The seven-party alliance and the Maoists had a good chance this week to address the madhesi grievances fueling the tarai unrest. And they blew it.

On Wednesday, instead of acknowledging genuine grievances and saying sorry to the families of those killed, and despite emotional references to his own mortality, Prime Minister Koirala delivered a lecture: your protests are delaying the constituent assembly election. Let’s talk, but stop the violence.

Madhesis compared it to the ‘concession’ speech given by Gyanendra last April when he went only half-way in meeting the demands of pro-democracy forces. The parties kept up the pressure until the king capitulated. Something similar could happen now, and the tarai violence could intensify.

The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), a hitherto moderate pan-madhesi group, has become increasingly radical during the course of the protests. It not only kept shifting the goalposts, making it impossible for the government to meet its demands, but also attacked police posts and media organisations. Hours after Koirala’s speech, MJF activists kidnapped policemen in Biratnagar and killed one officer.

The NSP-A may pull out of the government just to maintain legitimacy in madhesi eyes. One of its ministers resigned this week, others could follow.

The Maoists’ own Madhesi Rastriya Mukti Morcha has warned the government of nasty consequences if madhesi demands are not met. Its leader Matrika Yadav is clearly under pressure from constituents to go against the Maoist high command.

The two ex-Maoist factions of the TMM were the original radicals, but find themselves competing with the MJP, Matrika’s group, and even the NSP-A. The seven parties and the Maoists had a chance to check this radicalism before it was too late. But except for the NSP-A, they failed to grasp the gravity of the situation.

No one understood that the tarai clamour is as much about identity as fair representation and justice.

Out of this muddle emerged Koirala’s lame-duck speech. He announced the government was committed to federal rule based on population and geography through the constituent assembly. Electoral constituencies would be redrawn without a reduction in the number of constituencies in each district. This will presumably give the tarai a few more constituencies, but not reduce the number in the hills, taking the total number of CA members to more than 425.

Moderate madhesi may still accept Koirala’s concessions, seeing it as an incremental step in the right direction. But they will likely be drowned out or cowed down by radicals.

Not one madhesi group or individual has welcomed the prime minister’s speech. Not one.

Keep talking       p2

Still volatile     p4

Tari paddhas are now feeling threatened by the gathering storm. People want to get out but the roads are blocked,
Bar none

The Nepal Bar Association has a chance to reinvent itself

Lawyers can play a special role in helping create a legislature that, by including representatives of all zones, classes, languages, and gender, promotes a competitive, decentralized, and inclusive political system.

Despite the new political environment, human rights remains a vulnerable issue. The association has to be vigilant that Nepal follows all UN human rights agreements and respects all provisions of the interim constitution to which we are party. It is the responsibility of everyone in the legal profession to remain unbiased, and the challenge before the NBA is to ensure that no individual’s right to freedom is violated or encroached upon.

One of the most daunting tasks ahead for the association is to make the judiciary genuinely independent and efficient. A judiciary that is independent, efficient, and not directed, can protect the rights of citizens and help steer the country in the right direction when faced with a political dilemma. The association also needs to be represented at the judicial council when judges are nominated, as the relationship between the bar and the bench must be cordial, and law professionals duly recognized as officers of the court.

Other tasks the NBA will have to do justice to include protecting professional integrity of law professionals and producing efficient manpower. The association needs to include women, janajatis, and new law professionals.

In order to meet these various and important challenges, the association needs to evolve, just as Nepal itself is changing and reconstructing itself. There will be considerable negative consequences if the NBA cannot reinvent itself. It needs to advocate the rights of manyefi, janajatis, and women lawyers. Regular trainings and seminars need to be offered so they can hone their skills, the welfare fund needs to be augmented and made to function better, and the human rights and intellectual property sections should be more efficient so there is proportional representation.

By producing efficient law professionals, the NBA can expand the salubrious influence of the legal field. For example, the association can play an important role in developing and implementing laws relating to intellectual property, meeting the legal challenges put forward by international conferences, and training legal manpower which can compete with international law professionals.

Sabin Bhanj Barai is an advocate and the new treasurer of the Nepal Bar Association.

(A version of this article appeared in Himal Khabarpani, 30 January.)

Hour of reckoning

From the fallout of his ill-judged address Koirala must salvage the last chance

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala didn’t make the address to the nation as anticipated. He read a statement Trust and confidence are the full glare of his TV cameras. Though he looked frail, his voice was steady and he seemed in no mood to lose it. The signs of Koirala’s feeble inflexibility are portentous.

Contestations over the controversial provisions of the interim constitution were anticipated, negotiations preceding the April Uprising, different parties had contradictory positions on the country’s

STATE OF THE STATE

post-subsidy politics. Elections to a constituent assembly became an agenda of compromise, but all signatories to the common minimum program continue to hold a grudge against a document they signed under difficult circumstances. The lack of trust between coalition partners was reflected in the draft of the interim constitution. Instead of being a charter of consensus, the statute turned out to be contentious. NC leaders are unhappy because leftist dominate the interim legislature. The UML is sore, it could check the rise of the Maoists. Royalties are alarmed that the king has been sidelined. The interim constitution isn’t even a compromise—it’s a deed of compulsion that the party in power will make sure to keep. The paralysis of democracy is what prompted the Madhesh Janadhikar Forum activists to burn copies of it last month.

The vulnerability of the statute is what made the Madhesh Janadhikar Forum activists to burn copies of it last month. The government is in a bind, so it will not even last 10 days. If there is no statute, the interim government will have to go. The current agitation by shooting dead an activist in Lahan and then beating activists to burn copies of it last month. Law enforcement agencies handled the exigency by involving as many people as possible in decision-making and negotiations. This can be done by probing police and Maoist lapses in Lahan and Nepalganj and punishing the guilty. But it is the Maoists who are most to blame for sparking off the current agitation.

Executing madhesis in the army, dalits in academia, or janajatis in the state structure is a time-sensitive issue. The law enforcement agencies handled the exigency by involving as many people as possible in decision-making and negotiations. This can be done by probing police and Maoist lapses in Lahan and Nepalganj and punishing the guilty. But it is the Maoists who are most to blame for sparking off the current agitation.

