

Nepal emerges as a growing security threat in South Asia

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

A well-coordinated series of terrorist raids in six remote mountain districts in February by the Maoist faction of Nepal's Communist Party has raised the specter of a new wave of terror, ready to be unleashed in a most-sensitive region of South Asia. Intelligence reports of large amounts of arms flowing into Nepal through the arms-drugs conduit from Southeast Asia, and increasing evidence of activity by "afghansi" (British-backed veterans of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan) in this remote kingdom sandwiched between India and China, indicate a serious security threat to India's northeast, Bangladesh, and even Sri Lanka.

Reports indicate that during the raids by the radical Maoists, who identify themselves with the Shining Path terrorists in Peru and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, slogans of "Long Live Maosim" and "Long Live the People's War" had rent the mountain air. Masked men and women struck under the cover of night, overrunning the police posts, looting the houses of wealthy families, and even engaged the police in the western Rolpa district in an hour-and-a-half gun battle. Eleven people have been killed and dozens injured in clashes, news agencies report.

One of the radical Maoist factions of the Nepal Communist Party, led by Babu Ram Bhattarai, claimed responsibility for the attacks. Bhattarai, and his party, had mobilized support for Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán following Guzmán's arrest in 1994, and had organized a black flag demonstration demanding his release when U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Nepal last year.

A protected asset

Unlike any other member of the London-based Revolutionary International Movement (RIM), the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), which has various faces, came to power, and ruled Nepal from 1994 through August 1995. The Nepali communist movement, initially an adjunct to the democratic movement, is a product of the 1950s and was a mere sideshow in the movement waged against the ruthless landlords, the Ranas, by the mainstream democratic forces. The party was, however, banned in 1960, along with all other political parties, when the Nepali monarchy took back absolute power and persecuted the democratic forces. However, as early as 1965, Nepal's late King Mahendra, who had sidled close to

Mao's China following the India-China border conflict, allowed concessions to the aggressive Maoists and let them build close contacts with Beijing.

The CPN continues to have close relations with North Korea, as do several other members of the RIM. During the 1994 elections, the posters, manifestos, and pamphlets of the CPN were reportedly printed in Pyongyang. The statement by Luo Bin, director of the foreign affairs of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, which appeared in an interview with the Xinhua news agency on March 2, clearly states that China's objective is to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with the armies of its neighboring countries. Although Nepal has not been named as one of China's future beneficiaries, the spurt in Maoist activities has made New Delhi wary.

Afghansi footprints

During the uprising in Punjab in the 1980s, when some externally aided Sikhs were demanding a separate Sikh nation carved out of India, Nepal was identified by intelligence reports as sheltering these so-called Khalistanis. These Khalistanis were using Nepal to bring in arms and drugs for enhancing their operational capability in northern India. In later years, it was noticed that although the Khalistanis ceased to function from Nepal, the country became a major center of the afghansis. The object of the center was to encourage secessionists and terrorists operating within India and to replenish the coffer through export of drugs and guns into India through its porous borders. For example: a recent arrest in New Delhi of a Swiss national, carrying a cache of arms in the undercarriage of a caravan bus, brought in from Nepal, for delivery to a Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence agent within India. The incident identified Nepal as the transit point for the arms, and the source as Pakistan, the operational headquarters of the afghansis.

The raids by the armed radical Maoists in Gorkha, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Ramechhap, and other impoverished districts, indicate that an alliance has already formed among the Bhattarai group, other radical factions, and the afghansis. The afghansis bring in arms for the Maoists, and the communist terrorists use them to spread terror throughout the country.

Intelligence reports indicate that Harkat-ul-Ansar, an afghansi-sponsored terrorist organization active in the Indian-

part of Kashmir, has recently recruited 60 youths from Bara district for training in an Islamic country, most probably Bangladesh. Recruitment is also in progress in the bordering Sili-guri district of India's West Bengal province and in Parsa, Rajbiraj, and Sunsari districts of Nepal. Mosques and madrassas (Islamic schools) have begun to appear in Trishuli, Narayanghat, and Gorkha Bazaar on the Indo-Nepal border—the funds allegedly provided by the Nepal-Arab Bank.

At a recent seminar in New Delhi, a paper presented by Hisila Yami of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), a Maoist front-group, identified "Indian expansionism as an heir to British colonialism in South Asia" and "the principal external enemy of the Nepalese people." Calling for a Maoist communist revolution, she said: "It is more urgent and important in the case of Nepal, where the unity of all progressive forces opposed to Indian expansionism and its puppets would be needed to thwart the impending danger of external armed intervention against the people's war led by the Maoist revolutionaries."

The kingdom had long been nurturing a most dangerous form of nihilist forces. As far back as 1988, college campus elections were dominated by the Leftist Joint Progressive Students' Front and the Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh. The Joint Progressive Students' Front consists of the Nepal Progressive Students' Union, the Nepal National Student Federation, the

Revolutionary Students' Union, and three factions of the All-Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Annisu). It is no secret that the Nepal's left as a whole had been the staunchest backers of the monarchy, and on many occasions has provided the necessary teeth to the weak democratic set-up organized from the palace.

A food-deficit nation

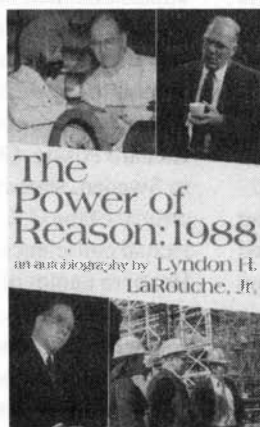
On the other hand, the degeneration of Nepal's internal situation is brought about by a number of factors. The monarchy, and its disreputable hanger-ons, have turned the capital city of Kathmandu into a modern entrepôt, where tourists of lesser moral values descend for flesh and other pleasure. In the remote mountain districts, where western activists, financed by myriads of pro-environmentalist foundations from abroad, organize environment-protection groups, the people are on the verge of starvation. Nepal, once a food-surplus nation, has now steadily waded into the misery of food dependency.

Bhattarai and his brainwashed colleagues claim that the Maoist solution is the only one left for the rural poor. The poor, however, have still remained loyal to the monarchy, which has practically abandoned them to the Maoists and environmentalists, in its frenzy to make Kathmandu "another Bangkok."

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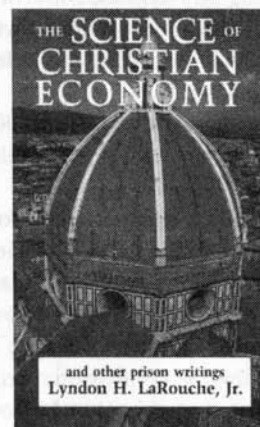
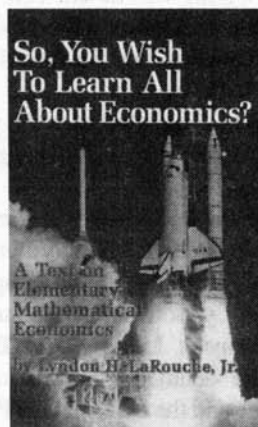


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