

NEW POLITICS, UNCERTAINTY AND LAND ISSUES IN NEPAL

Bharat Shrestha
Director, MODE Nepal

New Paradigm

With the success of people's movement in April, Nepal is in a state of transition between a chaotic authoritarian past and emerging new direction. The frontline challenge is to institutionalize the peace and political stability for ever. Since the Maoists have taken some courageous steps towards mainstreaming themselves, Nepal seems to be drifting away from violent conflict toward a new kind of politics, intending to put the institutional means of civilian rule into the hands of a full-blown constitutional policy to end the crisis.

Democratization however, is never easy, for it requires consensus on the rules of the game and faith in its process. Indubitably, radical changes have taken place since the disgrace the monarchical-authoritarian rule suffered, but yet to clear to embark upon an unambiguous journey towards 'good democracy' in all dimensions: rule of law, accountability, responsiveness, freedom, and equality. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce some changes in the existing political, social and economic behaviour of the state in the process of restructuring.

Uncertainty

In a short period, the seven party alliances [SPA] government is fast losing people's confidence. Chaos and frustrations are on the rise and are becoming pervasive elements of political landscape. Private properties are burnt or shattered by mobs with incalculable physical and psychological damages. Farmers with parched fields are agitated as are those in the western hills suffering from acute food shortages. Disadvantaged *Madhises*, *Dalits*, *Janajatis*, *Kamaiyas* or victims of conflicts or April uprising do not see tangible actions.

Civil society is beginning to be chaotic and lose its neutrality and credibility. Those organizations have also not been able to affect significantly the policy-making process from outside. The SPA is both in government and banging on the streets. There has been an erosion of the rule of law in civil and political decisions. The scenario is disappointing when legislators enact silly laws. Mass politics remains a tool for a handful of ego-driven, short-sighted, and self-serving politicians who marvel at their short-term gains but inflict long-term damage. The reinstated House of Representatives continues to extend its "supremacy tentacles" beyond the call of people's movement instead of making way for alternative to ensure timely constitution assembly elections. Peace talks have not been able to show its confidence to the people.

Concern on Land Issues

People's movement composed at large of the peasants was driven by their hardship of life for survivability irrespective of the geographical setting. Their expectations with the SPA government are high for permanent peace and constitution assembly. There is no question that constitutional assembly is important not only because it is a venue for influencing political decisions but also because it transforms democratic right into actual rights. Dialogues are somehow brought in the media on land poor and land issues.

Very recently, an unofficial declaration by the government authority on land ceiling has reduced to 1.25 ha in the hills, half a hectare in Kathmandu valley and 3.15 ha in Tarai flat plain. This reduced level of ceiling itself requires a lot of dialogues in terms of implementation in reality. Multistakeholder's dialogues are required to come into reality than rhetoric policy including the defined boundary of land issues and solutions. It seems to be possible only when society becomes inclusive, participatory and extend positive response of all sectors including the donors and international organizations to the changed political context. Nepal's sustainable management of land issues requires complex interplay of cohesive political culture, strong civil institutions, professional bureaucracy, economic society, international supports; and common principle of order - for there may be no other shared vision that might bind together a nation better.