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## Nepal: Violent Incidents By Chand Group Should Not be taken Lightly.

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On 22 night February, a major explosion took place at Kathmandu and at many other districts the mobile cell towers of Ncell were torched simultaneously. The explosion near gate of N Cell Headquarters at Naakhu in Lalitpur, Kathmandu took the life of one person and injured two other women who were standing nearby.

Several N Cell towers in 12 other districts that included Achham, Kanchanpur, NawalParasi, Nuwakot, Gorkha, Karki and Myagdi were torched.

The Home Minister Thapa who was himself a former Maoist Insurgent Commander said that all evidence gathered indicated the involvement of Netra Bikram Chand Group. He added that it was a bid by the Chand Group to run a parallel Government.

Six persons were arrested initially from Kathmandu and 22 others from other districts. More arrests have followed.

Netra Bikram Chand cleared the doubts two days later on 24<sup>th</sup> by claiming responsibility for the violent incidents. He said that it was in response to the failure of the Mobile company (N cell) to clear its tax liabilities even after the Supreme Court Order. This appears to be just an excuse as one other pressure cooker bomb, a trade mark of Maoists during the insurgency period was defused on the same day at Aaangan Restaurant in Kamal Pokhri in Kathmandu.

The Supreme Court case related to a petition filed by some civil society members on the tax liabilities of N-Cell and its parent company in Malaysia Axiata. On 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. The firm Axiata bought it from the Swedish Firm Telia Sonera in April 2016. The Court ordered the firm to pay

up Rs 75 billion as Capital Gains Tax to the Government.

This is not the first time that Chand's Group has created violent incidents. It happened in 2016 and again in 2017. The one in 2017 related to a series of explosions in many districts that included Chitwan, Rolpa, Nuwakot and Dhankuta.

Some significant points to be noted in these incidents are

1. The Chand Group quickly issued an apology for the loss of life but did not renounce violence and did not appear to be repentant in expressing their apology.
2. It is said that the Chand Group planned the incidents for more than a month before their execution. The Government appears to have had some inkling about the intended violence but nothing was done to prevent them!
3. The incidents occurred shortly after Dahal threatened the Government that he would start another "People's War" if he is ignored. ( See my last paper on Nepal)
4. None of the senior leaders of erstwhile Maoist Group, now part of the Ruling Party -the NCP condemned the violence.
5. The incidents against a private sector firm took place just a week prior to the Investment Summit that Oli was supposed to inaugurate. Some think that the Chand Group wanted to gain international publicity by timing the violent incidents just prior to the summit. This does not appear to be correct.
6. It is ironic that the incidents have pitted the Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, formerly known as "Badal" during the Maoist insurgency against "Biplab"- the name Netra Bikram Chand took during the civil war against each other as both were very close friends in arms and both were very popular with the armed Maoist cadres then!
7. It was only in December 2018 that the Government formed a high-level political dialogue team to hold talks with Chand's group along with another – the Terai Group of Raut.

It was in 2012 that both Thapa and Chand broke away from the Unified Communist Party of Nepal led by Dahal and joined with Mohan Baidya who left the party on ideological grounds. While Thapa alias Badal returned to Dahal's camp, Chand alias Biplab formed a new party in 2014 with the intention of moving forward with the revolution".

Chand has made no secret of his intention to use violence as a means to achieve his ends and yet he has been treated with kid gloves by the Government and particularly by the Home department led by Thapa his former Comrade. Chand is still sitting cozily in Chaabail in

Kathmandu and planning all the incidents and for the eventual revolution and yet nothing is being done to him. What is to be noted is that Chand continues to be very popular with the rank and file of the erstwhile Maoist cadres who are now part of the combine Nepal Communist Party led by Oli and Dahal!

One should recall at this juncture how a few incidents that were not duly acted upon and not taken seriously in 1996 that led to a full-scale civil war that took the lives of 16000 people. It was on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996, that the Maoist began the civil war with simultaneous attacks at 7 places in six districts . The then Government did not take the incidents seriously. It did not even let the Army tackle the insurgency and left it to the poorly armed and trained Nepal Police, until the Maoists themselves took on the Army to get them involved later. But by then valuable time was lost and the Maoists had by then consolidated themselves into a formidable group.

It is hoped that Oli Government, at least Prime Minister Oli would recall the old days and does not allow history to repeat itself. The erstwhile Maoists may be soft for other reasons, but Oli cannot take it lightly and should take all measures to prevent the Chand group from spreading its brand of revolution again and play with the lives of the innocents!

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