



## Editorial

## Outgunned

More cops are needed if the worsening security situation is to be stemmed

The Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force (APF) have asked the government to immediately increase their strength by 13,000 personnel. As of now, the Nepal Police numbers 56,500 and the APF 25,000. The proposed number of extra officers, if sanctioned by the government, will be used for maintaining law and order, conducting investigations and establishing border check posts. This, according to an estimate, will cost the government Rs. 3.75 billion. In addition to this, a central bureau of investigation is also in the making. This agency will have a staff strength of 170.

The security apparatus is overstretched, and there is a need to increase its strength because of the deteriorating law and order situation. According to a senior police officer, a majority of Nepal Police personnel are kept busy handling rallies, sit-ins and protests — recurring events these days. As a result, less than 15 per cent of the workforce has been mobilized for other necessary activities. Also, the worsening security situation in the eastern hills and the central Tarai has generated a need for more cops. In both these areas, the ratio of the number of policemen to the population is very low. In the Tarai, there is one police officer for every 700 residents; and in the hills, the ratio is one to 500.

The request to reinforce Nepal's security forces is a legitimate one. The police do confront major problems and need additional support to overcome them. But it is unlikely that simply increasing the numbers will help bring much improvement in the situation. An increase in size does not necessarily mean an improvement in professionalism, or that the security bodies will be able to work autonomously of political forces. In fact, one of the major reasons for the ineffectiveness of the police force has been intervention by political actors. Politicians use their leverage to set free criminals under their patronage, instead of letting the police and the judiciary prosecute offenders independently. These acts on the part of politicians have seriously lowered the morale of the security agencies. Unsurprisingly, due to this, even in the face of a major law and order breakdown, police act as mere bystanders. Police officers rely on their political masters for promotion, and they fear demotion if they do not act according to the latter's wishes. This has perpetuated the system of patronage. And because merit is often not a factor in an officer's future prospects, there is lack of incentive to increase the professionalism of the security bodies.

This is a time when the heads of the security bodies themselves have been engaged in serious thinking regarding how they can improve the effectiveness of their organizations. The time is apt to undertake an even more thorough analysis of the problems these bodies are facing, including the issues mentioned above. Political leaders should be confronted with the facts and shown the harm they are causing by interfering in the security bodies. This perhaps will lead to the beginning of an urgently needed, far-reaching reform in the way that the police forces function.

## Banning booze

RAJIV KAFLE

Alcohol, alcohol and alcohol everywhere. Every International anti-Drug Day (June 26), I wonder why we don't celebrate International anti-Alcohol day. My guess: It's too big a problem to cure and few would celebrate it because of conflict of interest. Both guess come out to be true. It is too big to handle because of the economic opportunities it creates for the lucky few — at the risk of millions of lives. In fact it's our government's greed that it taxes alcohol instead of banning it.

Whether we talk about HIV/AIDS, violence against women, or any other crime or anti-social activity — they are all, in one way or the other, related to alcohol. In Nepal, 48 per cent of reported HIV cases are migrant workers and their families.

Male migrants to various Indian cities bring back HIV. From a remote village of Jogbudha in Dadeldhura to a bustling Indian metropolis; the adventurous journey of one 17-year-old Nepali boy is as profound as Balaram Halwai in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Unless HIV prevention measures are applied in these Indian cities, young Nepali men will continue to be infected.

Whenever I talk to Indian returnees, I find the same pattern over and over again. Most of them were drunk when they had sex, so they could not remember if they had a condom on. When they come back home, their HIV status unknown, they put

more people at risk. In the remote village of Payal in Achaam district, more and more women and children are catching HIV virus.

Every night, many men fight and brawl under the influence of alcohol in urban Nepali cities even as alcohol continues to be glamorized by its profiteers: A Nepali or Hindi movie without crime and alcohol is unimaginable. A 'don' is always seen pouring whiskey into glass and drunken policemen raping women. And the majority of road accidents occur under the influence of alcohol.

Yet we do not celebrate anti-alcohol day even as we mark anti-drugs day. Government law enforcement agencies claim to make large seizures of marijuana and hash once in a while. It's ironic that alcohol, which does the most damage in our society, goes unnoticed while relatively less harmful herb gets all the beating.

We beat around the bush and miss the point. In the U.S., California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger 'got the point' and legalised medicinal use of marijuana in his state. Taxing it was a wise step in increasing state revenues in the middle of an economic crisis. In Europe, the government of Netherlands proved to be wisest. Shiva Skunk is a legally sold ganja brand in coffee shops of Amsterdam; Himalayan Haze is another. They have been taxing it for years and it works. Hence, it's high time we put a ban on alcohol — no less! — and tax marijuana.