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TARAI TROUBLES

The governing alliance in Nepal has woken up albeit very late ("Shadow of a gun", #333). We can cautiously welcome the parties agreeing to state restructuring through federalism, but the issue of proportional representation requires in-depth and holistic consideration. This is because people occupy diverse topological territories vis-a-vis comforts and adversities of life, in general, and in Nepal, we have heterogeneous populations in the mountains, hills, and tarai. So, proportional representation today shouldn’t land in possible ethnic imbalance tomorrow. Let’s hope the 7+1 parties can douse the flames for the time being.

About charges that former royal ministers have infiltrated the tarai agitation, the government must provide valid evidence. But if it is just a ‘cetamol’ step to keep down the tarai fever it may lead to another embarrassing fiasco. So, why not act genuinely to identify covert culprits rather than highlighting tainted royal faces as scapegoats every time?

Pradeepa Sharma, Mumbai

● Responsible intellectual and professional madness can’t shrink from their duty by keeping mum and taking double advantage. While anyone with even a little sense of justice would hardly disagree that the madness have not been included in the Nepali nation state since its inception, no one should forget that the Nepali people are already led up with violence. They’ve not only been discriminated against by the state mechanism but also by ordinary hill people. A child in Kathmandu calling out “Dhaiya, eta aajta” to madhesi vendors is an example. The government has already been directed by the eight parties and other civil bodies to implement all necessary measures to tackle the issues of citizenship and proportional representation. Now the responsibility lies with the madness to stop letting others taking undue advantage. Those spreading communal hatred against pahadis are not the older madhesi inhabitants of the tarai but fake “freedom fighters” who’ve infiltrated the border to take advantage of their dual citizenship. This is going to harm Nepali madness much more in the long run. Instead of voicing their legitimate demands through legitimate means, the movement is taking the path of violent communalism. Still, if the current movement opens the eyes of the madness themselves about caste, faith, and gender discrimination within their own community, it may be a good thing. Social equality and justice are far more important than artificial national unity.

Divas Sarma, Kathmandu

● Kunda Dixit hit the nail on the head by pointing out that the Maoists can’t put the genie of ethnicity and communalism back in the bottle ("Shadow of a gun"). The Maoists can’t put the genie of ethnic composition back in the bottle. The Maoists calling the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum “criminals” and “bullies” is like the pot calling the kettle black. Madhesi Janadhikar Forum “criminals” and “bullets” is like the pot calling the kettle black.

Gyan Subba, email

● I must say if Nepal’s rulers had been reading editorials in your paper and columns by CK Lal in the past four years they’d have seen the tarai crisis coming. Now it’s too late to do anything about it. May Lord Pashupatinath save us all.

Tilak Sharma, email

● I don’t know how you did your arithmetic in your editorial ("Search for common ground", #333). About tarai groups having only 41 seats in the last parliament when they should ostensibly have 112. But even if that were true, and was addressed by proportional representation in future it would be naïve to believe that it would solve the problem. Madhesi activism has now been hijacked by royal Hindus and nothing will satisfy them.

Name withheld, email

Tilak, email
In the central and eastern tarai, rage, determination, and grief

CAP ON IDENTITY: Student leaders of the seven-party alliance and the Madhes Janadhikar Forum burn a dhaka log in Rajbiraj on Monday.

CHARLES HAVILAND in LAHAN

Rano Devi Mahato’s cries rend the air. She weeps, sobs uncontrollably, her breath faltering. She cries for her lost 16-year-old son whose cherubic image stares out of the photo she holds.

She and her grey-haired husband Ravi sit in their dusty yard in a village an hour from Lahan, their palms staring out of the photo she holds.

“They tell me he was shot but Ramesh was safe. But I went to the clinic and saw his body. People say Maoists killed him, but how would I know?”

There are the usual jumbled accounts of what happened. A man stops us near the Mahato home, saying “Then I heard someone else had been shot but Ramesh was safe. But I went to the clinic and saw his body. People say Maoists killed him, but how would I know?”

The highways and tatty streets of the eastern and central tarai are periodically overrun with demonstrators, almost entirely men and boys. By the time of our visit last weekend the demonstrations in Lahan itself had become ritualised and much of the violence had been sucked out of them.

“The pahadis say a madhesi can’t be prime minister,” bellows Krishna Bahadur Yadav of the Madhes Janadhikar Forum (MJF). “Well, I challenge them. They’ve run the federal government is needed now.”

The crowd loves it. Yadav enjoys breathing the fiery rhetoric, egging them on with continual swipes of his arm. He is humorous rather than threatening, but he means it when he says madhesis are treated as “stepsons” and that the federal government is needed now.

At the time of our visit, the demos could only happen outside curfew hours. When there was no curfew, there was a banda—and still is. South of the central chok there are shards of glass scattered all around. Away to the right are burnt-out hulks of perhaps a dozen buses. Nearer, on the left, are massed armed police, ready in their riot gear.
Thirsty for change

Why contracting out Kathmandu’s water supply management is the only option left

Even in the early 1990s, as schoolchildren trudging through slippery lanes, my friends and I sensed something was wrong with the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC). Each monsoon, the NWSC would inconvenience pedestrians by digging trenches on narrow roads to lay down its pipes.

Twenty-five years later, the corporation is still doing the same. Kathmandhu’s residents, more in number today, actually pay the corporation for the water it pretends to supply. But there is a glimmer of hope. After 49 years of the same thing, the Kathmandhu segment of the corporation might be run differently. If that is, a six-year performance-based management contract goes to a private party with international experience.

Predictably, the five politically-affiliated NWSC workers’ unions, with a total membership base of about 2,000, are unhappy. Fearing that they will lose both jobs and influence, they are staging protest rallies, and calling for support. In doing so, they present an opportunity to think about broad and specific economic issues.

The broad issue is this. At a time when Maoists’ stance against private property reigns unchallenged, what nature of policies should Nepal adopt, for everything from delivering essential public services to enabling entrepreneurs to turn ideas into profits? Should the government keep the NWSC afloat with soft loans worth Rs 130 million a year even when the corporation appears to be literally throwing the money down the drain? Isn’t the government better off outsourcing to a private party the core task of collecting, distributing, and billing for water? Doing all these requires a sound management of money, technology, and expert personnel, none of which the NWSC is known for.

