Shadow of a gun
Nepal is falling from the frying pan into the fire

The tarai turmoil is spinning out of control, but the 7+1 parties are still treating it as just a law-and-order problem. After five people were killed in unrest in Lahan, the violence and looting spread to Janakpur on Wednesday, Birganj and Biratnagar on Thursday.

The root of the crisis is deep, long-standing bitterness among the madhesi population. Discriminated against by governments in the past, they saw that they would be denied political representation in proportion to their numbers by the interim constitution too.

Exploiting this could be religious and royalist groups with powerful allies in a rabidly anti-Maoist Bihar government across the border. Many of the arsonists who went on a systematic rampage in central Janakpur on Thursday were not known to anyone.

Politics, ethnicity, and religion make an explosive combination. But the lesson is lost on the parties in Kathmandu. The Maoists find they cannot control the genie they let out of the bottle with their ethnic-based politics. They are making things worse by calling madhesi activists “criminals.” The NC and UML are using the tarai as an arena for vote competition in future elections.

It’s still not too late for a multiparty declaration by parliament to amend the interim constitution and meet genuine madhesi demands for proportional representation. It may not stop the violence—there is evidence it is being instigated—but it will help reduce the anger. There is no other way to tackle this. Nepal is falling from the frying pan into the fire.
Lament for Lahan

It makes horrific reading.

undergoing treatment. There is no telling what is going on. That's the tragedy of all violent deaths.

from the Yadav community also succumbed to violence. Kumar Sahani, 32, and Pramod Sada, 15, were murdered.

T he monarchy may be on its way out, but what about other forms of feudalism? A matrix of the following current peace efforts will be whether they help create an environment in which the most oppressed communities, like dalits, can live a free and dignified life.

GUEST COLUMN

Uday Panyar

But when I talk to political analysts about this, even those I consider friends, there is a depressing response: "Widen your horizons and move beyond caste-based thinking. This is the time to address important national issues, not focus on what benefits a particular section of society should get." Okay, so perhaps I should ask. But practically every breath I take is still contaminated with casteism. Even now, people look at me through their caste lens. For members of oppressed communities, the founding of a democratic republic will in itself not feel like a notable achievement. India is a secular democratic republic, but dalits continue to be suppressed in many places there. At the grassroots dalits really don't care who wins or loses on the political front. What they are interested in is whether they can look forward to a better future, if not for themselves, for their children.

Accept ed, social changes can never happen as swiftly as political ones, and nobody has a magic wand to manage everybody's expectations overnight. But it is reasonable to ask whether the political parties are genuinely interested in addressing these problems. If they are, we need to see this demonstrated not in words but in actions.

There is a lot of talk about the need to include dalits in the interim government and the constituent assembly. Inclusion is of course a catalyst for social change. But it isn't everything. Look at past efforts to include dalits as key players in decision-making bodies. The royal regimes did so, as did party politics after 1990. Yet, no substantial changes were noticeable as a result.

What we need now are practical measures to enforce constitutional and legal tenets on dalit rights. It's not enough to merely give dalits the legal right to participate. The decline of the centrist politics demands, the NC is handing over half the legislature.

The eight-party alliance has called for a separate, clear-cut and substantial changes were noticeable as a result.

The seven parties and their Maoist partners promise a lot, but they are not rhetoric.

On dalit rights, parties need to lead by example not rhetoric.

The mayhem in the madhes has already claimed innocent lives and injured, more are undergoing treatment. There is no telling when the turmoil in the tarai will end.

Ramek Kumar Mahato, a 16-year-old student allegedly beat to death by a mob came from an underprivileged background. Vijay Kumar Sahani, 32, and Pramod Sada, 15, both shot by the police, were madhesi dalits, the most oppressed of all in the country. Muhammad Alam, 18, another victim of police firing, was a Muslim, a category that needs no explanation to show its exclusion. Thirty-two-year-old Bechan was pulled from the Yadav community also succumbed to bullet injury. All died in their prime for a cause they were probably not even fully aware of. That's the tragedy of all violent protests: they devour the weakest and the most inarticulate first.

The cause behind the death and destruction is consonant with universal democratic values. “We want a federal government structure and regional autonomy for the tarai... We want the elimination of discrimination against the people of the tarai, including racial, lingual, cultural and economic,” Madhesi Janadhirak Forum president Upendra Yadav told a news agency after the tragedy in Lahan. On Wednesday Janakpur burned, where is this fire going to spread next?

TheMadhesi were ostensibly fighting for these very rights. The seven-party alliance swears by similar democratic values.

For democracy to take root, popular aspirations for the institutionalisation of local autonomy and an end to discrimination must be seen as a step forward. The ambivalence of Sher Bahadur Deuba or Madhav Nepal towards democratic norms has been well known since they were co-opted by Gyanendra's autocratic regime.

But the indifference of the Maoists to the plight of madhesis defies logic. The major parties took years to degenerate into their unresponsive state. The Maoists seem to have acquired that trait within days of entering the interim legislature.

This deafening silence will delegitimise Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai faster than their slip-ups in implementing the comprehensive peace accord. And if Deb Gurung and Krishna Bahadur Mahara hark on about a revolutionary conspiracy without substantive substance, that may turn out be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The extremists on the right are as adroit at exploiting genuine grievances as they are on the left.

The country must face disturbing questions. Why do political parties ignore institutional injustice to die to make themselves heard? How many deaths does it take to shake a government from its complacency? The government has formed a commission to investigate the violence in Lahan.

The eight-party alliance has called for a separate, clear-cut policy on practical ways of addressing the problems of dalits, and the future state needs to adopt a zero tolerance policy against caste discrimination.

