One country two armies

Maoist anniversary coincide with splits in party

PRAKASH JHA
in NAWALPARASI

The Maoists staged a show of military strength to commemorate the 14th anniversary of their revolution on Thursday in a camp in Nawalparasi at a time when splinter groups are threatening the already-rocky peace process. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal told his former guerrillas: “I am not here today as your supreme commander, but as the prime minister.”

He said the PLA would now “in principle” be directed by the Special Committee on integration, and he asked the former fighters to accept this unconditionally “with honesty and responsibility”. Dahal underlined the need to keep the peace process on track by setting up a “new national army” and a “new people’s constitution”.

Significantly, a banner on the stage read ‘Federal Republic of Nepal’—the word ‘Democratic’ was missing. Dahal appeared to be preparing his fighters to the prospect that not everyone would be inducted into the Nepal Army. The Maoist anniversary coincided with new splits within the party. Dahal still controls his army through loyal commanders, but some ex-guerrillas attacking police stations appear to be taking orders from a parallel hierarchy.

On Wednesday, Madhesi Maoist leader Matrika Yadav set up his own party and vowed to “restore the revolutionary Maoist path”.

Past and present splits within the Maoist movement are along regional or communal lines, and by elements within autonomous councils promised ethnic self-determination. Recent attacks on police stations in Khotang, Makwanpur, Nuwakot and Piuthan have been carried out by ex-Maoist groups.

EDITORIAL
The ethnic edge p2

ANALYSIS
Rebel rebellion p10

REPORT
Anarchy in the east p11
THE ETHNIC-EDGE

What is it about our political leadership that they can’t give up without verbally evincing each other, predicting Armageddon, threatening to resign at least three times a week and making apocalyptic self-fulfilling prophecies about unleashing another war on the people. The Maoists dictate the agenda in the CA, direct the government and run the streets through the VCL, student and labour wings. And yet its leadership exhibits extreme paranoia. The reason could be that they don’t control the Tara armed groups, ethnic activists in the masses and going their own thing and the media is insipid. After trying to face the threats head-on, Prachandapath and his team seem to have realized the enormity of the task. They are now pushing the Maoist propaganda machine to a level that is terrifying. The Mohan Baidya lead group is being persuaded to believe that going back to their ‘risky business’ control? If so, it is spin.

Could the Maoists be mobilising their forces to present an image of the people or areas going astray? Or could the Maoists be doing this in an effort to appear as the oppressed masses? If so, they are very good at it. It has been seen that the Maoist leadership will be successful in appearing hardline ethnic militants within their party and put the communal genie unshackled back into the bottle.

That leaves the media. Here, a two-pronged strategy seems to be at work. A section of the media is being persuaded to believe that the Maoists are the true representatives of the people and the government is the false face of the state. Civil society and the international community must press the Maoists hard to complete their transformation into a fully-democratic political force that eschews violence.

Over the past nine years we have warns that Maoist war shouldn’t turn into a caste war. This logic is much stronger when you think that there is a danger of multiple-ethnic conflict along the road.

Mission statement

Press freedom in Nepal threatened

mission was represented by

The Working Journalists’ Act of 1993, which is considered a direct infringement of the right to freedom of expression and urges the stakeholders to allow media professionals and organisations to have a chilling effect on press freedom. Free and open debates are hindered with journalists and media being forced into self-censorship, seriously jeopardising the press and democratic process currently underway in the country. Any substantive grievances over legitimate charges against the accused, who was earlier released on bail. The International Mission also calls for an intervention in the killing of Dekendra Thapa, an environmentalist, and two destroy the country and undermine its development and democracy. The Mission is convinced that the government, through its new constitution, has put an end to the legislative and executive processes.

Letters

CHAiNE

After a long war we had hoped that there would be finally be positive change, but it looks like the government is leading us back to the dark ages in more ways than one (Editorial, ‘Citizen Dahal’, #437). The current crisis is just one example. What if we just stopped paying our electricity bills? Then there is the question of how to allow the media to be gagged. It is a pity that after a people’s movement, sacrifice by thousands of Pakistanis and optimism after the elections those hopes are being dashed. 

S Ranjit, email

Some Nepalis may have really believed the 10-year war and the people’s movement was to improve the lives of the poor. You just look around today and you can see it was all hogwash. Your editorial calling on the Maoists to publicly renounce violence is foolish (Editorial, ‘Citizen Dahal’, #437). The ruling party’s mafia-style unions are crippling the last bit of economy that still survived. There is no doubt about it, the Maoists want a totalitarian regime. Anyone who harbors any doubt on that score (especially the Europeans) are looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. The end justifies the means: threats, intimidation, extortions, murders. Any talk about a democratic process is just a way to buy more time. Nepal’s democracy is under attack, don’t trust a word they say.

Luba Jovina, email

WATT AND WATCH

When you assume that India is the key player in the Mahds, there is nothing left for national parties to do (‘Wait and watch’, #436). This is exactly the wrong base the Panchayats played their politics on and destabilized the NG. Are you encouraging parties to line up outside the Indian embassy or take a plane to Delhi every time the Tara is discussed? Is that what you want the political parties to do? Or are you trying to scare off Pahadis so that the government can announce a war on the people? It is a complete nonsense.

