Army row is bad news for constitution-writing and the peace process

PRASHANT JHA

The recent rows over recruitment and the retirement of generals, it was army chief Rookmangud Katawal’s decision to partially pull out from the national games last week that seems to have been the last straw for Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The controversy has now become a prestige issue between the two, as the country’s ex-guerrilla prime minister and its army chief engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

“The trigger was the national games. The PM was personally furious at Katawal’s defiance,” a senior Maoist leader told Nepali Times on Wednesday. “We have logic and the law on our side, and have been preparing to do this for two weeks.”

But non-Maoists, even those who believe in civilian supremacy, feel the Maoists are bent on a strategy to take over total state control. Katawal’s dismissal would pave the way for a more pliable chain of command dependent on Maoist patronage, while also enhancing Dahal’s popularity within the party.

However, it hasn’t quite gone according to the script because of escalating divisions within the UML. Dahal is learnt to have secured UML chairman Jhala Naresh Khanal’s assent before his departure to China, but after cutting short his visit Khanal and returning Thursday Khanal had changed his tune.

President Ram Baran Yadav’s stern advice to Dahal to work for political consensus played a part in the Maoists taking a step back. Yadav is said to have warned of the consequences if an ethnic candidate for the chief’s position is bypassed. General Chhatranauk Singh Gurung would head the army if Katawal retires on schedule in September. If he is sacked, General Kul Bahadur Khadka, who is understood to be lobbying hard for the job, would take over.

As expected, there was pressure from India to leave the army alone. Delhi had assured the army that its chain of command, structure and interests would be protected in return for support during the peace process in the last three years. It sees the institution as the last bulwark against the Maoists, and sent word to Dahal there would be costs if he went ahead.

But the game is not over yet. “If the prime minister pulls back now, he can play the victim card temporarily but his credibility within the party would be dented and the cadre will be demoralised,” a Maoist secretariat member admitted.

Dahal will now have to find a face-saving way to appease his cadre, assuage nervous political parties and wary internationals. On Thursday, the prime minister met UMIN chief Karin Landgren and later summoned a group of ambassadors from India, UK, US and China and told them he was looking for a “third option”. The envoy reportedly only listened, and didn’t ask any questions.

The row doesn’t bode well for the constitution-writing and the peace process, deepening mistrust between political actors.
ARMED AND DANGEROUS

In normal times, the elected prime minister of a country may be entitled to ask his army chief for an explanation on why he is disturbing the peace process. But these are not normal times. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal leads a party that still fields an army. He and his comrades have been making open threats to capture state power by coercion. His party has shown disdain for democratic norms and contempt for press freedom and human rights. We have witnessed a collapse in law and order in just a few months since Dahal became prime minister. His cadre are still murdering people and getting away with it, and there is little to show that the Maoists are making much progress in the transition to open non-violent politics.

In such a situation, tampering with the national army, the institution of last resort, carries an ominous meaning. Whatever the army may have done in its ex-roval avatars, it had played by the rules laid out in the 2006 peace accord and the interim constitution. The army, and investigating and punishing the siting government, and let the government right in grave circumstances to provide advice to it. He has the mandate to stop them from grabbing total power and have decided to undermine it from within. As Supreme Commander, President Ram Baran Yadav has a responsibility and role in resolving this issue before it derails the peace process. He has the right in grave circumstances to provide advice to the sitting government, and let the government know his concern and dissatisfactions. He can’t do more that, but much he must do. After all, he is not a benevolent authoritarian, by nature, but constitutional one, with a constitutional function in a parliamentary democracy. This crisis can bring the country into an opportunity to focus more on the much more urgent matter of integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants and accord them the rights agreed reached before the elections. The issues of downsizing the army, and investigating and prosecuting theСП and the Maoists excesses during the war, and cannot be diluted by any subsequent debate. There can be no lowering the standards to induct the combatants, because the army as a national institution is meant to protect national territory, and it cannot be undermined from within. The Nepal Army’s capacity to protect national sovereignty when required should not be weakened. Surely, the Maoists don’t want that. At least that is what we hope.
In the 19th century, when imperial messengers from Middle Kingdom arrived in Kathmandu, the king would travel to the edge of the town (probably where Tin Kune is now) with a cavalcade of courtiers in ceremonial outfit to receive the missives. The elaborate ritual involved with the acceptance of a mere letter from the Chinese infuriated the British Resident Brian Houghton Hodgson so much that he wrote: ‘But my situation is by no means so agreeable as it might be if these barbarians did but know their own good. Instead of which they are insolent and hostile, and play off on us, as far as they can and dare, the Chinese etiquette and foreign policy.’ Little did Hodgson know that the Chinese were similarly told to remain watchful of British incursions in Tibet. Chandra Shamsher, the strongest and most influential of all hereditary Rana prime ministers, felt so helpless in front of the British resident that he fervently wished for the permanent occupation of Tibet by the Chinese. Once the Chinese PLA overran the Potala in 1950, King Mahendra rejoiced at the prospect of playing Beijing and New Delhi against each other. Mahendra soon learnt that being at the centre of regional conflict had its costs. When the wily monarch toyed with the idea of threatening India with a land route to Lhasa, Indira Gandhi dared him to approach China and Beijing coerced him into accepting the albatross that connects Kathmandu with nowhere on the Tibetan border.