Untouchability should be declared a crime against the state and a crime against humanity. Last, but not least, the non-governmental organisations that the political parties, which consider themselves champions of freedom and democracy, thenceforth ignore the plight of madhesi dalits. Not only are virtually all party leaders high caste, there are often very few dalit leaders who are publicly humiliating and putting down dalits. Even the ‘revolutionary’ Maoist party has made its mark on its dalit party cadres who display discriminatory behaviour and restructure their parties to be more inclusive. This is why we can see the changes they promise in action. Can the parties start doing their bit to dismantle feudal practices before the elections to the constituent assembly?

Apropos the problem of dalits being unique and complicated by poverty, illiteracy, and exclusion. The idea that Nepal is moving towards a federal state is meaningless until such critical issues are tackled. There will be no durable peace or democracy without it.

Uday Panyar writes in Kathmandu for an international agency.
In response to Prashant Jha’s ‘Nepali too’, I would like to add a few things. The social, cultural, religious identity, what shapes Nepali nationalisms, is pahadi-defined. Pahadi nationalism uses fear to keep the madhesi community from access to power, claiming it is untrustworthy and pro-Indian. The fear that nationalism will die if madhesi have equal access to power is true—if you fall into the popular trap of believing pahadi nationalism is the only kind there is.

As a pahadi, I see the current madhes movement not as an overturning of pahadi nationalism or privilege, but a way to bring together pahadi nationalism with the sensitivity and riches of the madhes. I blame our education system for nurturing and sustaining the poisonous, untruthful stereotypes of madhesi. Real social inclusion starts from education. It’s not too late for the madhesi movement not as an overturning trap of believing pahadi nationalism is the only way to bring together pahadi nationalism and madhesi nationalism. We are simply not nurturing and sustaining the poisonous, untruthful stereotypes of madhesi.

My thanks and appreciation for Prashant Jha’s ‘Nepali too’. While his piece was timely in the current madhesi-pahadi clashes in the tarai, it should strike a chord with anyone who has ever had to justify calling themselves a Nepali, with anyone who has been told that they are too light, or too dark, or too slant-eyed, or have ancestors from the wrong place, or speak with too much of an accent to be a ‘real’ Nepali. Bravo.

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**P Kaphle, email**

**M Kapline, email**

**Biplab Nepal, email**

**Abhi, New Delhi**

This winter, get an attractive hair dryer free, with every 400ml Sunsilk Black Shines Shampoo.
Lahan’s losers
As it roils the nation, the madness is rolling itself

In the wake of this week’s Lahan violence, the Madhes Janadhikar Forum rejected calls by the government to sit down for dialogue. Many other groups however, both madhesi and pahadi, have urged the MJF to talk. The MJF may or may not talk in the end, depending on how the situation evolves. For now though, it is in the driver’s seat and its recent behaviour shows just how strong it has become in the post-Lahan scene. As Nepalganj before it, Lahan signifies the deep resentment in the tarai against a pahadi state structure that has treated madhes as second-class citizens. The MJF emerged practically out of nowhere to capitalise on this situation. This new dynamic in the volatile tarai politics is roiling the madhes as much as it is roiling national politics. It is no secret that various madhesi groups today are locked in a struggle to lead the madhes agenda. They are in competition for influence across the tarai with a single-minded purpose: each wants to prove that it is the indispensable leader of the madhesi community. This is why December and January have witnessed more bandas and strikes in the tarai than at any other time.

Lahan arrives just at this point and hands the MJF a clear victory. The biggest loser in all this have been the Maoists, the seven mainstream parties, and Nepal’s Kathmandu-centric civil society who can think of nothing more original than holding goodwill rallies at the Maitighar Mandala.

SCENES FROM A RIOT: Wednesday evening in Janakpur showed how many sides are competing for supremacy in madhes politics.

If there is one single person has emerged as the biggest loser, it is the Maoists’ madhesi leader Pradash Yadav. It was bad enough that his party disregarded a banda for a genuine madhesi cause by trying to bulldoze through a blockade in Lahan. He then showed extreme stupidity by forcibly body-snatching the dead boy, thus insulting madhesi sensibilities. His pahadi leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, made matters even worse by stating: “there should be no talks with the MJF because talks can only be held with political parties, not criminals and gangsters.” The MJF must be laughing all the way to the vote bank, at the expense of the Maoists and every other tarai group.

This is the dynamic in the madhes, what is the country to do? Anyone who has followed tarai politics in recent months will know that madhesi-pahadi violence there was waiting to erupt. Yesterday it was Nepalganj, today it is Lahan. Tomorrow it could be the dozens of other towns and villages that dot the tarai landscape. Ethnic politics is here to stay, and we cannot be blind to it. But we have been blind to it, especially the pahadi dominated mainstream parties and civil society. Their belief that the constituent assembly election will resolve all problems has been shattered by this violence. They failed to see that the assembly was the problem, not the solution that they hoped it would be.

The eight political parties who run Nepal today probably don’t realise it, but their peace process (the Comprehensive Peace Accord, interim constitution, constituent assembly, etc.) is seen by almost everyone as an eight-party process. It is perceived as exclusionary and elitist, and reinforcing a pahadi ethos—this view is particularly strong among madhesi and janajatis. Correct this view, now. It must start with a public acceptance by the eight parties that the peace process is flawed, that they have not acknowledged—let alone resolved—the grievances of the many communities struggling to be heard. They should lead a national conversation with all marginalised groups. That process must be rounded up by amendments to the interim constitution that at least provides for fair representation in the coming assembly.

I am sure there are plenty of moderate madhesi willing to give the parties a chance if the parties accept their mistake.
Dis-service charge

You may pay your monthly cable fee, but it doesn’t buy you trouble-free viewing. Forget interruptions due to power outages, a certain cable operator won’t even allow you to watch what is available in peace, superimposing ads on the lower half of your screen no matter what the channel, obliterating your view of the news and sports scores tickers.

