

Nepal elections: Maoists routed

MAHMOOD HASAN

NEPAL went to elections on November 19 to constitute a new Constituent Assembly. The new Himalayan Republic is still not out of constitutional woods. For the past five years politicians have been trying to arrive at a consensus to write a constitution. But the new charter eluded the politicians because of endless bickering.

The Constituent Assembly (CA-I), formed in April 2008 with a 2-year mandate, was dissolved in May 2012. Thus, fresh elections were needed for a new Constituent Assembly. It took 18 months for the politicians to agree to have fresh elections. That election was held amid uncertainty and fear of violence. However, election day passed of rather quietly, though there were some incidences of disorder.

Nepal has a population of 31 million people. More than 70% of the total 12.21 million voters went to the polling booths to cast their verdict. Interestingly, in 2008 the number of voters was 17.5 million. The Constituent Assembly will have 601 members. The composition is a complex mix of "first past the post" (FPTP, 240 seats), "proportional representation" (PR, 335 seats) and 26 nominated members.

What has surprised political observers is the decisive rejection of Unified Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN-Maoists) by voters. The Maoists are led by Pushpa Kumar Dahal (58, known as Prachanda). Maoist insurgency, which cost more than 12,000 lives, ended in 2006 under Indian mediation and led to the adoption of the "Comprehensive Peace Agreement." Subsequently, the 2008 multi-party elections set up the Constituent Assembly.

Between 2008 and 2012, CA-I was extended twice, but it failed to deliver the new charter. Politicians wrangled over the form of government -- parliamentary or presidential; number of provinces and the structure of administration -- federal or unitary; rights of citizens; formation of cabinet; electoral system; and power of the House. In the midst of political bickering five prime ministers came and left -- each ousted by conspiracies hatched by those not in power.

At the 2008 election, Prachanda's UCPN secured 229 seats -- failing to get the magic majority figure of 301 seats. He was at the height of popularity and emerged as the "fierce," as his name Prachanda suggests. Nepal's oldest party, Nepali Congress (centre-right, NC) got 115 seats, Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist (centre-left party known as UML) mustered 108 seats and Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF) got 54 seats. The remaining 69 seats went to smaller parties.

Complete results of the November 19 elections have not yet been announced. But according to FPTP results the Maoists have suffered a serious blow. Their tally has come down to 26 seats. On the other hand, NC has secured 105 seats, UML got 91 and MJAF got 4 seats.

What was shocking to Prachanda was his defeat in Kathmandu to little known Rajan K.C., a NC, candidate by a margin of 8,000 votes. Prachanda, a former prime minister, losing in the capital has lots of political significance. However, Prachanda has won the Siraha-5 constituency, a district bordering India. Rajan K.C. brought out a procession to celebrate the

downfall of UCPN-Maoist in Kathmandu.

When vote counting began and showed that UCPN-Maoist was trailing behind in many constituencies Prachanda reacted angrily and demanded that counting be stopped and blamed "national and international conspiracy" for his party's poor showing. Later, he, however, said that he will accept the people's verdict.

Why did the people reject the Maoists? There are several reasons. Firstly, Prachanda's close associate Mohan Baidya split with a sizeable number of Maoist followers, accusing Prachanda of being a traitor for abandoning the "People's War." Baidya campaigned against Prachanda in this election. Secondly, despite being the largest party in CA-I, Maoists failed to get the support of the other major parties to draft the new Constitution. Arrogance, intra-party squabbles for leadership and attempts to undermine the NC and UML in CA-I alienated UCPN-M from the people. Thirdly, lavish lifestyle and allegations of widespread corruption and sheltering of war criminals came to haunt UCPN-M. Fourth, Prachanda centralised party powers and excluded names of loyal party cadres who worked against him from the proportional list. Finally, Prachanda failed to explain why he wanted Nepal divided into 13 states. NC and UML opposed Prachanda's move fearing that dividing the country into separate states would unleash ethnic tensions.

The election has shown that the caretaker government under Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi has done an excellent job with his cabinet of 11 technocrat ministers. The decision to set up "election-time government" was taken by a High Level Political Committee, which was formed in March 2013 at President Ram Baran Yadav's initiative. The leaders of UCPN-M, NC, UML and MJAF formed a syndicate of four parties to help and guide the interim government.

The Election Commission also lived up to the expectations of the people in conducting a free and fair election. Former president Jimmy Carter, EU and other international observers have given full marks to the Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety. The White House also expressed satisfaction with the elections.

India's role in the November 19 election is more than evident. India has given more than 100 vehicles to the Election Commission, and technical support to the voter identity card project. Nepali journalists believe that India had a hand in the UCPN-M debacle. It is not surprising that India, which has a violent Maoist movement, has lost all sympathy for the Nepali Maoists.