Kamal Kishor, email

DNA PIONEERS

It was good to read about the establishment of a molecular-based lab in Nepal (‘New firm pioneers DNA testing’, #436). However, the swab samples of the dead chicken from poultry farms in Janakpur were tested in Nepal in the swab samples of the dead chicken from poultry farms in Jhapa was tested in Nepal and would indicate the presence of H5N1. These tests are available in Nepal’s Central Veterinary Laboratory first and found positive. The samples were then sent to the UK for confirmation of the tests. RT-PCR is the fastest way to test for avian flu virus among many others like H5N2, H9N2 and H7N3. These tests are being conducted at Nepal’s Central Veterinary Laboratory.

Kajal Shrestha, Research Scholar, GADVASU, India

CONGOING

I am disappointed in Nepali Times for publishing what appears to be a sponsored six-page promotion on housing complexes. As a neighbour of one of these upcoming ‘iconic creations’ I assure you there is no attempt to develop them as responsible, integral parts of the local communities. There is not even a proper access road, the designs are not environmentally friendly, no attempt is made to develop the local economy. The socio-economic colonies introduce their own traffic jams, food delivery, clubs, and other facilities so these new neighbourhoods lead an isolated, parasitic lifestyle behind mighty walls, while the communities suffer increased water shortage and increased noise and waste pollution, blocked roads and loss of view. Condominium owners might have bought ‘complete peace of mind’, ‘an enticing lifestyle’ and ‘lush green ambience’, but that is exactly what they took away from us neighbours.

Ludia de Vries, Dobighat

Letters
JANAKPUR—In a town associated with the process of personal growth, childhood memories ride on waves of nostalgia. Until the late fifties, this sleepy hamlet woke up only during Bibahpanchami—a festival to commemorate the marriage ceremony of Janaki with Ram. All through rest of the year, priests, ascetics, and devotees took dips in its innumerable ponds several times a day and chanted sonorous prayers at neighboring temples even more often. The town was clean and garbage-free.

By the late-sixties, the once docile crows were as aggressive as the Russian technicians at the Soviet-built cigarette factory. The ubiquitous pigeons were driven away from the temple cornices. Janakpur was now a budding industrial town with diesel-powered electricity, piped water, an airstrip and a highway—all of it built with Indian assistance. No arrangements were made for the safe disposal of household waste. Almost four decades have passed, but the town still doesn't have a sewer system or any form of solid waste management.

By the seventies, students from neighbouring districts had begun to flock to Ramswaroop Ramsagar (RR) Degree College as standards across the border deteriorated with the introduction of Karpoori Division—a category that signified ‘passed in all subjects except English’. Right up to the referendum-induced euphoria of early eighties, RR was considered one of the finest centres for science education in the country. And then came the era of student politics directed, controlled and run personally by Anchaladhis. No one speaks for the quality of RR students anymore.

The Eighties belonged to titans of vote-bank politics. Hem Bahadur Malla ferried truckloads of poor devotees to Pashupatinath, Bhola Nath Jha campaigned for building more Hindu temples and Yadav was the leader to influence the election outcome. Crony capitalism created ‘import-export millionaires’ who continue to dominate social life in the town.

Winds of hope swept the town during the People’s Movement of 1990, only to be blown away with the hard realities of nepotism and favouritism in the distant capital. A new class of fixers emerged who made a comfortable living through their connections with the centres of power in Kathmandu. Many have since emerged as NGO-entrepreneurs and infiltrated the town. They were nowhere to be seen when one of the first and biggest anti-Gyanendra rallies was organised here prior to the Rhododendron Revolution.

When supremacy of the people was restored and mainstreaming process of Maoists was initiated, hopes were high that the long-neglected Mithila would finally get its due in national life. But once again, the new ruling class refused to address long-standing grievances of Madhes. Janakpur became the epicenter of the Madhes Uprising. Its success has since secured the NC nominee in Shital Nibas, MJF leaders in Singh Darbar and the TMLP stalwarts in the CA. But did the city and its residents get anything for their tireless efforts? The unresolved issues remain.

When the Janakpur-Jayanagar Railway is extended northwards and the BP Lokmarg finally joins the East-West Highway with Kathmandu, regional commerce too will probably shift to Bardibas. Janakpur will then once again be a backwater and have to look for a new role and identity.

In myths mixed with history, the capital of King Janak was known for its devotion to the search of knowledge and that’s a role this town is best suited for. Janakpur needs to revisit its origin and develop a Yagyawalk centre of excellence for higher learning in a tribute to the sage who propounded the theory that wisdom comes from mixing materialism with spiritualism.

A town lost in transition
The capital of Mithila still searches for a purpose

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Back to square one
Expect another Madhes movement by April

If the Integrated Services Centre fiasco has taught us anything, it is that the Madhes is back to the period post-January 2007 that was characterised by a clash between the state and Madhes between the Maoists and Madhesi parties and between Pahadis and Madhesis.