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Restive MJF
Himal Khabarparka, 30 January

“Nepal can be a Hindu state only if we are committed to Hindutva.” Those were the words spoken from the podium of a RSS Hindu extremist conference in Gorakhpur on 19 December by none other than Upendra Yadav of the Madheshi Janadhar Forum (MJF). In November 2006, Yadav took part in a meeting in Raxaul of the BJF’s fraternal organisation, Sima Jagaran Manch. The MJF was set up soon after the Gorakhpur meeting and included such personalities as Laxmamari Kama of the royalist NSF as well as republican activists.

There is now uneasiness about Yadav within the MJF. “We can’t deny that our Forum is slipping into regression,” says ex-general secretary and current member of MJF, Jaya Prakash Gupta. Royalists have lately become prominent in the MJF and are given to spouting radical rhetoric. Sources say the Indian Embassy is worried about India being dragged into the controversy, and diplomats admit privately that the BJF could be involved. The JTMM’s Gorkha faction is said to be supported by BJF’s Raj Kishore Singh, while Jwalia Singh is being egged on by Pappu Yadav. The fact that Yadav is being forced to backtrack on the gains made during the ‘People’s War’ and that his movement is now out of the control of the leadership. Says madheshi activist Vijay Kanta Manoj Singh, the son of pro-Indian member of the interim parliament Amaresh Kumar Manoj Singh, the son of pro-Indian leader Ramrajma Prasad Singh.

Upendra Yadav
Singhu, 29 January

The Madheshi Janadhar Forum (MJF) led by its showcase chairman, Upendra Yadav, is currently engaged in violent unrest in the tarai. Who is this man forcing the country to backtrack on the gains of People Power 2006? Sanghu has learnt that he is a flycatcher who has never stayed with any cause and is probably a front for someone else.

But barely a month later, he is now leading a movement for a secular, federal republic. Along with Yadav, the Forum consists of discredited individuals like Sitananda Rai, who was expelled from the UML, corrupt NC leader Jaya Prakash Gupta, royalist Ramdendra who now himself a member of the interim parliament Amarcha Rama Singh, and Manoj Singh, the son of pro-Indian leader Ramrajma Prasad Singh.

No USAID
Abhiyan, 29 January

The United States suspended all aid programs in Nepal after the Maoists entered the interim parliament. The Maoists are still on the Americans’ terrorist list. On 18 January, four days after the interim parliament was convened, USAID wrote to the government and NGOs informing them of the suspension. US officials told Abhiyan that when the Maoists enter the government, additional curbs would be announced. The letter says: “Since the Maoists are now in parliament, you may not provide services or assistance to any ministry, agency, commission, department, court, local government, or other institution of the government of Nepal.” The letter says it is expected that the US government about the definition of ‘services and assistance.’ The agency has verbally warned its partners that if they have any dealings with the Maoists, future aid could be suspended.

The $6.6 million ARD Rule of Law Project is now in limbo, as are support for Transparency International, the Law Society, Sawtee, and Rimek. “We never imagined that activities would be terminated even before they are completed,” said a CIAA official. US assistance is verbally warned its partners that if they have any dealings with the Maoists, future aid could be suspended.

The United States suspended all support for power from the private sector one of the main reasons for loadshedding. The NEA is ready to buy electricity at a higher commercial rate, but doesn’t trust the private sector enough to buy it from them. It seems pretty clear that the authority is not interested in Power Purchase Agreements (PPA).

Nepal’s annual demand for electricity is 60MW [sic]. If the private sector can produce half, or even a quarter of this, the NEA will not have to make large investments. But instead of creating a situation where the

Gymnalm’s takeover, Aid suspension will also affect the National Democratic Institute which had been helping the political parties and the parliament secretariat.

Dark deeds
Bikash Thapa in Kathmandu, 30 January

By next year we will live in darkness for 12 hours a day. Loadshedding will certainly have a negative effect on Nepal’s economy and our lifestyle. But things have not come to this pass because of some natural calamity. This is a situation of our own making, and the king’s direct rule, inconsistent government policies, and bad financial decisions have only pushed us further into darkness. In addition, the unwillingness of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to purchase power from the private sector is one of the main reasons for loadshedding. The NEA is ready to buy electricity at a higher commercial rate, but doesn’t trust the private sector enough to buy it from them. It seems pretty clear that the authority is not interested in Power Purchase Agreements (PPA).
private sector and the NEA could share the burden, the authority, which itself cannot invest because of its outstanding debts, firmly kept the private sector out of the game too. The result is the mess we have now.

The NEA’s official reason for not signing PPAs is the absence of transmission lines. However, the law states that the NEA is responsible for laying transmission lines.

Many people within the authority are always looking to bilateral and multilateral agencies and companies for investments. The NEA needs to change the perception that it is not interested in rupee investment, and can do so by issuing a whitepaper explaining the methods, models, and transmission corridors through which the electricity generated by the private sector could be purchased.

There is talk of setting up a diesel plant. If that PPA is approved, electricity could become as expensive as Rs 31 per unit. The NEA has to join hands with private institutions to address power scarcity.

Graft and riots

Desiantar, 28 January

The government has not yet taken action against the people identified by the Rayamajhi Commission as having been involved in suppressing Jana Andolan II. In the meantime, those accused by the Commission have been found to be involved in communal, ethnic, and religious violence. While Kamal Thapa has been arrested for inciting violence in the tani, we understand that royalist Badri Prasad Mandal, royal chief secretary Lokman Singh Karki, and advisor to the king Satchit Shamsher Rana were also actively involved in stirring the violence in the tani.

Karki is said to have used his sources at the Finance Ministry to raise the money needed to organise the riots. Karki apparently receives commissions on evaded custom’s duties for successful smuggling deals. He also gathers funds using the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (via commission on contracts) and the Supreme Court (via revenue-related cases).

Smoke: Madhesi dissatisfaction

Gagro: Pahadi nationalism

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We are still climbing Mt Everest, it’s just that we are taking a slightly roundabout way by going into the interim parliament.

