While the seven-party government focuses on delicate negotiations with the Maoists, sections of the tarai, where 48.4 percent of the nation’s population lives, are descending into turmoil. Vigilantism and anti-Maoist activity are turning into sometimes violent ethnically-laced evictions and abductions. Separatist sentiments are getting populist play, while among the intellectual moderate majority there are debates on how the tarai could be best represented in restructuring.

Maoists, ex-Maoists, separatists and moderates all see a Nepal polarised between hill and plain. For many Madhesis, anger from long-felt discrimination fuelled by radicalised identity politics is boiling over.

Over the past year, Jaya Krishna Goit’s Tarai Janatantrik Mukti Morcha (TJMM), which has been battling Maoists since late 2004, has also been hounding the Pahadiya community, mainly in the central-eastern tarai but also in adjoining areas. Families are rushing to sell off houses and land, and migrate to the hills.

“This trend has picked up recently, many of my friends from Rajbiraj have settled in Kathmandu,” confirms former NC minister Jay Prakash Gupta ‘Anand’ who is now general secretary of the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum (MJM).

A recent UN situation report also states that the situation in some tarai districts was “rather volatile…especially in early June”. It said the TJMM issued threats against hill ethnic groups settled in the tarai asking them to go back to their villages.

Much of the unrest stems from a rift in the Madhesi movement, between ex-Maoist Goit and his arch-rival, Maoist leader Matrika Prasad Yadav.

The issues themselves go deeper, including identity politics and a sense of discrimination felt by the Madhesis. All of this is fanning radicalism in Nepal’s resource-rich breadbasket.
PLAINS SPEAKING

As if we didn’t have enough problems already, the tarai is flaring up. While the ceasefire has restored relative calm over much of the country, in the eastern tarai districts of Sapari and Siraha the war never really stopped. The Maoists and their breakaway Tarai Janatanist Muki Morcha (TJM) are battling it out with killings and abductions (see p.11). What’s brewing is an ominous sign of the way things could go if the tarai grievances are not addressed promptly and decisively.

On the surface, this is a struggle for leadership of the tarai constituency between two militant leaders: Matrika Yadav of the Maoist Tarai Muki Morcha and his arch-rival Jaya Krishna Gol of the TJM. The two had a major falling out when they were Maoists. Now, both are using long-standing injustices done to Nepal’s Madhesi diaspora community: some four million people who have fled their war-torn homeland are still treated like second-class citizens and face a sensitive decision to set a cut-off date for citizenship. While some hold that the rule of law means that the constitution is designed and future Nepal and decides its future, the Maoists insist that the interim constitution should be mandatory for all parties so they don’t have to contest elections not just to become candidates but also to keep their parties going. The Madhesi community: some four million people of the tarai, hill settlers, and more recent migrants from India. The seeds of this crisis were sown by King Mahendra’s transmigration program that changed the demographics of the plains and inner-tarai valleys. Nepal’s Madhesi diaspora community: some four million people of the tarai, hill settlers, and more recent migrants from India.

The NG and the UML, despite their preoccupation with the peace process, have tried to come to grips with tarai citizenship. The Nepali Congress central committee recently took the politically sensitive decision to set a cut-off date for citizenship. While some hold that the rule of law means that the constitution should be mandatory for all parties so they don’t have to contest elections not just to become candidates but also to keep their parties going, the Maoists insist that the interim constitution should be mandatory for all parties so they don’t have to contest elections not just to become candidates but also to keep their parties going. The Madhesi community: some four million people of the tarai, hill settlers, and more recent migrants from India.

Since we don’t find them, this could turn ugly. We’ve seen it around the world: the space for compromise and negotiation is narrowing. Yet if we don’t find them, this could turn ugly. We’ve seen it around the world: whenever ethnic divisions and separatist sentiments are mixed with politics, they invariably turn under resentment into a long messy war. That is something this country simply can’t afford.

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The most ideal solution is the formation of an apolitical cabinet. Currently, the judiciary is independent from both the executive and legislature. However, people from both the executive and legislature populate the cabinet. Only the head of government should be selected by popular vote. He then puts together a technocratic cabinet from outside parliament, vetted by parliamentary hearing. This would stop politics fighting elections with the express purpose of becoming ministers to make money. That will also stop ministers from using their constituencies while neglecting the rest of the country. Such a cabinet will also be able to concentrate on their legislative functions and monitoring the cabinet’s work without being involved in the ministerial rat race.

Finally, the Auditor General’s Office requires more teeth to transform it from being a mere watchdog into an organisation able to stem corruption at all levels by using a treasury function. Parallels may exist in India and the United States, where these bodies are empowered to stop disbursement of embezzled organisations. Such an institution is called the Comptroller and Auditor General’s Office in India and General Accounting Office in the US. Corruption will decrease substantially when these two policy changes and two institutional modifications are incorporated in the new constitution. The Maoists may then be ostracised, and corruption treated with abhorrence, as it should be.

Rama Sunar Shrestha is a chartered accountant and attorney-at-law.
## LETTERS

**DISARM**
Too much is made of managing the Maoists’ arms. The seven-party government itself has lacked a cohesive opinion, and it is quite ridiculous to find even civil society intelligentsia derailing the whole debate with the paranoia of regressive coup before the election. Nowhere in the world do rebels get the keep the option of revolting again open if the negotiated settlement produces an outcome that differs from their manifesto. Why did the SPA not come out with a strong and unequivocal demand that the rebels disarm first? A shaky decision now may lead to an unprecedented political catastrophe in the country.

Pradeep Sharma, Mumbai

**BARNYARD WISDOM**
An alternative parable in place of the one you propose in your editorial (‘Peace riddle’, #309) might be the story of the frog and the scorpion. The scorpion convinces the frog to take him across the pond, even though the frog is deeply suspicious of the scorpion’s intent. Halfway across the pond, the scorpion stings, and when the dying frog looks up at him with a bewildered look, the scorpion says, “What can I say, it’s in my nature.” Both die. We all know who is pocketing the $8 million dollars being paid over the cost price—Ram Sharan Mahat, the army chief to okay the deal. Ram Sharan Mahat has sided with PN and his army did to the people of Nepal does not need to play all of them. They are 17 teams in the ACC, but there are 17 teams in the under-19 Nepali cricket squad. Kanishka Chaugain was the captain of the under-19 Nepali cricket squad. The article ‘Once and future nationalism’ presents the real deadlock of the farmer, the grass, the goat, and the tiger. The deadlock is a crisis of confidence that was clearly exposed by the two side’s differences on managing the two armed forces. The blueprint offered by CK Lal (‘The elusive formula’, #309) presented the real deadlock of the farmers, the grass, the goat, and the tiger.

Prakash Pangeni, via email

**TRUTH-TELLING**
The SPA, the Maoists, and other players lack sincerity, transparency, honesty, and unity. The political discourse now should be on what is right and what is wrong and who gets what and who takes responsibility. The government must consider the Nepali army and Maoist military wing as formidable forces that can destabilise the country at any moment. Neither should be tolerated favourably, or as a stepson. Nepal could look to South Africa’s transition in bringing the army and guerrilla groups together successfully.

