In the past three months, three of India's neighbours have gone to polls. The high point, of course, is Nepal, which witnessed a historic triumph against the monarchy and a republican upsurge led by the CPN(M). Lal Bahadur Singh from Liberation and Ashok Kumar from Lokyyuddh were eager observers of Nepal's polls; in this feature, the former comments on the Nepal election experience. Bhutan's polls, conducted by its King, presented a contrast [1]. And while Pakistan's polls brought Musharraf's nearly decade-old regime to an end, its new Government continues to face grim challenges. Farooq Tariq, Spokesperson, Labour Party Pakistan, writes on the post-poll situation in Pakistan [2]. - Ed/.)*

### **Republican Resurgence Led by the Red Flag in Nepal**

Nepal Stuns World, Itself: Poll Peaceful, Turnout 60%', that was the banner of Kathmandu Post, the leading Nepal newspaper, on April 11, the morrow of the historic Constituent Assembly elections. It was stunning indeed that the CA elections in a Nepal torn by civil strife were held a remarkably peaceful atmosphere, and that too with a huge participation of the people. However the real stunner was yet to come some hours later when by the midnight of April 11 itself it became clear that a Red Star was rising in full bloom over Sagarmatha, i.e. Everest, the highest peak of the world, in the erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom.

In an ironic reversal, at a time when people were speculating whether the Maoists would accept the verdict or return to the jungle again in the eventuality of their presumably certain defeat, when American ex-President Carter was citing his Nicaraguan Sandinista experience and telling the world that Maoists had assured him that they would accept results even if defeated, and so on and so forth, the people of Nepal catapulted the Maoists to power.

It was indeed a great comment on the complete alienation from the popular masses and myopic vision of the middle class opinion makers in Nepal, as well as the corporate media and powers-that-be in India and the world over, that till the election results started pouring in, they were all predicting a Congress lead and Maoists in third place.

To be in Kathmandu and Nepal was to have a real feel of the excitement that rocked Nepal in those

tumultuous days, in its historic moment of epochal political transition from monarchy to republic and that too under revolutionary Communist leadership.

*"Dundubhi Baji sakeko chh*

*Gandiv Uthisakeko Chh*

*Ekaishon Shatabdi ko yo Mahabharat Ma*

*Aaj, Aeuta Abhishapta kalo Yug Astaunaiparchh*

*Aaj ko Kuruchhetrama Pani*

*Satya, balidan, Nyay Ra samanta Ko jit Hunaiparchh*

*Aaj, Aek Jugma Aune Tyo Aek Din Ho*

*Jasle Ulatpulat, Uthalputhal ra Herpher Nyaujaiparchh"*

*(A Maoist slogan painted on the walls draws upon the imagery of the Mahabharata and calls upon people to lift the bow and blow the bugle; to ensure the victory of 'truth, sacrifice and justice' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kurukshetra (battlefield); to end feudal oppression; and to turn an upside down world the right way up. This is a glimpse of the popular, spirited propaganda that stirred Nepal in those stormy days.)*

The people's verdict was equally stunning and unexpected for the political parties, too. Had even the Maoists assessed such a huge lead over others for them and hence not insisted for Proportional Representation system, they would not have been just the single largest Party today, but would have secured an absolute majority in the newly constituted CA.

However, the writing on the wall was there for anyone willing to see, that the Maoists were set to win in quite a big way. All along the route from Birganj, the gateway to Nepal on the India border, up to Kathmandu, we found bold, beautiful wall-writings by the Maoists calling upon the people to participate in the CA elections to make Nepal a federal, democratic republic, abolish the monarchy and make Prachanda the first President of Republican Nepal. The hectic movement of the enthusiastic Young Communist League cadres on campaign vans with red flags atop, wearing the hammer and sickle in a circle (the election symbol of the CPN(M)) on their clothes and even painted on their bare bodies, could be seen all around. As we entered Kathmandu, the first comment we heard from the young conductor of the city bus gave us some hint of the things to come. As soon as he came to know that we were interested in the elections, his impromptu reaction came, gleefully and confidently, 'Yahan to Maovadi jeetenge.' (The Maoists are winning here)

Just on the heels of the elections, while roaming the lanes of Kathmandu, we found a broad pattern of the social preference for various parties, of course based on our limited experience in the Kathmandu valley. The traditional upper sections favoured the Nepali Congress, the liberal middle sections, employees etc supported the UML and the lower, unorganized working masses and overwhelming youth force vociferously worked for the Maoists.