From the election results it appears that Prachanda's clout in CA-II will be substantially reduced. Neither the NC nor the UML will give him space for political maneuvering.

Now that the Maoists have been routed, it is most likely that NC Chief Sushil Koirala will lead the next government with the support from Jhala Nath Khanal of UML. The new government will have to move fast to deliver the constitution. People of Nepal have overwhelmingly voted for democracy. They want peace and stability. An unstable Nepal is certainly not in the interest of South Asia.

We in Bangladesh can probably take some lessons from our Northern neighbour.

The writer is former ambassador and secretary.

Fifty years, yet the legacy lives on

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

his death?

Despite the salacious disclosures about his personal life, and the controversies surrounding his presidential accomplishments, JFK's charisma endures. One may agree or disagree that he was central to the evolution of the American presidency from a mere chief executive to something much larger, one cannot ignore the JFK legacy and its impact on American domestic and foreign policies.

Much has been written about Kennedy's tragic assassination on November 22, 1963. As America commemorates his fiftieth death anniversary, the media is once again rife with conspiracy theories: "Did Oswald act alone or was he the front man for some country/ideological group/the mafia?" We may never know, and the purpose of this column is not to probe the mystery surrounding JFK's death. Rather, the key question that intrigues me is why the 1,036 days of the Kennedy presidency have been the subject of a stream of analyses, articles, documentaries and movies. Is it because he remains frozen in time as a youthful, vibrant, handsome president whose life was cut short unfairly? Or is it something deeper?

When the Kennedy assassination took place in November 1963, I was not mature enough to fully grasp the enormity of the tragedy. And I was 8,000 miles too far away from the scene of action. Fifty years later, as the world reviews JFK's life and presidency, I am at a stage in my life where resolute leadership carries a high premium since it's in short supply. Perhaps I am now in a relatively better position to fathom the impact of Kennedy's contribution to the US and beyond.

While opinions may vary on what makes him special, for me Kennedy is the president who averted a nuclear war. The world has never come so close to an apocalypse as during Kennedy's presidency. In his documentary *The Untold History of the United States*, filmmaker/director Oliver Stone reveals that after the Bay of Pigs invasion JFK stood up to his generals and refused to embark on a nuclear attack on Cuba.

Despite tremendous pressures from the Pentagon, Kennedy resisted pressing the button! Stone asserts that when the world teetered on the edge of a nuclear war, Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev and Kennedy both acted like statesmen to prevent its occurrence -- Khrushchev by removing missile sites from Cuba and Kennedy by secretly pledging to dismantle American sites in Turkey.

As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis Kennedy moved dramatically away from the Cold War rhetoric.

Film clips of his commencement address at American University in June 1963 reinforce his legacy as a president intent on peace. Kennedy urged graduates to think of Soviet citizens in human terms and talked about "general and complete disarmament, designed to take place by stages permitting parallel political developments to build the new institutions of peace which would take the place of arms."

On the domestic front, after a period of hiatus on civil rights legislation (which outlawed major forms of discrimination against minorities), Kennedy adopted the cause as a national imperative. He was triggered into action after witnessing the police brutality on African Americans during the Birmingham protest march. He went on air and declared: "The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights ... one hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free ... And the nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all citizens are free." The fact that Kennedy's death bequeathed the honour of passing the Civil Rights Bill to Lyndon Johnson does not diminish his role in initiating this important legislation. America's first African American president is in many ways a gift of the Kennedy legacy.

Interestingly, history honours leaders who win wars and nations celebrate victory days. But we fail to acknowledge visionary leaders who have stopped wars from happening. The ones who "fought" for peace. I would like to pay my homage to President Kennedy as the president of peace -- someone who prevented a conflict from escalating into a nuclear war. Even if this is Kennedy's only contribution to humanity, it's an achievement that posterity must honour. Especially at a time when the world is steeped in an arms race. In the words of Oliver Stone: "We owe him a great, great debt of gratitude. We wouldn't even be here talking if it hadn't been for him."

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Should the people of Bangladesh relinquish 'all powers'?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE Constitution has recognised and pronounced the people as the supreme owner of this country as we, the people of Bangladesh, have established the independent, sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh through a historic struggle for national liberation. We are the owner of 'all powers' in the Republic and these powers shall be effected only under, and on the authority of the Constitution, which is the solemn expression of our will.

We, the people of Bangladesh, are empowered to elect our representatives who will govern the country with our consent. Through them our effective participation at all levels is supposed to be ensured. We constitute the Jatiya Sangsad through electing 300 MPs, the majority among who forms the government and also ensures accountability of the government on our behalf. We are also empowered to hold all of them accountable to us for their every work through different means. Election is also one of the crucial and vital means. We are now in an election process through which we are supposed to elect 300 MPs to constitute the new parliament, the supreme political institution, through which we are supposed realise our aspirations. The parliament is also supposed to act as a forum for ventilating our grievances, difficulties, anxieties and frustrations. The MPs will discuss our various grievances, aspirations and needs and will enact necessary legislation in this regard.