Pio wrote, “mankind will not get rid of its evils until either the class of those who philosophise in truth and rectitude reach political power, or those most powerful in cities, under some divine dispensation, really get to philosophising.” As long as the politicians do not learn to speak the truth to the people, your editorial (‘Peace riddle’, #309) will stand. “The national mood tends to swing from euphoria to hopelessness.”

S Tuladhar, Geneva

**WHEELING DEALING**
The royal government, being what it was, may have ordered the two useless, outdated, and dangerous MA-60 planes for the army from China and paid the $5 million advance (‘No plane dealing’, #309). But why is this new (loktantrik) government not scrapping the deal altogether? Even $5 million will be nothing compared to the potential dangers that these planes pose for the people and the total loss they will cause if ever they are put in service, having no insurance etc. As the remaining payments are being made only now, who is pocketing the $8 million dollars being paid over the cost price—Ram Sharan Mahat, the seven or eight parties, and in what proportion? Bad wine will always be bad, even if it comes in brand new loktantrik bottles.

Rajendra Khadka, Kathmandu

- Thanks to Suman Pradhan for unveiling the story of the controversial Chinese aircraft deal. As a taxpayer am disappointed that Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat has sided with the army chief to okay the deal. How much can we lose to protect bilateral ties?

Shiva L Bhusal, via email

- We are glad to know through your paper that Sharad Chandra Shah is behind the dubious Chinese aircraft deal (‘Not plane dealing’, #309). Please print some evidence and we will expose him ruthlessly for the people’s verdict. Otherwise, we will do the same to you. Somebody is getting away with lots of things and we will not tolerate it anymore.

R. Parajuli, fax

**CORRECTION**
The article ‘Once and future champions’ (#309) should have said: Kanishka Chaugain was the captain of the under-19 Nepali cricket squad. Shakti Gauchan’s quote reads as follows: “If we come out as a winner in the ACC Trophy, we’ll secure a place in ICC Cricket World Cup’s qualifying games; if we come out as runners, we’ll qualify for Asia Cup.” Finally, there are 17 teams in the ACC, not Nepal does not need to play all of them.

**FOUNDING FATHER**
There have been efforts in the past to discredit King Prithi Narayan Shah to meet vested political interests. Vandalising his statue was a hollow attempt by the Maoists to push their republican agenda, but it hurt the sentiments of Nepal’s, whose very sense of identity comes from this man (‘Prithi Narayans message’, #309).

Maoist rhetoric goes that this country was not unified, but pulled together for one man’s ambition. Enough is enough; there is a limit to one’s tolerance. We Nepalis now know that Nepal was and is integrated in the real sense by King Prithi.

Our government, which calls itself a Nepali government, should show some respect for the man who made that possible, and restore the idol to its previous self.

Pratt Rana, via email

**NATIONAL MYTH**
I agree with Bharat Basnet’s worries on how to foster inclusive nationalism. If that is what he means by a ‘stronger nation’ (Basnet’s message, #308), I do not agree. Despite his good intentions, Basnet’s assessment just echoes the fabricated historical narratives popularised under Panchayati Raj.

Does ‘stronger praja’ (from Dibyopadapati) really mean ‘empowered people’, or does it mean ‘valbajai janata’—strong subjects—who could work and provide for the labour for the landlord? The king was bhupati, lord of the land. Semantics matter, when the contexts of such phrases are obscured to make them fit contemporary nationalist myths. Who authored these phrases and who interpreted them? Who gained by its telling and who suffered? One way of staying in power is by writing a history that masquerades as unquestionable truth. During PN’s time, territorial conquest to become a maharaja was common. But this unification didn’t bring ‘unity’, probably because that we mean a social order of the victims. In Dibyopadapati, Shah says, “I’ve earned this land by dint of my sword,” having defeated so and so. Would janajatis and others depicted as conquered subjects see this as a legacy of unity or pluralism? Of course this territorial unification was significant for the later historical formations of the nation-state of Nepal. But to see a single historical actor or action as historical savours from colonial powers is to ignore political-economic history.

Basnet finds it ‘ironic’ that the various groups demanding their rights in front of the Singh Darbar are standing at the foot of the great king of justice. Sure, there was a saying ‘Go to Gorkha if you don’t get justice’, but many times in Gorkhal history there was terror and suppression—for example, what PN and his army did to the people of Kirtipur, and later to the Kirati people. Prithi Narayan’s ‘garden of all castes’ homily is held up as an instance of concern with pluralism. But PN also naturalised the caste hierarchy by defining his country as a garden of high and low castes. He claimed that his country was ‘asali Hindustaan’ untainted by Muslims and Christians. How is this an imperialist message for pluralism? The unification came at the price of wounds inflicted on different subjects, communities and cultures. Many of the ‘crowds’ that Basnet sees at the foot of the masked statue are acknowledging the historical wounds and envisioning a Nepal nationalism that does not credit any single historical actor or action for what we are today. The women, janajatis, ‘feud’ kamayas, Mahadevis, Muslims aren’t just standing at the foot of a masked statue laden with symbolism. They are citizens with political agency standing up to Singh Darbar, where Prithi Narayan’s messages often become stand-ins for real debate.

The essence of Bharat Basnet’s message is important, but his choice of historical actor to carry that message is misplaced.

Janaak Rai, Tribhuvan University
KUNDA DIXIT IN PALPA

When an approaching storm rattled window panes at the Nepal Army barracks here last week, the sentry guards thought the base was under attack and let off a volley of warning fire.

The Maoists, who had been holding a mass meeting to push their agenda of Magar autonomy promptly issued a statement accusing the army of firing at them. Although things may seem outwardly calm here in the hills of central Nepal, incidents like these prove this is a hair-trigger ceasefire.

Up on the ridge overlooking the town, Radio Paschimanchal was literally caught in the crossfire that night. In the dark, a small army patrol ran right into one flank of the attacking Maoist force and a fierce firefight ensued. The soldiers ran up to the roof of the hotel above the radio’s studio while 400 Maoists went on surrounding rooftops.

There are still bullet holes in the studio’s acoustic panels. On the roof, station manager Damodar Khanal shows us the damaged antenna, a bullet mark and bullet holes. “The battle lasted all night, and we found the bodies of two soldiers right here, next to piles of cartridges,” points out Raghu Maniwal of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. The irony is that other businesses that invest in remote areas of Nepal are eligible to tax holidays.

Now these diverse groups are coming together to figure out how to save their businesses, and to strengthen the role of medium in conflict resolution and during the democracy movement,” says Khanal in Palpa, “so the government can’t make a distinction between commercial and non-profit radio in rural areas.”

Go, go dancers

ALOK TUMBHANGNEPHY

Dance bars around Nepal attract all kinds of attention. Customers, lascivious or bored, looking for a drink and a show. Cops on the take. Women’s rights and labour activists. The moral outrage brigade. Now these diverse groups are coming together to counter the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Women’s Organisation – Revolutionary (ANWO-R). In late July the organisation started a “preliminary investigation” into the dance bar, dohori, and cabaret restaurant business. The Maoist women seem to have sent the message: “clean up the dance bars, we or will.” When contacted, ANWO-R downplayed the issue, saying it was a small part of their larger political awareness program.

