Chapter VI

POLITICAL TREND IN NEPAL: A SURVEY OF MAJOR POLITICAL EVENTS SINCE THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PARLIAMENT

The dissolution of the Parliament brought with it the suspension of the Constitution as well as the disbandment of all the political parties. A Royal Proclamation issued on 5 January 1961 stated that the attempt to build democracy from the top through political parties met with failure. It also mentioned various issues on which the party Government could not meet the aspirations of the people. Through the Proclamation the king levelled charges against the party Government on corruption, maladministration and failure to maintain order.1 A rebellion also broke out in several parts of Nepal in the month of January. The discredited N.C. party took the lead in the agitation. It placed Nepal's relations with India in considerable strain. The king's Government accused the Government of India of encouraging subversive activities of the underground politicians of Nepal. King Mahendra's visit to Delhi on 18-26 April for talks with Mr. Nehru,2 however, improved the situation for a short while.

2. Ibid., 13-20 October 1962, p. 19024
King Mahendra subsequently declared that he would launch a system of "Guided democracy" in the country. The king envisaged the gradual establishment of Panchayat system in Nepal through a pyramidal structure of elected councils on the model of Pakistan's "Basic Democracy" established by Field Marshal Md. Ayub Khan. The following table shows the structure of Panchayat system in Nepal.

**Table XIV**

**NEPAL'S PANCHAYAT SYSTEM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council of Ministers</td>
<td>King appoints up to 15% of National Panchayat Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper House</td>
<td>National Panchayat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Class Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zonal Class Panchayat</td>
<td>Zonal Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zonal Class Assembly</td>
<td>District Panchayat</td>
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<td>District Class Panchayat</td>
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<td>District Class Assembly</td>
<td>Town Panchayat Village Panchayat Village Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town Class Panchayat</td>
<td>Village Class Panchayat Village Class Assembly</td>
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* Source: Gaize, Frederick H., Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal, Berkeley, 1975, p. 138

At the bottom of the tier were the village Panchayats and Nagar Panchayats. In the second tier 75 District Panchayats and in the third tier 14 zonal committees were established. The Rashtriya Panchayat - a unicameral legislature was formed at the apex. The village Panchayats numbered about 4000 and they covered 97% of the population. Through these organisations the resources and energy of the village people were channelised for development of village life. It was a novel political experiment in Nepal. Under the new dispensation the villages came to have two structures, namely, Village Assembly and Village Panchayat.

There were 16 Town Panchayats in the political hierarchy of Nepal. A Town Panchayat was formed where there were more than 10,000 population in one area. Formation of a Town Panchayat was depended on population. The District Panchayat was an important Panchayat unit from both political and administrative point of view. District Panchayats played important role during the election of the members to the National Panchayat.

The Zonal Assembly consisted of the representatives of the District Panchayats. By an amendment of the Constitution in 1967 the Zonal Panchayat was replaced by a Zonal Committee. The Zonal Committee functioned as an advisory committee to the Zonal Commissioner.
The Constitution of Nepal provided for the establishment of a national unicameral legislative body. This body was known as the Rashtriya Panchayat (R.P.) which was also known as the National Panchayat (N.P.). It stood at the apex of the four-tier Panchayat system. The N.P. consisted of 125 members, some of whom were indirectly elected by the Zonal Assemblies and some by class organisations. Others were directly elected from the Graduate constituency. The rest were the nominees of the king.

In the early part of 1961 political activities of the disbanded political parties continued despite the imposition

4. Art. 34 (2.3 & Schedule 5) provides: 90 members shall be elected by the Zonal Assemblies. The quota to each Zonal Assembly is specified in the Constitution Schedule 4, Constitution of Nepal, 1962.

5. 15 members were elected from among the class organisations. There were seven class organisations (a) Nepal Peasants Organisation sent 4 members to the National Panchayat. (b) Nepal Youth Organisation had 4 representatives; (c) Nepal Women's Organisation had 3 representatives; (d) Nepal Labour Organisation had 2 representatives; (e) Nepal Ex-servicemen's Organisation had 2 representatives; and (f) The Nepal Student's Organisation and the Nepal Children's Organisation did not have representation in the National Panchayat. Ibid., Schedule 5.

6. 4 members from the Graduate constituency were elected by the college Graduates of Nepal on the basis of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote. Ibid., Schedule 5.

7. 15% of the total elected members of the National Panchayat were nominated by the king. Constitution of Nepal 1962, Art. 34, Clause 12, Section (d).
of severe restrictions by the king. Mr. Sharat Shumsher the leader of the high Wing Gurkha Parishad joined the exiled political leaders in India in November 1961. He was arrested in December 1960 but was released in April 1961 on the understanding that he would not oppose the king. The leader subsequently left Nepal with Royal permission ostensibly to attend to private business in Europe. After his visit to Europe he came to India and entered into negotiations with General Subarna Shumsher* although they belonged to two political parties opposed to each other in the past. Bharat Shumsher accused King Mahendra at a press conference in Delhi on 13 November for creating a reign of terror and torture. He also alleged that B.P. Koirala was refused proper medical care in his deteriorating state of health. He criticised Nepal's foreign policy by saying that the king imported "Cold War" into Nepal. He announced that his political party had given him full powers to direct a non-violent struggle for the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Nepal. For it he decided to cooperate with the N.C. He welcomed the decision of the Gorkha Parishad to merge with the N.C., since differences in details of programmes had to be sacrificed for a bigger cause. Two other parties, namely, the People's Party and the U.D.P. had previously merged with the N.C. although it

* The former Deputy Premier in the Nepali Congress Government.
gave critical support to the Royal regime. As a result of these developments all other parties which formed the Parliament of 1959-60 excepting the Communist Party were absorbed by the N.C.