- Baburam Bhattarai at the Maoist National Training Camp in Chitwan on 20 January

Money talks

Dristi, 30 January

The king surprised the nation by showing up at Basanta Panchami celebrations with a moustache. The Finance Ministry and National Treasury are also surprised, wondering why the palace is not interested in collecting the royal allowance.

The government has allocated Rs 32.7 million in allowances to the royal family, and another Rs 200 million has been allocated for their ‘general expenditure’. Officers at the National Treasury have sent numerous messages to the palace, asking them to collect their allowances, but no one has showed up so far. Our source at the Finance Ministry tells us that the treasury is perturbed by the almost six-month delay—until now, the palace has been in the habit of collecting its allowance in mid-July.

Some speculate that this is because the king is dissatisfied with the interim constitution. Initially, the palace said it would collect the money after the promulgation of the interim constitution. It’s been two weeks since the interim parliament was put in place, but the money is still uncollected.

Others say that the king told the prime minister that since he is going to only be a ceremonial king anyway, the money should be distributed to victims of the Maoists. However, the prime minister did not agree, and the money remains unclaimed.
Inspired by the documentary *Born into Brothels*, which explores how the lives of children from Calcutta’s red light district were transformed through learning photography, with the help of Asha-Nepal, a UK charity working for women’s and children’s rights in Nepal, I decided to run a similar project here.

We started in September last year in Pokhara. My first students were 22 girls, aged six to 16, from SOS Bahini, which looks after girls from desperate situations, housing them with families and putting them through local schools. All are from poor backgrounds; most have lost one or both parents; one was found in rags, barely able to walk or talk.

At SOS Bahini they have blossomed, but, unlike girls brought up in more equal societies, they find it difficult to form or verbalise opinions. Photography encourages creativity and self-expression largely because it is so simple and so immediate. As soon as they got the cameras, the girls snapped away excitedly.

One type of shot prevailed at the beginning: a full-length photo of friends standing to attention. But My World, My View aims to encourage children to explore and capture their world in all its reality, good and bad. The girls soon began to photograph their daily lives, with ‘najik’ and ‘natural’ as their watchwords.

We initially used conventional cameras, but 36 frames and a fixed wide-angle lens were too limiting. Once we moved onto digital cameras with zoom lenses, there was no stopping them. Parvati, who is just six, would return from assignments with 300 shots. She and some of her friends will be here next week to see their remarkable work on show at the British Council. The exhibition is

**Clockwise from top left:**
Parvati, age six, always has a refreshing perspective. She often takes pictures of tourists and has a striking and amusing series of this woman in her glittery kurta and shiny handbag. With the white World Peace Pagoda and blue sky in stark contrast behind her (and Parvati right at her feet) this is a great contemporary image.

Belmaya was thinking of home, she says, when Kamala snapped this candid picture of her lost in thought.

Anju’s shot of Sunita G is captivating. The colour of her kurtha and the earth-red background, along with Sunita’s gaze out of the frame, make this a picture you can keep turning to. Anju is slightly physically disabled and her early shots were of heads and ceilings, so her achievement is all the greater.

Young Parvati again and again gets in close to the action and comes up with an original, winning shot. Because she is so small, people often overlook her, which adds to her ability to take natural, candid shots of people like this one of Sue with Belmaya, left, and Sunita N, right.

Laxmi, 12, was part of the group that went on assignment to Pokhara’s Bindyabasini temple during Dasain sacrifices and came back with great reportage, having shot the temple-goers, incense sticks, idols, and offerings.

The girls love doing close-ups—of existing photos, posters, flowers, food, as well as still likes like this one by Parvati of the personal items of a fellow SOS Bahini girl and her mother.
one of the important outcomes of the project, to validate the students’ talents and worth.

I hope they won’t stop here. As Belmaya, 14, says: “Boys say, this is a girl, she can’t do anything. But I want to lead my life independently and show them I can do something. I’d like to photograph women to show the injustices against them—bringing wood from the forests and carrying heavy loads, while men sit and give orders.” These girls are set to be the next generation of photojournalists.

Sue Carpenter is a journalist and photographer.
Nepal shares much with Thailand. Neither was colonised by European powers. In both places, unique courtly rituals and religious practices have thrived. Thai Buddhism is an effortless synthesis of aspects of Hinduism, a mirror image to faith in Nepal. And then there’s royalty: once both countries had well-regarded constitutional monarchies. None— with even Nepali banknotes ready to see the last of Gyanendra Shah—only the Thai royal dynasty has the respect of most citizens.

That situation may be changing rapidly. King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a popular, even beloved, head of state. But the military coup in Thailand last year that dislodged Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatara has so far been a political, public relations, and economic disaster. Thais know King Bhumibol gave the takeover his tacit support. Some even say his court encouraged the generals to step in to what was admittedly a messy, corrupt, and increasingly unstable situation.

In the past, the Thai king had been renowned for staving off military takeovers, or condemning army brutality against protestors. Back in the days when only military strongmen could run Thailand, the king occasionally mediated between opposing camps of putative dictators. Like Tribhuvan in Nepal, King Bhumibol is also credited with helping establish the democratic system that has since been wiped out in Thailand.

Other eerie parallels abound. The Crown Prince of Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn, has long been seen as a wayward, thuggish womaniser, although he’s apparently burnishing his image as his father grows frailer. The same Thai public that loves Bhumibol is troubled by the prospect of his son ascending the throne. Of course, Thais have to keep these fears to themselves as strict lese majeste laws punish perceived insults to the Crown with heavy fines and jail terms. Here’s one area where Nepal never got so absurd over monarchy.

So what about this new government in Bangkok? Has it managed to make the trains run on time? Fascism is supposed to be good at such things. Alas, it seems that the corrupt and crazy democrats actually ran the country more adroitly than the generals and palace placemen currently in cabinet. Thailand is a mess and all the new ministers can do is look for external sources to blame.

Remember how Gyanendra’s governments went after the press and human rights groups? So too Thailand’s coup leaders. They’re reportedly looking at how to extend lese majeste to cover criticism of the authorities in general, not just the royals. And they’ve found a foreign hand as well. It’s… wait for it… Singapore!