The last four weeks have been a repeat. The government decided to set up the service centres as a supplement, not replacement, of the district administrative office for people living far away from the district capitals.

In the Tarai, the decision had another motivation: The Maoists followed a ‘highway strategy’ during the polls and got votes from Pahadis in the northern belt. They wanted to deliver a tangible benefit to this constituency, which is increasingly fearful of going to the southern border towns to get paperwork done.

The TMCP started the agitation. The NC was looking for an excuse to discredit the government. And Madhesi civil society, which has bitter memories of how the state has systematically favoured hill migrants, got suspicious.

After three weeks of protests, the state had to put the decision on hold. This in turn triggered a mirror agitation, largely but not exclusively by Pahadis, up in the north, demanding the implementation of the decision. The government was in a Catch-22.

What is significant here is the unstated admission by the state that it is a difficult for Pahadis of the northern belt to go down to the district headquarters. This was an almost formal recognition of the communal divide. Instead of working towards bridging that gap, the state announced separate service centres which would only reinforce and legitimise that gap.

This was not just an ethnic issue. There are hill-origin people in district headquarters and there are Madhesis in bajas like Bardibas and Nikol. In fact, even a TMCP member was leading the struggle committee near the highway asking for its implementation. Baribas activist Nagdev Yadav says: “I am a Madhesi from the highway and I want this centre. The problem was the state did not explain the decision. And Madhesi leaders were opportunistic.”

But few have time for these nuances, and the message that has gone out is that this is a Pahad-Madheshi issue, where the Maoists and UML are on one side and Madhesi parties on the other.

Despite efforts by ministers and officials to clarify that this decision was not a precursor to shifting the headquarters, Madhesi did not believe them. They went by the inflated propaganda of the protesting parties and supported street protests in Jaleshwor and Kalaya against the decision. This should tell Kathmandu as well as the state announced separate service centres which would only reinforce and legitimise that gap.

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Service (not) included

We still don’t understand the link between good service and revenue

Last week, when the Beed was taking a few friends out late one evening, it was shocking to see a city that should be gearing up to receive hoards of visitors in the next few years in a manner unfriendly. Restaurants were behaving as if they were doing us a favour by even letting us step into their eateries. A five-star hotel refused even letting us step into their premises when we told them it was still half an hour till their official closing time. In the bid to share out the service charges, establishments have created a monster that they cannot tame. In the mythology of splitting that 10 per cent, both the establishment and the workers have lost the focus on the person who actually pays them that 10 per cent.

Nepal orientation towards service is traditionally very poor. Look at our tax offices. The people who pay taxes honestly are penalised. Why would someone be willing to pay the highest tax rates when one can find away of investing the taxes to be paid over many years and get away with paying just 10 per cent? What is the additional service one gets from the state for diligently paying taxes? Similarly, when you go to the offices of the Employee Provident Fund, you are not treated as a customer. Like the restaurant owner, the state seems to think it is doing you a favour by keeping your money. It takes ages to get your own money back, and one has to bribe the official with tea money just to withdraw one’s own hard-earned savings. The dis-service issue is everywhere. You take a cab and pay a horrendous amount that has no correlation with the price of petrol. You pay a high mobile phone tariff to use your gadget as an anticipated pager. You pay for cable television and never get to watch anything because the cable operator does not have backup power. In fact, the state electricity utility, which provides power only eight hours a day, is just a backup power supplier. You pay the highest airport tax in the region and never get to enjoy your luggage. You pay for food products and the weight on the packets never matches the weight of the contents. You hardly question why yogurt prices shoot from Rs 40 to Rs 68 per litre in a span of months. When you run out of mains water because there is no electricity to pump it at the allocated time, you patiently wait four days for a tank to be delivered, but it doesn’t turn up.

If the Nepali economy is to grow then businesses must seek to understand the wants and needs of the customer. Businesses and the government are to start generating revenues, they need to take care of the customer who holds the purse strings. Nepal Tourism Board as well as the numerous tourism bodies and hospitality entrepreneurs could start by taking a long hard look at themselves before springing into action.

In this new republic, customer may not be king, but customer should be president.

www.arthabeed.com
Piuthan attack
Editorial in Naya Patrika, 10 February

The Maoist-style attack on the police station in Piuthan and the shooting of Prime Minister Sushil Koirala by a Maoist terrorist on Saturday indicate that the Maoists are taking a new shape. Nepali society is just coming out of the brutality of the 10-year war and violence has not yet abated in the Tarai. Those responsible for atrocities during the war are still free. There has been strong political polarization after the Maoists came to power. Now, there seems to be an effort to push the country towards civil war by the anti-federalists and those who define federalism only through ethnic chauvinism, anti-republicans and criminals, religious fundamentalists and revisionists. The government must act strongly against these elements and end impunity, otherwise this country will slide into chaos.

Modern day slavery
Nepali women are paying brokers to be sold to Korean ‘husbands’

Sunil Neupane in Himal Khabarpatrika
29 Jan - 13 Feb 2009

A Himal Khabarpatrika investigation shows that ‘marriage bureaus’ that advertise in the papers are selling Nepali girls to Korean men who are married to elderly farmers in rural Korea.