Do the dance bar owners and the police are not taking the “investigation” lightly, and neither are labour unions and NGOs, who believe that dance and dohori restaurants come under the purview of “civil society”. It’s almost a turf war, and who calls the shots is significant.

In April, this radio as well FM stations across the country played a critical role in defying government control over information and spreading the word about the pro-democracy movement through news, interviews and studio discussions.

Radio Paschimanchal is part of a network of over a dozen district stations that exchanged news and programs about the intensifying protests during the uprising. Its partner station in Kathmandu, Nepal FM 91.8, brought news of what was happening in Palpa and elsewhere to the capital as news of the street agitation in Kathmandu was beamed live across Nepal.

Radio journalists and producers from across the country met in Kathmandu last week to analyse their own role in the April uprising and brainstorm about how to strengthen the role of medium in supporting public debate and free speech. District FM stations were banned from broadcasting news for four months, later they were banned and some were aided for trying to do independent journalism. In Tansen, radio stations banned from airing news and current affairs turned to SLC coaching classes which became widely popular.

“It was community radio that gave voices to people who would not otherwise have been heard,” says Min Bahadur Shahi whose group runs Karnali FM in Jumla, “during the conflict the medium played the role of a mediator.” However, Shahi says Karnali FM is often of the air because of transmitter problems caused by unreliable power supply, and the lack of knowledge over the backup generator.

Go, go dancers

Maoist women keep dance bar owners and police on their toes

formed the Nepal Dance Bar Entrepreneurs’ Association. They consulted the Nepal Congress (D)-affiliated Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONTU), the Nepal Police, and members of various civil society groups, and came up with a code of conduct. While this motley crew of previously opposed groups wrote the code jointly, it is to be “self-imposed,” says Sameer Gurung, president of the owners’ association.

Though the business has grown enormously in the last dozen or so years, it is all illegal. Bars, even regular ones, may not legally stay open after 10PM. The Hotel Management Sale and Distribution of Alcohol Control Act 2023 also prohibits what it calls “obscene and vulgar dances”. Dance bars started up in Kathmandu in the mid-90s and were tolerated in large part because gentrified versions already existed in the city’s casinos. The Nepal Police has for years played a cat and mouse...
NGOs under pressure

Madan Purushottama, head of the NGOs in Kathmandu, said that both local and international NGOs working in the districts to register with their ‘people’s government’, pay taxes, and seek permission for every activity. NGO staff have been asked to pay five percent of their salary as monthly tax. Aid workers are concerned that this has already led to suspension of several poverty-alleviation, income generation and forestry activities. “Many NGO workers are now really in a pickle to work in remote villages where they are needed the most,” said Padam Pal from the NGO Federation of Dadeldhura. Maoist leaders in Kathmandu have expressed their commitment not to hinder development and humanitarian work.

Janajati demands

World Indigenous People’s Day was marked in Kathmandu on Wednesday with a two-day political conference on constituent assembly elections and re-structuring of the state. The National Federation of Indigenous Nationals (NFIN) and along with the several newly formed Janajati groups are demanding a strong Janajati reservation in the parliament, a representation election system to vote in political and community representative, and 50 percent seats reserved for women at all levels.

Sanitary pads

India has revoked the 4 percent additional customs duty on specified goods manufactured in Nepal and exported to India. Exemption was given on primary goods in June 2006, during prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala’s visit to New Delhi to meet Indian premier Manmohan Singh. Nepal’s exports have been hurt by the additional duty for the past five months.

NEW PRODUCTS

SANITARY PADS: Jasmine Hygiene Products has introduced Safety Sanitary Pads Eco-Ultra. The INFRA-PAD has dry net cover and core flow guide groove, all sides seal and adhesive system. The product is priced at Rs 60 for a 10-pack and is available at all drug stores.

NEW BRANCH: Siddhartha Bank opened its 19th branch in Pokhara, at New Road, offering complete banking services. The four-year-old bank already has branches at Kathmandu and Pokhara in Kathmandu, and Birganj and Biratnagar outside the Valley.

ELEPHANT in the room

We do like what Nepal will look like if the Maoists have their way?

What do life, liberty and pursuit of property mean to the Maoists?

Nothing, if recent newspaper articles are anything to go by. The items present a disturbing trailer.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

W hen I mentioned the terms that have accompanied the Maoist bid for power, I was told that no one would take them seriously. They are just a way of ensuring that the Maoist لن

life in Nepal for 25 million Nepalis in the near future, brought about by thirty thousand Maoists. In the everworn words of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, such a life will happen according to “the people’s wishes.”

 Compared to the case of two hapless hotel owners Mun Babar Moktan, 20, and Mura Humauna, 18, who flung themselves from the top of a Khokana police station recently. Earlier, they were in a Maoist prison, undergoing a punishment for committing a ‘cultural crime’—a clattering phrase meaning ‘sex between consenting adults who fall in love’—for members to peer in from the windows.

 Or, consider the case of Rajendra Karki of Morung, kidnapped by his way to a pilgrimage in late July. Or, Ram Tarang of Sunsur, sent off on a ‘labour detention camp’ to toil in the field of a Maoist achievement. Or the report that Maoists continue to collect steep tolls on the highways and on bridges, and even the expressways, to provide, “security to vehicles as security forces failed to do.” And what is one to think, in light of the Maoist law primer, compiled by one-time architect Babu Ram Bhattarai, declaring the destruction of property in a source of crime, and therefore, as per The Communist Manifesto (1848), has to be abolished? Had people affiliated with the Nepal Army or the present government been caught suggesting, let alone committing, similar acts, a big hankanger would have erupted. But because reflect- ing comrades are involved, no one knows just what to say and, how loudly. And all one senses is a nervous hush, even while degrees of freedom got reduced.

 The examples above indicate that the Maoist Nepal is likely to follow the rigid dictates of a Stalinist state, which wants everyone to chant slogans from a single book. Such a Nepal is likely to be intolerant of individual voices, dissenting opinions, diversities of views, behaviours and morals. That Nepal is unlikely to allow social tensions trumping inalienable individual rights—in the name of specious justice.

 And as the law primer suggests, debate is likely to be heresy, while doubt is considered a sin. Meanwhile, justice will be served, with the usual leftist phrases in the cadence of Nepali ideas belonging to the era of Bhanumati. The sales pitch will be the same: The radical change is compulsory to set the Nepali nation on the path of the past 300 years correct in a few years with Maoism. No attention will be paid to why, alas, no one freely wants to copy such a scientific system anywhere else on the planet.

 In a recent Kantipur ed, social commentator and former friend of Deveshwar Rai Pandey worried more about the SPA’s swatting system “threatening royal institutions” than about the Maoists’ ongoing atrocities. But by continuing to squeeze jujube-out of confined royal institutions at this stage, Pandey et al still appear to be giving a free pass to the comrades to continue to violate Nepal’s rights.

We have a deal

Boots on the ground, it won’t be. But a civilian UN operation to monitor arms and armies could begin in a matter of weeks, thanks to a joint initiative sent on Wednesday to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist chairman Prachanda. An announcement in New York on Thursday that he was satisfied with the invitation. Contained in separate but identical letters signed by Koirala and Prachanda, the invitation is based on a five-point agreement asking the UN to deploy qualified civilian personnel to monitor and verify confinement of combatant armies and their weapons within designated cantonment areas. It also asks that for all modalities for all combatant armies, including of arms and armaments, be worked out at a later date between the parties and the UN. The deal was the result of an expanded UN mandate, sealing the world body’s long-term involvement.