The same goes for just about everything else: compensation for flights delayed or cancelled; high taxes, but no paved roads or reliable water supply. Consumer rights are a joke here, a fact which helps businesses and the government to get away with shoddy goods and substandard service. An almost-militant labour force only compounds the problem. A cause and consequence is that we do not believe in differential services or pricing. The essence of a market-based economy is that the consumer has the choice in a regulated market. Consumer choice is a right. It’s up to a consumer to decide whether they want to pay differential pricing or a service charge.

Five long years ago when there was a half-hearted debate about the levying of a service charge, the Beed argued in a number of columns that businesses and entrepreneurs should decide for themselves (‘Service charged’ in #18, ‘Playing hard to get’ in #31, and ‘Essential acts’ in #35, all Economic Sense).

A month ago, the very same industry people, probably trying to find a way around the new players in parliamentary politics, decided to introduce a service charge, with a quiet share going to the owners and probably a bit trickling back to the Hotel Association of Nepal. Another cartel, another syndicate the consumers need to put up with.

In a country where a disappointed consumer has nowhere to go, to pay for service regardless of quality is ridiculous. Yes, it’s traditional to pay a ‘service charge’ to the meter reader or the cop who tries to pull you over right before dasain, but our euphoric labour leadership wants to extend this to every single human interface that exists for a service—healthcare, education, construction, anything.

We have embraced the market economy, the government is not only cutting back on new businesses, it is even thinking of exiting fields in which it is in business. Consumers will be paying more for services rendered by private enterprises, whether for telecommunications or electricity. It is therefore more important than ever that the regulatory framework governing the rights of the consumer are strengthened. Consumer rights must balance out the domination of service owners and providers. People like Sudeep Shrestha of Kantipur have been working hard to this end. We need more people like him.

www.arthabeed.com
Irresponsible

There will be serious consequences if the dissatisfaction of many communities and groups [madhesi and others] against the interim constitution are not addressed. Many Nepalis are panicking about the growing violence in the tarai. The situation is worsening as repressive forces take advantage of the disorder.

But despite the gravity of the situation [and the grievances voiced by madhesi groups], the human rights community and citizens group are keeping quiet and not doing much to control the damage. The lack of a fact-finding mission and the inability of independent institutions to hold people accountable can sow the seeds of a political culture of impunity and anarchy.

There is a danger now that the conflict will intensify, and the government will not be able to control the situation. The credibility of human rights organisations is in question now—they have kept quiet even though things have come to a head, with the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum calling a ten-day banda. This is not the time for quiet even though things have come to a head, with the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum calling a ten-day banda.

The human rights activists and organisations have failed in their responsibility to put pressure on the government, to hear the voices by madhesi groups, the human rights community and citizens group are keeping quiet and not doing much to control the damage. The lack of a fact-finding mission and the inability of independent institutions to hold people accountable can sow the seeds of a political culture of impunity and anarchy.

Koirala’s call

As the interim constitution was in the process of curtailting his rights, the king was so depressed that he reportedly asked palace secretary Pushpabati Bhakta Maharjan to announce that he was ready to let go of all his powers. According to a highly placed source, the king invited Koirala to talk before the interim constitution was promulgated, but Koirala refused to meet him. However, when he heard that the king was about to make an announcement, Koirala hurriedly called the palace and advised the king to wait until the elections.

Royalists have reportedly given the king three options: abdicate from the throne and install his grandson Mahendrainstead, knock on the army’s door and prepare for a coup, or wait and see. The first option was rejected by Koirala and the second won’t work because the king knows there is no international support for a coup. Which is why Gyanendra is compelled to choose the third option, waiting until the constituent assembly elections.

Meanwhile royalists are hoping for the US to again pay attention to Nepal. They think the Americans will support the role of king in Nepal and that the monarchy will eventually be saved. They want Nepal to be like the Nordic countries which still have ceremonial monarchies.

There are royalists who think that the king will stay in power. But despite the gravity of the situation [and the grievances voiced by madhesi groups], the human rights community and citizens group are keeping quiet and not doing much to control the damage. The lack of a fact-finding mission and the inability of independent institutions to hold people accountable can sow the seeds of a political culture of impunity and anarchy.
MEDIA DARLING: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala turns away as Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal gets all the attention of the press at a tea party at the prime minister’s residence in Baluwatar on Wednesday to welcome the new members of parliament.

understood to be happy to be the acting secretary at the cantonment office if he cannot get into the planning commission.

Ungoverned

Dristi, 23 January

As we are preparing for the constituent assembly election, the situation is getting worse due to communal violence. There is looting everywhere, transport is constantly affected and the security situation has been weakening. The home minister should resign. There are concerns about how security will be maintained when the Nepal Army is confined to barracks and the police have proven useless. Laham burned and innocent people died because the Maoists take up arms to control any situation and fail to recognise the existence of other people. But while the Maoists were responsible for the situation there, and opportunists infiltrated it to aggravate matters, the home ministry absolutely failed to curb it.

Happy king

Ghatana K Bichar, 23-30 January

Contrary to reports that the king has been in a deep depression after the promulgation of the interim constitution, he was seen happily socialising at a recent family event. His relatives were surprised to find him in a jolly mood at son-in-law Gorakh’s residence at Keshar Mahal. The king was attending the gumii chho ceremony of his, and stayed a long time chatting with his relatives. The king talked about retired General Kumar Fudung’s nomination by the Maoists. When some of the people present started calling Fudung a traitor, the king said he welcomed the nomination and considered it as a good decision made by the Maoists. Fudung is understood to have been very close to the king, and his nomination came as a surprise. Fudung has said that he will work towards changing Nepal’s defence policies. A large chunk of the evening was spent discussing the latest Nepali bestseller Raktakunda. The book revolves around the royal massacre and talks extensively about various ‘conspiracies’ inside the palace.

