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Are you optimistic about the peace process leading to a settlement of the conflict?

The issue now is how to materialise comprehensive peace agreement into a new constitution in the constituent assembly established by the constituent assembly election. But this implementation of general agreement is really difficult, because it demands many political compromises from political parties.

Politics is a compromise or "the art of possibility." Parliament is the most important public space for political parties to reach an agreement through mutual political compromises. But these political compromises are possible only in a state in which people are not totally divided into some social groups.

Unfortunately Nepal has serious social divisions among castes, ethnicities, regions, etc. Among them, the most serious is the division between the rich and the poor, or the development gap. Due to economic liberalisation after the 1990 revolution, economic or development gap is growing rapidly. Many statistics testify it. We must realise that this development gap is not only a statistical objective fact, but also a psychological gap. Thanks to popularised mass media, even poor people in rural area can know well about prosperous Kathmandu life. The gap between their life and latter's life is tremendous. Now that they know this gap, they cannot endure it anymore.

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This objective cum psychological development gap sharply divides Nepali people and makes political compromises very difficult. Even if leaders of parties think compromises are reasonable under given conditions, rank-and-file supporters do not accept them. This is especially the case with the Maoists. If Maoist leaders really want reasonable compromises necessary for agreements, grass-roots supporters will not accept them. The grass-roots radicals will organise their own organisations and start new wars against the establishment including their own past leaders.

But in the long term, I am rather optimistic. For an outsider like me, Nepal seems to have developed amazingly. England needed about 400 years and Japan, more than 100 years for democratisation. Nepali history of democracy is about 50 years after 1951, or more strictly only 17 years after 1990. In this very short period, Nepal has admirably developed industries and democracy. We must evaluate history fairly. And we also should not fail to see the growth of the middle class. They are the core people of civil society who can stabilise society and gradually mature democracy in Nepal.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Nepal is very vulnerable in international relations. The global society now can use much influence for the peace building in Nepal.

If Nepali government recovers its legitimacy and reliability through peace process, it will be able to give its people a hope of steady step-by-step improvement. Japanese people just after the defeat in the World War II were in miserable conditions. They did not have enough food, clothes, houses and other necessary things for daily life. But the Japanese government with help of the US government could give them a gleam of hope for better future. With the hope, Japanese people could avoid anarchy or coup and follow a way for steady development and democratisation.

Nepali government with cooperation of political parties and civil society can give a hope for better tomorrow. With it, people can accept political compromises for peace, expecting a steady improvement. In this way, peace will

come again to Nepal.

One major area of difference is about how to address the cases of gross human rights violations during the years of insurgency. What is your view on this?

To solve problems related to human rights violations is a necessary step for the peace settlement. For this purpose, an independent powerful commission must be established. The government can delegate an investigation power to the commission. After close investigation, the government must compensate for all property damages from national budget or let the concerned persons compensate them.

Theoretically, property compensation is not very difficult. But in practice it is hard to carry out. Maoists caused much damage to houses, land and other properties, so to let them compensate for all these damages is in fact very difficult. The government should let Maoists return confiscated houses, lands and other

properties as much as possible, and for the rest the government must compensate the same way as in cases of government caused damages.

Physical and mental damages caused by both sides are much more serious. In this case, a truth reconciliation commission like the one in South Africa is practical and effective. After the facts about damages are fully disclosed

and recognised by assailants and victims, the commission requests reconciliation between them.

In Nepal where both parties have waged violent attacks against each other for more than 10 years, punishment due to past deeds tend to result in revenge, so it is not good for the reconstruction of peaceful society. To victims and their families, the government must provide mental care and financial support. Civil society is also expected to contribute much to this victim care and support program.

How hopeful are you about the election taking place on schedule?

Election to the constituent assembly may not be possible on 22 Nov under present circum-

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stances. To have elections, the eight parties should put full trust in the interim government which is the election administration government established by themselves. This is a compromise necessary for peaceful free election. And the UNMIN as well as NGOs can contribute much for free election. If eight parties can compromise for the election and international society gives full support to the government, it may be possible.