American historian Leo E Rose was to note later: ‘Nepal had paid a high price in economic terms and in its relationship with India for this useless road.’ Even though a railway line now connects Lhasa with mainland China, the traffic on the road to Khasa bordering Nepal continues to be sparse.

After his ‘Zone of Peace’ proposal in 1975 and its prompt endorsement by the Chinese, King Birendra made regular trips to Beijing without much to show for his sincere efforts. In fact, it was the other way round as increased trade. It’s a tribute to super-suave Chinese diplomats that they have succeeded in selling their commercial interests as goodwill gestures.

Anti-aircraft guns bought from the Chinese in 1988 proved to be extremely expensive to Nepalis: the resulting economic blockaded enforced by Indians crippled the economy.

No one ever learns anything from history. Within a fortnight of his first diplomatic trip to New Delhi, former king Gyanendra went to Beijing with the hopes of engaging the northern neighbour more closely in the counter-insurgency operation against the Maoists. Enthusiastic with the courtesy of his hosts, he gushed that China was a “trustworthy” friend.

Perhaps it’s too early to tell, but Dahal’s communist predecessor at Baluwatar failed miserably with rhetorical innovations of ‘equi-proximity’ in foreign policy for India-locked Nepal. Dahal’s expedition to the north will probably test the integrity of Maoist diplomacy. That may also determine the longevity of the leftist coalition in Singha Darbar, and nobody knows it better than Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The Chinese are spreading their diplomatic eggs in many baskets.
Elections in a time of Maoism

If only India’s wonderful ability to hold elections could be applied to ending poverty that fuels the Naxalite violence...
KALIMPONG—The emergence of Bimal Gurung as the new messiah for the Nepali people in search of their own homeland—in the form of Gorkhaland—has brought back the characters from Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, set during the first political movement in the Darjeeling hills in 1986, back to life.

This time, the movement has been kept generally non-violent but the fear of violence remains. Supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and choosing former Minister Jaswant Singh as the candidate for the forthcoming federal elections in India has become a hotly debated move. People are asking whether a district that is nearly 20 per cent Christian should vote for a party that blatantly talks of creating a Hindu nation and has a poor record of accepting other minorities, especially after the attack on Christians in Orissa and Karnataka.

People are also asking that if it’s about Nepali identity, why not field a Nepali candidate? There is further speculation and rumour about whether the former Nepali King actually brokered the deal with the BJP. As the 13th and last King of the Gorkha dynasty, he may be the only person set on keeping the Gorkha identity alive.

While Nepal’s identity war has fostered breaking away from the Gorkha badge, it is very strange to see Nepalis in India eager to be associated with a brand that has been banished from Nepal. Identity is all about your brand, be it a Gujarati or a Jew identified as a merchant or banker, a Keralite women identified with nursing and office administration, the youth from Karnataka identified with IT or a Filipino identified with music. Do Nepalis really want to be identified as the brave Gorkha soldier fighting guns with a Khukuri knife when wars today are fought with the help of satellite guided missiles and sophisticated technology driven weapons?

When the Indian administration asked those demanding a Gorkhaland about their plans for economic growth were the area given a state, the answers were never articulated. This is reminiscent of the way the government of Nepal is unable to figure out its economic agenda when it meets the donor community. We need to move from asking who we are to asking what we can do. The millions of Nepalis in India cannot just hang their fate based on what will happen to the demand for a separate state. It’s more important for them to be integrated in the economic growth of India and carve out the identity of Nepalis in India. Perhaps having a separate state will give them direct control over resources but they need to build competencies and capacities too. Otherwise, the opportunity would be squandered in the same way that Gorkhaland leader Subhas Ghishing, played for 20 years on the hopes and aspirations of Nepalis in India.
Not scared

Editorial in Himal/ Khabarpatrika, 14-28 April

“There are many journalists among the Maoists who have been killed by the government.” President Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s accusations against the press on 7 April have been one of the most dangerous yet. While the statement denoted the self respect of everyone working in the media, it also serves to justify all attacks on free press. Journalists are already working in an insecure environment and the PM’s comment added to that insecurity. Unit now the national and international communities have given the Maoists the benefit of the doubt, but the PM’s anti-press stance is sure to shake that belief to the core. Many chose to turn a blind eye to the undemocratic and violent behavior of the Maoists in the name of peace. But it seems the Maoists are out to take advantage of everyone.

Being in the government gives a political force the highest power, which can be easily misused. Thus, it is the duty of the press to keep an eye on the leading party, to investigate and to expose the truth. The media has played this critical role before and continues to do so now. It is ironic that in the past the Maoists appreciated the media’s observations about the government, but now that the tables have turned they are resentful. We are no longer in the conflict years or the interim period—Dahal’s shortsightedness will not work. During the decade of conflict Dahal lived in hiding for eight years in India. India’s The Hindu and the UK’s BBC were all used to build his public persona at a national, regional and international level. Even though the Maoists had brutally murdered many journalists, the press supported them to join mainstream politics for the sake of long term peace.

Dahal’s accusation against the press on 7 April of smugglers. “Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s accusation against the press on 7 April has been one of the most dangerous yet. While the statement denoted the self respect of everyone working in the media, it also serves to justify all attacks on free press. Journalists are already working in an insecure environment and the PM’s comment added to that insecurity.”