After much discussion, the royal relatives concluded that the book was an attempt to give a bad name to the royal family. In the middle of conversation, the king allegedly said, “Now anyone can say and do anything.” The conversation also revolved around the new political changes, but the king did not comment on the recent tami violence.

Kiran Panday

MEDIA DARLING: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala turns away as Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal gets all the attention of the press at a tea party at the prime minister’s residence in Baluwatar on Wednesday to welcome the new members of parliament.

QUOTATION OF THE WEEK

“...You can wake up people who are asleep, but you can’t wake up people who are pretending to sleep.”

Pushpa Kamal Dahal reacting on 24 January to a question on the BBC Nepali Service about negotiating with the JTM

VACANCIES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Sujha Yatay, this pioneering cooperative transport company of Nepal, plans to revitalise its operations from its hub at Pichwak, Lalitpur. The goal is to serve the dramatically expanded need for public transport in urban transport within Kathmandu Valley and long-distance travel within the country. Two senior positions need to be filled as Sujha Yatay starts in this renewed journey. We invite applications to fill the positions. The selected candidates will be hired for an initial contract duration of 2 years. Possibility of career advancement with expansion of the company’s network and ambitions. Salary scales are according to ability and expectations.

1) Position: Business Manager

Reporting to the Executive Director, and interacting closely with the personnel, the Business Manager will define and implement management decisions to develop Sujha Yatay’s service within Kathmandu Valley and country-wide. The Manager would use the company’s four decade experience as a foundation to solve the evolved needs of the travelling public. S/he will be involved in the leadership in the company to develop business plan and identify and evaluate business opportunities.

Responsibilities:

- Report to the Executive Director in policy-making, programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, taking final responsibility as possible.
- Help develop and implement business plan for Sujha Yatay’s short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Seek to develop sustainability in the company’s workings and explore options for income-generation.
- Planning long-distance routes as well as Valley urban network.
- Develop management strategies on the basis of feasibility assessment and competition analysis, balancing this with the service demands on a public transport company.
- Work to diversify into alternative, environment-friendly transport systems.
- Overseas training of staff to maximise safety, security and efficiency.
- Commercialisation of assets for revenue maximisation.
- Special responsibility for passenger safety as well as comfort levels in both urban and long-distance sectors.
- Linkages with government departments to enhance service-capacities, and develop links with private bus operators with a view to maximising transport options for the travelling public.

Qualification and Experience:

- MBA, with preference given to candidate with specialisation in enterprise area or transport sector.
- Minimum six years’ work experience in senior management in reputed private or public-sector organisation(s).
- Clear understanding of the basic concept of transport management and market driven enterprise development strategies.
- Clear understanding of the needs of public service by a transport company.
- Ability to help by example, experience in managing large number of personnel.
- Advanced computing and communication skills.

2) Position: Automobile Engineer

Reporting to the Executive Director, the Automobile Engineer will supervise and coordinate the company’s technical team to maintain Sujha Yatay’s fleet of old and new buses.

Responsibilities:

- Routine maintenance of bus fleet.
- Efficient inventory management.
- Ensuring quality on all aspects of vehicle operation.
- Ensuring passenger safety.
- Developing long-term technical strategies for optimising fleet.
- Supervision and guidance for upgrading and maintaining fleet.
- Knowledge of automobile and electrical systems, and latest systems for monitoring, inventory and route management.
- Specialised knowledge of fuel efficiency processes in alternative fuels, electric vehicles and environment-friendly procedures.
- Financial management.
- Liaising with senior management within Sujha Yatay, and keeping contact with required counterparts in government, industry and engineering institutions.

Qualification and Experience:

- Bachelors Degree in Automobile or Mechanical Engineering with 5 years’ experience, or Masters Degree in Automobile or Mechanical Engineering with 2 years’ experience.
- Comfortable with ability to manage engineering staff.
- Competent in advanced technical requirements specific to a transport company.

Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements should submit the address to the addressed below application with biodata and as much details of work experience as possible. Also submit to the contact persons for further interest. Please also include a one-page essay on “Public Transportation in Nepal” written from your personal perspective, whether technical or managerial.

Deadline for submission to 15 February.

Short-listed candidates will be contacted by 28 February.
For those interested in the mapping of Nepal, 2006 was a tragic year in which we lost Dr Harka Gurung, one of the foremost exponents of social demography. But 2006 was also the year in which three atlases based on data from the 2001 Census of Nepal were published, each with Dr Gurung as principal author or editor. Each of them tells us about the unique and changing nature of modern Nepal.

Cartography is a curious discipline, highlighting relations between data sets in two- or three-dimensional space. Maps, and the statistics which underlie them, can provide a visually rich snapshot of reality in a manner words can rarely achieve. But maps can also be deceptive and inaccurate, or manipulated for political effect. Poorly constructed or inexact maps are potentially dangerous when they enter the public domain, precisely because of their immediately definitive power as markers of spatial reality.

The Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups and the Nepal Atlas of Language Groups, both published in 2006, were the swansong of the outgoing Chairman of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), Professor Sant Bahadur Gurung, who also wrote the Foreword to each. Both priced at Rs 500, these publications should be thought of as one atlas in two volumes, providing district level information on 103 officially recognised ethnic groups and 93 officially recognised languages. The difference between these two figures is already worth some thought, for in Nepal there is no one-to-one correlation between language and ethnic group.

Combining the analytical insights of Harka Gurung with census data analysis by Yogendra Gurung and the map-making skills of Chhabi Lal Chidi, these two volumes offer the kind of baseline data that policy makers, development workers, and academics need for their work. The black and white maps are not by themselves scintillating, but they do provide the relevant census data on the left hand page with a visual representation on the right. Pages 227 to 266 are particularly helpful, providing population counts by language.
and ethnic group for each of Nepal’s 75 districts.