But here we must be careful not to expect too much from the election. Election is very important, but many other things are required to legitimatise the government. "Election democracy" has failed in many developing countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Ethnic, language and religious problems as well as development gap cannot be solved by election. Election is not magic. To solve these problems, we must utilise other available means that are non-electoral or sometimes traditional. Election is only one of many means, so we should not put too much weight on it. Paradoxically speaking, political parties and other interest or social groups can compromise for the election.

One major agenda now is moving towards federalism. How effective will the federal system be for future Nepal for its development?

I do not think federal system is good for Nepal. Many people say federalisation is necessary for various social groups such as ethnic, language, religious or regional groups to be recognised. This is not true. It is not realistic and even dangerous both for national integration and for the social groups themselves.

Clear definition of social groups is almost impossible. To which group does a family belong whose father, a Chhetri, married a Newari woman and has lived in Terai since several generations? There are many such attributes in a person. And groups are always changing their character. So, if we want a clear definition of each group for federalisation, it means forcing a person to select only one identity among his/her many multiple identities.

Federalisation for group rights inevitably intensifies identity politics, which forcefully divides people into social groups, cements them, lets them differentiate from one another and leads them to endless group or communal conflicts. Federalisation will endanger national integration and peace. It endangers even individuals and minorities in a component state.

If component states are set up according to ethnicity, religion, languages and so on and have autonomous ruling power over their respective territories, the majority in a component state can much easily suppress individuals or minorities in it, and the central government cannot defend them effectively because it has the right of self-rule. Federalisation is dangerous both for individual citizens and small minorities.

For development too, it is disadvantageous. It cannot realise a lasting peace in Nepal, and up to a certain level of development, a strong stable centralised government rather than a weak government is necessary for planning and managing development.

What alternative model would you suggest?

It is much better for Nepal to maintain the existent unitary state system while promoting devolution and local self-rule. Japan completely destroyed the Tokugawa regime, feudal or in a sense federal system, by the Meiji revolution in 1867, and built a unitary, extremely centralised modern state. The Japanese government since then successively suppressed minority groups and local cultures, homogenised Japanese society by the national language, national religion, general compulsory education, and modernised and industrialised Japan by strong top-down method. This was a typical developmental dictatorship.

After Japan, some Asian countries such as South Korea did it and developed dramatically. Japan is still one of the most centralised states though democratised only after the World War II. Centralisation of power does not necessary prevent development but, on the contrary, promoted top-down development in states like Japan and South Korea.

However, Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. The government cannot forcefully homogenise Nepali society, even if it wants it. A unitary state Japan cannot be a state model for Nepal. And Nepal is not a state as the United States that was established by the agreement of several existent states. Nepal has been a unitary state for a long time, so its division into states is difficult. For example, how to draw border lines and how many states to be created? Artificial forcible creation of states will cause new ethnic or cultural conflicts leading civil war or separation of some parts of Nepal. Therefore, Nepal has to follow gradual step-by-step transformation. It will be a compromise of some systems.

Nepal is a modern state, so its base must be liberal democracy. In public sphere, each person is treated as one person irrespective of his/her ethnicity or culture, that is, as an independent individual with equal civil rights. Instead, ethnicity and culture enjoy freedom in private sphere where government does not interfere. This is modern individualistic liberal democracy of which France is typical. It is liberal, but majoritarian democracy, so it tends to majority rule and, in worst case, to totalitarian democracy. Minority rights tend to be only nominal in it.

Therefore, Nepal as a unitary state must introduce drastic devolution and strong local self-rule. For example, if 75 districts are delegated much power to rule their own area, it is almost same as federal system. In addition to this, Nepal should be bicameral. The lower house should be composed of representatives of the nation, not of any group or regions; elected on the basis of individualistic liberal democracy. The upper house should be composed of representatives of various social groups.

The lower house is superior in general, but the upper house has veto power under given conditions to those matters related directly to group interests. This bicameral legislature is a typical compromise or combination of two representation systems, and is more realistic in Nepal.

Do you envisage a Nepal minus monarchy? How would a republic Nepal be different from a monarchial Nepal?