Messy gamble

Editorial in Kantipur, 20 April

How ironic that an off-shoot of a party in the coalition government should pose a threat to law enforcement. Deputy Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has accused the Maoist-led trade unions of refusing to cooperate and obey the law is thwarting the government’s latest drive to enforce order in casinos.

There are eight casinos in Nepal, targeted at tourists and they employ more than 7,000 Maoist affiliated workers. They argue that without Nepali customers, their jobs would be threatened. But this argument is only a façade. There is reason to believe that corruption and nepotism are other motivating factors since most trade union and YCL leaders have their own relatives enrolled as members at the casinos. In the past, they bribed the police to let Nepalis in—now government officials are taking their share of the pie. Although they were built for tourists, more Nepalis than visitors frequent casinos. At least 200 Nepalis visit each casino every day. And, the numbers are increasing. If the government wants to enforce the law, it must be determined.

In total, casinos rake in around Rs 5 billion a year with each taking about Rs 1 million a day. Their collective turnover is up even though tourism is down. Moreover, since most of them are run by foreigners, their profits are not contributing to the Nepali economy.

Besides revealing the lack of power of the executive in Nepal, failure to enforce the law also reflects on the social, economic and cultural instability of the country. The government should not acquiesce to the demands of a single group; instead, it should bring those guilty of disobeying the law to justice.

Closed

Nepal, 26 April

According to the Police Headquarters, there were an average of three bandas and three road blockades each day in Nepal in 2005. The total number of bandas and road blockades in the five development regions were:

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Constitutional deviation

Having the best constitution in the world doesn’t mean a thing if no one is going to follow it

Neapol’s geopolitical location, sandwiched between China and India, has proved to be a boon and bane advantageous and disadvantageous from the viewpoint of political stability.

The year 1951 marked a significant change in Nepal’s politics, and India played a major role in that change. Although the royal proclamation got legitimacy in the country, it was designed and drafted in Delhi on December 1950 and became known as the ‘Delhi agreement’.

The constitutional process is the proclamation made by the reinstated parliament in 2006, which had no constitutional base. The constitutional which reinstated the parliament was annulled by the reinstated parliament. This parliament then went on to promulgate the interim constitution before the constituent assembly drafted it.

Political parties and individuals are busy fighting for power. They don’t seem to be concerned about the new constitutional framework, and they hold intractable views on what it should be like. It is unlikely that we will be able to finalise the constitution but we will rather end up endorsing the draft of a constitution prepared elsewhere.

The problems associated with the constituent writing process are beyond the control of Nepali people and politicians.

Ganesh Raj Sharma is a legal expert.

Constitutional deviation

Ten reasons why ethnic federalism is a bad idea

Ethnicity-based federalism has been on the agenda of many ethno-political groups in Nepal. There are 10 problems associated with it:

1. Ethnic federalism links each ethno-cultural group with an exclusive territorial homeland. Since there are many dozens castes and ethnicities living in Nepal, to be fair to each group, we will need to create an exact number of federal provinces. This is impractical.

2. A few bigger ethnic groups have demanded an ethno-federal setup. If we let only these groups have ethno-based federal provinces, other groups will feel cheated and an agitation for more provinces will follow.

3. Ethnic federalism is based on the belief that people of specific ethnic origin are concentrated in separate regions of the country. But no region has more than 35 percent of the dominant group, most areas have an even lesser ethnic concentration. What is the justification for letting a few larger minorities become political majorities in their regions?

4. Ethnic federalism is based on the primacy of ethnic identity over other sorts of collective identities. Such thinking puts our newborn democracy at risk as it reduces acts of citizenship to biological inheritance.

5. Democracy is first and foremost about empowering citizens by ensuring the free exercise of natural rights. An ethnic group’s understanding of itself as a genetically bounded entity, whose membership is fixed in advance, imposes a type of rigidity over citizenship rights quite opposed to the democratic spirit. Its basis in tribal thinking cannot be the source of democratic politics.

6. Ethnic federalism romanticises the idea of race and culture. But cultural practices cannot be wholly group-specific. In fact, we need the openness of democracy to fight many shared cultural evils, including castism, sexism, racism, child marriage, and dowry system. When the unitary state is presented as the sole source of injustice, culture and society are left off the hook.

7. Ethnic federalism is driven by elite self-interest. Many among ethnic elites have been complicit in the unjust political practices of the past. Now they are eager to re-invent themselves as custodians of future ethnic provinces. Their ethnocentric politics of race, culture and identity is often at odds with the egalitarian agenda of mass political parties.

8. Ethnicity-based federalism is unacceptable for the same reason that an upper-caste dominated hill-centric state is unacceptable. A multicultural arrangement, one that accepts the principle of diversity as its formative principle, is desirable at both federal and provincial levels. The state is changing rapidly from its hill-centric ethnic character to a far more inclusive civic identity. We should design our federal units in such a way that they complement these goals, not contradict them.

9. Ethnic federalism is geopolitically dangerous. What happens if one or more ethno-federal territories, constitutionally autonomous and possibly self-determining, declare independence with or without any foreign support? The ongoing rivalry between India and China for regional influence indicates that Nepal is sitting on the fault-line of two hugely incompatible regional ambitions.

