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Comments on Adhikari and Mathe by Sijapati

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Adhikari and Mathe's criticize the role played by the global media in the aftermath of the palace massacre in Nepal. They also critique the high level Probe Commission for its manifest inadequacies. Both are condemned for not going into detail or exploring other possible explanations before arriving at a conclusion. However, the authors have overlooked or ignored historical and socio-cultural-religious factors while criticizing both the media and the Probe Committee.

Nepal is a poor country with limited strategic value and global importance. The international media normally does not cover Nepal. The BBC and CNN were the first to break the news of the Palace massacre. Residents of Kathmandu had no choice but to turn to the BBC and CNN to know what was happening in their own capital. The coverage of the Royal massacre was unprecedented in the history of the international media's coverage of events in Nepal.

The King of Nepal has been designated as the supreme commander of the Nepal Army. The Royal Palace is heavily fortified and guarded by the Royal army whose strength is more than 3,000 elite troops. Effectively it does not fall under the chain of Command of the Nepal Army. The Royal Palace has always been isolated from the outside world. It has its own administrative set-up. Even the Prime Ministers (who are customarily designated as the Minister for Royal Palace Affairs) do not possess an effectual role inside the Palace.

The King of Nepal is considered the guardian of the Hindu religion. He is considered to be above the law. According to the Hindu religion, post-mortem investigation of a body is an unholy act. Hinduism, as practiced in Nepal, also requires that dead bodies be cremated before the dawn, or at least on the same day, on which death occurred.

The public reaction to the royal massacre was very harsh. The Maoist insurgents did not lose this opportunity to spread rumors. They presented this as a conspiracy jointly orchestrated by India, the then Prime Minister of Nepal and the Present King. The new King appointed a three-person High Level Probe Committee under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; the two members were the Chairman of the Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition. It was a

fact-finding Committee. The leader of the Opposition, Madhav Kumar Nepal, withdrew his name on the ground that the King did not possess authority to appoint this committee. But even so, he stressed that he and his party would extend their full co-operation to the Committee. The main source of information for the Probe Committee were the people who were directly or indirectly associated with the incident. Based on the circumstantial evidence gathered, the commission concluded that the Crown Prince Dipendra was responsible for the killings.

King Birendra became popular only after the restoration of democracy (in 1990). Before 1990, he was a dictator under an absolute monarchy and his queen was known to be corrupt. The Crown Prince had never been tested.

Nepalese history illustrates that many of the Shah kings had proven mental problems. Prominent among them was the great-grandfather of the present King, Rana Bahadur Shah (1777 – 1806). He was known to be a madman. He broke the tradition of primogeniture to favor his illegitimate son, Girvana Juddha. Before the Rana period, many popular Nepalese personalities belonging to the Royal court were murdered for unfounded reasons. Both the King (from the mother's side) and the Queen (from the father) belong to the Rana clan. The credit for maintaining sovereignty goes not to the Kings of Nepal but to the Rana Prime Ministers, who ruled Nepal when the British Empire was flexing its muscle in South Asia, and who also committed various atrocities and crimes against the people.

Dr. Rajiv Shahi, the first person to give a public interview, before the Probe Commission had started its work, is the son-in-law of Dhirendera (the youngest brother of the King) who was shot dead in front of him. The authors have wrongly identified Neer Shah as the brother in law of the Princess Shruti. Neer is the youngest brother of Kumar Khadga (who was killed together with his wife the Princess Sharda, second sister of the King). Neer's elderly mother could not bear the pain and passed away after hearing that her eldest son and his wife had died in the Palace. Gorakh Samsher husband of Princess Shruti in a recently published interview in Nepal (16-31 Bhadra 2058) has vividly described how Dipendra aimed at him before shooting him in the chest. Shruti was shot dead while holding her injured husband.

The authors have rightly pointed out that from the release of the news about the massacre, to the cremation of the dead bodies, everything was handled in an unprofessional manner, creating confusion. The chain

of command in the palace administration was broken and remained defunct for days. The Government failed to fill in the gap simply because it never had any access to the palace.

The available information shows that Crown Prince Dipendra shot dead at least seven persons — his father the King, his sister Shruti, his uncle Dhirendra, the king's two grand aunts Shanti and Sharda and Kumar Khadga (Shanti's husband). There is not a single witness

to the killings of Queen Aishwarya and Prince Nirajan, or to the death of the Crown Prince himself. It is only speculation that the Crown Prince committed suicide after killing his mother and brother.

It is difficult to justify the authors' criticism of the international press and the Probe Committee. However, they are right in demanding a through investigation of the incident.

