In this prolonged political uncertainty, ad hoc populism passes off for governance. Hoodlums set fire to school buses like this one in Lalitpur on Monday (left), they vandalise colleges in broad daylight. A “revolutionary” wing of a “student” body takes responsibility, threatens to do it again, and they do. No one is arrested. In a country where politicians get away with murder, one can’t really blame their fundraising protégés for ransacking schools. The lawlessness will grow worse each day that the country drifts along in this purposeless vacuum.

Responsibility to protect

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Editorial page 2

Certainty uncertainty

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THIS IS IT
by Rubeena Mahato
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BY THE WAY
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SETI’S ORPHANS
Two months after the Seti flashflood, victims struggle to overcome the disaster and rebuild their lives. page 6-7
When the social discourse is so politicised, it is tempting for the media to be content with the operational strategy of day-to-day party politics. Which party wins and which party loses from the dissolution of the CA? The mightier the party, the higher the final tally. In the end, which faction of which party holds the trump card over the dissolution of the CA? Who gained the upper hand in the negotiations that led to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and now is there a stalemate on government formation between those who want the prime minister to step down before a unity government, and Baburam Bhattarai and the NC? I believe the opposition presents a viable alternative. It is clearly a side in a desperate hurry to end the deadlock: Bhattarai is perfectly happy where he is, and the NC knows an acrimonious dispute will erupt within its senior ranks between aspirants for the premier’s post.

This prolonged uncertainty has encouraged crime and corruption, and made impunity and lack of accountability the norm. Ad hoc populist measures are off for government. Farmers don’t have fertiliser, even in the monsoon there is six hours of power rationing, half the kids have been denied in a heavily road-widening spree, and all Baulavata is interested in is passing by ordinance allowances and facilities-for-life for government alumni.

In this climate of impunity, hoodlums set fire to school buses, vandalise colleges in broad daylight. A “revolutionary” wing of a “student” body takes responsibility, threatens to do it again, and they do. But no effort is made to catch the known ring leaders. This is not really about the English names of colleges or expensive school fees, it never was. It has always been about making an example of those who refuse to give in to extortion demands.

No profession is untouched. Journalists are harassed and beaten. Doctors are manhandled, and hospitals vandalised. High profile political assassinations go unsolved. More than 60 people are killed in highway crashes during a single week, and no one could really be bothered.

The lawlessness will grow worse every day that the community drifts along in this purposeless vacuum. It is time to take certain steps to end the uncertainty, and they are (in order of business):

- Urgently agree on a national government
- Announce a date for local and general elections by spring 2013
- Crack down hard and fast on impunity
- Restore investor confidence

The lawlessness all around is a result of politics being stuck in a deadlock within a stalemate.

The reason things are completely stuck now is that we have a deadlock within a stalemate. The deadlock in the constitution led to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and now there is a stalemate on government formation between those who want the prime minister to step down before a unity government, and Baburam Bhattarai and the NC. I believe the opposition presents a viable alternative. It is clearly a side in a desperate hurry to end the deadlock: Bhattarai is perfectly happy where he is, and the NC knows an acrimonious dispute will erupt within its senior ranks between aspirants for the premier’s post.

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Student unions of various hues have always used the glaring disparity in Nepal’s education sector and the unregulated over-commercialisation of schools and colleges as an excuse to extort cash to fund their mother parties. This act is sanctioned by the establishment, and it is regarded as an acceptable fundraising method.

It is the political culture they have been schooled in. Ever since the Panchayat days when political parties were banned and student unions acted as their proxies, students have been the militant vanguards of their parties. The Maoists only honed this into a fine art by making schools a recruitment centre, training ground, and a fertile source of funds for their revolution.

Now that a faction of the Maoist party has broken off and can’t purloin the treasury anymore, it resorts to vandalism, arson and terror of schools as fundraisers. It is a time-tested method and works brilliantly.