Two undercover women reporters posing as prospective brides were asked last month for Rs 500,000 as a facilitation fee to be paired off with a Korean man who would take them to Korea. Some women have paid up to Rs 1 million to brokers to be married so they can go to Korea to work. But once they get there, they are sold off to Korean men to work like slaves.

Dawa Sherpa, 22, from Nuwakot paid to be married to a 32-year-old Korean man so she could go to Korea. When she got there, he held her by the hair and physically assaulted her. After she ran away, she was sold ‘as is’ to another Korean man. Twenty-one-year-old Shanti Magar from Baglung paid Rs 1 million to a marriage agent in Kathmandu to be married to a 35-year-old Korean man. Two years later, when they got to Korea, he sold her to a 55-year-old man who made her work in the fields. Dawa and Shanti are among many Nepali women who are so desperate to migrate to work in Korea that they are willing to get married to Korean men. Little knowing that they will be sold to older, handicapped farmers who are willing to pay to buy young women to do household and farm work and provide sex.

This modern form of slavery has been seen with other ‘Asian brides’ in the 1960s in Japan and Korea with women from the Philippines and Vietnam, but as rules were tightened the trafficking has moved to Nepal. The girls are trafficked in three principal ways. The most common is for a young Korean man to come to Kathmandu to marry themselves, buy a girl from a Nepali broker, marry her and take her back. The second method is for a Nepali woman to pay an agent up to Rs 1.2 million to go to Korea and get married to a Korean man. The third method is for a foreigner to come to Kathmandu themselves, buy a girl from a Nepali broker, marry her and take her back. The third method is for a Nepali woman to pay an agent up to Rs 1.2 million to go to Korea and get married to a Korean man.

Nepali newspapers are full of advertisements from marriage bureaus inviting Nepali women to get married to Koreans. Although the ads all say the women don’t have to pay any fee, they end up paying between Rs 500,000 to Rs 1 million. The brokers then get paid by the Korean intermediary.

The ads also make exaggerated promises: that the women can get Korean citizenship within two years, that they can earn lots of money and take their family members to Korea. The girls are then sold, raped and sold again when they get to Korea. The ‘bridegrooms’ arrive on the bi-weekly Korean airlines flight in Kathmandu, get married in a church or a temple, get a marriage certificate and they then go back to Korea and within a few months they start necessary documents for the girls to get their visas.

A Nepali woman, who has spent up to Rs 1.2 million to get married to a Korean, is married to a handicapped old man when she gets there. There are many cases like this,” says Manju Thapa, a Nepali student in Korea. “There are even cases of Nepali husbands who have paid brokers to get their wives married to Korean men.”

Gangs pay a broker to work in a restaurant in Korea, but the man she was handed over to started beating her up when she refused to be married to a Korean man. Her visa has now expired and she is being blackmailed. “She and another Nepali woman fled the village of Chung Sung Namdo to Seoul, but there were 22 other women like them,” a Nepali woman in Korea, Bambahadur Lawati, told Himal.

The government in Kathmandu is either ignorant or doesn’t care about the plight of Nepali women. A young woman from Khotang who was cheated by her ‘marriage broker’ filed a case with the police in Maharganj, but the investigation has never been pursed.

There are now over 300 Nepali ‘brides’ in Korea, but the Korean embassy in Seoul says that since the Nepali women become Korean citizens after marriage, it is a problem that the Korean government should resolve.

A Korean social worker who was in Kathmandu recently, Cecilia Lee, said: “If something is not done, there will be widespread exploitation of Nepali women, they will suffer like their sisters from Philippiines, Vietnam and Indonesia has suffered.”

Pay or not pay
Annapurna Artha, 9 February

The private business sector, which had hoped to work hand-in-hand with the Maoist government, feels greatly let down. Business leaders now feel that even documents they submit to the government will be used against them. Although the voluntary disclosure of income source (VODS) scheme has been welcomed, businessmen fear that if the Maoists lose the next election and enter opposition they will again have to battle the terror of extortion. The business community is incentivized enough to get together to launch a joint campaign. They are asking: why should we pay taxes to the government when we already bear the burden of the war?

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Federalism isn’t a zero sum game

The solution is to go for a compromise mixed-model of federalism

Federalism is the most holy debated, and most misunderstood, issue of the current political-making process. Political parties, pressure groups and individuals are coming up with their own competing federalist models. What complicates things is that the politics of identity is difficult to reconcile with Nepal’s multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and geographically diverse country.

Everyone knows that the independence of the Dalits and the Tarai communities have been historically marginalised by the state. Since April, voices calling for inclusion, participation and proportional representation in state policy have been raised. Most of the proposals for a federal structure are based on ethnicity, while there are counter-proposals for including not just ethnicity, but languages, territory and natural resources.

In a country like ours where there are many castes, religions, cultures and geographic regions, there has to be more than one criteria to create federal units. Demarcating federal units based on geography or ethnicity alone would be neither workable nor acceptable.