10. Ethnic federalism is a wrong medicine to the problem of caste and ethnicity-based exclusion for which it is prescribed as a cure. The problem of exclusion is real, but we need to find better solutions to it, like: legal protection of minorities, full citizenship and cultural rights, bureaucratic-political inclusion and greater economic opportunity. A substantive inclusion of previously marginalised groups into state organs is already underway. As a result, the state is changing rapidly from its hill-centric ethnic character to a far more inclusive civic identity. We should design our federal units in such a way that they complement these goals, not contradict them.

B.P. Girij is currently on research leave from Dartmouth College, USA, where he teaches postcolonial literature and theory.
Lele

Lele is a small village in southern Lalitpur, perfect for a picnic or country walk and only a 45 minute bus ride from Lagankhel. On the way, you pass through Chapagaon, a cluster of quaint Newari houses with a bajar and temples, where it’s also worth stopping for a wander. You can also mountain bike to Lele: but be warned that in the dry seasons the road after Chapagaon is incredibly bumpy and dusty. But as quickly as the dust rises, the lush basin of Lele arrives. There are sprawling rice fields, small local eateries on the roadside and mules carrying bricks from the factory. Just above the Tīleswar Mahadeb temple is a small patch of green where you can set up your picnic. But if you want more isolation, walk upwards to the sparsely occupied hills that overlook the fields. Lele’s U-shaped valley may mean that you can’t view snow mountains from here but what you get are lush green hills.

Godavari and Phulchowki

To scale Pulchok you start at Godavari. There are some verdant botanical gardens, as well as an outdoor fresh water pool for swimming and boating, a Tibetan monastery and a smattering of little eateries. Pulchok is even richer in birdlife than Shivapuri. On the way you’ll see the Shanti Ban Buddha—a huge golden statue of the Buddha which is said to look better from a distance than close-up. Start early, ideally by 7.30 AM, and be armed with plenty of water, snacks and lunch, although if you reach the summit by lunchtime the soldiers guarding the telecom tower are pretty hospitable and will reward you with a bowl of noodles as you marvel at the spectacular views.

The mountain is lushly vegetated and the footpath pretty untrodden—though there is also a steep and slippery track that snakes its way up to the summit. Pulchok is home to 570 species of flowering plants, including magnificent red and white rhododendrons in March and April and a third of Nepal’s bird species.

Nagarjun

Towering above Balaju in the north-west of Kathmandu, Nagarjun offers an excellent day-long retreat. Nagarjun’s lush green forest greets you after just a 15-minute drive from Kathmandu. Head up for a three-hour hike through the forest to the top of the 7000ft hill and visit the Jamacho stupa atop the hill.

No worries if you don’t enjoy walking. You won’t miss the breathtaking view of the mountains and the valley below for there is a motorable road that leads up as well. Famous for its low limestone cliffs, these hills are ideal for rock climbers. Stock up on food and essentials before you set out. Recent incidents of crime mean you shouldn’t walk alone.

CHONG ZI LIANG

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA
Kakani

With a spectacular view of mountain landscape, Kakani is a great one day get-away. It is easily accessible and there are a handful of small restaurants to eat at. Located about 29 km northwest of Kathmandu, it is at least an hour away by bicycle. However, you can also get a microbus from Machapokhari bus stop, Balaju to Trisuli. Leave early in the morning so that you can spend the day exploring, even walking back via Shivapuri. Kakani is the place where you can eat some of the most delicious rainbow trout and sukuti.

Chobar

For a taste of Nepali folklore, head to Chobar. Easily accessible by bus and within walking distance of Satobato, this is the site where Lord Manjushri supposedly drained the water out of Kathmandu Valley by slicing through the limestone hill with one mighty swipe of his sword.

Indeed, a deep chasm with jagged rocky edges runs through the hills around Chobar. The Bagmati River flows through it, suggesting it was geographical and not mythical forces at work here. Chobar is also perfect for cavers who like squeezing through the maze of underground caves. Guides are on hand to take you through different routes lasting 15-45 minutes. Be prepared for lots of crawling and squeezing. Not for the claustrophobic.

The village itself is picturesque with the 15th century Adinath Lokeshwar Temple dedicated to Rato Machhendranath with an astounding array of metal pots, pans and water containers hanging from its roofs – kitchen utensils donated by newlyweds to ensure a happy marriage.

Shivapuri

National parks are aplenty in Nepal, but only one is within Kathmandu Valley itself. Shivapuri lies on the northern fringe and microbuses go all the way to its gates. Nepalis pay a mere Rs10 for entry but foreigner will need to fork out Rs 250. The park, which is the valley’s main water source, offers various hiking routes but the route to Sundarijal is the best for a day trip. Stock up on water and food before setting off from the park entrance as there are no shops inside. And binoculars: Shivapuri is a haven for birdwatchers from all over the world.

Roma Aryal, Shradha Basnyat, Katy Elliott, Chong Zi Liang and Paavan Mathema
A shape of things to come

The demand for Limbuwan autonomy takes on a militant edge

A midst the idyllic beauty of Nepal’s easternmost civil district, its thickly-forested mountains and hills draped with tea, there is a sense of foreboding.

The meal-stop highway settlement of Ranke looked placid enough this week, with passengers waiting for buses or buying fruits from sidewalk vendors.

The calm was suddenly shattered by a brawl between rival Limbu activists who came to blows over a turf war concerning highway taxes. “Things look peaceful, but beneath the surface the tension can snap at any moment,” says a Phidim-based civil servant.

The epicentre of the struggle by Limbu activists for self-determination and autonomy is in the Panchthar capital of Phidim.