The Communist Party's attitude towards the Royal regime remained ambiguous. Fourteen out of seventeen members of its central committee including all the five members of its Politburo succeeded in evading arrest after the coup of December 1960. Outwardly they campaigned in favour of official policies even to the extent of declaring that any attempt for the restoration of parliamentary democracy constituted high treason; but secretly they continued to propagate Communism. This double faced strategy seemed to be based on opportunistic grounds that they availed of in the country. This party however was weakened by its internal dissensions between the pro-Chinese faction led by Mr. Pushpa Lal and the smaller and more moderate pro-Soviet faction led by its General Secretary, Dr. Keshar Jung Rainajhi. The latter was arrested on 10 July 1961, but soon was released by the king's orders on 16 August. In the early part of January 1962 General Shumsher alleged that the Communists were supporting the Royal Government against the uprising of the N.C. since the Chinese Government intended to develop good

8. Dr. Sharan, P., op.cit., p. 139
relations with King Mahendra. In the opinion of Mr. Pushpa Lal who escaped to India, the Communists were fighting against the king to restore democracy and reports in the Nepalese Press confirmed that a powerful section of the party was cooperating with the N.C. rebels. The N.C. leadership was found rejecting a proposal of Dr. Raimajhi's action which wanted to form a joint front to struggle for the restoration of parliamentary Government. The ground for its rejection was that the Congress could not associate itself with a party which believed in violence.

A report of the Press Trust of India of March 1961 confirmed that clashes between peasants and feudal lords led to riots in western Nepal in which ten villages were sacked by armed rioters. The troops had to be sent from Kathmandu to control the situation. Though not much information was available of the time owing to the restrictions imposed by the Nepalese Government on press and platform, Mr. Bharat Shumsher stated in November that the revolt had been caused by the king's reversal of the Koirala Government's reforms and his support for the feudal interests. A number of people lost their lives in riots and sporadic incidents of varying importance were reported from many parts of Nepal.

Reports of local disturbances, raids on police posts, attacks on officials and sabotage became increasingly common in December which culminated in an armed uprising in several
areas under the leadership of the N.C. in the following month. The main driving force behind the rebellion was Mr. Shumsher who was found posting his own agents in the key areas. He also gave them a plan of action before leaving Nepal. General Shumsher was in Supreme command. Taking these developments into considerations King Mahendra declared on 5 January 1962 that traitors were trying to seize power in Nepal from the sanctuary of a foreign power. He warned that Nepal might disintegrate. In nine out of the country's thirtytwo districts there had been spontaneous peasant uprisings. In the Illam, Dhankutta and Okharlunga districts of eastern Nepal and the Gulmi district of western Nepal the peasants, led by underground Congress workers had raided police stations to secure arms and thus repulsed the Government forces. The rebels were operating from the difficult Terai region for which it was not easy for the Government troops to oust them. The rebels included many ex-soldiers with expert knowledge and experience of war tactics. Many of the rebels gained experience in jungle warfare while serving with the Gorkha troops in Malaya. They claimed that their tactics were modelled on those of the Malayan Communists.9

The rebels captured six police posts in Illam district in early January and seized partial control of the town of

Illam two days later. After heavy fighting they were driven out by the army which reoccupied six posts. Fighting also took place in the Dailekh and Salyan districts of Western Nepal. It was reported that a force of 1,200 rebels had been joined by all the peasants of Dailekh district and that all police posts and Government offices in the area were in their hands excepting the district headquarters. Numerous acts of sabotage also occurred during that period notably in the Biratnagar area of South-Eastern Nepal where King Mahendra began a loyal tour on 17 January. Destruction of revenue office, jute mill and even the rostrum from where the king was due to speak at Janakpur were some of the events that marked the period. 10

A bomb was thrown at King Mahendra's car while he was going to a civic reception at Janakpur. The king escaped unhurt. Several people were arrested, some of whom were said to be in possession of explosives. Allegations by Dr. S. Giri that this attempt had been organised by N.C. leaders in India were categorically denied by General Shumsher commenting that whenever a tyrant or dictator wanted to discredit his political opponents he took recourse to provocations organised by his own agents.

Subsequent development shows that rebel forces occupied the town of Bharatpur* on 7 February with the help of

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10. Ibid.

* 80 miles S.W. of Kathmandu.
the local police force headed by their commanding officer. They collected all the arms in the town, carried off a large sum from the revenue office, ploughed up the airfield to prevent troops from being sent by air and then withdrew into the jungle. In Southern Nepal rebels attempted to dynamite a bridge at Birganj on the same day and burnt down a police station in a raid on Amlekhganj. A force of about 100 rebels raided the town of Koilabas* and fought a four-hour gun battle with the police before withdrawing.

During March and April the rebels intensified their activities in eastern Nepal. Official records show that they held two villages on the Sikkim border for nearly a month and used them as bases for frequent attacks on the military, the police posts and the revenue offices. Fifty prisoners were freed by the rebels. They also disarmed seventy policemen and destroyed radio installations of Taplejung.** A rebel radio station which began regular broadcasts since 8 April was believed to be operating either from Sikkim and Darjeeling area or the adjoining area of Nepal. Following the steady process of revolutionary activities the N.C. captured almost all the police posts in the Gulmi and Pyutam districts. They received active support from the population. The Rebels raided a police post and a railway station in the Janakpur

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* 100 miles south-west of Kathmandu.