Left to right: Home Minister Krishna Sitaula, Maoist spokesperson and senior leader Bijaya Mahara, member of Maoist talks team Devendra Pandey and acting UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal Abraham Abraham at the handover of the invitation.

KISHOR SUBBARAYA

Dance bar customer wears his feelings on his T-shirt.

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KISHOR SUBBARAYA
Unicameral legislature

Balkrishna Basnet in Kantipur, 9 August

The Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which will present its draft constitution, is leaving unresolved political issues to the government and Maoist negotiating teams. The draft envisages a unicameral interim parliament but does not speak about its structure and number of members.

Committee Coordinator Laxman Prasad Aryal said final preparations were underway to hand over the draft Wednesday morning. "We are not in fact delivered as planned," Aryal said. "We will present the draft with the issues already agreed upon."

The committee had repeatedly urged all sides to come to a common understanding regarding interim parliament, arms management and procedures for a constituent assembly. "No understanding has been reached on the big political issues, so we see no alternative but to present those issues for the negotiating teams to resolve," committee member Shambhu Thapa said.

The draft to be presented by the committee will resolve," committee member Shambhu Thapa said. "We will present the draft with the issues already agreed upon."

The Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which

No dream job

Nepal, 13 August

Yamahahad Sherma collapsed under the weight of a 500 kg sandbag [sic] while working for a sand-casting company in a small town five hours from Seoul. The bag was supposed to be lifted by a loader but the company bosses forced her to do it instead. She was hospitalised for 10 months and is under medical care for 17 months. Her right leg was severely injured and she has been unable to walk properly ever since.

The company refused to take any responsibility for her hospitalisation as a result of hazards at the workplace. Sherma received only 11 months of basic salary. To make matters worse, the company made a decision not to renew her visa and deported her home. She has appealed to Amnesty International through a local association of Nepali workers.

Sherma dreams of earning a lot of money, so she took a huge loan to travel abroad for work. She shut down her photo studio in her village in Panchthar and went first to Qatar and then to Seoul. But in the end, this not only worsened her financial state but also affected her health. "All my dreams have been shattered," says 38-year-old Sherma. She has to support four daughters in her village but does not know how, as she also has to return a huge loan to her moneylender.

During the 1990s, a large number of Nepalis had headed to South Korea hoping to become rich. The reality is different. Most of the over 4,000 Nepalis there work under difficult conditions. Madan Khasha has been hospitalised for the past two months after he injured his leg while at work. "I swear Chandu Rai lost both his eyes, Khesung Kunwar’s index finger got chopped off by a wood machine. At least 700 Nepali workers have been disabled. Over 800 have died in the last 10 years. There is no Nepali embassy or contact office to offer assistance or to fight for justice and against exploitation by employers. The situation would be better if Nepal could forge a bilateral understanding with the South Korean government.

Madi waits

Dristi, 8 August

The victims of last year’s Madi incident have still not been compensated by the Maoists. They may have started their campaign to demand a federal republic from Madi, but the Maoists’ big words and campaign mean nothing to Bishnu Maya BK, one of the victims of the attack. She has lost the little respect she had for the Maoists and is tired of being consoled by people. “They come, take our pictures, talk to us and then leave. What do I get from all that?” asks the still grieving BK.
It has been a year since the Maoists blew up a bus at Char Kose Jhadi forest of Pathari, Madi, claiming the lives of 38 passengers and injuring many. Many of the injured say they are unable to work and can barely feed their families. One businessman who admits to smuggling timber and chemicals said, “No one has stepped up after we started paying the Maoists.” He even claimed that he started the business on the recommendation of local Maoists. After he paid the Maoists, even the police do not interfere. Apparently, the Maoists have warned them there will be ‘retaliation’ if they create problems. Another businessman said the Maoists seize the goods of those who conduct business without their permission. Although smuggling did stop briefly when the police checkpoint in Jhurkiya was reposted two weeks ago, sources say that the Maoists threatened the police again, and the illegal trade resumed. The Maoists are said to have told the police to mobilize their patrols against loggers and drugsmugglers, but do not interfere anywhere else.

Moring police chief ASP Gopal Bhaduri said he wasn’t ‘fully aware’ of these goings-on, but noted that the Maoists’ comments were against the ceasefire code of conduct. Bhaduri also stated that the police had information about smuggling taking place under Maoist protection in rural areas, but that in the current situation they couldn’t do anything about it. “The ceasefire monitoring committee should look into this matter. We have not gone against the code of conduct or shown any extra interest in the Maoists,” he said. Shakti, a local Maoist leader in Jhurkiya, countered by saying that smugglers were paying regional leaders in exchange for immunity.

Krishna Adhikari (above) was also handpicked for life in the Maoist rearward and can hardly feed her family. Even going to the Maoist meeting cost her—since she couldn’t work for that time, BK now has no money and no idea about how to feed her family this coming week.

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“We harvested in April; that food was finished in May. I went to work in someone’s house to earn money and when my husband came back from India, he brought one bag of rice. When that ran out, he went to Kolti and bought two bags. Then we borrowed to buy another bag and it ran out four days ago. If the (emergency) rice hadn’t come, I don’t know what I would have done.”

It’s a numbing, repetitive litany of hardship and hunger. In southern Bajura district, more than 500 m above the narrow, mighty Karnali River, villagers like Jasu Dhami are running out of options. The mother of five sits on the dirt floor of her house in Rudigaun, Sapata VDC, nursing her youngest child, and explaining how the family used to grow enough rice, potatoes, barley, and millet to provide most of its annual food needs.

For the rest, a family member would migrate to India during the winter to work as a labourer and earn some money. A few years ago, the already sparse rainfall petered out. Last winter was the driest on record. Lucky households reaped half their usual crop. With less yield, the food gap between harvests widened: last week, Jasu had just finished planting rice, one month late.

Kolti airfield was swarming with people when the food drop helicopter arrived. Villagers stooped to pick up the white bags marked ‘A gift from Australia’. After climbing a steep flight of steps, they arranged their loads for the walk home. “We’ve brought all these little kids here to help carry in the hope that we’ll get food...last year it was very bad but this year is worse because of the drought,” says Kanta Neupane from Sapata VDC, a day’s hike along the narrow trails carved into the steep hills that flank the Karnali.

From these paths, the scene below can be deceiving. Green plots may signal irrigated land, as in the fields near Kolti or, on closer inspection, contain stunted maize and for visitors, chicken soup. Many locals say the EMOP rice stopped them leaving their homes in despair. “Before this program was announced, 90 percent of people were planning to go to India but many have changed their minds. This is very good for the short term but do you have anything for the long term?” asks Birsingh BK at his farm in Sapata ward 2.

People are so hungry here in Bajura, they are completing back-breaking trail-building projects even before the 40-kg sacks of food ‘payment’ can be delivered. The operation here follows WFP’s ‘food for work’ model, which the agency believes prevents locals from becoming dependent.