That’s right. A tiny city-state of 4.5 million people threatens a regional power with 15 times the population and a far bigger military.

What’s also becoming increasingly obvious in Thailand is that the rural and urban poor are at odds with a traditional elite and new business classes in the capital. Corrupt and capricious as he was, the ousted prime minister was a raging populist who retains the support of the countryside. In city salons and counting rooms, they sing the praises of monarchy and military takeover. There’s growing inequality and frustration.

It all sounds depressingly familiar to anyone who’s lived through the agonies of recent history here. None of this suggests that the Thais will go through the same travails as Nepal. But their country faces an uncertain future where the sureties of monarchy and centuries of tradition may no longer be enough to keep fear and despair at bay.

Nepal knows that feeling only too well.
GNU

**Unravelling**

isn't arrested soon, through genuine inclusion of troubling, since it suggests that the terrible demons of racial hatred war and violent politics, the Maoists are shocked that others dare from the pulpits of Singha Darbar for his alleged meddling. Hand came a close second to royalty, flayed, with ire fit for a king, scapegoating is one of the few constants in Nepali politics. Foreign illegitimate. The tired accusations of Palace Intrigue showed that stunned and delayed reaction suggests the demands are considered feigned similar levels of righteous indignation. The government’s unity between the seven-party alliance and the Maoists, who all lumped in with Indians for convenience. The use of the term in the exclusive Bahun-Chhetri-centric Nepali identity and were claims of god-given caste-based superiority. Lowlanders had no place appropriate analogy. What tribe forms which part of the beast is for attachment to such poetic images, and suggests the gnu as a more

The acronym is curiously appropriate. The gnu is an awkward beast of the African savannah, a composite of horse, buffalo, and antelope randomly joined in bits, not unlike the dubious nation state beast of the African savannah, a composite of horse, buffalo, and antelope randomly joined in bits, not unlike the dubious nation state being a resource-free country. The Great National Unraveling (GNU) is independence, and form yet another impoverished, landlocked, resource-free country. The Great National Unraveling (GNU) is apparently underway.

The many hill principalities dotted the Himalayas grew less viable as the Mughuls conquered North India, giving Pritish, Narayan Shah an opportunity to unite them into something resembling a country. Later, as the British usurped the place of the Mughuls, their obsolete need for clearly defined borders led to further construction of national boundaries, with little consideration as to who ended up where. The threat of invasion helped the ruling class establish legitimacy and create a desperately needed national mythology centred on the royal family and largely defined by what Nepal is not (ie India). Marginalised jarajas were given subervient roles by the high caste producers of this national creation story and expected to grin and bear it. Pritish's famous description of his country as a bountiful garden of various castes and languages fits perfectly into the myth he did so much to create. Being Foreign, the Hand has no sentimental attachment to such poetic images, and suggests the gnu as a more appropriate analogy. What tribe forms which part of the beast is for readers to decide, according to their own ingrained clan prejudices. National myths are weak, especially when based on spurious claims of god-given caste-based superiority. Lowlanders had no place in the exclusive Bahun-Chhetri-centric Nepali identity and were lumped in with Indians for convenience. The use of the term 'madhesh', though linguistically neutral, often has pejorative overtones implying the supposed 'other' on the fringes of the nation. The outbreak of violence in the lowlands sparked a rare show of unity between the seven-party alliance and the Maoists, who all leigned themselves levels of righteous indignation. The government’s stunned and delayed reaction suggests the demands are considered illegitimate. The tired accusations of Palace Intrigue showed that scapegoating is one of the few constants in Nepali politics. Foreign Hand came a close second to royalty, flayed, with ire fit for a king, from the pupils of Singh Darbar for his alleged meddling.

Having stirred the proverbial pot, these long years with their ethnic-based war and violent politics, the Maoists are shocked that others dare adopt their tactics. The madhesh agitators, whose leaders are all ex-Maoist split-offs anyway, have learnt their lessons from the Maoists’ road to power. We can expect others to follow suit as the threat of GNU gives leverage to any group with a grudge. This spells trouble. The modern state of Nepal is a marriage of convenience between different ethnic entities and should be recognised as such. Placed together by geographical and historical fudge there is no escaping each other, which makes co-operation and mutual respect the only option, if only to avoid the dire consequences of collapse.

Fostering that respect is a mandate our politicians, given their abysmal record, are unlikely to pull off. Blaming the Palace is the best they can manage so far, which begs the question: who will be left to blame for their mistakes in the republic to come. (Answer: Foreign Hand)

That this conflagration took everybody by surprise is especially troubling, since it suggests that the terrible demons of racial hatred are poorly understood by the ruling class. If the Great National Unravelling isn’t arrested soon, through genuine inclusion of minorities into the national polity, choosing which meddler to blame for the ensuing chaos will be the least of our dilemmas. Ja Nepal. ●

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**MOVING TARGET**

**Foreign Hand**

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**Unravelling**

**Great National**

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**NATION**

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**Young fighters**

NEW YORK — The Maoists should immediately begin releasing the thousands of child soldiers in their ranks and cease recruiting more children, says a new Human Rights Watch report. The 72-page report, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists’ Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal* documents the failure of the Nepali government to attend to the needs of child soldiers, and describes how the Maoists have continued using child soldiers, and recruited more children recently, despite signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November last year.

The report is based on interviews with former Maoist child soldiers and Nepali and international monitors, and documents how children as young as 14 served on the frontlines, received weapons training, and carried out crucial military and logistical support duties. Observers believe that up to 4,500 Maoist soldiers were under 18 when they were recruited to fight in the ‘People’s War.’

Meanwhile, the Maoists have consistently maintained that they have not recruited or used child soldiers. “Only when the Maoists, from the top leadership down to cadres on the ground, acknowledge how many children are in their ranks and begin releasing them, can Nepal be confident that their children will no longer be recruited for combat,” says Sam Zarifi, Asia research director at Human Rights Watch. The report says the Maoists have used a variety of techniques for recruiting children—kidnapping, informing, ox-yoke, adopting large groups from schools, and mounting propaganda campaigns to attract children as ‘volunteers.’ In areas of the country under their firm control, the Maoists instituted a one family, one child policy that forced at least one child from each family to join the Maoists.