The gate to autonomy

The gate to Phidim welcoming visitors to Limbuwan (left) and Limbuwan militia guard their leaders at the national convention of the Federal Limbuwan State Council in Phidim.

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The epicentre of the struggle by Limbu activists for self-determination and autonomy is in the Panchthar capital of Phidim. The gate of the town is painted over with a ‘Welcome to Limbuwan sign and ‘Panchthar’ and ‘Phidim’, the original Limbu names for Panchthar and Phidim. There is graffiti along the highway warning ‘long noses’ to keep off.

Dozens of Limbu groups demanding everything from autonomy to separatism have taken up the flag of identity politics. No one dare be left behind.

Some, like the Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad led by Kumar Lingden and ex-airline pilot D K Buddhathari, want a federal autonomous Limbuwan province within the borders of Nepal. Then there are groups like Pallo Kirat who led by ex-RPP Dambar Lawoti and Samuhaung Palungwa’s Federal Limbuwan State Council who say they will wage a separatist war for a free Limbuwan state if their demands for self-determination are not met.

Lingden’s gripe is that the government had not kept its promise to the autonomy demands of the Limbuwan and other ethnic groups in the CA.

“We have a one-point demand, which is the Limbuwan autonomous state,” he told Nepal Times. He denied federalism would lead to separatism, and said the new federal unit would respect the rights of non-Limbus.

The independent Limbu nation is said to cover nine present districts to before Pithhi Narayan Shari’s ‘Gorkha war of expansion’. Activists here refuse to call it “unification”, and one argument is that because the Limbu nation had submitted to the Gorkha king, the understanding is now off since the monarchy is no more. The separatist rhetoric is now staple fare in speeches and workshops here, and in broadcasts of Santhalung FM, inaugurated last week by CA chairman Subhas Nembang.

What worries non-Limbus in Phidim is that Limbuwan activists, many of them ex-Maoists, are using the same tactics as the Maoists did during the conflict: threats, extortion and public punishments. So pervasive is the fear that no one we spoke to in Phidim this week wanted to be quoted by name, and most lowered their voices and looked over their shoulders.

“Is this the way to right historical wrongs?” asked one school teacher here who believes in correcting marginalisation, but not in self-determination. “Do the Kathmandu intelligentsia and donors understand where things are going?” Journalists here admit they self-censor due to heightened tension.

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Civil servants, civil society and non-Limbs are worried that a spark could set off 18th-century ethnic violence. Everyone remembers the last turmoil in this region in the 1950s after the fall of the Ranas, when there was an exodus of hill Parbates and others down to Jhapa. With groups competing to lead the movement by being more hardline, a solution looks distant. When they confront a Krakuri from a Limbu militant in Phidim recently, agitators surrounded the station and forced police to not just return the knife but to apologise.

Human rights activists have started to see the threat.

“There’s a risk of a civil war developing,” says a Phidim-based civil servant.

The calm was suddenly shattered by a brawl between rival Limbu activists who came to blows over a turf war concerning highway taxes. “Things look peaceful, but beneath the surface the tension can snap at any moment,” says a Phidim-based civil servant.

The epicentre of the struggle by Limbu activists for self-determination and autonomy is in the Panchthar capital of Phidim. The gate of the town is painted over with a ‘Welcome to Limbuwan sign and ‘Panchthar’ and ‘Phidim’, the original Limbu names for Panchthar and Phidim. There is graffiti along the highway warning ‘long noses’ to keep off.

Dozens of Limbu groups demanding everything from autonomy to separatism have taken up the flag of identity politics. No one dare be left behind.

Some, like the Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad led by Kumar Lingden and ex-airline pilot D K Buddhathari, want a federal autonomous Limbuwan province within the borders of Nepal. Then there are groups like Pallo Kirat who led by ex-RPP Dambar Lawoti and Samuhaung Palungwa’s Federal Limbuwan State Council who say they will wage a separatist war for a free Limbuwan state if their demands for self-determination are not met.

Lingden’s gripe is that the government had not kept its promise to the autonomy demands of the Limbuwan and other ethnic groups in the CA.

“We have a one-point demand, which is the Limbuwan autonomous state,” he told Nepal Times. He denied federalism would lead to separatism, and said the new federal unit would respect the rights of non-Limbus.

The independent Limbu nation is said to cover nine present districts to before Pithhi Narayan Shari’s ‘Gorkha war of expansion’. Activists here refuse to call it “unification”, and one argument is that because the Limbu nation had submitted to the Gorkha king, the understanding is now off since the monarchy is no more. The separatist rhetoric is now staple fare in speeches and workshops here, and in broadcasts of Santhalung FM, inaugurated last week by CA chairman Subhas Nembang.

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INTERESTING TIMES

GULMI—On an unusually hot early morning 18 army deminers are sweating in their protective jackets and helmets. They have been doing the dangerous job of excavating mines for hours. It is the seventh day of work. They have already found over 30 mines in Wami Taksar here in the hills of central Nepal and are about to destroy the explosive remnants of war.

Mornings are very crucial for deminers as they have to do as much as they can before it gets too hot to work. They take breaks and work slowly from one mine to another. There’s no room for error.

During the war the army laid mines to protect its base perimeter in 53 sites across the country. In addition it had 270 places where they had command detonated explosives. Only 10 minefields and 60 explosive-planted areas have been cleared so far.