Ceremonial monarchy is better for Nepal. Many people say that Nepali kings usurped power and were dictators and so monarchy should be dumped. Nonsense! If so, why don't you dump election or parliament that Hitler used for getting state power? Systems and their users should be separated. First we evaluate systems themselves, and then consider the risks of human misuse of them. In case of monarchy, an active monarchy is completely out-of-date, but a ceremonial monarchy, or a pure symbol king with no political power, is useful in Nepal.

For example, in Nepal about 80% of the population is Hindu, and people's daily life is closely interwoven with religion. So, Nepal cannot be completely away from religion. The state must take part in many religious ceremonies. When PM Koirala received the blessings from the priest at Krishna Mandir on 4 Sep; it was a violation of the interim constitution that provides secularism or the separation of religion and politics. Pious Muslims, Christians or non-religious people would never accept this religious activity of the prime minister. If the prime minister continues such religious activities as the head of secular state, non-Hindu people will be irritated, and this might lead to religious conflicts as in India. This is not the path Nepal should follow.

If Nepal is a ceremonial monarchy, secularisation of politics is much easier. The king performs religious and other cultural ceremonies while the prime minister focuses only on secular politics. Nepali monarchy has a long history and people are used to it. A ceremonial monarchy is suited well with the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural state.

But ceremonial monarchy will be impossible if the king does not accept complete renunciation of political power. Unfortunately he seems not to accept it up to now. So, Nepal cannot help but go for secular republicanism. In this case, the

republic Nepal should have a ceremonial president whom every citizen irrespective of ethnicity or religion can respect. This ceremonial president takes part in various ceremonies in order to observe the separation of religion and politics. Ultimately, the ceremonial president system will become almost same as the ceremonial monarchy.

What is the role that you see for Japan, one of the biggest donors, in the peace process in Nepal?

Japan can and should help Nepali peace building by peaceful means. Japan has sent six soldiers to the UNMIN. The UNMIN is a political mission and the soldiers are not armed. Japanese government officially explains their role is completely non-military and most Nepali people may think so too. But this is a wrong policy.

Japanese Constitution clearly prohibits military forces. The Article 9 provides "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." Therefore, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) is completely against the



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constitution and to send its soldiers is much less constitutional. What an irony! How can the unconstitutional Japanese government promote Nepali constitutionalism? Six Japanese soldiers in the UNMIN are symbols of Japan's militarisation. They are utilised to advertise the remarkably increasing overseas mission of the new ministry of defense.

But, what can the six soldiers in the UNMIN do for Nepali workers and farmers? And worse, the Japanese government seems to utilise the Japanese role in the UNMIN for setting up military relationship with Nepal. So, Nepali people as well as Japanese people should demand immediate withdrawal of the soldiers from Nepal. Instead, Japan should help Nepal by other non-military aids. Peace should be realised by peaceful means.

Conflicts in Nepal are resulting mainly from widening gap of developments. In the 1990s, Japan and other advanced capitalist states forced on Nepal an open free market economy. Big global companies like Toyota, Suzuki, Canon, etc. promoted their products in Nepal. This economic liberalisation presents big profits to the rich and serious unemployment to the poor. Japan, one of the global economic powers, is responsible for it.

A gun cannot produce food, clothes, houses and other things that Nepali people really need in their lives. Japan should not venture military role in Nepal. Japanese non-military development aid so far is very highly appreciated in Nepal and Japanese government should promote it more.

Finally, we can learn three lessons from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's resignation on 12 Sep. Firstly, the American-led globalisation should not be introduced without considering social conditions of each country. It has sharply widened the rich-poor gap in Japan like in Nepal. The depressed people especially in rural areas of Japan overthrew the Abe administration. Secondly, the separation of religion and politics should be strictly observed. Thirdly, militarisation should be stopped anywhere as violence causes more violence.

The root of conflicts in Nepal is global market capitalism, so we as global citizens should and can strengthen our people-to-people relationship to build a lasting peace in Nepal. We sincerely wish peace by peaceful means in Nepal.

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