In April, the UN World Food Programme started hearing that villagers in pockets of 10 mid- and far-western districts were selling not just their few valuables but also essentials like utensils to raise money for food after their crops had withered. In May, the agency approved an emergency food program, its first ever in Nepal.

“We asked SAPPROS (WFP’s NGO partner) to start work only in those areas that were most affected,” says Raju Karki of Mugu’s Human Rights and Environment Development Centre, who showed the video to ActionAid.

WFP staff said that they confirmed the 70 VDCs to get EMOP food only after a consultation that included representatives from the SPA, Maoists and NGOs.

Malnourished in Mugu

“Fearing famine in the far-west, many fle...”

FOOD AND WORK: Locals and WFP staff share the flour. (above) Most farmers are a month behind in planting...
where rice had been delivered...but most communities went ahead and did all the work before getting any rice, which shows how hungry people really were,” said WFP Emergency Program Coordinator Julie Thellouzan after landing in Kolti last week. Now WFP faces a bigger task—persuading donors that the pattern in this food deficit region has been upset this year, and that the food gap has become a yawning, dangerous chasm. “We’ve certainly been vocal about the crisis, but this area has food shortages regularly so we have to work harder to overcome scepticism that this year is different,” said WFP Country Director Richard Ragan in Kathmandu.

Out in Rudigaun, just a few hours walk from Kolti, at least some development has occurred. Birsingh explains that an NGO gave him an improved variety of rice seed, which he planted successfully for three or four years—but then it stopped producing. After a few questions SAPPROS regional chief Ratan Sharma figures out that the farmer should have sown the new variety in only one field, surrounded by fields of the traditional one. A trained farmer would have anticipated the failure. Earlier, at the foot of the Pilichaur suspension bridge, where the Karnali lapped at its banks like an ocean, Sharma asked men puffing on hookahs what sort of development they wanted. Irrigation and seeds, they promptly answered.

SAPPROS has irrigation projects in other parts of the region “but here would be very expensive because of the remoteness,” said Sharma. “We have written many proposals to donors for funding but have got no response.”

“What these people really need are development projects, but my god, where do you start?” says an official at one donor agency interested in funding the EMOP, adding, “we are planning to get more serious about the Karnali. But for the cost of helping one person here, you can help two people somewhere else in Nepal.”

In July’s budget speech the government said, “The absence of a road transportation network is the main reason for the economic backwardness of the Karnali” and surrounding districts. It pledged to finish routes linking Kalikot and Jumla and a ‘detailed survey’ of a road connecting Kolti and Bajura headquarters Martadi. Back in Rudigaun, Jasu Dhami’s neighbour Maghi Dhami isn’t heartened even by the thought of normal rainfall. “I have so little land since the landslide,” she says after opening her grain cupboard to reveal a few utensils but no food. She estimates that the 40 kg bag of rice will feed her ill husband and 10 children for roughly a week. Then she will return to India to earn money carrying sand. “Some days the children eat wild vegetables, some-days they sleep without food.”

Disastrous math

People targeted: 225,000 in 70 VDCs of Jajarkot, Kalikot, Bajura and Dailekh (phase 1) Humla, Jumla (2) Mugu, Rukum, Rolpa and Dolpa (3)

They receive: 80 kg of rice and 7 kg of fortified flour, half when they begin 20 days of food for work, the remainder when they finish

Already delivered: First half of rations to most families in phase 1 districts

Total budget: $5.4 million
Donated: $565,000 from Australia, $250,000 from the US
Money left: $0

WFP’s EMOP debts: 543 metric tonnes of rice borrowed from Nepal Food Corporation, $500,000 from an internal account

People annually. Emergency rice is a stopgap
For the first time since the war began in Lebanon, this main road deserted. Lebanese refugees who, until two days ago, poured over the border in thousands stopped crossing after recent Israeli air strikes made it too dangerous.

Pema Sherpa and Gori Kama stand under the hot sun at this southern Lebanon-Lebanon border crossing. This has been their home for the last twenty days. The dusty, dull-coloured landscape is a far cry from the mountainous Pema’s village of Lumcha in Solu Khumbu, and Gori’s lush hometown Dharan.

Pema and Gori had been working as maids in southern Beirut for a year-and-a-half when the war with Israel broke out. “The bombs were close to the house, near the airport. Our madam left with her family, telling us to stay and look after the house. We didn’t want to leave, so we stayed here,” explains Gori. Despite being owed four months’ salary each, the decision to leave was still easy, as the two women had been virtually enslaved by their employer.

They left with just their handbags and a small suitcase. By chance, they met some feeing Sudanese and Ethiopians and shared a taxi to the Syrian border for $100 each. There they were safe from the bombs, but didn’t have the papers to enter Syria.

Border officials told them to go back to Lebanon, but they refused and slept outside until they attracted the attention of the Syrian Public Relations Association, an NGO that has placed 2,000 Lebanese families in Syrian homes so far.

Pema and Gori’s story is not uncommon. There are an estimated 4,000 Nepalis stranded in Lebanon at the moment, but nobody is sure of exact numbers. Now heading back to the safety of Kathmandu, Pema and Gori are happy to have been so lucky.

The women said they were well looked after by Syrian volunteers. They slept in a mosque and were given adequate free food. The only request they had was for new underwear and clothes. “We can’t be lousy about the food we are given,” said a pragmatic Pema.

What were they looking forward to most back in Nepal? “I just want to farm,” laughs Pema. She is pleased she’ll be home in time for her son’s fifth birthday. “The Syrians have been very kind. And we have made many friends, from Palestine, Dubai, and Qatar. We spent our days cleaning our living quarters and playing volleyball.”

Pema and Gori were the only Nepali refugees at this southern border crossing. With no Nepali representatives in Syria, the Syrian Public Relations Association did not know how to deal with them.

Calls to the Indian embassy proved fruitless. In the end, it was a group of Nepali women who came to their rescue.

Nepal’s child soldiers need to make the journey from war to peace, drill to class

NARESH NEWAR

15-year-old Abhin from Dhading is a popular composer and singer—of Maoist revolutionary songs that encourage more children like him to join the PLA.

Yamu Sonu Lama from Makawanpur was 16 when she joined the Maoists and now, at 18, is a section commander.

Ramu, 18, from Ramechhap has been a frontline fighter in many Maoist military operations.

The Nepal Army has used children too, as messengers and spotters. Not being combatants, they didn’t protect them from capture and torture by the Maoists.

The insurgency, and the armed forces’ response to it, have had appalling consequences for children. They have been forcefully recruited by the Maoists, or tricked into being ‘informants’, and been arbitrarily detained and then ‘disappeared’ by the army and police for alleged involvement in Maoist activities.

UNICEF defines a child soldier as any boy or girl under 18 involved with a regular armed force or group. This definition is not restricted to combatants— it also includes those involved in any other capacity, such as cooks, porters, or informers.

The international children’s watchdog, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, claims that up to 30 percent of the Maoist forces may be children. Human rights groups agree; estimates that around 345 children have died at the hands of the Maoists and the state between 17 February 1996 and June 2006.

Yet children are nowhere in the peace process. Not one discussion has focused on child soldiers, and there has been no mention of how child soldiers are to be reintegrated during discussions on demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of the people’s liberation army. The government has not drafted any laws and policies for demobilising and rehabilitating child soldiers, and the Maoists want to wait until political issues are resolved.