Under the terms of the 2006 peace accord, the Nepal Army and the Maoists had to clear the minefields they laid during the war and also destroy unstable IEDs within 60 days of signing the agreement. Besides the army’s landmines there are stray improvised explosive devices (IEDs) of the Maoists strewn across the country. Villagers, especially children, are still being killed by them. The Maoist IEDs are uncharted, so the only current solution is to educate the people.

The Nepal Army and UN’s Mine Action Team are trying to make up for lost time. In the next few years cleared minefields will be handed back to the community so that children can play safely again.

Addressing what happened in the past is vital to the peace and reconciliation process. Demining is an important part of Nepal’s healing process. It has restored confidence in the people of Wami Taksar area that the government is concerned for their safety.

Just like landmines, the other legacy of war is impunity. While the demining process may be moving steadily, the same cannot be said about steps taken to address the atrocities of the past. Too many victims of war have waited too long for the government to take this clause in the peace accord seriously.

Most victims have no trust in the system because their wounds are still fresh. There are families of those who were killed during the war who don’t even know how their loved ones spent their last days. The families of the disappeared have waited for a very long time to hear news about the missing. Like mines, this is an explosive inheritance of conflict and if it’s not addressed there won’t be true peace.

The victims of war in Bardiya called for a banda last week demanding justice for what happened to them and their families during the war. The internally displaced regularly stage sit-ins demanding that the government ensure their safety when they go back to the homes they had to flee during the conflict. Those who suffered injury and torture want reparation and prosecution. And there are those who simply want the responsible to come out and acknowledge that they did wrong, so that they can forgive and move on.

The running feud between the Maoists and the army just distracts attention from the excesses they committed against the Nepali people during the war. The truth is usually delayed or shoved under the rug with the hope that no one will probe. There are people taking advantage of the lack of accountability and impunity, which is why there is no rule of law and crime is rampant.

We are running out of time. Bardiya rose up today because they were tired of the government dilly-dallying. There are thousands of victims who are organising because they are running out of patience. They need assurance that their struggle for justice matter, that the horrible things that happened during the war will never be repeated again.
Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Qiu Guohong, spoke to *Nepali Times* ahead of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s visit to China next month, covering the gamut of issues between Nepal and China.

Nepali Times: How would you characterise the state of China-Nepal relations at present? Qiu Guohong: China and Nepal are friendly neighbors since ancient times, and the friendship between China and Nepal is passed on from generation to generation. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations more than 50 years ago, no matter what changes occurred in the international situation and national conditions of both China and Nepal, the relations between the two countries have developed in a healthy and smooth way. China and Nepal always strictly abide by the five principles of peaceful coexistence, respect for each other, treat each other as equals and sincerely provide assistance. The relationship is indeed a good example of harmonious coexistence and beneficial cooperation between big and small countries.

There have been a slew of high-level visits by Chinese officials to past years, promoting closer economic, cultural and political ties. Since the formation of the current coalition government, high-level officials from both countries have made frequent exchanges. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ attended the closing ceremony of Beijing Olympic Games. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and special envoy of the Chinese Government Hu Zhengyue paid visits to Nepal one after the other. Foreign Minister Upro德拉 Yadav has just concluded his visit to China.

The visits show that the Chinese side attaches great importance to the development of China-Nepal relations. We also attach great importance to the development of China-Nepal relations. The Chinese side is willing to conduct economic cooperation and trade with Nepal and India on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence and respect for each other, in the spirit of friendly cooperation and shared benefits. We will try to expand the cooperation between big and small countries.

bilateral relations from a long-term perspective so as to strengthen the comprehensive cooperation and benefit the people of both countries. The major topics include how to promote bilateral political relations, strengthen economic cooperation and trade, boost people-to-people and cultural exchanges and push forward existing traditional and friendly bilateral relations to a new height.

Are there any concrete plans to extend the Beijing-Lhasa railway to Nepal? It has been listed in the Medium and Long-term Railway Network Planning of China to extend the Qinghai-Tibet railway from Lhasa to Shigatze, and from Shigatze to Nyalam. I believe that the extension of Qinghai-Tibet railway to the China-Nepal border will have a positive influence on establishing new China-Nepal road links and promoting economic cooperation and trade between China and Nepal and between China and South Asia. As Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, I’d like to play a active role in that.

But how exactly could Nepal benefit as a transit region for trade between China and India? Nepal is situated between China and India, and shares long border lines with both of them, enjoying an advantageous geographic position. China and India, as two major developing countries in the world, have maintained stable yet fast economic growth in recent years, and effectively boosted the economic development in the region. Nepal could make full use of the geographic advantage and traditional friendship with both countries to create a conducive economic atmosphere, take trade facilitation measures and cultivate professionalism so as to benefit from the fast economic development of China and India and stimulate its domestic economic growth.

The Chinese side is willing to conduct economic cooperation and trade with Nepal and India on the basis of mutual benefit, and make consultations on how to facilitate trade and economic development. Nepal’s remote northern districts need better connectivity. How cold China help?