In both his twelve-page introductions, Dr Gurung unpacks the data in his trademark manner, carefully comparing and disaggregating census findings to make interesting points. He is also justifiably sceptical about the underlying data sets, suggesting that “the census data records too many cases of a language population exceeding their related ethnic group population in almost all districts. Such a widespread anomaly could have been due to misreporting and misrecording of ethnic and linguistic data” (page 10). The ever-careful scholar was being generous: the 2001 census, while better than any earlier one, is full of holes, particularly regarding languages and ethnicities. One example of census fallibility records 168,340 speakers of unspecified languages (pages 224-225). This is an unacceptably high number, implying a poor choice of categories used by the enumeration team. Every language has a name!

In all, though, the NFDIRN books are strong, data-heavy publications which could also be hosted online or archived on a CD. As with all publications from the foundation, distribution remains the stumbling block, as they are not easily found in bookshops even in Nepal. Published by Himal Books, Nepal Atlas and Statistics is a colourful and varied introduction to a wide range of data sets concerning Nepal. Grouped into categories entitled Setting, Physical Basis, Socio-cultural Aspects, Economic Sectors, and Development Indicators, this atlas is a collection of 95 maps and five diagrams accompanied by related statistical tables. The statistics all derive from government sources, so they are as good and bad as the data in the NFDIRN publications. Still, many of the maps are vivid and well-constructed, such as the one depicting the Infant Mortality Rates in 1996 (page 95), in which the western districts of Bajura, Bajhang, Jajarkot, Kalikot, and Mugu show the highest number of deaths. (see facing page, centre).

Intriguing and unexpected maps include one on Registered Legal Cases in 2001 and another on Reported Criminal Cases, both of which show significantly higher numbers in the tarai. Are plains dwellers more litigious, at least on paper, or are lowland cases just better reported? Does higher population density play a role? These are just some of the questions which good maps prompt one to consider.

Two other maps which stand out are Map 3 (see above), providing a visual depiction of the Gorkhali expansion of the late 18th century, and Map 4 (see facing page, bottom), which offers the reader a glimpse of a greater Nepal. Sadly, the rich colours and vivdness of some of the maps are also their undoing. Map 51 of Higher Secondary School Enrolment is so dark, that all the shades of blue effectively blend into one, while the varying hues of green in Map 79 on Agricultural Credit cannot be disambiguated from one another, creating an over-saturated mess. I doubt whether Dr Gurung, being a perfectionist, would have found such maps acceptable for public consumption.

The three books under discussion provide important background data on many aspects of the composition of modern Nepal, and will be essential additions to collections committed to the dissemination and production of knowledge on this country.

Mark Turin is director of the Digital Himalaya Project and fieldwork coordinator for the Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) based at Tribhuvan University.
The parties are looking remarkably like the palace

Constancy in change

L
ast week, the compelling sight of the interim legislature being sworn-in obscured one rather important fact. Nepal is now deeper than ever in constitutional never-never land.

To me, there doesn’t even seem to be a government, as such. Of course, the interim constitution has empowered the prime minister with a level of authority that would have pleased Saddam Hussein, but where is the rest of the governing apparatus? The last cabinet was empowered by the previous parliament. This one is to be appointed by the PM. Has it been? If so, when?

Here and There

Daniel Lak

I’m afraid the legal limbo is worse than that. Even if we accept that somehow, seamlessly, the last council of ministers is still in charge, along with His Political Highness the PM, is anyone actually governing this country? For government is about more than simply calling oneself a minister and being ferried around town in a shiny vehicle with a flag fluttering up front.

Governing means leading, forging consensus, finding creative ways to deal with largely unexpected challenges. It means providing inspiration to a people increasingly left out as a new court based at Singha Darbar and political party headquarters takes over from Narayanhiti. The people launched Jana Andolan II to stake their claim to government, not for a re-division of the spoils of power between discredited old actors and scary new ones. They did it for real change, for economic and social justice, for jobs, healthcare, and security.

The various agreements between Maoists and political parties have certainly changed the face of government here. Grey jacketed young women and a few representatives of civil society now sit in parliament. But in public, little else is changing. Ministers—whether legally empowered or not—seldom seem to do anything about their ministries. Or at least, anything public.

Take water. It’s clear that our new court is well and truly behind the idea of developing Nepal’s vast water and hydropower potential, even the comrades. We’ve been here before. It’s patently necessary. Yet all the ‘new’ players seem oblivious to the need for public debate, hearings, discussions, consensus building, and agreement before vital natural resources are exploited. India needs Nepali water and power, that’s for sure. Nepal needs the cash and jobs that would come from sensibly developing them. But who’s at the controls? If deals are afoot and big plans being hatched, why the secrecy?

Then there’s inclusion. The much-heralded interim constitution doesn’t seem to have a lot of friends outside of Singha Darbar’s private meeting rooms. Janajati groups are burning it, women are unhappy, and parts of the tarai are in flames. Yes, this is all to be expected as long-suppressed grievances boil over in the new atmosphere of freedom. But modern politics is supposed to be about dealing with grievance, providing ways—federalism, for example—for people to feel part of their own government. Either the interim constitution doesn’t do that, or no one involved in drafting it has bothered to explain its less obvious strong points to the excluded people.

Nepal has once again produced something unique: a combination of legal limbo and political vacuum. A powerful prime minister is a scary thought. One who forsakes public leadership and openness as the country seethes with impatience is even worse. It’s time for the media, civil society, business, lawyers, professionals, and others to issue marching orders to the Eight-Party Court. Get governing, or else. Make it legal, or else. Or else what? How about Jana Andolan III.
At home, at work

jemima sherpa in dang

Maghi, the start of the new year for the Tharu community, is a time for new ventures. Promises and deals are made good on during the festival, including the decision to send girls to work as kamlaris—girl-child indentured labourers—for the next year.