Those who proposed provinces on the basis of ethnicity argue that the size of the population is not important. But such a proposal would be difficult to implement because of overlapping ethnic composition of proposed provinces.

Alternatively, those who propose a geographical demarcation have proposed mountain, hill and Tarai provinces.

The problem with this is that there is ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical diversity within these regions.

The solution is a mixed model. For example it would be workable to base Limbuwan, Khammawal, Thahalising and Mithila on geography. The provinces could be based on language and culture, with representatives from all ethnic, religious and linguistic communities. The solution is to make an informed choice and agree on a solution after consulting with the stakeholders so they can make informed choice and agree on a solution.

Kathmandu is not only the country’s capital but also it also represents the unitary central state in a federal structure. For the simple reason that it should be purely an administrative unit which should be neutral and non-political.

The right to self-determination of federal units should be unregulated as regional ethnic autonomy to develop political, economic, social and cultural rights while national unity, sovereignty and regional integrity.

The main purpose of the new constitution is to end the Maoist conflict and establish a centralised unitary state under a federal republic. The challenge is to reconcile competing demands in a spirit of compromise. This is not a zero-sum game, everyone should win and learn to accept alternatives. Today’s real issue is to make the state structures pro-people so that Nepalis can take control of their own destiny and improve their living standards.
HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

YOU AND YOUR VALENTINE ALWAYS CONNECTED!!!
It’s 1AM and Kathmandu is asleep. But inside a small room in Nardebi, six boys are hard at work manufacturing cotton candy.

The pink candy floss looks fluorescent in the dim light as one boy tosses dyed sugar powder into the machine while another twirls swips of candy with two sticks like an expert knitter. Some boys pack the candy into plastic bags while others fasten the end products on a clothesline hanging across to an adjoining bedroom.

The boys are aged 9-13 and are from Rautahat. They were sent to Kathmandu by their parents to look for work to supplement the family income. Due to load shedding, they have no choice but to wake up at irregular hours to prepare the candy floss.

A fellow villager, Dinesh Yadav, owns the ‘factory’ and takes charge of food, lodging and allowances for the boys. When he finished college, he bought a cotton candy machine in India and launched a small business venture to support his family here.

At dawn, the boys prepare and eat their meals before leaving for work with about 60 candy floss packets dangling from a stick. Priced at Rs 10 each, the packets sell fast, especially during festivals. Regardless of the sales, the boys receive fixed monthly wages: the younger ones earn Rs 1,500 and older ones up to Rs 2,500.

Some of the boys have spent at least three years away from their families and are homesick. But their optimism for the future helps chase the blues away. Some have ambitions to work in a clothes factory to fund their education.

Says 13-year-old Gopal Sah from Kesaiya: “I hope to earn enough money to work in India someday.”

Kids selling candy floss work 18 hours a day for their future

A fellow villager, Dinesh Yadav, owns the ‘factory’ and takes charge of food, lodging and allowances for the boys. When he finished college, he bought a cotton candy machine in India and launched a small business venture to support his family here.

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HOPE FOR SALE: Some of the boys harbour ambitions of earning enough money to leave the trade and seek better opportunities overseas.

Gobinda sells cotton candy daily in front of the Jawalakhel Zoo.

With their tall candy racks, these boys are hard to miss around town.

Sweet dreams

TEXT and PICTURES by KONG YEN LIN
Rebel rebellion

Danger not just to the peace process, but of a brewing ethnic conflict

The attack on the police post at Syaulibang in Piuthan on the night of 7 February was reminiscent of the war years. The raid was timed for the 14th anniversary of the start of the insurgency, and was a reminder of how close this country is to an ethnic conflict.

Discontent within the Maoists has been brewing in Rolpa ever since the ceasefire. Two Maoist politicos were killed in Gam during elections last year. Even today, nothing much happens in this eastern region of Rolpa without the permission of local Maoists.

The Piuthan attack is also the latest in a series of raids on police posts in Nuwakot, Makwanpur and Khotang in which weapons were captured and local ethnic splinter groups of the Maoists have been involved. In Piuthan, M16s were used and a policeman on sentry duty was killed.

The danger here is not just of a break-down of the ceasefire, but of igniting an ethnic conflict. The Maoists encouraged the Magars of the neglected mid-western hills to lay down their lives for liberation and self-determination. It was with crucial support of marginalised ethnic groups that the Maoists waged war, won the election and are now in government in Kathmandu. Now, these ethnicities feel they were used as cannon fodder and that their own party in government hasn’t shown much interest in redressing past neglect of the midwestern hills where the revolution was born.

At one level, these dissident former guerrillas are inspired by hardline leaders in the Maoist central committee, who have their own ideological disagreements with the party leadership. But at another level, they are working within the ethnic state councils that the Maoists set up during the war and used as effective veto-gathering mechanisms during the election by promising autonomy. Other dissatisfied combatants have taken to organized crime and are involved in extortion, murder and kidnappings.