Until the consecutive, security forces treated children accused of cooperating with the Maoists with the same brutality that they used against adults suspected of having Maoist ties, says the report. “Release from the Maoists’ ranks is only the first step for thousands of children who have missed out on their education or learning how to earn a living,” writes Jo Becker, child rights advocate at Human Rights Watch.

Since 2002, the Maoists have been named in three consecutive reports by the UN secretary-general to the Security Council for violating international standards prohibiting the use and recruitment of child soldiers. On 14 February, a UN Security Council working group on children and armed conflict, is scheduled to consider reported violations against child soldiers by all parties to Nepal’s conflict. The working group will make recommendations for Security Council action.


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**Primate business**

The battle between animal rights groups and organisations trying to export monkeys to the US for biomedical research is set to heat up again. The Nepali Biomedical Centre is trying to obtain permission to export a sampling of Nepal monkeys, both bred in captivity and from the wild.

There’s strong opposition— almost 1,200 people from 21 countries signed a petition against the plans last year. The International Primate Protection League, Animal Nepal, PETA, and Wildlife Watch Group (WWG) are all lobbying hard to reverse the Nepali government’s 2004 wildlife farming policy. The policy allows the Washington National Primate Centre and Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research and their Nepali partners to reverse the Nepal government’s 2004 wildlife farming policy. The policy allows the Washington National Primate Centre and Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research and their Nepali partners to...
Not-so-united nations

Ban Ki-moon's position allows him to push for changed attitudes among member states

Ban Ki-moon has become Secretary-General of the UN at a time when the prospects for conflict between or among the world's great powers—the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Europe, India—are remote. But the prospects for just about every other sort of conflict are high and the international agenda is crowded and demanding.

Ban needs to begin with a cold, hard assessment of his new position. He is more secretary than general. He cannot command. He possesses more influence than power.

Power at the UN is not only divided between the Security Council and the General Assembly, but between the 192 members and the UN itself. The UN comprises sovereign states, but cannot act as if it were sovereign itself. It reflects the ability of the major powers (the US, China, Russia, France, the UK, the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the Security Council) to agree and back up their agreements with resources. If they won't, the UN can act in the most limited way, if at all.

That the world has largely stood by in the face of genocide in Darfur reflects the reality that the major powers are divided. China clings to a notion of sovereignty that allows governments freedom of action within their borders, though today such an unconditional definition of sovereignty is inadequate. Negotiating in New York will not change this. Ban needs to spend time in Beijing, making the case for the notion that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens, and that when they fail to do so (as Sudan's government has), they forfeit some advantages normally associated with sovereignty.

Ban cannot reform the Security Council to reflect better the realities of this era. But he argues that countries such as Japan, India, Germany, and others deserve an enhanced position in it, one more commensurate with their power and status.

He can also loudly and repeatedly make the point that there is no justification in today's world for terror, defined as the intentional harming of civilians for political purposes. Governments and religious, and other leaders must be persuaded to denounce terror, and de-legitimise those who carry it out.

Practical changes are achievable and desirable in two other areas: the creation of an international facility that provides governments access to (but not physical control of) enriched uranium and plutonium for the generation of electrical power. This would help stem the spread of nuclear materials and weapons, and encourage a shift away from the use of oil and gas, thus reducing global warming.

The other area is peacekeeping. Establishing a large, standing international force under the UN's control is not feasible and may not be optimal. But providing incentives for governments to maintain such forces at a high level of alert, and setting standards for equipment, training, and professionalism is something the UN can and should do.

Any secretary-general's most important asset is his voice. What Ban chooses to say, how and where he says it, can enhance his influence which will enable him to get more things done.

All this will be especially important now given the status of the US, which has an often uneasy relationship with the UN. Ban would do well to spend more time in Washington and around the country. The US needs effective multilateralism in a global world in which challenges cannot be met by a country acting alone. It needs effective international cooperation now, when it is stretched militarily, economically, and politically owing to its policies toward Iraq and Afghanistan. Ban's accomplishment could be helping create a more productive relationship between the world's most important international organisation and its most powerful member.

Richard N Haass is author of The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course.
Cyber-tarai

Bloggers offer solutions to the madhes crisis

One day the SPA government says there is the hand of the royalists behind the tarai turmoil, and the very next day they form a committee to find the cause of the chaos in tarai.

Anonymous on Nepali Perspectives http://nepaliperspectives.blogspot.com

Step 1: Street action to amend the interim constitution, get electoral constituencies based on population.

Step 2: Win the election.

Step 3: First president of Nepal, a Madhesi

Anonymous for Nepal (BFN) http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com

The SPA delayed the peace process in the name of ‘arms management’ and is now paying for it through the conflict in the tarai.

-Rocky on Mero Sansar http://www.mysansar.com

What is the model for political effectiveness in Nepal today? Well, since we have no representation, and no elections, street violence and Maoism seem to tell citizens that the only way to get things done is to take to the streets. Witness the madheshi movement in the tarai. Where is there voice in government? Where is there faith in government that was supposed to be established through elections?

-Blogdai on http://nepalnov.blogspot.com

Some are calling the tarai turmoil a ‘holocaust in the making’, others are calling it “ethnic cleansing” and still others have compared what happened in Lahan to Tiananmen Square. This is racism and the factors that are causing this violence are—India and BJP. Hindu extremists like the Shiv Sena, and the royalists. This war will prove more dangerous than the ‘People’s War’.

-AP blazeofglory on Nepalnews http://www.nepalnews.com

Maiki Baje is not surprised that although it has been a week since the Prime Minister invited madheshi leaders for talks on regional grievances fuelling the unrest, dialogue remains as elusive as ever. He says that the seven-party alliance’s doggedness in dismissing the violence in the tarai as a plot hatched by reactionary royalists to subvert the constituent assembly elections is disgraceful. But bloggers like AP blazeofglory on Nepalnews do believe that India and the royalists are fuelling the turmoil.