“The girls have to be rescued during Maaghi, otherwise even a verbal agreement to make them kamlaris has to be honoured,” explains Krishna Kumar Chaudhary, president of Social Welfare Action Nepal (SWAN), a local group working in the Deukhuri area in Dang. Besides active intervention, the project also focuses on education, awareness, and livelihood and income-generating activities, because poverty is a major reason that Tharu girls between eight and 14 are more or less sold into work, mostly as domestic help.

Until this Maaghi on 15 January, over 1,400 girls from Dang were working as kamlaris. Estimates of kamlaris from all five western Tharu districts including Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur, range from 20,000 to 25,000.

The Nepalase Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF), along with PLAN, SWAN, Friends of Needy Children (FNC) and local clubs, is behind a major push to abolish the kamlari practice in Dang. Som Paneru, executive director of NYOF, says over 400 girls have returned to their families this Maaghi. With numbers still coming in from more remote areas, the organisations expect about 200 more.

The challenge is providing community support and opportunities for the girls, as the project only has provisions for about half of them. Still, Paneru is confident that progress is being made. “Within the next year,” he promises and deals are made good on during the festival, including the decision to send girls to work as kamlaris—girl-child indentured labourers—for the next year.

The project will support prevention, preparedness and planning, and response and containment. “This project is aimed at reducing the burden of disease, the consequent economic losses, the risk of human infection, and the loss of productivity attributable to human infections in Nepal,” said Ken Ohashi, World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

The Avian Influenza Control Project is designed to control such infections among birds, especially domestic poultry, and to control and respond to possible human infections, especially an influenza epidemic and related emergencies.

The World Bank last week approved a $18.2 million grant to support the Nepal government’s efforts to minimise the threat posed to humans by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). The Avian Influenza Control Project is designed to control such infections among birds, especially domestic poultry, and to control and respond to possible human infections, especially an influenza epidemic and related emergencies.

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Nepal has not had any cases, human or animal, of avian flu. However, the flu has been recorded in China and India, and Nepal is at high risk because it is on two known migration routes for birds that are known carriers of the disease.

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India can’t wash its hands of the Bhutani refugees in Nepal for much longer

Chased out by dragons

LONG ROAD HOME: Over 100 thousand Bhutani refugees have been living in the camps in Jhapa for over a decade.

No school bus stops here to pick up children. No postman comes here to deliver mail. They are refugees from Bhutan who were sitting for more than a month in front of the United Nations in Kathmandu. The UN gives most of them two square meals a day back at their camps in Jhapa, but compassion fatigue is setting in. “That is the maximum we can do,” says UNHCR representative Abraham Abraham, “it is, however, criminal to keep them in camps for so long.”

The camps have become a base for pro-democracy dissent activity against the Bhutani establishment. The refugees are not radicals. They have never questioned their monarchy, even though their host country might have. But they want to have a future.

It was not any green pasture which attracted them. They were forced to leave their lands and homes. The royal government of Bhutan found them too insistent on the question of democracy and human rights, too restive against laws on language and national dress. They still want to go back to the same setup, confident to overcome the difficulties in Bhutan and work for the country’s development. But neither Bhutan, nor any foreign nation, seems bothered about their future.

After deadlocked bilateral negotiations, the Americans have volunteered to absorb 60,000 of them in the US. The proposal has got mixed responses. Many Bhutani refugee leaders feel that while the offer was welcome, the US should have been exerting pressure on Bhutan to take back its people. Others feel that the proposal is not a long-term solution and could, in fact, act as a destabilising factor within Bhutan and among the refugees.

US ambassador James F Moriarity argues that it is a human problem which required immediate attention. He didn’t react to the plea to remonstrate with Bhutan except to say: “We are in touch with India.”

New Delhi should have been more proactive. An authoritarian regime which is solely dependent on it for defence should have been pressured to get refugees back to their homes. But New Delhi is afraid to even ask questions lest tiny Bhutan should be annoyed and tilt towards the next door China. Bhutan sealed its border in 1950 when the Tibetans were running away for refuge. It can’t afford to lean on China. But diplomatically and economically, India and Bhutan are close to each other and that is what makes New Delhi’s leverage important.

The people or organisations with which I interacted in Kathmandu recently expressed an urgent need for India to take an active role in resolving the refugee issue.

With its tradition of multi-party democracy, its pluralistic society and its role as a leading economic power in the region, India is seen as the only entity which could and should try to seek a solution to this humanitarian crisis. Bhutani refugee leader Teknath Rital says he is convinced New Delhi will not step in to help. His own experience was not a happy one. When he got to the border after being released from detention in Bhutan, he was jailed and given a choice leave India or spend the rest of his life in jail. He preferred to travel to Nepal because it allowed him to live freely and propagate the cause of refugees.

A report by South Asian Human Rights Forum has put the whole thing in perspective: “A major human rights deficit in the South Asian region is the prolonged exile of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal and India. Both host governments have often ruthlessly cooperated with the Bhutanese government in forced repatriation, arrest or denial of freedom of association and expression to the refugees. This tri-governmental alliance has demobilised the Bhutanese refugee population. Their visibility is low and all attempted solutions lack coherence.”

One of the consequences of allowing the problem to fester is the possibility that dissatisfaction and unrest among refugees could overtime drive them to extremism. This could create new conflicts in the region and India could experience negative fallout.
The Devil’s Road, a novel by Tom Vater, is a great read. It’s the story of three 1970s hippies driving a rickety bus overland from Europe through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to Kathmandu. Long on naivety, short on funds, they get involved with a couple of young women, a mysterious Frenchman, a set of Siamese twins who work as cabaret singers, some holy men, and drugs. Big time drugs. The deal they strike in Pakistan, they think, is their opportunity to pay for the entire trip. But get in trouble where it all went terribly wrong in Kathmandu and the money disappears.

