

Towards a cultural revolution?

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Giving constitution-writing mere lip service, the Maoist led government appears to spend time on seemingly non-essential things. Has it got its priority wrong or has it a hidden agenda? Just a sample of some trivial things the government has done lately.

On October 29, PM Dahal went to Basantapur to celebrate the ringing in of the Nepali Sambat 1129. Both he and Minister of Culture, Hisila Yami, promised to implement it. The Maoist-led government claims that the drastic appointment and transfer of officials to various posts throughout the country has rewarded merit. Many note that communist sympathizers and relatives have benefitted the most. PM Dahal, while in the USA, promised that the present ambassadors, appointed while the Maoist shared power with the NC and the UML, would remain. On his return to Nepal, Dahal changed his mind; and even an experienced diplomat like Murari Raj Sharma will have to return home. Cities with prefixes of "Mahendra", "Tribhuvan", and "Prithivi Narayan" have now received new names. The Vice-president told the truth regarding the integration of the PLA into the Nepal Army. The Maoist leaders, with their UML cronies, talk of impeaching him. The Maoist Finance Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai, himself a product of a mission school in Gorkha, declared that private educationists should now look for other jobs! Bhattarai also pledges that PLA fighters will receive special certificates recognising their 10 years in the jungle. Logically, such Maoist actions and proclamations appear cosmetic. PM Dahal should be prodding the government onto some more urgent issues. However, these seemingly trivial points take meaning if the Maoists have their own hidden agenda, to effect a Nepali cultural revolution as Mao Zedong did in China. Mao believed that the communist revolution in the Soviet Union had gone astray, and the same shouldn't happen in his country. Thus, he had four goals: appointment of officials loyal to him, purification of the Communist Party, revolutionary experience for Chinese youths, and making the health/education/cultural systems less elitist. The Cultural Revolution aimed at getting rid of old ideas, old customs, old culture, and old mentality. Mao utilised his loyalists for his aim. Defence Minister Lin Biao made sure that the Chinese Army had Maoists as top officers. Cleansing of the Communist Party began after Mao shut down schools in 1966. The students in the guise of the Red Guards attacked traditional values and "bourgeois" things through public criticism. Intellectuals, artists died in thousands; and millions went into prison or exile. With the help of his wife Jiang Qing, Mao brought in radicals to guide Chinese culture. Mao's death in 1976 ended the Cultural Revolution. His successor Deng Xiaoping criticised it as a tragic mistake. A similar cultural revolution hasn't the slightest chance of success in Nepal. However, our Maoists, firm disciples of their Chinese Guru, will not stop trying it. Now to some obvious Maoist attempts at a cultural revolution in our country. Maoist advocacy of the Nepali Sambat get rid of the "old" Bikram Sambat, but provides little else. Rather, it reminds us of the Panchayat government's glorification of Sanskrit, making it compulsory till the intermediate level at college. While King Mahendra pushed Sanskrit, his counterpart Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan promoted English as the language for education. Wangchuck, notorious for marrying four sisters at once and creating over 100,000 Nepali refugees, at least did one thing right in opting for English. Bhutan, which had only religious schools in the early 1960s, has made rapid progress in secular education. Thus, PM Dahal should have rather promoted the Gregorian calendar, worldwide in vogue from 1582, just as Bhutan chose English as the medium for education. Mao had the entire Chinese army and the civilian administration under his thumb. The Nepal Army (NA) remains democratic. So, Dahal and the Defence Minister, Ram Bahadur Thapa, have tried their best to infiltrate the PLA into the NA. While the UML has remained the obedient vassal, the NC, MPRF, TMLP and other democratic parties have seen through Dahal's ploy of maintaining a Maoist majority in the Army Integration Special Committee (AISC). The Maoist hope of Pasang heading the NA one day also fits into this scheme. The government's appointment/transfer of hundreds of officials and the recall of ambassadors loyal to the NC attempt to bring the civilian administration under Maoist control. Contrary to Dahal's pledge again in the CA (November 11) in deference to NC's nine point demand, the Maoists will never disband the YCL, the Nepali version of the Chinese Red Guards. The PM's similar promises in the past have come and gone. The Maoists need the YCL to do their dirty jobs. Mao didn't allow schools to run and college exams functioned again only after 10 years. Baburam Bhattarai, by his controversial announcement on private schools, may be feeling the public pulse to gauge his limits. Nationalizing private schools wouldn't only make India and other countries the beneficiaries; but some Nepali educational institutions, which have attained international standards, would also vanish. Students from Maldives and India study in some of our medical colleges. Besides, Maoist children continue to earn degrees in private colleges overseas. Dahal's wife Sita may not perform the role of Jiang Qing, Mao's wife; but Hisila Yami can be such to her husband Bhattarai. Mao got rid of any that criticized him. Thus the Vice-president Jha comes under fire for declaring the AISC unconstitutional. Not surprisingly, Mohan Baidya's resolves to "reform" the press. Thanks to the presence of other democratic parties, a cultural revolution can't succeed in our country. As with China, it will merely waste valuable time and lives. However, attempts at it can explain much of the present Maoist dual behaviour. publishes in TKP on 15 Nov