Ethnic-based splits within the Maoist movement aren’t new. Nearly all the Madhesi militant groups in the Tarai are former Maoists. The Limbuwan and Khambuwan unrest in the east is also steamed by former Maoists. The Tharu groups in the west have set up their own army after splitting from the Maoists. Some of them are using the same slogans and military tactics that the Maoists taught them during the war. The Maoist-led government at the centre doesn’t seem to know how to deal with the many brewing mutinies. There are more than two dozen armed groups in the Tarai alone that are putting pressure on the government with competing demands for autonomy and representation.

The Maoists, weakened in the ten-year insurgency, are using the same slogans and military tactics that the Maoists taught them during the war. In the mid-western hills, the Maoist movement aren’t new. The Maoist leadership realises what is sure to be a much more virulent multi-ethnic war. The coming crisis, of which Piuthan was just the latest reminder, points to a much more complicated multi-armed conflict waged by revolutionary groups whose identity and struggle are based on ethnicity, region and language. They are all inspired by Maoist ideology and are backed by senior figures within the party hierarchy.

Groups that have ‘split’ from the Maoists are organising their own national convention in Kathmandu in March, and it will include armed groups. The Maoist leadership urgently need to formulate a contingency plan for the day when these forces unite to wage what is sure to be much more virulent multi-ethnic war.

Cover: Tripartite struggle within the UML
Who will the cadre choose to lead the party?

Editorial:
End this messy transition

Report:
One country two armies
The Maoists failed to dictate to the army in the guise of civilian control

Eye-witness:
Illegal Nepalis in Hong Kong

Constitution 2010
What all parties agree on
Interview with CA chair, Subhas Nembang
Multilingual Nepal in the new constitution

Himal Khabarpatrika
12-26 February
Anarchy in the east

All the disparate groups of young men share making threats of violence

DEEPAK RAUNIYAR in PANCHTHAR

An interaction in Panchthar last week, local journalists were discussing how the struggle for Limbuwan autonomy was affecting their community. One woman participant burst into tears, another became very emotional and couldn’t reply. There was silence in the room.

In private they said friends had stopped speaking to each other, journalists were self-censoring because they were afraid of the militants. The journalistic community is itself getting polarised between Limbu and non-Limbu.

We got an inkling of the lawlessness of the east as we crossed the Kosi in a ferry. Six hundred vehicles were queued up to cross the river where it breaks out into the plains. A man claiming to be from the Khambuwan Rastriya Morcha approached us after he found out we were journalists. “Don’t forget to write my name in your report,” he ordered, “it is because of me that you got across today.”

Further east, we meet Sanjuhang Palunwa, leader of the Federal Limbuwan State Council in his home at Birtamod. He is supposed to control the Limbuwan Volunteers (LV), who were enforcing a new tax on businesses which had to register with his ‘government’, even though there seemed to be no mechanism to use this tax. Palunwa is fed up with the ruling party not listening to his group and the government not taking it seriously and has launched a series of protests in the east.

Even before the demarcation of the federal units are discussed, eastern Nepal is already carved up by the overlapping claims of various ethnic groups. There are more than 17 Limbu groups with different agendas. And then there are the Kirat and Khambuwan, Madhesi and the Rajbanshi of the Kochila. Even the Lepcha want their own Rong province. It’s hard to see how these conflicting demands will be reconciled when the slogans are so uncompromising and are being enforced by threats of violence.

There are moderate voices, like that of Satendra Jabegu, the Ilam district president of the FNJ, who used to be with one of the Limbuwan groups. He feels that dividing up the country along ethnic lines is wrong and that we should be careful about federal boundaries and the names of the new units. There are many here who agree with him, but their voices are getting drowned out in the clamour of the radicals.

The highways in the east are always blocked by one group or another protesting one thing or other. In the event that the roads are open, vehicles have to pay taxes to myriad militant groups. Every car that goes from Phidim to Jhapa has to pay taxes in at least three places to the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Palunwa), the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Lingden) and their respective sister organisation Limbuwan Volunteers, and Uppalo Kirant.

On top of all this, there are taxes collected by the DDC. The main cash crop of the region is cardamom and the DDC collects Rs 75 per sack, while merchants have to pay Rs 100 to various Limbuwan groups. Some truckers said even the police got a cut.

“The Limbus are also not happy,” said the group’s leader Manraj Jabegu in Ilam, “we are helpless that the police are not helping us control this extortion.” We put this to Panchthar CDO Dullu Singh Basnet, but his reply was: “We have no order to apprehend them. We can chase them, but we are not allowed to catch them.”

The next morning while returning from Phidim, we encountered a group of Limbuwan Volunteers in Ranke. There were five young boys carrying long khukuris and were asking for money from every vehicle and motorcyle (see picture). As we reached Sunsari we ran smack into another highway blockade, this time by the Tharu Kalyankari Sabha. After being stuck for days, we hit another obstacle in Nijgad organised by Chure Bhabar. The only thing these disparate groups of young men carrying rocks, sticks and knives had in common was that they threatened us to publicise their agitation in the media, or else...
Obama and Af-Pak

American policy needs to take into account Chinese, Saudi and Iranian interests

PARAG KHANNA

Despite the flurry of American activity in the region, it’s by no means clear that Washington is any closer to understanding the dynamics in South-Central Asia. To fix Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak), the Obama administration will have to go regional—and, crucially, look beyond the usual suspects for help, even if they are not naturally inclined allies.