Many liberal theories are now being peddled to explain the Maoist victory: ranging from its trivialization as just an anti-incumbency factor; a 'vote for change'; to downright defamation by terming it as a victory of their terror tactics and intimidation of other parties by YCL cadres. There are even some funny theories suggesting that people made Maoists victorious lest they again return

back to jungle and restart violence! In fact, the Maoist victory was in-built in the very logic of the political developments leading to virtual demolition of the monarchy in Janandolan II in November 2006 and the subsequent elections to the CA.

It is obvious that for the Nepalese people reeling under the dead weight of monarchist- feudal regime which had turned Nepal into an extremely backward country and a happy hunting ground for imperialist forces and Indian hegemonism for centuries, resulting in many unequal and humiliating treaties, the central political agenda has for long been the overthrow of monarchy. As the Nepali Congress was at the fore-front of the battle for democracy in 50s, people went with it and NC became the main political force. But the monarchy soon consolidated its autocratic power and ruled with an iron hand for the next three decades. In the next wave of the anti-monarchy battle in the early '90s, CPN(UML) played the crucial role, of course joining hands with Nepali Congress. The UML then naturally emerged as a major political force. However, this Janandolan I could not reach its logical conclusion. The King though weakened by the blow of the heroic peoples' movement, was down but not out. With his hold on the Army still intact, he gradually manoeuvred his way out. The opportunist parliamentary political games fatally corroded the moral authority of the main political parties and made them prey to royalist machinations. They became captive to the forces of the status-quo instead of persisting with the radical course towards fulfillment of the unfinished agenda of establishing a republic on the ruins of monarchy. As a bourgeois-landlord Party, this path was quite natural for the Congress, but UML too could not make any radical departure at this juncture to break the impasse. It was at this critical moment in the onward march of Nepalese history towards its destiny of republicanism, that CPN(Maoist) came out unequivocally for an uncompromising battle against monarchy, towards establishing a Republic, rejecting even the liberal proposal of ceremonial status for the king as proposed by the other main parties.

And with this central slogan they galvanized the whole of Nepal, arousing and mobilizing in particular the vast rural masses and youth with the dream of a new Nepal, a Republican Democratic Nepal, a sovereign, peoples' Nepal free of bondage and backwardness as well as imperialist loot and hegemonistic arm-twisting and humiliation. Winning the vast rural masses to their side, they deprived autocracy of its main social prop in society. Thus was paved the way for the eventual fall of the dead weight of monarchy like a dry wooden log, deprived of its roots and nourishment! The rest was done by the King himself in his arrogance: his patently miscalculated bloody palace coup-d'état'; later, monopolizing power in his hands and doing away even with the minimal semblance of democracy, ostensibly on the pretext of crushing the Maoists on behalf of the ruling elite. Thus he himself hammered in the proverbial last nail in his own coffin.

In this war against Nepal's people, he was obviously banking too much on the mightiest power of the world, the US and of course, his time-tested protagonists, the Indian rulers with their notorious 'two pillar' theory. The US openly offered him all-out help and co-operation in his autocratic rule in the name of crushing the Maoists. While the King declared an award of Rs 5 million (Nepalese currency) for Prachanda's head, the US put CPN(M) on its terror list and did much business of arms and ammunitions with Royalist Nepal. All this further alienated the already discredited and hated King and with the formation of a grand alliance of Maoists and other anti-monarchy forces the stage was set for a final showdown between the royalists and the republican forces. Thus the Maoists were perceived as the principal architect of the heroic mass uprising against the king which ultimately forced him to eat humble pie. Even the last-ditch effort by the Indian ruling establishment to sell its notorious two pillar theory, sending yet another dethroned king Karan Singh as their emissary, could not save the beleaguered King.