** 20 miles from the Sikkim border.
area by April and burnt down a nearby customs post by 8 May. About seventy rebels attacked the police post at Dhankhaceri* and they only withdrew after a seven-hour battle with the troops and the police. Two engagements between Government forces and large rebel bands took place on 8 June at Thori** and Deokhari.*** The Army could repulse the rebel attack on Bharatpur and dislodge them from their stronghold in the Churia range. Official sources show that twentythree soldiers, sixtythree rebels and fourteen other people were killed in the fighting since the outbreak of the rebellion and the wounded consisted of twentyeight soldiers and police, twentyeight rebels and twentynine common people.

The Government took drastic action against its opponents. A decree of 8 March 1962 empowered the district officers to use for six months all necessary force to deal with persons engaged in acts of destruction and sabotage. It empowered them to set up emergency tribunals throughout the country to hear all such cases. They could punish the rebels with six years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 5,000. By an order on 2 March General Shumsher, Mr. Bharat Shumsher and seventyfour other prominent opponents of the Government most of them still in India, were asked to report to their

* South-west of Nepal.
** 70 miles south-west of Kathmandu
*** in western Nepal.
respective district authorities within 21 days. They were threatened that their failure to act accordingly might lead to the confiscation of their property. A similar order was issued on 26 March against eighty-three other refugees including Mr. Pushpa Lal. As none of the rebels obeyed the order the property of General Shumsher and twenty-nine others was confiscated subsequently. On 24 August General Shumsher, Bharat Shumsher, Shashi Shumsher, and three other exiled opposition leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia by an emergency tribunal on the charge of sabotage, murder and looting. Besides them a number of persons were sentenced in absentia and their term of imprisonment ranged from twelve to twenty years along with heavy fine. The list included Mrs. Mangala Devi who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 2,500. Seventy persons were sentenced to six years' hard labour on the charge of committing sabotage as well as for attempting to rescue B.F. Koirala and his colleagues. Seven others were put to two years' imprisonment for conspiring to seize rifles from an Army camp.11

Even though the state of Emergency stood withdrawn with the announcement of the Constitution the domestic scene during 1962-63 bore a striking semblance with the post 1942

India. It was more or less a dormant volcano. All the popular leaders were thrown behind the bars. Rebel pockets all over the kingdom experienced a spell of brutal repression. The king appeared to be satisfied since he was under the illusion that the Royal forces had once for all crushed the democratic movement of the people. Administration came to be conducted with the help of a handful of collaborationists. People in general were in a state of panic as Kathmandu enforced its writ by stamping out popular unrest. It tried to create a mystique of authoritarianism by propagating the fiction that the king was synonymous with God. The hard reality however was not difficult to deduce from the prevailing political and administrative scene. Until November 1969 a majority of the people's elected representatives were in arms against the king. A section of Congress supporters nursed the illusion that dissolution of the Parliament was only a stop-gap arrangement. A third section of persons were out to prove themselves more loyal to the king. This group included the palace, military and civil services who had vested interest in the king's direct rule. After the sacking of Koirala's Government the services were subjected to screening and about one hundred and forty officers and men were axed. With the Palace running a parallel secretariat, the ministry and the services hardly ever felt the need to exercise their duty on decision-making. They shunned accepting responsibility for any work not to speak of taking initiative on any decision.
Lack of self-confidence in the secretariat services was hardly conducive to administrative efficiency. Moreover the services were divided community-wise with battle-lines firmly drawn among the various castes and clans like Brahmins, Newars, Thapas and Rhettries. Recruitment rules existed on paper only. In practice officers were appointed by Royal favour. Since appointments and promotions were governed by favouritism, few bothered to observe discipline or excel in administrative efficiency.

Withdrawal of movement by Subarna Shumsher gave the Royal administration a feeling of elation. Relation with Peking being favourable, the king sent Dr. Tulsi Giri as his emissary to New Delhi to hold talks with Pandit Nehru. A series of visits by Indian dignitaries to Nepal who included Bhagwan Sahay, a former ambassador, as well as Lal Bahadur Shastri then the Home Minister of India with their "healing" mission to Kathmandu contributed a lot to ease the tense relation between India and Nepal. The king appointed Dr. Giri as Chairman of a new Council of Ministers. Since the F.D. was about to be inaugurated in April, the king required a person to project his political personality in the House. The king, it seems, had a plan to alienate the N.C. and other...

12 Council of Ministers appointed on 4 April 1963: Dr. Tulsi Giri, Chairman, Council of Ministers, Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa, Vice-Chairman and Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Affairs, Mr. Bhuanilal Pradhan, Forests and Agriculture, Dr. Nageshwar Prasad Singh, Health and Power and Canals, Mr. Kirtinidhi Bista, Education and Transport and Communication, Mr. Sedanand Jha, Industry and Commerce, and Mr. Khadga Bahadur Singh, Home and Panchayat.
political parties from popular sympathy. Few were allowed to mediate between him and B.F. Koirala. Political workers continued to be persecuted. The king was certain that he could achieve his political objectives following that course of action. About a thousand of the first ranking political workers went into exile. The political situation in Nepal was far from being normal even though it had adopted a non-party system. On the other hand Mr. Giri's Chairmanship was unexpectedly shortlived. Two actions of the king disillusioned him. The first was the appointment of Tanka Prasad Acharva as Vice-Chairman of National Guidance Council, and the second was the appointment of Rishikesh Shaha as Chairman of the Standing Committee of Raj Sabha. The appointments were made without consulting Dr. Giri. In both the cases a controversy took place regarding seniority since according to protocol the Chairman of the Council of Ministers had to serve on both the bodies as an ex-officio member. Giri had to resign in December 1963 on grounds of ill-health. The king promoted the mild-mannered deputy Chairman and Finance Minister, Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa, a politically obscure figure, as the acting Chairman. Despite repressive measures adopted by the authorities democratic urges of the people could not be stamped out. Tulsi Giri staged a come-back two months later and he was entrusted with the charge of Home Ministry. The atmosphere warmed up in the spring when Shaha gave his support to the students of Tri-Chandra College to form Students' union.
Giri did not countenance any student body other than that affiliated to the officially-sponsored Youth Organisation. Shaha was, however, of the opinion that under the Constitution there was no bar to autonomous bodies being organised by students of different colleges. The atmosphere became suffocating by degrees. It seems that during that period political vacuum prevailed in Nepal. Shaha’s new political rival I.J. Singh dropped a brick in the muddy pool by launching a non-violent Satyagraha for revival of fundamental rights of the people.

