

Happy honeymoon

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With the oath-taking on August 18th by Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal as the first prime minister of republican Nepal, the leader has formally wedded the Nepali society as its provider and protector. After the new cabinet forms under Dahal's leadership, his honeymoon period (the first 100 days) will begin.

This honeymoon could become a happy one. During the transitional period starting from 2006, the government (consisting mainly of the NC, the UML, and the Maoists) under Girijababu's leadership held the CA poll, got rid of the monarchy, and declared the country a republic. These are great achievements. However, the country went downhill in every other area. We could summarize the state of our nation by the word "lack": lack of constant power though the monsoon has reduced the load-shedding a bit, lack of books for students, lack of fuel for vehicle-owners, lack of food for many in west Nepal, lack of security for the wealthy under threats of kidnapping for ransom, lack of travel because of frequent bandas/strikes by youth groups and pro, anti-syndicate agitations and lack of government as many bureaucrats refused to work because of threats to life. Thus PM Dahal's restoration of some normalcy in our nation would signal the beginning of a happy honeymoon. Positively, Dahal's oath-taking in the name of the people instead of "god" indicates his desire to make Nepal a truly secular state. His award of two crores of rupees for those afflicted by the flooding Saptakosi River gives hope to those severely affected by this unexpected natural disaster. His instruction, if truly obeyed, to Maoist parliamentarians to visit their constituencies while the CA is in recess can bring hope. We should remember that cadres of other political parties have not done this either because of lethargy or Maoist threats. Negatively, PM Dahal hasn't been able to wave his magic wand; and promptly bring about a government as expected. Both the UML and MRF complain that the Maoists haven't kept their word in the distribution of the ministries promised. The longer the delay in the formation of the government, the quicker will the euphoria in the Maoist leadership subside. Though Dr Baburam Bhattarai announced the cessation of YCL's paramilitary nature on August 15th Friday, immediately after the election of Dahal as the PM, news of Maoists looting maize belonging to UML faithful in Sankhuwasabha and YCL goons beating up a Panchthar man (not voting for the Maoists in the CA poll) came in the papers three days later. The public hardly believes that the YCL "asses" will actually turn into "cows", and Dahal should prove his intent by action. Further, Dahal distrusts the security the Nepal Army/the Nepal Police are providing him; and relies also on PLA's protection. Many, including this writer, didn't want a Maoist-led government. However, hopes for an alternative quickly faded as NC fielded the jaded Sher Bahadur Deuba against PK Dahal. Even his RPP mother-in-law Pratibha Rana didn't vote for Deuba, and many NC parliamentarians must have cast their ballots for him reluctantly. Deuba had the largest ever "jumbo" cabinet of over 40 ministers, started the Pajero culture, didn't heed the 40 point Maoist demand in 1996 thus allowing the 10 year long insurgency to start, split the Nepali Congress, surrendered our democracy to King Gyanendra in 2002, and became dubbed "incompetent" by the latter. Thus, senility, not only on part of the octogenarian Girijababu but the NC as a whole, must have played a role in allowing him to stand for the PM's post. I had advocated that either Ram Chandra Poudel or Dr Ram Sharan Mahat should have become the candidate. On the other hand, Deuba had demanded seniority as a price for uniting his splinter party with the NC; and after Girijababu, he had a claim to the PM's post. Whatever the internal politics, Deuba himself must have proposed some other fresh candidate in his stead. If he had done so, surprising amalgamation of parties may have formed through the night for an attractive NC hopeful. Anyway, now that the Maoist chairman is also our PM, all should wish him a happy honeymoon; and applaud his successes while bemoaning his shortcomings. This writer sees a few things Dahal should give priority to. He should keep his promises. Let his darling YCL abandon its paramilitary nature as soon as possible. This group shouldn't come into the news again for fresh atrocities. Let the Maoists return the confiscated property as they have promised for the umpteenth time. The Maoists should also make known the conditions of those disappeared, both by them and the past governments. Dahal shouldn't demoralize the Nepal Army (NA) by still relying on the PLA for his protection. He can hasten the integration of the PLA into the NA through agreed norms and procedure, but shouldn't maintain the parallel military outfit. Such behaviour can incite jealousy if not a rebellion in the NA. He should quickly introduce the "revolutionary" land reform. Under such a scheme, President Cory Aquino of the Philippines parted with a lot of her own land to help the poor. When BP Koirala introduced a genuine land reform programme in the late 1950s, the royals and the rich were the first to object to it. King Mahendra put an end to it by ousting BP's democratic government. As long as the Maoist land reform is genuine and does not seek to augment the party's vote-bank, people will support it. Of course, the new government's main task is to write the first, federal, democratic constitution for Nepal. Within a few weeks, Dahal should ensure that this process begins. Happy honeymoon! Published on August 21 in TKP