But we, the people of Bangladesh, are now fighting for our survival in the fierce battle between the two rival political camps that are fighting each other to grab our 'all powers.' One camp has finalised all designs to retain power by holding so-called election to renew their claim that we, the people of Bangladesh, have voted for them to rule the country for another five years. They have prepared the playground as per their wish. The other camp has refused to participate in the elections. So, they have been intensifying the agitations on the streets by denying us our right to freedom of movement,

and the right to freedom of work for our livelihood.

If we come out of our homes for the sake of our livelihood, the cadres, activists and hired goons of agitating political parties burn us alive on the streets. We are not safe anywhere. We are not sure whether they will not set our homes on fire in the dark of night to burn us alive in sleep.

By burning us alive they want to force their rival camps to negotiate with them to realise their demand for installation of a non-party election-time government. But they cannot achieve their mission. They cannot force their rival camp to open negotiation because our deaths matter nothing to them. We are nobody to them, although they very often make loud noises by professing that we, the people of Bangladesh, are the sources of all powers.

Those in power are supposed to ensure our security, but have failed to do so. They are not worried about our security. Under the leadership of our all-powerful prime minister, they are busy with their own game to recapture our powers by staging a sham election to remain in power. Before the election we are really helpless and powerless. Our president is unable to rescue us from the potential debacle since, by his own admission, he does not have the constitutional powers to do anything. If the guardian of a family feels powerless to do something, then the members are left with nothing to escape from the looming danger. We are now in fact feeling we have no guardian in a turbulent time. We are on board a ship without a captain!

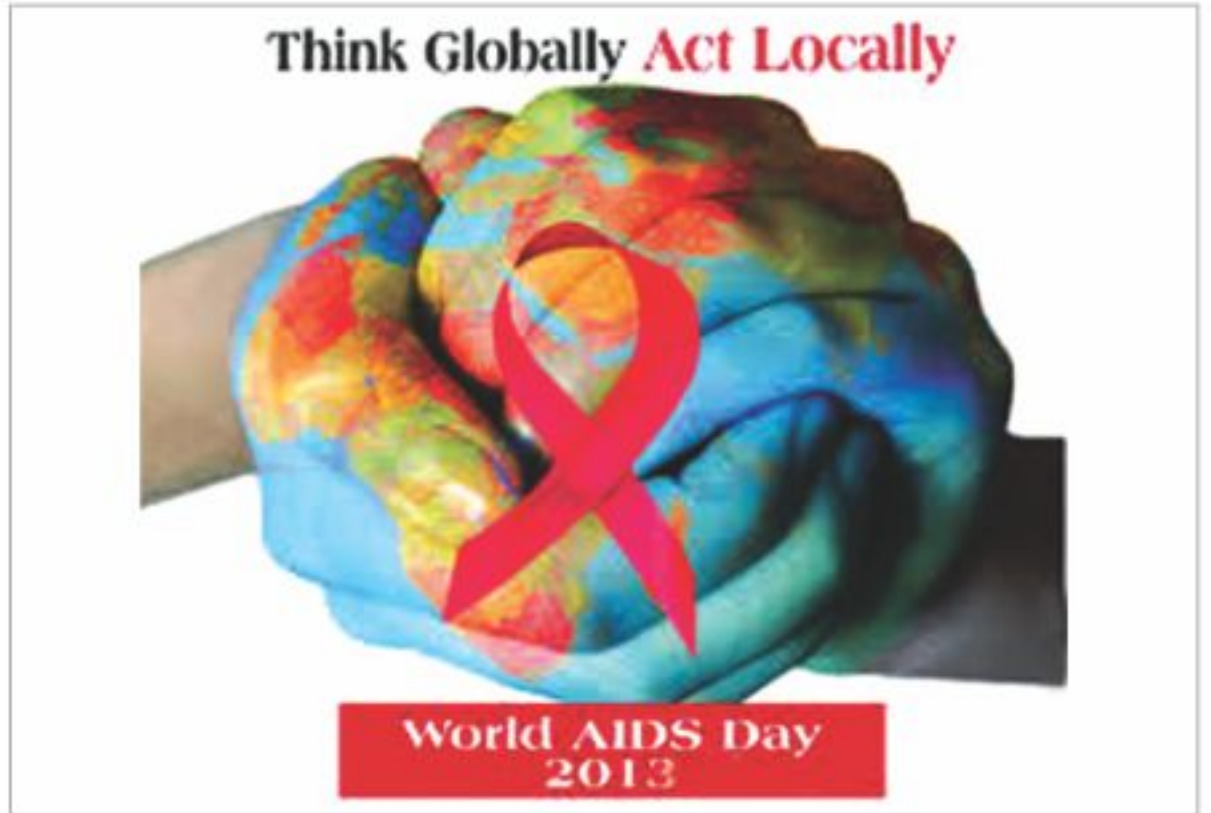
We, the people of Bangladesh, no longer want to be the repository of 'all the powers.' This appeared as a curse for us. This has made our lives miserable. Politicians who are supposed to serve us have become our masters and stood against us. Let the politicians grab all our powers uninterrupted without staging the farce of an election that always jeopardises our existence. We, the people of Bangladesh, will love to get back our 'all powers' when real democracy will exist in the country.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