It is curious to see that the Indian ruling establishment and even some CPI(M) leaders are patting themselves on the back for advising the Maoists to shun violence and 'join the mainstream'. In Nepal, it is apparent that the Maoists are now themselves the new mainstream while the so called

mainstream of the politics which Indian rulers wanted them to join has now itself been relegated to the margins. The dichotomy of armed struggle vs elections is a false one; it is obvious that the essence of the Maoist rise lies in their command over politics and their correct political orientation: their uncompromising battle against the monarchy. The form of that battle followed as per the demands of politics at different junctures. It was here that they proved to be of a very different mettle from the Indian Maoists, who remain cut off from crucial questions of Indian politics and from the political pulse of the people. The Indian Maoists were always flummoxed by the change of tactics of the Nepal Maoists when the latter came over-ground and joined hands with the seven parties to launch a mass movement and then subsequently decided to participate in elections. The Nepal Maoists' experience till now also presents a contrast to the CPI(M): far from tailing behind the ruling class formations as the CPI(M) does, the CPN(M) pioneered the agenda of the Republic and led the pro-democracy movement from the front, while ruling class formations vacillated and dragged their feet as is their wont.

The spectacular performance by Madheshi Parties (specially, MJAF led by Upendra Yadav) has surprised many political observers. It is essentially rooted in the democratic aspirations of the Madhesh people, though it is true that powerful vested interests and reactionary forces within and without Nepal have been making desperate efforts, as their proverbial last straw, to save the monarchy and stall the Maoists. Ironically, however, it seems that Madheshi Parties have damaged the electoral prospects of the Nepali Congress more than they have damaged the Maoists. To cite just one example, Sujata Koirala, daughter of Girija Prasad Koirala projected as the heir-apparent to the Koirala dynasty, was trounced by Upendra Yadav. The Madhesh issue is bound to remain one of the central concerns of the future dispensation in Kathmandu to be addressed with utmost sensitivity and caution, as reactionary forces won't miss a single chance to lead it on a sectarian course.

We can only wait and watch the trajectory of the new Republic, and the role of Nepal's communists on the road to people's democracy and socialism. But indisputably, the world has witnessed that the successful consummation of a popular mass movement for a republic has been led by none else but the Communists. Those very Communists, who were tagged as 'terrorists' by the 'world's greatest democracy', the US (it is another matter that the US is seen as the biggest terrorist for the world's people!). It will certainly be interesting to see whether these biggest hypocrites to use the word democracy, will buckle down and recognize the Maoist-led Nepalese Republic and remove the terrorist tag, thus saving themselves from further ridicule in the eyes of the world! Or if they will still treat the newest democracy of the world, whose elections have been observed and applauded as free and fair even by their ex-President Carter and the UN, as a terrorist/rogue state like many others in their list!

The pronouncements of some 'strategic analysts' and foreign policy experts in India as well as the Sangh Parivar ideologues are also revealing. They glaringly prove the popular perception of Nepalese people that Indian rulers regard Nepal as their fiefdom. These Sangh ideologues and 'expert' advisers of the Indian ruling class accuse the Indian Government of 'gifting' away Nepal to the Maoists and failing to protect that great guarantor of 'India's interests' - the Nepalese King. They forget that Nepal, in the first place, was never theirs to 'gift away'! And if Nepalese people choose to get rid of their King, and vote overwhelmingly to do so, shame on those who imagined they could meddle and reverse that decision! One such 'expert', Brahma Chellaney, writing in India Today, ended by declaring that the Madhesis, "who populate the Terai, Nepal's food bowl, are India's natural constituency, and that card is begging to be exercised." This is the language of 'strategic' policy advisors in India, which claims to be the US' partner in exporting democracy: a blatant, open, shameless game-plan for an Indian design to retain hegemonic control on a sovereign Republican neighbor!

In the past much damage has been done by the hegemonic and erroneous Nepal policy of Indian ruling establishment; it's time for a new beginning, forging a healthy democratic bilateral relation based on genuine equality, mutual respect and benefit.

In a society where the level of subservience to the monarch was such that till yesterday Parliamentary candidates, prospective people's representatives, sought blessings from the king by offering a coin at his feet, the abolition of monarchy is no less than a miracle - a miracle achieved by the Nepalese people. Let us hail this great victory of the Nepalese people and the republican forces, and warmly wish success for Nepal's communists in facing the many complex challenges that lie ahead on the road to democracy and socialism.

**Lal Bahadur Singh**

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**P.S.**

\* From Liberation [magazine of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation)], May 2008.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] See: [Royally Regimented Polls in Bhutan](#)

[2] See for a longer version of this article: [Pakistan after the General Elections](#)