A survey of the records shows that all was not well with the state of Nepal. Even the non-party system had started developing cracks and fissures. Giri was apparently appointed on probation in 1964 and this time his term did not last longer than nine months. Vishwa Bandhu Thapa* was re-assigned home portfolio when he returned to capital after leading a delegation of the Panchayat members to China. In the last days of his term Giri was left with only the portfolio of Palace Affairs. By September 1964 V.B. Thapa resigned from the post of Home Minister. As Minister of Home and National Guidance he had rendered yeoman’s service to King Mahendra by liquidating his former party comrades, whom he preferred to call as the “anti-national armed gangs”.

* He served for a brief spell as Chairman of the N.P.
He had indoctrinated a new cadre of Panchayat workers to mobilise support for the "new partyless democracy". After quitting office he turned highly critical of the Government in the debates of the N.P. Subsequently he re-aligned himself with the king in 1969. In order to reinforce the political structure the king went to the extent of wooing the Communists of Nepal. To him they were preferable to the other political parties as they were at daggers drawn with the K.C. Shajiendra Kumar Upadhyaya a member of the Politburo of the CPN was persuaded to join the ministry. Bhuwanlal Pradhan, Chairman of the Nepal-China Cultural Association, who easily passed off as a "fellow-traveller", was already in the ministry. The entry of Nepal's "loyalist Communists" in the cabinet brought into existence important political implications. It enabled the communist cadres to infiltrate into the secretariat services, panchayat bodies and class organisations as a sequel to ministerial patronage. Their entry in the administration gave a fillip to the Communist Party's policy of serving the Government from within and subverting it from outside. It weakened the administration. 13

Late in 1964 Tulsi Giri discovered much to his embarrassment that the Constitution did not specify the functions of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. In January

13. Tribhuvan Nath, op.cit., p. 222
1965 he was compelled to resign due to the cabinet in-fighting. A faction of the ministry tried to squeeze out Dr. Nageshwar Prasad Singh, the Health Minister from Terai with a campaign that he had apportioned several new development projects to his constituency. N.P. Singh, who was also a N.C. defector was about to resign when Dr. Giri intervened. He was willing to serve if N.P. Singh was not included in the ministry. It seemed that Giri's terms were not acceptable to the king. As such both Giri and N.P. Singh tendered their resignations together on 25 January 1965. Dr. Giri, who was initially equating the Chairman's post with the Prime Minister's held that by an amendment of the Constitution the functions of the Chairman of Council of Ministers be defined. With three N.C. defectors out of his team, the king again promoted the deputy Chairman and Finance Minister, Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa to the Chairman's post. In fact these exits and entries made little difference since the Government was working under the king's direct leadership. Men who came to bide their time could not have implemented a political programme of their own. Following Giri's exit, all the seven assistant ministers attached to the outgoing cabinet were upgraded to cabinet rank. It implied that the king was making a fresh effort to gain support from all sections in the N.P. Among the ministers, S.B. Thapa and B.L. Pradhan were nominated members of the N.P.
A study of the records, reports and statements of the responsible persons has shown that the performance of the Panchayat bodies was far from satisfactory. Nobody even dared challenge the "system" openly and the ministers continued to warn enemies of the "system" of dire consequences. Outsiders could not say how effective the members were inside the N.P. in calling into question the Government's performance with a view to exercising a corrective influence. On Mr. Vishwa Bandhu Thapa's testimony, persons at the helm of affairs were working against the spirit of the "Panchayat System".*

A step towards democratic process was undertaken by the members of the Opposition in 1965. They wanted to revive multi-party system also. Conspicuous among them was Tulsi Giri who attempted to form a small group of N.F. members in the mid '65.14 This group had the plan of highlighting anomalies in the existing system, inefficiency of the administration and defective policies of the Government. The attempt however proved to be a failure since the leader lacked qualifications or political resources to lead the Opposition. Equally vocal was Vishwa Bandhu Thapa, who made a solo attempt in the N.P. in July 196615 to fan opposition amongst its members.

* Mr. Thapa's letter of resignation from membership of the National Panchayat in 1966.

14. Commoner, 4 June 1965 & Ibid., 11-12 August 1965
15. Commoner, 10 September 1966
members by demanding revival of political parties. As a vigorous supporter of the ideologies of the parliamentary system, he seemed totally disenchanted since partyless system had come to stay contrary to his hope of seeing it as a transitional process for the people's graduation into democracy.