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-AP blazeofglory on Nepalnews http://www.nepalnews.com

At Blogdai’s forum an anonymous poster is calling the Maoists a modern reincarnation of colonialists who believe in “divide and conquer”. This post says the Maoists are responsible for inciting hatred between madhesis and pahadis as a colonialist who believes in “divide and conquer”. This post says the Maoists are responsible for inciting hatred between madhesis and pahadis as a colony.

Madhesi United We Stand has video of the Nepalganj incident, recent news of what is happening in the tarai, a discussion forum, and a hard-to-miss sign flashing on one side that reads, “I am Madhesi, save me from bullets.” Ram Manohar Sah, a contributor on this forum says solving the tarai turmoil is easy. He says the madheshi needs employment opportunities, agriculture infrastructure, and administrative power, but most importantly what madheshi need is acceptance and confidence in them as people of Nepal. He says by calling them ‘madheshi’ the rest of Nepal is alienating them.

What were the mistakes committed by the madheshi? Why are their own countrymen against them? Sometimes I consider the foreigners who come to Nepal luckier than us because they are here for work and they do not regard this country as theirs. But what about us? Have we ever said Nepal is not our country? Have we never fought for Nepal?

-Nitesh Thakur on Madhesi United We Stand http://madhesi.wordpress.com

Running rings

Saturn’s dark gleam returns, as does flighty little Mercury

The months’ headliner is Saturn, the second largest planet in the solar system. For several months, there were no bright planets well placed in the evening sky. The ringed planet is returning to easy visibility in February when it reaches opposition on 10 February that is, when it is located opposite the sun in the sky. When the sun sets in the west, Saturn will rise in the east. A planet is closest to the earth when in opposition, and so makes for good viewing.

Saturn is near the Sickle of Leo, which imparts an exotic aspect to this well-known asterism. Unlike dazzling Venus and Jupiter, Saturn is faint enough to be mistaken for a normal star though it outsieshines nearby Regulus, Leo’s brightest, by a factor of three or four. The ringed world rises at sunset and is out all night, shining at a bright, though not dazzling, magnitude zero. Small telescopes work well to see the rings, which are more edgewise now than they have been in several years, a circumstance that makes Saturn appear only half as brilliant as in recent years. When it rises on the evening of 2 February, the full moon will appear close above it, and the two objects will stay close together through the night.

NASA’s Cassini spacecraft is sending back some incredible pictures of swirling clouds and thunderstorms from its current trip around the Saturnian system. Also early in February, don’t miss the solar system’s two inner planets at once: the elusive Mercury will be to the lower right of Venus in the twilight. As darkness falls, though, Mercury will set, so make sure you catch it early.

The central landmark of the winter evening sky is the bright constellation Orion, which is currently high in the southeast to south. In its middle is the eye-catching diagonal, three-star row forming Orion’s Belt. The lower left of the Belt towards the brilliant Sirius, or Dog Star, the brightest star in the night sky and, at a distance of 8.6 light-years or 50 trillion miles, the closest star.

Other February highlights:

The Sun is in the constellation of Capricornus at the start of February and moves into Aquarius on the 16 February. Mercury reaches its greatest elongation east of the Sun on 7 February, so there is a chance to see this elusive little planet in the early evening sky. After this, Mercury disappears into the glare of the Sun again, at inferior conjunction (in front of the Sun) on 23 February. Venus is now a brilliant Evening Star, and will put on a spectacular show every evening from now right through to summer. On the evening of 19 February, the young crescent Moon will appear close above Venus. Mars rises in the south-east just as the sky brightens towards dawn, which will make it difficult to see until much later in the year. Jupiter is coming up in the south-east much earlier than Mars. At the start of February it rises at about 4.30 AM, and will be an hour-and-a-half earlier by the end of the month. By dawn, Jupiter is well up in the south-eastern sky.

Meteors: There are no significant meteor showers in February, and it is a quiet time for sporadic meteors too.
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- My World, My View 1 exhibition of photos by underprivileged children, 6-13 February at the British Council. 4410798
- Mixed media art by Munsh Lal Shrestha, until 7 February. 10-6PM at the New Chinn Gallery
- Homage to My Country Exhibition of digital prints by Impress Singh at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 7 February. 11-6PM. 4216046
- Portfolio presentations by various photographers, at the Sundhara Bakery Café, 10AM on 3 February

EVENTS

- Youth Initiative discussion on Mathes – the burning issue, 2 February, 3-5PM at Martin Chautar. 4107599
- Australian Big Day Out reunion, Australian art at Nepal Academy Hall, Kamalati, 3 February at 11-6PM
- Vipassana meditation for today, talk program, 3 February at 1PM at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor. 4279712
- Krishnamurti dialogue session on love, 3 February at 2.30 PM at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor. 4279712
- Aitaibare Discussion Series on Satyaban Pahalara, a novel by Govinda Raj Bhattari on 4 February at 4PM. Martin Chautar. 4383800
- Mangalbare Discussion Series on the representation of women in the interim parliament, 6 February at 5PM. Martin Chautar. 4383800
- Eco Walk to Changu Narayan, fund-raiser for Antardrist Nepal on 10 February, 10-4PM. Rs 700 for admissions, including lunch and transport. 4437877
- Arohan Natak Mahotsav 2063 seven plays for three days each until 12 February at 4.30 PM at the Gunakar theatre. 4466695
- Learn German by playing games with native speakers, every Wednesday, 3PM at the German Info and Culture Centre, Thamel. 9841841230
- Salsa workshop with Binayak and Kati, Wednesday and weekend classes available for Rs 1,000 per person or Rs 1,800 per couple at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhaktapur. 4422019
- Hata yoga classes, 7.30-8.30 AM and 5-6PM, Sunday to Friday, 45 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Bahal Mahal. Revisited. 4356618

MUSIC

- Open Mic Night at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday. 8PM
- Classical fusion music at Jatra, every Saturday. 7PM onwards
- Gaine (Gandharbas) perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680040
- Fusion and classical Nepali music by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien. Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards. Rs 800.