### POST PLATFORM



Aditya Man Shrestha

A black flag was shown to Sujata Koirala, our newly appointed foreign minister, in Pokhara when she was on a visit there after assuming office. Those who don't like her, and, in fact, many don't like her, must be delighted to see her being publicly so derided. But, on the contrary, she should feel overjoyed by this act of open derision because a black flag is not all that bad. It is recognition of her personae in politics and power. No longer is she merely the daughter of Nepali Congress (NC) president Girija Prasad Koirala. She is now leader of the NC representing her party in the coalition cabinet. She has now crossed the kinship boundary and opened up a new vista of her own. Sujata is fast coming up leaving many of her party stalwarts behind.

She overcame the first hurdle to this coveted position by sidelining senior leaders of her party like vice president Sushil Koirala and general secretary Ram Chandra Paudel, who fumed in fury at her and her invincible father, but ended in habitual nothingness. Technically, they lost their point as Girija Prasad Koirala, exercising the newly vested decision-making power on the choice of the leader of the party to join the Madhav Nepal government by none other than the central committee, selected his daughter to do so. He was asked to use his discretion, and he used it. Was it morally wrong? Who cares for morals in politics, that too in our lokatantric Nepal?

We know that even Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal had asked NC president Girija Prasad Koirala to rethink his choice of Sujata for the cabinet berth she has now occupied. He has, of course, no choice but to accept her as his redoubtable colleague, whether he likes it or not. Everyone is aware how helpless he is in the picking of his cabi-



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“There's a fire raging in BJP,” said a headline in India the previous week. After the humiliating loss in the recently held parliamentary elections, the top leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party that propagates the idea of Hindutva has been involved in internal wrangling, blame game, finger pointing and leg pulling. The party, like all losers, has been trying to figure out the cause behind the unexpected wallop in the national polls that gave the rival Congress party an opportunity to continue in government with enhanced authority.

Amidst the mudslinging and backstabbing that is happening in the BJP, the largest party after the Congress in parliament, one very positive thing has come out. The party has realized that its hard-line brand of Hindutva politics doesn't work anymore. The party, it appears, has understood that intolerance towards other religions was the key factor behind its debacle. That's why L.K. Advani, its prime ministerial candidate during the polls who is now leader of the opposition despite some opposition from his own party colleagues, has started urging his party to follow a tolerant version of Hindutva. That request came after the party adopted a political resolution last week insisting that its Hindutva ideology was not exclusive of certain religions.

“Hinduism or Hindutva is not to be understood or construed narrowly confined only to religious practices or expressed in extreme forms,” the resolution said. “It is, therefore, inclusive representing the finest imprints of our cultural and civilisational ideas. This profound concept is the real inspiration for a resurgent India with which the BJP is proud to be associated.”

It's an open secret that the BJP harbors deep dissatisfaction over the decision of our interim parliament to declare Nepal a secular state three years ago. It also dislikes the respectable recognition accorded by the Indian establishment to the atheist Maoists in Nepal. BJP leaders

# Watch out for Sujata

She has crossed the kinship boundary and opened up a new vista of her own

net members from different coalition partners. The jumbo cabinet is not his option, but a compulsion. There will indeed be more and more compulsions forthcoming to keep the team intact. He can, at least, depend upon Sujata's full support till he can survive in his position of premiership. The day his position starts dwindling, earlier than later, he will be obliged to lend his full support to her in her bid for the premiership. The only hurdle left in this process is to get

for hatching a conspiracy to seize power. Her plan to join the Prachanda cabinet was confirmed when there was a call for disciplinary action against her within her own party. The plan did not fructify, nor did the penalty come forth. What the whole exercise did was to establish her as a force to reckon with in her party, which she subsequently demonstrated by joining yet another leftist government of the CPN-UML, if not the UCPN-Maoist. When she seeks the support of

India, on its part, will be more than pleased to see her rise to this highest executive position. It was evident from her undiplomatic statement on the Dang border incident to the Nepalese press in front of the Indian diplomat, Rakesh Sood. It appeared as if she took the words from the mouth of Sood in denying in clear terms any untoward happening across the border. She spoke in public before she had actually time to inquire and learn the truth in private. Even if she was right in substance, she was awfully wrong in manner. Being an adept tactician, Sujata lost face before us to win a great favour in New Delhi where she had paid a meaningful visit a few months ago apparently to canvass for her candidature to the head of government. If India has its way, which it always has, she is well poised to go down in history as the first woman prime minister of Nepal, a high probability in lokatantric Nepal.