Role of the Opposition:

The idea of organising opposition inside the N.T. did not die out altogether. Early in 1967, a few members of the N.C., Communists and Independents were found to be determined to get into the N.C. from the graduates' constituency for that purpose. They issued their manifestos, some of them advocating the reinstatement of parties, addressed public meetings and openly canvassed as reformists in order to seek popular mandates for their candidacy. Their demands were the aggregation of the ones made to date by other individuals, but they were much more vigorous while advocating them. With the exception of Shaha, all such reformist candidates were arrested before the election which had been scheduled for 12 May. They were charged with illegal activities against the king and the Constitution. Some were released when they signed statements affirming their full faith in the Panchayat system. Others

were punished with fines and terms of imprisonment. 17

On 30 October 1968 former Prime Minister's B.P. Koirala was released along with his colleague Ganesh Man Singh. Shortly thereafter, Koirala left for India for his medical treatment and while in India he refused to make any comment on the prevailing situation in Nepal. After his return to his home in Biratnagar in the beginning of February 1969. 18 Koirala made no secret of his dissatisfaction at the prevailing political, economic and social conditions in the country. He believed that democracy had been "murdered" in Nepal after his arrest in 1960 and did not consider the existing system as a democratic one. Maintaining his populist stance, he believed that only the people were competent to determine who was right and who was wrong. In a democracy it was the people's wishes that determined everything. As expected, Koirala was condemned by the ruling elite and the Press alike with the allegation that being anti-king, anti-system and anti-national, his views were seditious enough to instigate the people to resort to extra-constitutional means for the reversal of the existing political set-up in the country. However, Koirala denied that he had ever contemplated to bring about change in the political system by violent means or revive political

18. Gorkhapatra, 22 February 1969
parties. Government leaders in Nepal were not prepared to let Koirala regain his political role in the country. They scorned his hypothesis about the inevitability of a violent or non-violent revolution. To them the existing system was the benign Royal leadership and so to contend with Koirala meant a process of liberalization.

The Royal takeover had been backed by the army, it was reinforced by suspension of fundamental rights and nurtured by a ban on political parties. Ruthless repression deterred the people from bringing their genuine grievances to the attention of the authorities. Sometimes criticisms against the regime were voiced. Discussions on public issue also took place but all these were allowed within certain restrictions so that nothing could disturb the status quo. Equally responsible for the weakening of oppositions was the role of the Decembrists. Looking like the Camarilla of court intrigues of the ancient regime and like confidents of conspiracies hatched earlier for power, the triumvirate of the Decembrists Bishnu Kesh Shaha, Tulsi Giri and Vishwabandhu Thapa started exhibiting every demagogic skill to paralyse the king and devalue the N.C. with an intent to incapacitate its leaders from injecting opposition in the society against the Royal regime. Furthermore the people in general were so much governed by their traditional conduct that to them deviation or divergence from official line was equal to sedition.
Opposition has been hindered not only by the lack of response from the intellectuals and professionals or by the existing gap between the educated and the illiterate, tradition-bound people but also by its demonstration generally localised at a few urban centres without touching their periphery. In the absence of a party system the Opposition had no prospect of becoming competitive and hence durable. The so-called interest groups, that is, the class organisations had been disabled for being pressure groups. Panchayat members very often were required to act as informers. There was practically no parliamentary checks on executive action and it is doubtful whether the judiciary was independent. No adequate expression to the country wide discontentment could be made without being punished.

The absence of communication between the Opposition and the mass often became accentuated by the vagueness of language of the former due to extreme caution of not expressing themselves openly. University teachers did not seem to be happy at the prevailing set-up, but they hesitated to express their views frankly. Students tended to be oppositional at times but the so-called democrats, who were identified with the radical forces of the N.C. appeared to be pro-Chinese. All were maverick but the democrats had to face several odds. There was a tremendous generation gap between the former leaders and the youth, since the latter had no
opportunity to train themselves as possible potential leaders. The political and material rewards dangled out by the authorities resulted in the vacuum of democratic leadership. Most of the former leaders were either neutralized or incapacitated either by the authorities or by their own style from offering their leadership to the directionless young generation. The opposition also suffered from lack of response from the intellectuals and graduates, the majority of them being in the Government service. Poverty of the people in general and oppositional elements in particular were the factors that inhibited the Opposition from becoming organised and aggregated. Few rich people were willing to support the Opposition. Even those who could afford to help the Opposition with that financial means at their disposal were not prepared to enhance their source of income or property and expose their family members to victimization at the hands of the authorities. Businessmen, capitalists and petty landowning bourgeoisie were understandably unwilling to cause displeasure to the authorities by contributing to the funds of the opposition. Opposition to the Government was regarded as high treason by the people in general and so it was indeed hard to be organised against the establishment in the prevailing situation.19

By the time of King Mahendra’s death in 1972, a broad range of new groups had been integrated into the complex of

central institutions he had developed. The top secretaries familiar with the demands of the interest groups as well as with the state's development needs, were able to make some progress towards the policy goals even while distributing state resources to maintain and support the new as well as the established political groups. But the king's political strategy could not convince the illegal but still active party organisations to accept the Panchayat system. Consequently repressive measures were still undertaken to control the activities of the political parties. State resources continued to be diverted to retain the loyalty of individual Panchayat members, thereby contributing to the growing problem of corruption. The king's disruptive method of controlling bureaucratic elites failed to enable the administration to build the organisational capability required for the extensive economic controls and sophisticated development projects undertaken by the Government.  

Students of Tribhuvan University went on an indefinite strike on 11 August to press for their ten-point charter of demands. The demands were among other things, abrogation of the code of conduct rules which prevented the students from participating in political activities and revision of the education plan. The students also demanded immediate and unconditional release of all student detainees.

20. Rose, Leo E. and Schols, John T., op.cit., p. 57

and political prisoners in the country, judicial inquiry into the recent firing in Terai towns, and to the Government control on the Press, harassment of journalists and closure of the British Gorkha recruitment centres at Dharan in the Terai border area.  