We all know that Pakistan is a vital piece of the puzzle, but consider for a moment the consequences of a strategy that lacks a regional element. If the additional 30,000 US troops being deployed in southern and eastern Afghanistan succeed in pushing Taliban fighters into retreat over the border into Pakistan, they could destabilize the country’s already volatile North West Frontier Province, which is almost as populous as Iraq. US troops would be squeezing a balloon on one end only to inflate it on the other.

Meanwhile, few carrots from a pro-democracy Obama administration have diminished the Pakistani military’s willingness to support American priorities, evidenced by a sudden increase in attacks on NATO convoys in Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. Centcom is scrambling for new routes through Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. As was the case under the Musharraf regime, the Pakistan Army is more interested in American planes than policies.

But China, Saudi Arabia and Iran are also becoming increasingly important—not as neighbours of the chaos but as mediators in it. China has become the largest investor in Afghanistan, developing highways to connect Iran and the giant Aynak copper mine south of Kabul and financing the deep-water port at Gwadar on Pakistan’s Arabian Sea coast.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, is widely thought to be funneling unquantified sums to Wahhabi mosques and the Taliban, and the country’s leadership is breaking the US’s negotiations with the Karzai regime. Iran is building electricity plants to meet Pakistan’s growing shortfall. More importantly, the country is renewing efforts to construct an Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, which both Pakistan and India badly need. Cooperation will have its price; the Obama administration may face greater pressure from Pakistan to lift US opposition to the IPI pipeline. The US may also need to appeal to Iran to allow access to Afghanistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar and the Indian-built Zaranj-Delaram highway in western Afghanistan that connects the country’s ring road to Kandahar and Kabul.

One way to align Afghanistan’s and Pakistan’s regional partners would be to follow a regional security model. It must begin with a joint Afghan-Pak force empowered to conduct operations on both sides of the border. At the same time, the US will have to accept Afghan and Pakistani negotiations with Taliban commanders.

These are just some of the trade-offs necessary to encourage a thaw with Iran, monitor China, stabilize Afghanistan, encourage political reform in Pakistan, and placate insecure India. If the US cannot negotiate a modus vivendi among the nations and rivals of South-Central Asia, then perhaps China will.

**Musical revival**

Eighty-six year old Lure Gandarba (pictured) still recalls days when he carried his sarangi and travelled with his music. “We used to go from house to house and play our songs. We even carried messages from one village to another,” reminisced Lure.

Lure was the oldest sarangi player in Music of the Gods: The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal’s Musical Customs, a concert organised last week by the UNESCO in collaboration with the Gandarba Culture and Arts Organisation, the Music Museum of Nepal and Creative Statements.

The three-day festival brought together over 35 artists from Gandarba, Badi and Damai communities from all over Nepal. The festival featured an exhibition of musical instruments, film screenings and the heart-touching sounds of sarangis and mandals.

“When it comes to music and dance, no one can beat the three (genres).” Lure is a perfect example of this quality.”

In fact, with the gratuitous displays of masculine physique on the part of Hugh Jackman, his latest work, albeit without much singing and dancing, it seems he hasn’t left Bollywood yet. If anything, the film seems comfortingly familiar to any viewer of Hindi films. At a spewing 2 hour 45 minutes, you have that similar format of two (or three) movies in one, post- and pre-intermission—a veritable cocktail of genres with generous shots of comedy, drama, romance and tragedy in the mix.

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- Picassos of the jungle, elephant paintings by Khem Prasad and Sundar Kali at Indigo Gallery, 13-22 February. 8AM to 6PM.
- Love in the air, art by Ragini Upadhayay-Greha at 5.30 PM, III J March, Siddhanta Gallery, 4218949
- A Search for serenity, artwork by Chirag Bangdel till 15 February, Gallery 32, Kamaladi

EVENTS

- Second Documentary Open School Workshop, 16-28 February at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Bhakta, 4263070
- Call for entries for Film South Asia, documentaires made in and after January 2007. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org, 5552141
- Rakshya Nepal Mela, 14 February, 10AM-5PM, the New Era, Colony, Balkot, 4429903
- Salsa dance workshop, 20 February at Salsa Dance Academy, Mahal Revisited, 4491234
- Nonviolent communication workshop with lunch, 21 February, 9.30 AM-5PM, Rs 800, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal, Thamel, 4140802

MUSIC

- Live Jazz, every Tuesday and live fusion every Saturday at New Orleans coffee shop, Puchoh, 5552708
- TGIF, Friday night party with live band Reverb, 6PM onwards, the Fun Café, Chakupati, Patan Bhakta, 4700012
- Yala Maya Classic featuring Tarabar Singh Tuladhar and Jervan Rai on 12 February at 5PM at Yalama Kendra, Patan Bhakta, Rs 100 entry, 5553767
- Rock with Rashmi every Friday and Suli and Raga every Monday, 8PM onwards, A-tea Lounge Bar, Puchoh.
- Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM, 4425124
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, 4260326
- Strings Band live every Tuesday at Gi’s Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel, 4479488