DINING

- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cold meu meals at La'Scrom, Pulchowk, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kíly's, Thamel. 4250440
- Shop Talk Drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4378103
- Café Bahal at Kathmandu Guest House. 4076032
- Smorgateh lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- Gyasok lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum of four guests at Rs 400 per person; two hours order in advance.
- Retro brunch barbecue with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12 noon-4PM. Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink.
- International Brunch weekends. 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5522900
- Te Tibetian delicacies at Nepal’s first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 4258911
- Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kababs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 974100793
- Japanese Food at the Coffee Shop at Hotel Shangri-la, 12 noon-3PM. Rs 499 per person. 4412999
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- Some Like It Hot live music from Side B every Friday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 799 includes BBB dinner. 4475048
- Soul Warriors Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika’s, Rs 599 includes a Fusion platter and cocktail. 4479488
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadside Café, Thamel. 4262768, Bhaktapur. 4456679
- AKK Pizza at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- Moro and Sekuoia Revolution Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680040
- Happy Hour Lost Horizon Bar, Hotel Shangri-la, from 5-7PM. 4412999
- Cocktails and Mocktails daily happy hour. 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road

GETAWAYS

- Weekend package at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights at Rs 8,888 and one night two nights at Rs 4,444. 4453122
- Winter retreat three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7,499. 4443899
- Harmony of the mind, body, and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- 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.
HEARTWARMING: Ang Bahadur Lama of Humla receiving the first lot of 90 packets of clothing for children from schools and families in Kathmandu under the Nyanopan initiative (‘I’m a Nepali first’, #328).

Nepal Airlines captain Vijay Lama is seen handing over the consignment at Simkot airport.

EXHAUSTING: A sea of bike riders are stuck at the Thapathali bridge on Friday as traffic ground to a halt because of a Rastriya Janamukti Party rally from Jawalakhel to Ratna Park on Friday.

CUT DOWN: A woman chops up a tree stump for firewood on the sidewalk near Sahid Gate on Martyr’s Day last Tuesday.

Nothing too knotty

Shyam Badan Shrestha is not afraid of working hard or of taking chances. She’s been doing both since she was a child. After Shrestha lost her father and most male relatives, she and her mother made the decision, unconventional 50 years ago, to live by themselves in Patan. Shrestha would spend the day at school and, because she was good with her hands and money was tight, sew clothes for the neighbours at night. “Sometimes I’d work till two in the morning,” Shrestha remembers. “I had no books, no time to do my homework, I don’t know how I managed to do okay in school.” Shrestha breezed through school and college and in 1972, won a scholarship to study in the UK. She returned a year later to teach at a Kathmandu school. On the side, she devoured the craft books at her school library. “I read everything I could find on handicraft, knot work, macramé,” Shrestha says.

In the early eighties, the handicraft business barely existed in Kathmandu. Shrestha taught herself and, in 1984, started Nepal Knotcraft Centre with two young women she had trained. “When I started the showroom, my intention was to teach, encourage, and give employment to women. I wanted them to learn skills they could use to support themselves,” Shrestha explains. Eighty-four people, for the most part women, are employed at Nepal Knotcraft Centre’s factory in Patan Industrial Estate.

The business has never been static, evolving as Shrestha learnt more. She used to import raw materials from India. Faced with the trade embargo in 1989, Shrestha travelled extensively around Nepal and realised the enormous potential various local materials have. “I found that there are 42 varieties of local plant materials that we can use!” she says gleefully.

Nepal Knotcraft has produced everything from cornhusk dolls to elegant, minimalist steel and paper lamps. Shrestha’s designs and finished products draw on local traditions, but debunk the unfortunately often true image that products of well-intentioned skill development projects have sloppy workmanship and unattractive patterns.

In 2003, Shrestha started the Nepal Resource Development Centre to study natural resources, work with experts to develop technology to turn wastage into commercially viable materials, train women in rural Nepal, and find new markets. If you walk into Knotcraft’s showroom on Kopundole these days, you’re unlikely to see Shrestha. This energetic, positive woman is at work, behind the scenes, studying new fibres, designs, colours, and patterns.

Mallika Aryal
Profound apologies for having cast unhygienic aspersions (Backside, #332) on Nepal's stellar five-star establishments and implicating them in the epidemic of jaundice among our movers and shakers.

A quick round of the wards of Teaching Hospital this week revealed Foreign Minister KP Oli in Room 601 with a bad case of hepatitis. Down the hall was Education Minister Mangal Siddhi Manandhar with typhoid and who knows what. Recuperating at home are Labour Minister Ramesh Lekhak (he hardly made it to the meeting with the visiting Korean Labour Minister on Sunday) and Tourism Minister Pradeep Gyawali. All were suffering from the Yellow Peril, as was Supplies Minister Hridayesh Tripathi, who seems to have been miraculously cured after resigning from his post on Sunday. (As Supplies Minister, he is resigning just as his government is about to be dismantled anyway and before he gets all the blame for failing to ensure oil supply, electricity supply, and water supply. You have to hand it to the guy for his great sense of timing.)

Since some Maoist stalwarts in the negotiating team were also afflicted with jaundice, the Ass put two and two together and concluded that they were infected at the venue of the peace talks between the seven parties and the Maoists. The fact that most senior government secretaries who attend cabinet meetings have also all turned yellow lends credence to this hypothesis. The firm that has the catering contract for Baluwatar is obviously trying to save money washing the salad in the waters of the Tukucha that flows past the prime minister's official residence.

King Gyanendra re-painted his palace pink and shaved his beard on advice from tantriks and is given to inspecting the palace's peacocks clad in kurta pajamas. The 7+1 parties are removing his head from bank notes anyway, but that's probably not why he has been meeting bankers lately. After last week's scare on the Ring Road when tyre-burning followed Prince Hridayendra's motorcade's non-fatal collision with a motorcyclist, Crown Prince Paras has moved lock stock and barrel to Gokarna. The royals are taking it easy as their fundo hangers-on use the restive tarai as a weapon to get back at the loktantriks.

Taking his cue from the paintjob on Narayanhiti, Pushpa Kamal Dahal has also painted his three-storey rented house in Balaju, but olive green. We don't know who advised Brother Number One on the choice of colour, but the camouflage does seem to prove that the military wing of the party is still calling the shots. Faecal contamination could be almost as effective as radioactive Polonium 210.

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