Under these circumstances, child soldiers will be hesitant about leaving the Maoist army, partially given past experience. During the second round of peace talks in 2003, a number of children returned to their families. However, no demobilisation and reintegration agreement was discussed between the government and the Maoists, and when the talks broke down, all these children were recalled to the PLA.

Removing children from any activities linked to armed conflict is essential and should not be dependent on any adult DDR agreements or cessation of hostilities,” stresses Sandra Beidan, chief of the protection section of the UN’s Nepali Office of the High Commission for Human Rights.

The psychological and sociological scars are as serious as the physical, and will only get worse the longer we wait. “Child DDR should start as soon as possible. Early intervention is critical for the normal development of children even without a peace process. If you don’t act now, it could be too late,” explains Rosanna Vega, a child protection officer with UNICEF, who is working with child protection agencies to prepare an action plan for child DDR.

Other countries have dealt with demobilising and rehabilitating child soldiers during a conflict but before a formal peace process. In Sri Lanka in 2003, for example, while the peace talks were going on the UN worked with the LTTE to release over 600 child soldiers and develop a plan for social integration and education of the returning children. In Sierra Leone, the child-focused DDR process helped to demobilize over 6,000 child soldiers who were then sheltered in interim care centres between 1996-2002. The success of these two programmes, UNICEF experts say, came from the fact that the children had access to education and community support.

In the absence of an official child DDR program, a network called Children Associated with Armed Groups and Force has already been set up to help former child soldiers with rehabilitation, social integration and psycho-social counselling. “The immediate step should be to form a national child protection policy to ensure safe return, free education, vocational training and, most importantly, immunity to former child combatants,” explains child-rights expert Blinda Dahal of Save the Children (Norway).

The start of a UN brokered peace deal could be what’s needed to speed up the process, as UN Security Council Resolution 1314 stresses that national governments in such situations must include provisions for DDR of child combatants in peace agreements.

In the meantime, the agency’s action plan is taking shape, and will be based on the UN’s experiences in successfully advocating and securing the release of children from armed forces in a number of countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan.

(Names of the children have been changed to protect their identity.)
A volatile cocktail of separatism, discrimination and citizenship fuels a split in tarai Maoists

SUMAN PRADHAN

life-long communist, Jaya Krishna Goit joined the UML after 1990 but was lured into the Maoist fold by Matrika P. Yadav. But the two fell out and in 2004, when Yadav replaced him as chairman, Goit set up the Tarai Janantri Mukti Morcha (TJMM). The TJMM’s stated aim is to fight the Maoists for control of the Madheshi agenda. More worryingly, it is aiming to split the tarai plains from the rest of Nepal. It has an estimated 150-200 fighters but is active from Saptari to Rautahat districts through its ally, the Tarai Tigers. The tactics it uses are brutal, many would argue, terrorist-like.

Earlier this month, the TJMM abducted two Nepali Telecom engineers for ransom. This month it captured two employees of the small border customs in Saptari. All were of hill origin and were later released, but it’s not clear whether ransom was paid. Goit’s group has threatened hill origin people to vacate the tarai or face “action”. Several Pahadiya-owned industries have been forcibly closed and their owners forced to flee. Large farms owned by Pahadiya jamindaars have been confiscated.

Madheshi intellectuals and leaders in Kathmandu deplore the TJMM’s tactics. “There is no support in the Madheshi community for an independent Madhes, we all want to remain a part of Nepal,” asserts Vijay Kant Karna, a lecturer of political science and chairperson of Kathmandu University. “Goit was dissatisfied by the discrimination within the Maoists’ own ranks, very few Madhesis got leadership roles in the party’s organisational structure in the Madhes. Almost all were sent from the hills,” says Karna. Yadav agrees there was plenty of discrimination. He says the grievances have been addressed, particularly after the Maoists’ Chunwang plenum.

Many Madheshi intellectuals and leaders see this as an attempt to diffuse the Maoists’ power. “Nepal’s ruling elites have forever been suspicious of the Madhes because they think these people are of Indian origin, and therefore pro-Indian,” explains Gupta, “that is not true. We Madhesis are as much Nepali and pro-Nepal as anyone else.”

For Gupta of MJM, citizenship is not the topmost agenda in the Maoists’ Tarai agenda. “We are not in favour of a unified Madhesh but divided into two regions, he split and set up the TJMM.” Many Madheshi cadres have now been given leadership roles in the party’s organisation in the Madhes. Our army has even formed two Madhesi battalions.

People who have known Goit say the TJMM leader was radicalised after falling out with the Maoists over his replacement by Yadav in the Maoists’ Tarai Mukti Morcha, apparent discrimination against Madhesis even within the Maoist hierarchy and the division of Madhes by the Maoists into the ‘Madhes Autonomous Region’ and the ‘Tharuwan Autonomous Region’.

“A unified Madhesh”

Interview with Matrika Parsad Yadav, Maoist Central Committee member, Chairman of the Tarai Mukti Morcha, Chairman of the Tarai Autonomous Region

“Goit was dissatisfied by the discrimination within the Maoists’ own ranks, very few Madhesis got leadership roles in the party’s organisational structure in the Madhes. Almost all were sent from the hills,” says Karna. Yadav agrees there was plenty of discrimination. He told us in an interview (see box): “I myself resigned from all major positions in the party to show my dissatisfaction.” Yadav says the grievances have been addressed, particularly after the Maoists’ Chunwang plenum in late 2004. But this was too late for Goit. Having lost his leadership position and disagreeing with the Maoists’ division of Madhes into two regions, he split and set up the TJMM.

The division of Madhes is a potent issue. The Maoists have not just split off Tharuwan from the Madhes, but have also floated a concept of further dividing up the Madhes into five different regions. Many Madheshi intellectuals and leaders see this as an attempt to diffuse the Madhes’s power. “Nepal’s ruling elites have forever been suspicious of the Madhes because they think these people are of Indian origin, and therefore pro-Indian,” explains Gupta, “that is not true. We Madhesis are as much Nepali and pro-Nepal as anyone else.”

Even Maoist leader Yadav hesitates about accepting this division. “I am in favour of a unified Madhesh,” he says haltingly, “but I also believe there can be separate regions within a unified Madhesh.”

Mixed up in all this is the issue of citizenship for two-four million people in the tari who don’t have it, the main plank of the Nepal Sadbhahana Party (NSP). In the seven-party government it appears to be a way to buy time and make concessions—the NC and UML have set a deadline to resolve the issue.