If all this political and diplomatic support is not enough to fulfil her ambition to attain the highest office, Sujata has made sure to add strength in her favour from the Nepal Army. She showed her love for Gen. Khadka, but did not hate Gen. Katawal. What does it matter who is out and who is in till the incumbent commander is ready to salute her? That is how she has positioned herself vis-à-vis the army personnel dispute. In fact, she can keep both the contending generals happy, unlike Prachanda, by conferring good rewards sans punishment. The Nepal Army, in fact, would feel more comfortable working under a workaholic than a talkative person, a more conciliatory person than a provocative politician. Would Sujata not be the best preference in that sense going by its bitter relations with the civilian authorities?

The last but not the least decisive factor in catapulting her to the top is the stars favouring the losers against the winners in the national polls. If Madhav Kumar Nepal could cross all the barriers caused by his electoral loss to reach his goal, how could Sujata Koirala be left behind with the same fate of being an electoral loser in the race to win the game?



her ushered into the Constituent Assembly (CA), and she can and will follow none other but Madhav Kumar Nepal's footsteps getting an entry into that legislative body.

As far as the Maoists are concerned, Sujata has already curried favour with them on the Katawal controversy. She was hobnobbing with them during the peak of the heat generated by that issue when her party was vehemently attacking the Maoists, who were then in power,

the Maoists in forming a new government under her leadership, they will have to oblige her irrespective of their like or dislike for the person. They might even justify it for want of an opportunity to form a government under their own leadership and for want of a better acceptable alternative to lead the next government. Moreover, supporting Sujata will fulfil the great Maoist agenda of installing a woman in the seat of the prime minister.

## Inclusive Hindutva

The BJP has realized that its hard-line Hindu stance doesn't work anymore

argue that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance mishandled India's Nepal policy on those two issues by not voicing Indian concerns enough. If the Hindu religion is under attack in Nepal, that's not just an issue of Nepal, the BJP thinks. It's an issue that touches Hindus around the world, they feel. During the Pashupatinath priest crisis, the BJP believed the Maoists were out on a rampage against the Hindu religion in Nepal and that the Congress-led Indian government was doing nothing to stop it.

While it is next to impossible for them to have India declared a Hindu country in the foreseeable future, the gang of the BJP, their parent organization Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh and other fringe ultra-Hindu forces fantasize a "Hindu Rastra" Nepal as a source of

sive and tolerant towards other religions. That is why one can say the recent bomb attack in a church in Kathmandu, allegedly done by Hindu fundamentalists, was not against a certain religion but the basic Nepali ethos itself. Just as Chinua Achebe said marriage was a private affair, I feel religion too is a personal matter. No other person should be

Many Indians live in fear of possible persecution



inspiration for them to fight for their cause. That is why the defeat of the BJP and the subsequent realization by the party that hard-line Hindutva doesn't work anymore is good news for Nepal too. Certain hard-line Hindu elements that are trying to fish in the muddy waters that is the current fluid situation in Nepal will be discouraged now. Nepali culture, by and large, is inclu-

disturbed while one is practicing his or her religion. This is precisely why I used to be so irritated when loudspeakers go on the rampage with *bhajans/kirtans* from an unseen house hundreds of metres away in my neighborhood in Kathmandu. Why do they have to disturb thousands of people in the locality when they can still pray to their God without those loudspeakers? A few

weeks ago I saw a blog post titled "Bhajan Terror" in which my sentiments were brilliantly expressed. The writer, herself a deeply faithful person with a sound knowledge of some *bhajans* and the greatest respect for God almighty, was so annoyed by the continuous disturbance from the *bhajan*-singing loudspeakers that she almost "cursed" the people who were doing that in the late hours of the night.

Coming from Nepal where one can still see a decent level of religious harmony, I feel India is a deeply divided society where people are judged based on their religious affiliation. Even in Delhi, the cosmopolitan capital city of India, I occasionally find some people, Indians, who have deep hatred towards other religions. "These Muslims should be deprived of the franchise," said a so-called "educated" and English-speaking man from my neighborhood in south Delhi recently. "They are a threat to Indian democracy." I was stunned. "I don't go to a nearby salon because the barber is a Muslim and he plays anti-Hindu music," he said. One thing that I do not agree with my Hindu landlords here is their radical views against a certain religion.

My impression is that many people in India do live in fear of possible persecution. An Indian Christian friend of mine from Bangalore who works with a TV network in Noida, a town attached to Delhi, said her mother gave her "a religiously neutral name so that I would not find problems in different parts of India."

Policies and the politics of parties like the BJP play a key role in removing or increasing those fears among the Indian people. The outcome of the post-poll chaotic introspection in the BJP has been welcomed by some of its own prominent Muslim members and those stalwarts who are soft to Islam. It remains to be seen if the BJP can move ahead with its newfound realization of inclusive Hindutva or succumbs to the ultra-Hindutva ideology. If the party walks on the first path, it might not just restore itself to power in Delhi but also provide great relief to the people on the subcontinent.