Twenty-five years later the hippies return to Nepal, back on the trail of the lost drug money. One is travelling with his son. I won’t tell you what happens next, nor the story’s climax, only that it’s a riveting read all the way from Hunaman Dokhoi to Khumu.

Vater is a good writer with an eye for detail and the ability to set a scene with authentic dialogue and descriptive, somewhere east of Peshawar boy meets girl: “On the wide veranda that extended past east of Peshawar boy meets girl: “On

The Devil’s Road to Kathmandu, Dragon’s Mouth Press, Hong Kong, 2006, 366 pp, Rs 860

Tom Vater has also published a well-received travel book, Beyond The Panjshir Trench: Road Tales from the Wild East (Orchid Press, Bangkok, 2004). It has been described as “a wholly enjoyable book, free of the pomposity that dogs many travelogues and... the antithesis of the coffee table book” (The South China Morning Post).

The Devil’s Road is available at Mandala Bookpoint and Vaja Books in Kathmandu, at Orchid Books in Bangkok, and online at orchidbooks.com or amazon.com.

In the course of their daily investigations, Nepali Times staffers are often on the receiving end of confessions and questions about all spheres of adult behaviour—sticky office issues and messy relationships, but habits and crises of creativity. As a service to our readers, we now refer all quadranguiers of a grown-up nature to Auntie, a wanphil spinster whose colourful past, scepticism, and indescribable wealth of put-downs make her the perfect source of advice and wake-up calls. Please address all queries to auntie@nepalitimes.com.

I have been thinking about being a man for a long time, but I often have evil, dirty thoughts. Do you think there is still hope for me?

Dear G&G,

First, may we compliment you on your devotion. To persist in wanting to take your vows in the face of powerful fantasies is noble indeed. But is it wise? There’s no point becoming a nun if your only meditations are going to be about the sweaty, slippery, and tender body you find yourself still feeling strangely empty, so to speak, you will have to grit your teeth, shave your head, and don the robes. Sometimes, delayed— even permanently so— gratification is the best kind there is.

If you hated the war you’ll despise the justification

One factor that makes the Hand so Foreign is his affliction with the ‘logic syndrome’. Despite a long, mediocrity seeking the ‘entertainment’ that is to ultimately make sense. In a country like Nepal this need can be quite a burden, especially when faced with a civil war completely bereft of rationale.

Imagine his relief when the latest bahun to stalk the corridors of power explained it was all about achieving Federalism. Since previous justifications for this tragic conflict were so mired in unrelated jargon as to be nonsensical, the Hand seized upon this interpretation as a way of finally pulling the nagging question to rest. Within moments, though, the logic syndrome flared up again: was it not necessary to launch a devastating revolution to establish a federalist government?

This current excuse for the Pupil’s War, lame it may be, it establishes another first for Nepal, as the only nation in history to institute federalism through mayhem and terror.

It lies beyond the scope of this diatribe to debate the merits of various systems of governance but well within its range to call a spade a spade.

When the fledging Maoist party saw its demands ignored in 1996, they declared war in a pique against a democratically-elected government. Ten years and 14,000 deaths later they join the same government, ironically composed of the same individuals and parties they went to war with, proving the entire exercise was a disastrous, ego-driven waste of time.

Wanton destruction of infrastructure, torture, murder, coercion and endless extremism going to do with federalist or Maoist centralism. No one attacks police posts with human waves of hapless villagers to establish a series of ethnically-based states, nor do they shut down schools, slaughter teachers or kidnap children for such a cause.

In the hard-bitten world of international meddling, speculation as to how it might have been has no place. Nevertheless, the Hand indulges in the occasional wishful moment (usually on national holidays) between interfering in the country’s internal affairs.

A recent daydream took Tom Vater to a lost decade of conflict, amazed at the amount of energy expended on wrecking the state. Impressive organisational skills were displayed in targeting and destroying the nation’s infrastructure, setting up chains of command, safe houses, munitions supply, kargaros courts, bomb factories, and propaganda centres. The extensive network of spies and informers established to suppress dissent and gather intelligence is notable, exemplified by the highly detailed research conducted before embarking on their recent Kathmandu based extortion drive. The Maoists spent months collecting information on the assets of potential targets (anyone with anything). This required vitality, and paid off to the tune of billions of rupees.

The daydream grew more surreal with the insight these very skills and high levels of motivation could have been used to build the country instead. The extraordinary energy required to conduct a war and organise the people might have been used to build bridges instead of demolishing them.

An impossible dream, of course, shattered by the tawdry realisation that this war has never been about benefiting the impoverished masses, through federalism or anything else. Nepal’s political class across the spectrum has always treated the people as expendable, a medium to be manipulated while grabbing at the throne. This particular power struggle has proven to be no different— just another attempt by a warwane aristocracy to seize power. Once again, the state have pitted the sons of poor men against each other in pursuit of their narrow, self-serving agendas.

Imagine: If ten years of reckless destruction got the Maoists 30 percent of the seats in parliament, a decade of constructive activity might have earned them the respect and votes of the majority. Too late for that now. ❧
Exhibitions

- Mixed media art by Manish Lai Shrestha, until 31 January from 10-6PM, at Newa Chhen Gallery.
- Homage to My Country Exhibition of digital prints by Impress Singh at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 24 January–7 February, from 11-6PM. 4210048