A report about the starvation death in the northern belt of the kingdom and food scarcity following the failure of two consecutive crops in the entire northern belt bordering China rocked the kingdom. The members of the N.P. urged King Birendra to appoint a Royal Commission to make an on the spot study of the places where people were dying of starvation. They charged the Government with "failing to take any effective steps" to solve the food problem and provide seeds in time. One by one the Panchayat members and others gave newsmen harrowing accounts of people having to leave their hearths and homes in search of food and on the way eating "banko" to sustain themselves. They said that some people had even crossed into India from the north-western areas. In their opinion over 15,000 people had trekked down to Barhabise, some 80 Km east of Kathmandu, in quest of food. On 17 March a spokesman of the Food and Agriculture Ministry described the allegations as "baseless".

22. Ibid.

* A sort of roof.

In his first Address to the N.P. on 26 July the king affirmed his faith in partyless Panchayat system decreed decade ago by his father. The king made it known to the Panchayat members, including the dissident ones, that his Government would take care not to disrupt such incomparable principles of the system as partylessness, class co-ordination and decentralization but make them more strong by introducing timely reforms. Though he did not specifically mention the recent revolt by the Opposition members against the cabinet he cautioned that such elements might frustrate the attempts of the Government. He hoped that all panchas would extend cooperation to it with mutual goodwill and understanding to face the problems and difficulties that might come in the way. He also referred to the country's economic development, five-year plan, agriculture, industry, tourism, education and foreign policy. He held that Nepal would continue its policy to strengthen friendly relations on the basis of equality, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful co-existence with all the countries particularly with their neighbours.24

The king laid stress on the development of healthy relation with the neighbouring countries. He was of the firm opinion that the Panchayat system with decentralization of

power would go a long way to involve the common people in administration. 25

The unrepresentative Panchayat system was the but of all criticisms levied against it by the defunct political party workers. 26 A liberalised political atmosphere to be achieved through the institution of direct national elections as well as provisions for fundamental rights for the citizens were some of the outstanding demands put forward by the political workers. 27 Sensing the political aspirations of the people the king introduced a few changes in the Panchayat system in 1974. 28 However the possibility for the emergence of a powerful political party to challenge the Royal leadership remained very much present in Nepal politics. The Constitutional amendments introduced in 1975 though reaffirmed the partyless nature of the Panchayat system, the undercurrent of political unrest continued unabated throughout the period. A statement of B.P. Koirela amply testifies it: "We, democrats consider the present policy of the king and the Panchayat system not only anti-democratic and anti-people but also brutal and anti-national. We consider that one does not promote

27. Ibid., 8-14 October 1973, vol. XIX, No. 41, p. 11646
national cohesion or help build a nation by depriving the people of the political and constitutional rights. It is exactly that what the king has been doing. Chauvinistic slogans as a garb for totalitarianism do not constitute nationalism. The way of the king will take the nation to its doom.\(^\text{29}\)

The first political dialogue on reconciliation initiated by Prime Minister Koirala with the king in October 1978 was an important political development. Some prominent F.C. party members led by late Subarna Shumsher Rara openly dissociated themselves from the efforts of B.P. Koirala. They set up their own ten-number “ad-hoc committee” with Bakhan Sing Gurung, a veteran party activist, as its leader. The Subarna group was optimistic that some reforms would be initiated after the Panchayat polls in March-April.\(^\text{30}\)

Leaders or rival and banned political parties in Nepal, viz., the N.C. and the pro-China Communist Party urged the Constitutional Reforms Commission to recommend far reaching changes in the partyless Panchayat system. Referring to various “inner contradictions” in the existing system Parashu Narain Choudhury\(^\text{**}\) demanded immediate reforms. He criticized those outside Nepal who seemed to be unaware of

\(^{29}\) Chatterji, Bhola, op.cit., p. 155

* B.P. Koirala, who in 1977 travelled to the U.S.A. for medical treatment, after being released from detention, returned to Nepal on 8 November 1977 and was immediately arrested.

\(^{30}\) Times of India, 9 November 1978

** Former Minister and General Secretary of the N.C.
the enthusiasm throughout the kingdom for reforms and who tried
to vitiate the atmosphere by undesirable and false statements.
Some of them even suggested to drop the word "Hindu" from
Art. 3 of the Constitution. This suggestion seems to have
far-reaching effect since after the reversion to the multi-
party system in 1990 that demand has again been raised by the
leftist political party.

Politics in Nepal entered a new phase with the third
amendment to the Constitution which provided for direct elec-
tion to the national legislature after 22 years. The election
seemed to be a mere eye wash since the whole administration
continued to be dominated by the king. A students' movement
of April-May 1979 shook the palace for which the king announced
a referendum to decide whether the people wanted a multi-party
parliamentary democracy or the continuation of Panchayat
system. 31 B.P. Koirala promptly welcomed the decision as a
historic step and maintained that in his opinion at least 95% of people would vote for reverting back to the multi-party
system.

The referendum was held on the basis of adult fran-
chise and secret ballot. Before the referendum students
demonstrations clashed with the police and the army had to be
called out. It also marked the culmination of the seven-week

31. The Illustrated Weekly of India, 21 July, 1985
long student agitation in which 20 lives were lost and over 250 persons injured in various parts of the kingdom. Almost all the leaders of the major defunct political parties welcomed the holding of the referendum. The Royal palace also announced full freedom to the supporters of either form of the Government to hold meetings, campaign etc. to support and propagate their views. The constitutional disability regarding formation of political parties and politically motivated activities and associations remained until the referendum. The Royal palace issued a warning that full freedom to propagate views during the pendency of the referendum did not mean that the Government would tolerate any violation of the laws, disorder, arson and loot. 32

There were dangerous portents in the atmosphere because of the intensified activities of the extremist communists, naxalites and terrorists, who supported the cause of partyless Panchayat. Their aim seemed to bring about a split between the people and the supporters of the multi-party system. They operated mostly in the eastern region of the kingdom and occasionally confronted with the police. Some of them were arrested for indulging in arson and subversive activities. From all these developments it was clear that the odds were heavy against the multi-party camp. The records of that

period have shown that the political parties had been in the wilderness for about two decades and their leaders suffered long years of incarceration. Their ranks were depleted and degenerated and mostly liquidated. The premier political party, N.C. was divided into three groups. The Subarna Shumsher group joined the "establishment" after years of exile in India. The next important political party was the pro-Peking Communist Party. It also stood divided in three groups. It seems that at the heel of the announcement for referendum there was resurrection of the political parties.