The 15 districts of the northern part of Nepal share common borders with China’s Tibet Autonomous Region. The Chinese side attaches great importance to border trade between China and Nepal. The China-Nepal border trade has been developed vigorously since 1982. Currently, there are five major trading points. There has already been a road linkage between Zhangmu and Kodari. Now the Chinese side is upgrading the infrastructure in Zhangmu Pass and the surrounding road, and is positively considering initiating construction of the dry port near Tatopani in the Nepal side as early as possible. The Sylabuben-Rasuwagad road is now under construction under a Chinese grant. After the completion of this road, the Chinese side will push for the establishment of Kyerong Pass, which will mark the inception of the second trade corridor between China and Nepal. I’m convinced that these measures will further enhance the border trade between two countries and benefit their people.

Any chance of China lifting visa requirements for Nepalis visiting Hong Kong? Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese Government deals with Hong Kong affairs in accordance with the principles of “one country, two systems” and the Basic Law of the Hong Kong SAR. Therefore, only the Government of the Hong Kong SAR has the power to decide on whether to grant Nepali citizens free visa treatment and when to grant this treatment. As the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, I am willing to convey this aspiration to the Government of Hong Kong SAR through an appropriate channel and at a suitable time.

How do you assess the measures taken by the Nepali government vis-à-vis Tibet-related issues? In 1959, the Chinese Government started carrying out democratic reform and abolished the theocratic feudal serfdom, through which millions of serfs got liberation and personal freedom. For the past 50 years, tremendous changes have taken place in Tibet: the Tibetan people enjoy and exercise all rights endowed by the Constitution and Ethnic Region Autonomy law of the People’s Republic of China, live much better lives with the comprehensive progress of social welfare, harmony in religion, prosperity in culture protection and development, and have been the real owner of Tibet. Here I want to emphasise that the democratic reform and abolished the theocratic feudal serfdom in 1959, which has been proven by the big development and changes of Tibet in the past 50 years. Any force or any person who tries to deny the above-mentioned facts, is holding ulterior motives. The intentions to restore the feudal serfdom and separate Tibet from China by the Dalai clique will incur strong objection from all Chinese including Tibetans, and is doomed to failure.

The Nepali Government and people always pursue a one-China policy. In Tibet is an inalienable part of China since ancient times. The Tibet issue concerns the unification and core interest of China. The abolition of feudal serfdom and an ethnic autonomous region system can benefit the Tibetan people, which has been proven by the big development and changes of Tibet in the past 50 years. Any force or any person who tries to deny the above-mentioned facts, is holding ulterior motives. The intentions to restore the feudal serfdom and separate Tibet from China by the Dalai clique will incur strong objection from all Chinese including Tibetans, and is doomed to failure.

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Forgotten

BC doc. The Forgotten Refugees, is an admirably succinct summary of the Bhutanese refugee situation in Nepal and captures the complex human calculations of the resettlement solution.

BBC correspondent and director Amanda Burrell begins by following Chamlin, a refugee and midwife, whose narrative describing camp life intersects nicely with a sequence of the impressively efficient food operations, representative of the humanitarian aid work honed over the 20 years of the camps’ existence. More importantly, it allows us to appreciate the trauma of Chamla’s and her elderly parents’ exodus from Bhutan and their current plight, illustrative of the experience of many of her peers.

For the middle portion of the film Burrell shifts to Bhutan, where the crew is allowed a brief day visit to that gorgeous and tightly restricted country. It is here that she garners some of the most intriguing interviews, interspersed as it is with weak Lonely Planet-esque cultural relativisms. There are chilling comments by Michael Hudson, an apologist for the Bhutanese position, that gives a frightening double-edge to the response to human rights activists protesting the citizenships act of 1988: “Because harmony was so much part of the way of life... it was very difficult to know how to deal with this sudden promotion of disharmony. ...I think measures were taken to try to promote harmony.”

It is followed by denials from a government official of any wrongdoing and denials that most of the refugees were ever actually Bhutanese citizens. But upon her return to Nepal Burrell chooses to provide a platform to negate the Bhutanese version of events. The footage of an aged Bhutanese man with his battered folder of worn documents of taxes, marriage certificates and yes, an unmistakable footage of an aged Bhutanese man with his battered folder of worn documents of taxes, marriage certificates and yes, an unmistakable

A reminder of the still unresolved and evolving predicament of Nepal’s Bhutanese refugees

frustration and lunacy of the situation of the refugees. By minimizing any indications that many Bhutanese refugees have formed outside the camps for work and education. Forgotten Refugees fails to underscore the one other option for the remaining Bhutanese refugees—some kind of compromise that affords the Bhutanese refugees the right to lawfully work and live outside the camp in Nepal either as citizens or withholding their political rights for repatriation.

In the final portion of the documentary Burrell focuses on the resettlement program to third-countries. Her treatment of the subjects who have chosen third-country repatriation captures both the sense of uncertainty and the tantalizing promise of a more prosperous life. But upon her return to Nepal Burrell chooses to provide a platform to negate the Bhutanese version of events. The footage of an aged Bhutanese man with his battered folder of worn documents of taxes, marriage certificates and yes, an unmistakable citizenship identity card provides a striking illustration of the
EVENTS

- **Silent Witnesses**, stencil artwork by Anjica Hamon, till 24 April, 5-9 PM at The Bakery Café, Patan.
- **Caravan art show 2009** by Narayan Shrestha at Hotel Summit till 30 April, 9851000519.
- **Buddhism in a Nutshell** one day course, 29 April, 8AM-9PM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel. 4410402.
- **Starry night barbecue**, live music, every Tuesday, every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi.
- **Mocktails** by Sotai & Kai therapy centre at Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, 9-11AM, 28 April, 5013554.
- **Call for entries for Film South Asia** till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141.