Events

- Vipassana meditation talk program at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor, 1PM on 27 January. 4279712
- Krishnarumri dialogue session exploring human problems at the Mind Body Library, 2-30PM on 27 January. 4279712
- British Film Festival 2007 until 28 January in Pokhara.
- Kathmandu Chorale Rehearsals at the British School, every Monday 7-9PM from 29 January. 5534737
- Singing bowl demonstration and concert ČIGSN Annual Membership Event at the Shankar Hotel, Lazimpát, 5.30 PM on 31 January.
- Civic Concerns Youth Initiative workshop on 3 February, 10.30-5.30PM at PIC, Heritage Plaza, Registration Rs 100 by 1 February. 4107599
- Eco Walk to Changu Narayan, fund-raiser for Antaradri Nepal on 10 February, 10-4PM, Rs 700 for admissions, including lunch and transport. 4249017
- Aarohan Natak Mahotsav 2063 seven plays for three days each until 12 February at 4.30PM at the Gurukul theatre. 4469656
- Salsa workshop Wednesday and weekend classes available for Rs 1,000 per person or Rs 1,600 per couple at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhatbhateni, 4422019
- Hata yoga classes, 7.30-8.30 AM and 5-6PM, Sunday to Friday, 40 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618

Music

- Live music by Rashmi Singh and group at the Absolut Bar, Hotel Narayaní, 26 January, 7PM onwards. 5521408
- Robin and the New Revolution live at Moksh on 27 January, 8.30PM onwards. Rs 200. 5520212
- Open Mic Night at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- Classical fusion music at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards.
- Gane (Gandháthás) perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 668080
- Fusion and classical Nepali music by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800.

Dining

- Walk and lunch every Saturday until 27 January at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel. 4262768, Bhatbhateni (4262587), and Pulichok (5521755).
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at The Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road.
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fireplace at Kilroy’s, Thamel. 4250440
- Shop Talk Drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel
- Café Bahal at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632.
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- Gyakoy lunch and dinner at the Shamala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, four guest minimum at Rs 450 per person. 4412999
- Retro brunch barbecue with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, 12 noon-3PM for Rs 1,000, including swimming and complimentary drink.
- Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs and elaborate cordon bleu meals at Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fireplace at Kilroy’s, Thamel. 4250440
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at The Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road.

Getting away

- Weekend package at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 451212
- Winter retreat three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7,499, 4412999
- Harmony of the mind, body, and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4497224
- Aesthetic living with nature at Park Village. 4375279
- Pure relaxation at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 4361500

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com.
NO AMNESTY: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour speaking to the press during her six-day visit to Nepal on issues including impunity and the tension in the tarai. She urged that there should be no amnesty for perpetrators of human rights abuses.

SOARING: A paraglider practices over Fewa Taal in Pokhara on Sunday for the eighth Nepal Open Paragliding Competition.

ALL HITS: Veteran Nepali actress Tripti Natkar and movie director Shambu Pradhan present the award for best vocal collaboration to Da 69, Aid Ray (holding award), Mausami Gurung, and Kranti Ale for their version of Gopal Yonjan’s Chyangba hoi chyangba at the 10th Hits FM Music Awards on Friday.

TRouble in the Tarai: Violence spread through the tarai despite curfews, leading to incidents like this one in Inaruwa, Sunsari, on Thursday morning, when Madhesi Janadhikar Forum activists torched a vehicle used by the assistant CDO.

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Right. We have it on good authoritarians that the disappearance of rhinos in the once-royal Chitwan National Park bears a direct correlation to the arrival of loktantra and the Girija Restoration. In fact, the rhinos started being killed as soon as two notorious poachers were released from jail by the seven-party alliance in September last year.

Now, conservationists at Kasara tell the BBC Nepal Service that envoys of two "developing country embassies" in Kathmandu are directly involved in paying middlemen for rhino horns at important five-star venues in the capital. Under CITES, envoys enjoy no diplomatic immunity when it comes to poaching endangered species. But that doesn't seem to deter these dogged diplomats.

The allegation has sent tongues wagging all over town about who the likely culprits may be. Narrowing down the search to 'developing countries' has made the job considerably easier. Those who remember how street dogs suddenly started disappearing in the Chobi Ghaut area in the 1980s recall that it coincided with a certain developing country embassy moving into the neighbourhood. This gave the word hotdog a whole new meaning. But with horny ambassadors now smuggling rhino spare parts into their checked-in luggage, there isn't much of a future for what could five years hence be posthumously declared Nepal Extinct National Animal.

Two famous Aishwaryas plighted their troth within a span of a week in India. One of them is a Miss World and the other tied the knot with our very own Devyani. What a coincidence that Devyani's husband's name is Aishwarya, a name that could easily have been her mother-in-law's if fate hadn't so cruelly intervened. Arjun Singh pulled out all the stops for his son's semi-royal wedding. He can afford to, since he is old money and new money all rolled into one thick wad. So what if Nepal is getting rid of its royalty, the Republicans of India are clinging on to theirs. And how come Bhutan's ex-king Jigme got an invite but our ex-majesty didn't? Devyani's Daddy had over 2,000 people on his invitee list but alas the Ass was not on it either.

The Nepali animals that did get to go to the festivities in Delhi were wild boars in the form of bandel ko bath. Bellywood glitterati and assorted Indo-Nepalese royalty were seen digging into the stuff. The proceedings were strictly out of bounds for Delhi-based paparazzi but our mole heard there were 450 Indian princelings at the Gwalior House function and the talk there was all about how the commies are taking over Nepal and what is the left-leaning Government of India doing about it?

So, what's with the moustache, Kingji? Maybe it is just as well that the monarch is not going to grace our bank notes from this year. Too little too late: the royal carcade to Hanuman Dhoka on Basanta Panchami didn't bring all traffic to a halt at New Road for two hours as used to be the practice. Emissaries have been sent to gauge the mood of the political forces about keeping at least a token monarchy. Even the Fierce One got a feeler and reportedly sent word back that His Majesty missed the bus. So, Plan B has been activated: a pro-monarchy julus of nange babas on Shivaratri which is guaranteed to send shivers down the spines of even die-hard republicans.

OK, so the Ass overdid it a bit last week with all that stuff on the UN but that's no reason to stop talking to him at the neighbourhood watering hole is it? C'mon, I was just horsing around. If you'd rather drop dead than be seen consorting with the backside donkey then go right ahead.

Kingdom for a horse

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