About 1,100 candidates participated in the referendum. Leaders of the Panchayat, multi-party camps and the Press launched a lively debate on the possible impact of the referendum on Nepalese politics. The N.C. led by B.P. Koirala and the two Communist parties boycotted the poll. They did so in protest against the condition which required every candidate to take a pledge stating that he/she did not belong to any party and that he/she adhered to the partyless system. These three parties regarded the constitutional changes proclaimed by King Birendra as a mockery of reform. In the light of the unmistakable disenchantment with the present dispensation as reflected in the overall outcome of the election, the nominees of the three banned parties would have fared well even as Independents. In that event the new Panchayat would have included a sufficiently large number of members truly opposed
to the partyless system. They would have been in a position to give a new edge to their agitation against it. B.P. Koirala, whose group stayed out of the election, said in a public speech that the condition that all candidates must be members of one of the six professional class organisations discriminated against those who opposed the system. Another senior democratic leader, D.R. Regmi remarked that no election could be meaningful without the participation of all political elements. He also alleged that the referendum without democratic participation would help only the loyal Panchayat leaders to return to power through the ballot box and legitimise their hegemony.\(^{33}\)

Surprisingly the supporters of the partyless Panchayat system won the election by a small margin. 54% voters supported the partyless form of Government while the remaining voted for multi-party democracy. N.C. leaders later alleged that the referendum was rigged by the palace. Independent observers also shared this opinion.\(^{34}\)

For the first time in 22 years the people of Nepal exercised their franchise in the referendum. This event proved to be an important landmark in the kingdom's march into the modern age although it was held under a Constitution which fell far short of genuine reform. The most significant

34. *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 21 July, 1985
aspect of the poll results had been the defeat of a large number of candidates sponsored by the establishment, i.e., the palace together with the top leadership of the partyless Panchayat system which included the Deputy Chairman of the N.P. and a minister. Notable among the winners against the officially sponsored candidates was Mrs. Nani-Dahal who was not a known public figure. Her victory in Kathmandu was followed by a rare popular rejoicing.

The winds of change have been blowing from the Caucasus to Kathmandu. The landlocked Himalayan kingdom of Nepal also has struggled to bring in a change in its 30 years old political system, in which the king commands absolute power behind a facade of partyless democracy.

On 18 January 1990 leaders of the outlawed N.C. began their party's three-day national conference to chalk out a plan of action to fight for the restoration of a multi-party system of Government in the country. The meeting was also attended by the representatives of a newly formed front of Nepal's splintered C.P. and leaders decided to launch a Satyagraha from 18 February, if King Birendra, Nepal's retiring Monarch, failed to concede their demands by then. From all indications it appears that the king was in no mood to relent. And with the Royalty choosing to remain impassive and impervious in the face of growing popular resentment against
what has come to be regarded as a malevolent system, a time-bomb seemed to be ticking away in Nepal. 35

This was not the first time that the N.C. raised a demand for political change. The party stridently demanded reintroduction of the multi-party parliamentary system, ever since Nepal's nascent democracy was subverted by a Royal coup in 1960. That year King Mahendra, father of King Birendra dismissed the elected Government of B.P. Koirala, one of Nepal's political titans and dissolved the Parliament. He introduced a partyless Panchayat (Parliament) system in which the members came to be elected as individuals without any party affiliation. The king assumed absolute authority by reserving for himself all legislative and executive powers. His son King Birendra, who succeeded him in 1972, also refused to bow down to popular pressure.

The factor that set apart the January conference from all previous conventions of the party was the participation of a number of Indian parliamentarians, who openly advocated an end to Monarchical rule in Nepal, much to the chagrin of the country's loyalist establishment. The Indian delegation led by the Janata Dal (J.D.) leader, Chandra Shekhar, comprised Hari Kishore Singh (J.D.), M.J. Akbar and Barish Rawat (Congress-I), Harkishan Singh Surjeet (CPI-M), Subramaniam

35. Sunday, 4-10 February 1990
Swamy (Janata Party) and M. Farooqi (CPI). While these leaders arrived to take part in the proceedings on the opening day, three more Janata Dal Members of Parliament Yashwant Sinha, Kamal Murarka and Rabindra Manchanda flew in the next day. The conference was held at the residence of Ganesh Man Singh who was designated as the supreme leader of the N.C., since the Government refused permission to the party to hold the meeting in the Royal Academy Hall. The N.C. was constrained to hold the public rally in an adjoining plot of vacant land which could at best accommodate 5,000 people.

In a brief, fiery speech punctuated by rapturous applause, Chandra Sekhar lashed out at the Monarch and the Monarchy. He cited the fate of some of the most hated dictators in history and said that if Hitler and Mussolini could fall, lesser despots could not hope to fare better. And Shekhar, whose speech was bound to affront the Nepalese royalty and had the portent of torpedoing Indo-Nepalese relations, made it clear that he was not speaking in his individual capacity, but was voicing the sentiments of his party and the ruling Rational Front in India.

