

# Political Awareness: EYES WIDE OPEN NOW!

By Markus Ruckstuhl, President SNS

Being a columnist in a quarterly magazine is not always easy: Looking at the title of my last column "*Nepal at a stand-still*", the reality completely outdated my analysis and proved me wrong, only a few weeks after the publication of the Namaskar 89 in March this year.

Nineteen continuous days of widely peaceful demonstrations and protests by an impressive crowd of common people have not only ended the autocratic regime of King Gyanendra but also of the absolute Hindu Monarchy in Nepal.

Under the pressure of an ever growing public unrest and pushed by various national and international forces, the King, not sure any longer of the protection of his personal safety by the armed forces and the police, announced on April 24 that he would accept a roadmap prepared by the SPA (Seven Party Alliance) and vaguely agreed to by the CPN (Maoist). This paper basically paved a way towards a multi-party democratic system and revived the dissolved parliament.

The King had to bow down in front of his people who openly refused his leadership and now even questions his religious and ceremonial role - very surprising indeed for a none-Nepali observer, considering how deeply traditional values are still rooted in the Nepali society and how strongly religious and cultural heritage influences the daily life of common Nepali families. It will only be of historic book-keeping interest on how far the contribution of the established political parties and the Maoist were needed to stir up the masses. In the heart and the brain of the Kathmanduites, the road brought the war to its end.

More than 13,000 people have died in the Maoist uprising and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. History will one day tell us if this was a reasonable price for washing away the Monarchy in Nepal in its traditional, preserving robe. It is too early to assess the long-term consequences of the decision of the Nepal Maoists to abandon their path of revolution and take part in parliamentary democracy.

It's now diplomatic high noon for international mediators in Kathmandu! Consensus need to be elaborated on arm management (what a word!), the

integration of the Maoist fighters into the regular army or on dissolving the House of Representatives as just a few of the demands from various political corners for negotiations on planning national and local elections.

But how far have the 8-point agreement, 12-point understanding and 25-point ceasefire code of conduct of the post-Jana Andolan era just replaced the 5-year plans of the Panchayat system? Are these heavily disputed letters of intent, often recited, but much less translated into actions, leading to real political, social and economic improvements or will they just serve as a disguise for establishing and cementing a next version of the traditional power network?

And then again, who defines "improvements"? How far can political dinosaurs such as G.P. Koirala or Prachanda claim to dream the dreams of the young urban population of Kathmandu? How far are they just guarantors for "*yo Nepal ho*", the anthem of the preservers? How much does the urban spirit match with the rural reality in the backyards of Humla, Dolpa or Terathum?

Personally, though being only a distant observer, I clearly miss new heads, new ideas, and the nationwide enthusiasm of the protest days in April. I hope that the heroes of the road protests keep their eyes wide open, observe and permanently question how far the current struggle for power and influence in Kathmandu really addresses the key issues for which such a significant segment of the Nepali society has suffered in a decade-long fight: breaking open a feudal, bourgeois society and thus establishing a democratic system ensuring a fair sharing of power and resources among genders, social classes, ethnic groups and geographical regions.

This issue of the Namaskar highlights background information but does not claim to give an exhaustive picture of the political environment of Nepal. It sheds light on historic landmarks and tries to provide a knowledge base for classifying the daily developments in its historic dimensions.