For Gupta of MJM, citizenship is not the topmost agenda in the Maoists’ mind. He says: “The main issue is discrimination, and how that might be resolved through a federal state structure with real autonomy.” Gupta has written a book titled Rebellion against Tamil Discrimination in Sri Lanka which he says is about how problems like Sri Lanka arise if ethnic discrimination is ignored by the state.
The hopes and fears of life post-dictatorship

Cuba after Castro

H e has been in power so long that Fidel Castro is barely noticed now as the anachronism he has become: an absolute ruler of a one-party state, a beachhead survivor of an ideology long swept away elsewhere, a man who has kept the modern world at bay while corruption eats away at his island fortress. Cubans rarely break the taboo and speculate on Cuba after Castro. Most, with reason, do not dare. But and speculate on Cuba after Castro. Most, with reason, do not dare. But

The prospect of Fidel Castro’s death or disability has convulsed the Caribbean. The long US blockade, the regional political balance and Havana’s predictable backing for any anti-American insurgency have all been fixtures of a stalemate that has been a determining factor in US regional policy. Cuba may have only 11 million people, and a stricken economy overly dependent on sugar and raw materials, but it has long been seen in Washington as an ideological dagger pointed at the Western hemisphere. It was over this island that the world came closest to nuclear Armageddon. Cuba’s defiance and the clout of Cuban exile influence on US domestic policy.

What happens now will be watched in Washington and Miami as closely as in Havana. Both on the island and abroad, people are preparing for change. Few doubt that the communist system will die with Señor Castro. The collapse of the Soviet Union made its continuation ever more precarious — and cautious market reformers a few years ago so quickly began to unravel the entire structure that the frightened Cuban government quickly backed down. For now the economy is in stasis. But entrepreneurs know well the pent-up demand for change, for imports, luxuries and links to the outside world. They are already preparing to seize the moment when the US embargo is lifted.

Some fear that the country could quickly return to 1959, becoming a playground of the American rich, where weak governments are dominated by gambling interests and current-business. There is, indeed, a danger of change coming too explosively and of a new mafia taking advantage of a communist collapse, as in much of eastern Europe. But that is to ignore everything that has happened since the fall of Batista. Cuba is in more robust now. For all the repression, neither persecution and assault on human rights, the Cuban people have three advantages on which to build a future: an education system that has given them literacy and qualifications; a credible national health system; and a cultural pride, seen in the flowering of the arts and music.

The challenge now is how to plan the inevitable transition without triggering collapse and chaos or fresh repression. The US Administration appointed a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba in 2003 to hasten political change, setting aside $40 million to boost democracy. The US will certainly find vast sums to satisfy post-Castro expectations. Within Cuba, officials must also be looking at ways to survive the change. Rumors abound and hopes are rising. But nothing should be assumed. Señor Castro has survived past health scares. He could yet surprise.

Fatwa fear

PESHAWAR- Negative publicity and attacks by Islamist groups on NGOs working with women have forced the closure of several offices in Pakistan’s north-west frontier province. The 16 June murder of two female teacher trainers, and 10-year-old daughter and two-and-a-half-year-old son of one of the victims, has created fear among female NGO workers and many have resigned. The attack is believed to have been carried out by Taliban supporters, and is not the first of its kind. Mosques recently called for all civil society groups to sack women employees before July-end or quit the area. Conservative authorities and media have also criticized female involvement. Many feel the situation and local attitudes are unlikely to change. On 14 September last year, President Pervez Musharraf came under fire for making comments implying that women get raped for profit and foreign visas. The comments came on the heels of a controversial government decision not to allow a female’s rights activist who was gang-raped on the orders of a tow-and-half-year-old son of one of the victims, has created fear among female NGO workers and many have resigned. The attack is believed to have been carried out by Taliban supporters, and is not the first of its kind. Mosques recently called for all civil society groups to sack women employees before July-end or quit the area. Conservative authorities and media have also criticized female involvement. Many feel the situation and local attitudes are unlikely to change. On 14 September last year, President Pervez Musharraf came under fire for making comments implying that women get raped for profit and foreign visas. 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The PC turns 25
One clunky machine wrought enormous, but familiar, sociological changes

I
n August 1981, IBM introduced the 5150 personal computer. It was not the first personal computer, but it turned out to be ‘the personal computer,’ which revolutionised business life and the way people thought about the world.

The 5150 was a break with IBM’s previous business model, in which it did not sell computers, but leased them. With the 5150, IBM moved into mass production of a standardised commodity using components produced by other companies. ‘Big Blue’ (as IBM is known) allowed other companies (notably the infant Microsoft) to develop its software.

By making the PC, IBM practically destroyed itself as a company. Its innovation gave rise to a huge number of new, dynamic companies, forcing IBM to reinvent itself completely to compete with them, an example of the socially transformative effects of the PC.

Before 1981, visionaries who thought about the impact of technology on society believed that the computer would allow a centralisation of knowledge and power. This was the world of George Orwell’s Big Brother, the totalitarianism. Powerful computers led to potent states and powerful and centrally directed business corporations.

The PC seemed at first to promise a restoration of balance in favour of the individual. Computing became decentralised, and the new flexibility produced a sense that control was moving away from big agglomerations of power, whether governments or companies. The triumph of the PC was accompanied by a revival of the 19th-century vision of classical liberalism and individualism.

The idea was that an individual could buy a computer and the software needed for a specific (and increasingly complicated) purpose, and immediately generate a productive result. Indeed, individuals soon possessed in a small machine as much computing power as the mainframes IBM 360s that revolutionised centralised computing in the 1960s.

But this initial triumph of the PC (and very substantial sales substantial productivity gains. New activities—internet auctions, encyclopaedias, chat rooms—replicated the interactions of individuals over transatlantic wireless. Interlinked PCs created a sense of a vibrant social market.

This was the world of the socially transformative potential. Suddenly, economists demonstrated the limits of centralised power. This was the world of the socially transformative potential. Suddenly, economists demonstrated the limits of centralised power.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the cotton revolution, the true measure of the social and political transformations wrought by the PC will become clear only after a much longer time. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Harold James is a Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University and author of The Roman Predicament.

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ANALYSIS
Harold James

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The initial disappointment about electronic productivity demonstrated the limits of classical individualism. Only the informed requests for assistance, forcing knowledgeable workers to become computer gurus to colleagues.
EXHIBITIONS
◆ Satin: a painting exhibition by Korean American Artist Joong Baek Kim Nepal Art Council, till 11 August. 4220735
◆ Harmony: Sculpture Symposium 2006 at NAFA complex till 18 August.
◆ Infinity paintings by Ramesh KC, Gaurav Shrestha, Suman Shrestha and Binoq Gupta at The Art Shop, Durbar Marg till 20 August. 4267063
◆ Impressions of Manang 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS
◆ Carandiru-a Portuguese film with English Subtitles, at Martin Chautari, 10 August, 3PM.
◆ Jwana Debi Jwanaama written by Abhi Subed and directed by Sunil Pokhrel at Gurukul, 5PM till 15 August.
◆ Sunauli Nepal Fashion Week at Hotel Hyatt Regency, 10-14 August.
◆ Teeg Festival at Radisson Hotel, stalls, exhibition, sale and more 11-12 August. 9AM-7PM. 4425898
◆ A View from the Bridge by Rato Bangala School’s Aangan Tedo at St Xavier’s College, 11-13 August. 5528814
◆ Loktantrik and Samabeshi toilets recital by Laxmi Mal at Gurukul, 11 August, 3PM.
◆ Hike to Sundarijal at Budhanilkhantha gate at 7:30 AM.
◆ Changa Chalti-2063 Battle in the sky at Club Himalaya on 9, 16 and 13 August.
◆ Jatra Wednesday Nights at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
◆ Breakfest & swimming. 5560675