M.O. Akbar, who brought a message of goodwill from his party President and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, also spoke passionately, advocating changes in Nepal's political order in a speech that was unmistakably Nehruvian in its lofty idealism and style of delivery. Pointing to Romania,
where a popular upsurge swept aside decades-old autocratic regime in December 1969 Akbar wondered how the forces of change could be kept subdued in Nepal. Subramaniam Swamy, a former Harvard Professor and leader of the Janata Party launched a satirical attack on the king by casting aside the civility of referring to him in innuendos. Surjeet and Farooqi, who represented the Indian left at the conference, were equally critical of the king for trying to perpetuate, what they called, a despotic feudal order. They particularly welcomed the increasing camaraderie between the N.C. and the Nepali Communists, who had decided to fight for democracy on the basis of common programmes. 36

The seven top leaders of the newly formed "United Left-Front" met their counterparts in the N.C. during the Congress Working Committee meeting at the residence of the N.C. leader Ganesh Man Singh which met to form a co-ordination committee of the two groups for the proposed movement. Girija Prasad Koirala* told the newsmen that the "United Left Front" had not only extended full support to their movement but would also participate in it actively. Both sides assured each other to go to the fullest extent to make the movement a complete success. 37

36. Sunday, 4-10 February 1990
* The party's General Secretary.
37. The Telegraph, 17 January 1990
That the polarisation of forces ranged against the prevailing order was evident from the Communist parties and groups that joined hands with the N.C. This was unprecedented. During the two previous challenges to the Monarchy, as in the early sixties (1960-63) and the late seventies (1976-79), the mutually incompatible and competitive Communists and the democrat, had never come together. They had their differences on issues like India's role in present struggle, future pattern of Indo-Nepali relations and the ultimate place of the Monarchy in the Nepali political system. However they worked out a strategy of parallel and coordinated action and elimination of even the factional divergence on how to carry forward the movement. A notable development was that veteran Nepali Sections of the ruling elite also extended their supports to the N.C. movement.38

This impressive anti-system lineup was the result of several factors. Half-hearted political liberalisation promised under the third constitutional amendment of December 1980 resulted in dissension even within the Panchayat system. In the process not only the Panchayat leadership but also the palace had come under public criticism.

Growing political frustration was aggravated by two almost simultaneous and quite unrelated international developments. One was Nepal's trade trouble with India. The prolonged

38. The Times of India, 17 February 1990
economic hardships created by the breakdown in the trading arrangements between the two countries since March 1999 eventually led to a widespread perception that the regime did not care for the common people who suffered while corrupt vested interests were enjoying benefits. The anti-regime forces received a tremendous moral boost from the wave of freedom and democracy sweeping through Eastern Europe. The Nepali people's jubilation at the collapse of Ceausescu's dictatorial regime in Romania thus had much significance. The regime's strategy to counter the movement appeared to be comprised of four important components like (i) the usual attempt to initiate a counter mobilisation of Panchayat interests through various rallies of Panchas at the national and regional levels, though the rallies were not drawing popular support; (ii) use of divergent personality and ideology partners; (iii) the third component of the regime's strategy was to let loose repression on the N.C. and the United Left Front segments. This repression was aimed at the second and third level of leadership. Finally, the regime launched a massive diplomatic initiative to mobilise international support to blunt the thrust of the movement. Accordingly, it tried to stop or lower the political representation from India and other countries sought by the N.C. for its pre-movement conference on 18-20 January. 39 The pro-democracy

39. Ibid.
movement was supported by India, U.S.A., Finland and West Germany.

Never before the king or his tiny Himalayan kingdom witnessed a popular movement of such magnitude. 40

The N.C. and seven Communist parties came together to launch a joint protest in favour of the multi-party system between 18 February and 2 March. On 18 February which was a holiday to honour the late King Tribhuvan, a massive demonstration, to which some Indian politicians have been invited, was staged. More protests erupted in different parts of the country the following day.

The simmering movement for the restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal had come to the boil despite repressive measures by the Government. 41 That is why the banned N.C. launched a countrywide movement for the restoration of 'complete' democracy, freedom and human rights in the Himalayan kingdom from 18 February 1990. 42

A palace announcement of 9 April conceded the major demands of the movement, namely, the return of democracy to

40. Sunday, 11-17 March 1990
42. The Telegraph, 17 January, 1990
the tiny Himalayan kingdom after a gap of 30 years. The palace announced that the word 'partyless' would be deleted from Nepal’s Constitution. It also paved the way for the formation of an interim Government and the abrogation of the Act which banned the political parties in Nepal. With King Birendra finally giving into the demand for democratic rights, the three-month old agitation has achieved a major victory.43 Under the changed system Nepal’s Monarchy would be deduced from one having absolute authority to one having merely a constitutional status. Nepal’s parliamentary system which was dissolved in 1960 was a dormant volcano. After 30 years it erupted and the king had no other way than to concede to the demand for multi-party system. The transition from absolute Monarchy to democracy in Nepal and the ushering in of a popular Government headed by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai as Prime Minister have been the events of great political significance.44

It was the second dawn of democracy in Nepal after 15 December 1960, when King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah, father of the present King Birendra, dissolved the first democratically elected Government of B.P. Koirala through a "Royal coup" with the help of the army and imposed the partyless Panchayat system of Government which became synonymous with

43. India Today. 30 April 1990
44. Frontline, 28 April to 11 May, 1990
suppression of civil liberties and corruption in high places. What ultimately forced the king to give in after pursuing a hard line was the unprecedented mass upsurge in support of restoration of democracy as well as the pressure of international opinion, especially the strongly worded appeal of donor countries such as the United States and West Germany to start a dialogue with the protagonists of democracy. The freedom wave sweeping the countries of Europe also contributed to it. The king had the support of the army but he could not use it without antagonising world opinion.