HIV/AIDS: No longer a death sentence?

POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

SCIENTIFIC breakthroughs have helped us chart an impressive course to the HIV/AIDS response such that in the fourth decade of the epidemic, we are already talking of ending AIDS. A death sentence at the outset, HIV is now a chronic disease. It is unique in the sense that vaccine for this communicable disease still eludes us and cure is yet not possible. Despite this, we have been able to not only control but have also managed to reverse the epidemic in large parts of the globe.



For us to reach this stage, contributions have come from a wide variety of stakeholders -- national governments who have provided the leadership; funding agencies that spearheaded the response and needed research; development agencies including the UN that collaborated and joined forces to support countries in addressing the epidemic and last but not the least communities who continue to relentlessly fight for the right to affordable and equitable access to treatment and without whom we would not be where we are today.

Moving ahead, we need to ensure that the bio-medical

response addresses both prevention and treatment. The division is now more blurred than ever with the scientific advances that have firmly positioned treatment as prevention. Starting treatment early not only improves quality and longevity for the infected individual but also prevents further transmission to partners.

With effective HIV control, we have been able to reduce the number of direct HIV related deaths and adverse outcomes. As people continue to live longer on antiretroviral treatment, not only do they face the common problems of aging like non-HIV population, they are at heightened risk of non-AIDS conditions such as heart disease due to persistent inflammation. These conditions, so far mostly studied in the US and Europe are now becoming important in the developing world. These additional comorbidities and the shift of HIV care to chronic disease management could overburden already stretched health care systems.

These could be addressed if we were to find a potent vaccine to prevent HIV and cure for HIV once infected. A number of cases, including the so-called "Berlin patient" the "Mississippi baby", and the "Visconti" cohort, have given us hope and impetus in our search for HIV cure. Our quest for a vaccine continues. However, realistically speaking, a scalable cure or a vaccine is not foreseen in the near future. Until then, we must continue and enhance our efforts to ensure that health systems are prepared to safely and effectively deliver long-term chronic HIV and related care.

We must not forget that bio-medical interventions alone will not take us to the finish line. In order to achieve an AIDS free world, we need to blend the bio-medical and social-behavioural interventions that ensure universal access to prevention and care of HIV in a health and social system that respects human rights, sexual diversity and gender equity.

The writer is the Regional Director-Elect of WHO South East Asia Region.

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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2 Current

3 River

4 Mint

5 Sacked

6 Raid

7 Tennis

8 Winnipeg

9 Canteen

10 Like Poe

17 Chest

22 Tell tales

24 Lingerie

26 Feasts

28 Peaceful

29 Groan

31 Shipping

32 Cavalry

33 Batter's

35 Finish off

38 Nerve

42 Quarter-

back

Manning

Yesterday's answer

1 Anne

2 Current

3 River

4 Mint

5 Sacked

6 Raid

7 Tennis

8 Winnipeg

9 Canteen

10 Like Poe

17 Chest

22 Tell tales

24 Lingerie

26 Feasts

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33 Batter's

35 Finish off

38 Nerve

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back

Manning

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A XYDLBAAXR

is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

10-26 CRYPTOQUOTE

JMZ JTKR YC LQR JVIL MI

OVIR; VL VC YF LM YC LM

JVKR MYXCROKRC LQR JVIL

MI OVKVAJ SROO. — KMOLTVXR

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:

BE COURTEOUS TO ALL, BUT INTIMATE WITH FEW, AND LET THOSE FEW BE WELL TRIED BEFORE YOU GIVE THEM YOUR CONFIDENCE.

- GEORGE WASHINGTON

BEETLE BAILEY

YOU TOLD ME TO RUSH YOUR REPORT TO HEADQUARTERS AND RUSH BACK. I'M BACK. WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

4-9

GREG+ MORT WALKER

HENRY

WANT ADS

4-7

by Mort Walker

I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN DOING IT!

by Don Tranchte

BOY WANTED

BOY WANTED

GR-R

QUOTABLE

Quote

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

Albert Einstein