MUSIC

- **An evening with Manose Singh**, 25 April, Yala Maya Kendra, 5PM, Patan Dhoika.
- **Roots**, a musical performance by Bob Marley along Desmond O’Sullivan and Anthony Cornell, 5.30-8 PM at L azimuth Gallery Café, 4428549.
- **Kathmandu express**, performance by International Acts, 7.30 PM onwards free entry at Makah.
- **Live band** everyday at Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbar Marg, 4227288.
- **Sunday Jazz brunch** barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234.
- **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4206326.
- **Strings Band** live every Tuesday at Gā Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- **Wednesday Melody at Jazzabell Café**, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM, 2140757.
- **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards. Rs 699 at Fusion, Dwarkais Hotel, 4479488.
- **Happy cocktail hour** 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jalta Café & Bar.
- **Live Sensation**, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Radhimi Singh every Friday, sull & raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5021408.

DINING

- **European BBQ at Fusion bar**, Dwarika Hotel, Rs 1499/- 24 April, 7PM onwards. 4491234.
- **Weekend Brunch** by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, Soaltee Crown Plaza Kathmandu, 11AM-3PM. 4279899.
- **Pizza & Pasta at the Roxel Restaurant** every Monday & Tuesday, starts from 13 April, Hyatt Regency, 4489362.
- **New York Café, Singha Mahal, Thapathali**.
- **Home made pasta** at Al Fresco, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999.
- **Gourmet trout at Olive Garden**, 8PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazzini. 4411818.
- **Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine**, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070.
- **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4:30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- **Mediterranean culinary delights** every Friday from Greece, Italy, The Café, Hyatt Regency, 6.30PM. 4481224.
- **Nhuicheo goes Thai** at Nhuicheo Thai Kitchen, Bakwater. 4429690.
- **Fusion of Marcela Reganis new menu and Mannaís new bar at Dhokaima CaE.** 5522113.
- **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999.
- **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarkais Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341.
- **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- **Sunday Jazz brunch** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Girey Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Thursday 7PM onwards. 4412999.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com.
FACE LIFT: A painter at work at the premises of Shital Nibas, the office of President Ram Baran Yadav.

BALLAD DAYS: Pandit Vinod Kumar performs at a gejal night at Rastriya Nach Ghar on Sunday.

MODEL STUDENTS: Winners of VOW Magazine’s Top 10 College Women collect their awards at Everest Hotel on Sunday.

AMERICAN ACE: The Commonwealth and US tennis teams celebrate after the US won the Quetta Cup double’s tournament at Phora Darbar on Saturday.

ONE TRACK: National Janamorchha Party stages a 10-day protest against federalism at Mallighar Mandala on Monday.
Nepal’s not a failed state, it’s the world’s most fatalistic state. Why else would Kathmandu be chosen to host the Asian Astrologer’s Convention in June? If you are planning to get married, launch a new education consultancy, or stage a coup d’état then it would be wise to time it for the dates that Asian astrologers will be here. You can be sure the soothsayers have ensured that it’s an extremely auspicious day during which there will be no bundles, no chukka jams, no afternoon hurricane and all present and future enemies will be vanquished. Astrologers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Japan, Malaysia, Burma and Sri Lanka will be attending, although strangely absent are the DPRK. Our country’s foremost jyotisis will host the conf. But Nepal’s comrades have a lot to learn from other countries, for example numerologists in Burma determined that the most auspicious day to crack down on pro-democracy demonstrators in Rangoon was on 8 August 1988, the infamous 8-8-88.

All the gossip this week concerns the army. Was this move prompted by the COAS politely declining PKD’s offer of ambassadorship because he already has lucrative UN appointments lined up in Baghdad or Kabul? Is his vociferous opposition to integration becoming an irritant to neighbours who want UNMIN out of their countries? Whatever the case, Bicki and his Buddies thought they had the timing right to sack the Chief because the Indians are distracted by elections and NK was on a China junket. What they didn’t bargain for was the complete rejection by the Indian security establishment of any meddling with the Nepal army and the fact that the Indian army chief is Gen Cutwall’s buddy from the academy. And the Indian elections had something to do with it because the Maoists calling the shots in the army. Earlier, ambitious generals knocked at the doors of royal relatives to get a proper hearing. These days they route their complaints through Baddie ministers, high-profile conflict beeds and friendly dips. The only saving grace is that there is someone even less kewl than Gen Cool: Bum Deb. The fellow lost the election, and has been the most spectacular failure in his inability to control the deteriorating law and order situation, but he has managed to wriggle his way to become the seniormost Eh-malay in the government. He gave the go to PKD sending the spastikarr letter without even consulting his party and conveniently when his party boss was away. His action has led the UML now to the verge of collapse. Wait a minute is that what the Maoists are really trying to do by taking on the army? There are now enough grounds to believe that by making Leftist God their home minister, the Maoists were using him as a fifth column. He’d conveniently stay at home when the time came for them to take over the state.

Comrade Baidya has more faith in private enterprise than in institutions of the government, it seems. The ideologue chose a private nursing for treatment while President Ram Baran Yadav had himself operated upon at the much-maligned Bir Hospital sometime back.

These figures just came in: the total number of bund days in 2005: 768. Total number of highway blockades last year: 7,211.