MUSIC
◆ Cadenzas performs at Mohik Live, 11 August, 8.30 PM. 5526212
◆ Yala Maya Classics presents Santosh Bhakta Shrestha, live at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 18 August, 6PM. 5537567
◆ Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant, 4423613
◆ Cadenzas Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday, 8PM at Upstairs.
◆ Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4700311
◆ Uncork the good times with Ciney and Par-e-jat playing along with BBQ. Every Friday from 7PM at Fusion-The bar at Dwarika’s Hotel. 4706448
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DINING
◆ Masterpiece menu at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
◆ Mezza and Margarita at Dwarika’s Fusion every Wednesday, Rs 555. 4479484
◆ Eden Lounge Bar Happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
◆ Monsoon Madness Wine Festival Enjoy wine from four continents at Kirti’s of Kathmandu. 4205440
◆ Mango Masti at all restaurants in Soalte Crowe Plaza. 4273999
◆ Traditional Cuisine at Patan Museum Café. 5526871
◆ Wet & Wild Summer Splash Special package of swimming and lunch, or brunch with breakfast and swimming. Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
◆ Earth Watch Restaurant Breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fireplace at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
◆ Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
◆ Special buffet lunches at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4426213
◆ Breakfast Singma Restaurant. 8.30-11AM daily. 5000962
◆ Jens Wednesday Night Free cocktails for women. 426622

GETAWAYS
◆ Shramanism Full Moon Trek to Lake Gosainkunda Rs 5999, 14-12 August. 4412508
◆ Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
◆ Conferences and workshops at Godavari Village Resort. 5556765
◆ Nature Retreat at Park Village Resort & Spa. 4375280
◆ Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage and Moksh Live, 11 August, 8.30-11AM daily. 5000962
◆ Jens Wednesday Night Free cocktails for women. 426622

NEPALI WEATHER
It’s a bad monsoon all right, but last year was far worse. Only a third of Nepali paddy farmers could reap a harvest, and in the far west it was even lower. Barring the arrival of a dramatic front, August is shaping up to be the third consecutive month with below normal rainfall around the country, except for the eastern hills. We’re already in the second half of the four-month monsoon, and this is traditionally less wet than June and July. Expect fewer storms but more lasting rain for the rest of the monsoon. Thursday morning’s satellites photo shows just a few scattered clouds, so there are more hot and humid days ahead, with just a little rain. It’ll be a scorching weekend in Kathmandu Valley, with high humidity. Relief will come from lower temperatures late evening through the night due to cooling showers.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

DID YOU MISS ?

MUSIC

KATHMANDU VALLEY

GETAWAYS

NEPALI WEATHER

EXHIBITIONS

EVENTS

MUSIC

DINING

GETAWAYS

NEPALI WEATHER

EXHIBITIONS

EVENTS

MUSIC

DINING

GETAWAYS

NEPALI WEATHER
The school’s tin roof leaks during the monsoon and during summer months heats up, making the rooms unbearably hot. The school has no library, laboratories or big playground. And this is Namuna English Medium School in Jhapa, where Anjana Rajbansi spent 11 years. Had the government not decided to scrap the ‘board first’ announcement this year, Rajbansi, who earned 92.38 percent in the SLC exam, would have been the topper.

Anjana grew up in Junspani in south-west Jhapa, in a family of five. Her parents, both primary school teachers at a government school, encouraged her to work hard and never settle for second best. Anjana makes it all sound easy. To do well on a national exam, she says, “you have to work hard, have the drive to succeed and be very ambitious. Also, you need to study for a few hours everyday, concentrate and be very disciplined.”

“We were encouraged to use our imagination, to work with what we have, and all 12 of us from my class who took the SLC exam this year passed with good scores,” says Anjana, who believes that as long as the teachers are good at what they do and encourage students to question, labs, libraries and other physical facilities are secondary. Anjana sounds wise beyond her years when she says, “It makes no difference to me if I am ‘board first’ or not. My scores reflect my hard work, and I am very happy with that.”

For Anjana, the story is just beginning. She was encouraged by her teachers in Jhapa to think of the SLC as just a stepping stone to bigger and better things. “I was encouraged to do well, not pressured to be the best,” she now studies in the science faculty at Universal College in Kathmandu, and wants to later pursue Biology. She’s here on a scholarship, and says her college administration has also promised her a scholarship to study medicine, if she keeps her grades up. This bright spark is thrilled. “I was taught to work hard and not expect things in return, so any small encouragement means a lot to me,” she says.

In some ways, though, Anjana Rajbansi is just another teenager—she doesn’t want to make long-term plans just yet. “Let me do well in plus-two first, then I can think about what to do next,” she smiles. She does believe, though, that if an SLC topper had been announced, it would have not been her, but another student, from Kathmandu.
not even the most patriarchal male chauvinistic piglet in this country will begrudge parliament’s recent proclamation to set aside 33 percent of civil service jobs for women.

Because as long as we men can still get to be the King, Prime Minister, Speaker of the August House, Chief of Army Staff, Editor-in-Chief, Head Bartender, and also the Maid-in-Waiting in case there is no suitable female candidate, we have no problems with girls joining the rank and file to stand head-and-shoulder with us.

Parliament has also passed legislation allowing daughters to inherit parental property, and is working on a new law requiring parents to force their daughters to marry certified dorks thus making doubly sure that parental property remains in safe hands.

And right in front of our eyes, parliament has taken away our right to be king by allowing a royal first-born to be henceforth crowned Queen of the Kingdom, especially if aforementioned first-born is a she.

But parliament may be overstepping its bounds here. At this rate there will be no jobs left for men. What is parliament doing to help broad-minded men like us who, the last time we checked, were still allegedly holding up half the sky? Ok, ok, one-third.

What we Central Non-working Committee members of the recently-formed All-Nepal Federation of Alpha-Males and Drones (Reviled) want to know is, how is the interim legislature going to guarantee that this epidemic of politically-correct legislation in favour of members of the opposite species will not leave us men high and dry and out in the wilderness.

Should we guys be getting worried? You bet. And what should we gentlemen be doing about it? Kicking butt. Yes, lifting a page from the Great Helmsman himself who said, and I quote, “To be offensive is the best form of defensiveness”, we men have no other recourse but to follow this wise dictum and start behaving in an even more obnoxious and louche manner than we do at present.

And we are going to launch this multi-pronged campaign throughout maledom starting this Guy Jatra season so those of us who wear Y-fronts and are proud of it can assert ourselves and reclaim our past honour. We will protect the bastions of our manhood from female encroachment till the last man is left standing.

As usual in these cases, it is the private sector that has taken the lead by launching a risky and pioneering venture to set up the first-ever male beauty parlour in this country. At a time when us card-carrying members of the unfair sex were feeling a trifle beleaguered and left out, at last there is a place we boys can call home, where we can go and get our blackheads squeezed by professionals without any danger of those things getting infected and erupting into pus-filled carbuncles and aunties.

So, let this be a warning, we are not going to sit idly by while women outscore us in SLC and take away our jobs. This Tij we will counterattack by sitting outside parliament till all our demands are met. Which means we want 33 percent of all jobs traditionally held by women to also be reserved for men. Only through affirmative action can men also have a chance to prove themselves as housewives and stewardesses.