WEEKEND WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

23-4 24-5 21-7
Fri Sat Sun

The long dry spell was finally broken, but only in central and western Nepal where 25-35 mm of rain fell. Everything east of Kathmandu is still reeling under drought, all we got on Wednesday was 1mm of rain. This satellite and radar composite taken on Thursday morning shows another westerly system tracing the first one, but this one is curling away to the west instead. There are still chances of precipitation in the central and western mountains and maybe a drizzle on Sunday to the Valley rim, but other than that no dramatic surprises like the Valentine’s Day snowfall in Kathmandu in 2007. Expect the max temperature to climb steadily, with clear and cold nights.

Rakshya Nepal Mela, 14 February, 10AM-5PM, the New Era, Colony, Balkot, 4429903
- Home made pasta at Alfresco, Solitaire Crowne Plaza, 4279999
- Reality bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4435344
- Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson, 4411937
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.

ABOUT TOWN

WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

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- Fusion and Lozoo Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat, 4412193

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FLAG BEARERS: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav at the 1st Development Convention of the Honorary Consular Corps, Nepal on Wednesday.

88 YEARS OF LIFE: Culture scholar Satya Mohan Joshi celebrates Jangkhu on Saturday at Patan Darbar Square.

MEASURING FREEDOM: Representatives from International Federation of Journalists and ARTICLE 19 inspect burnt copies of Himal Khabarpatrika during their visit to Himalmedia on Saturday.
Let’s go back to sleep

Go back to sleep, we’ll wake you up when things start getting really exciting around here. As things stand now, nothing is really happening. Politicians are all up to their ears in party affairs, and no one has any time for the country.

The southern plains and the eastern hills have been locked down now for weeks, but PM PKD has all the time in the world to helicopter over to Panchthar to attend his army’s anniversary. Defence Minister Cloudy was off in western Nepal attending a Tharu council. This whole week, the Baddie brass has been busy getting organised for the three-day gala war anniversary in Nawalparasi. All the UML members of the cabinet, including the Hydro Minister, will be out of action for another week because of the party convention in Butwal. And next week Nepal’s Other Army will be celebrating its own Army Day on Shivaratri. So, with all this pomp and ceremony, who is looking at ways to reduce loadshedding, unblocking blocked highways, getting some momentum back into the peace process, and writing a new constitution?

The Rs 40 million Unified Marxist-Leninist Convention in Butwal is boiling down to a tripartite struggle between Messrs Makunay, Jhallu and Oli. More than the UML party votes themselves, it looks like it is the influence of other parties that will determine who will get to be general secretary. The Maobaddie favourite for the post of top job in the UML is Comrade JN, but unfortunately this very fact has become the kiss of death for poor Jhallu because the UML cadre base is seething at continued Maoist excesses in the countryside. No wonder, then, that Oli’s consistent and sharp criticism of the Maoists has earned him brownie points within the party, and he is the front-runner. For his part, Comrade MKN has been waiting to see which way the wind blows and is torn between seeking the party leadership or gunning for prime ministership, especially after wily old GPK put the idea into his head this week.

When a lot fewer weapons than anticipated were handed over to be put into UNMIN containers at the start of the peace process, Comrade Terrifico had been asked what happened to the rest of the arsenal. His answer “khola le bagayo” was widely ridiculed. And sure enough, the missing M-16s and SLRs magically resurfaced during the attack by a Rolpa warlord on the police base in Syaulibang last week. With his trusted PA being shot in the leg, senior baddie comrades are getting antsy. Which must be why PKD is soon taking delivery of a brand new $130,000 bullet-proof Landcruiser equipped with oxygen and defibrillator.

What’s with all the to-ing and fro-ing of our comrades to China? It was the very next day after Naxalites Mohan and Matrika went to Naxal to meet their Chinese host that Matrika jetted off on a weeklong visit to the Mainland. As soon as he gets back, he splits off from the main party. And then its Comrade Rainman’s turn to fly off to Honkietown on Dragonair. Meanwhile, Awesome is still hasn’t confirmed his attendance at the India Today do in Delhi in March even though his name is already on the website. It looks like his Delhi dates are going to clash with yet another visit to Beijing.

Many of the invited members of the KTM dip corps did not attend the Nawalparasi PLA extravaganza, except GTZ. The prez has also declined the PLA invite but will be taking the salute at the Mahendra-era Sainik Munch. The PLA tried to show it is no different than the Nepal Army by carrying out a silly simulated comando raid on a civilian house during their anniversary in Halikhur on Thursday just like the Nepal Army used to on Army day. Was that a message?

If the COAS really wants to make a public relations coup the way to do it is not to have his troops fire blanks into the air on Shivaratri but to reverse his military’s creeping expansionism in Tundikhel, and re-open the Mallighar to Bhadrakali short cut which was closed during the war. There is no reason the army should prolong its occupation of a huge chunk of the city centre any longer.

ast(at)nepalitimes.com