The reason schools are targeted is simple. They alone have the cash this time of year just after admissions, when all other businesses are struggling because they have been bled dry by extortion, political uncertainty, militant labour and power outages.

The hoodlums masquerading as students who destroyed computers in colleges in Kathmandu this week will in most likelihood be members of a future parliament (if we have one). The anarchists who torched school buses in Lalitpur and Chitwan may well be ministers 20 years down the line. People who blame the old guard in the political parties for letting the country down and pin their hopes in the next generation have a huge surprise in store.

What is outrageous is the lack of outrage at schools being targeted. We mince words and try to justify the attacks, blaming it on the frustration of jobless youth when it is plain this is about extraction and extortion. Just think about it, these are school buses not armoured personnel carriers or riot trucks that are being set on fire. Only cowards use terror against buses carrying children.

It’s not just schools. Hospitals are regularly vandalised and doctors and nurses in Dharan, Chitwan and Pokhara are physically assaulted. Police often step in to tear gas into hospital premises. Yet there is the same silence from commentators and the public. Terrorism thrives in this silence.

The uncritical mass

In a country where politicians get away with murder, one can’t really blame their student protégés for setting fire to school buses

Setting fire to school buses is a crime, vandalising a hospital is a crime, and the silence encourages criminals in the garb of politicians to justify what they do. They have our blessings, they know they are immune and people are powerless.

This impunity obviously thrives because of a weak state, there is no fear of punishment. It’s the media’s responsibility to highlight the wrongdoing, but when reporters and commentators do take notice, they treat it like an isolated incident. By trying to be ‘balanced’ and ‘neutral’ in its coverage the media equates the victims with criminals, legitimising the use of terror and justifying impunity.

This cycle has been repeated so often, the public has been desensitised and has come to accept terror, extortion, intimidation and vandalism as the norm. When the known murderers Ujjan Shresthas, Arjun Lamas and Mana Sunars walk around in broad daylight, become ministers, are promoted or share the podium with the prime minister, criminals down the line get the message.

Our values are tainted by ideologies long considered obsolete elsewhere. We support state harassment of businesses, local opposition to infrastructure projects, militant unions on extortion sprees because the pro-fit motive is considered evil. This spooks the few investors who are still here.

Perhaps we should bring the discussion back to the public sphere. When people are more aware of their rights and responsibilities, when they are clear about the core values they strive to protect, when they begin to understand that the state derives power from us the people, and not the other way round and that it is people who are indispensable and not the government, they will be able to assert their rights and protect their freedoms better.
The battery-operated Reva cars are no longer the head turners they used to be five years ago in Kathmandu. The residents of the capital have got used to seeing the tiny vehicles plying alongside motorbikes, microbuses and SUVs on the congested streets.

But the electric cars are likely to gain more popularity among urban Nepalis now that Agni Incorporated, the authorised distributors of Mahindra vehicles in Nepal, has been granted dealership of Revas.

The Indian multinational bought half the stake in the Bangalore-based company earlier this year which makes the California-designed car that was introduced in Nepal in 2000 by Eco-Vision.

“Reva is not a new name in Nepal, but we intend to increase its visibility by marketing the brand intensely,” says Cabinet Shrestha of Agni Incorporated, which has been the dealer for Mahindra in Nepal. “Extending the partnership in electric vehicles was a mutually beneficial agreement for both of us.” Shrestha plans to market the car outside Kathmandu as well, starting with Pokhara and Lumbini.

With the fuel crisis certain to get more acute and petrol more expensive, electric cars are the perfect environment-friendly addition to Kathmandu’s roads. The little Reva is often described as “cute” and lets the driver manoeuvre through chaotic traffic and narrow alleys effortlessly and needs very little space for parking.

For those who are skeptical of buying electric vehicles in a country with chronic load shedding, Agni says the car can be charged at home by plugging it to a 220v wall socket for three hours and can run 80km on full charge. The operation cost is less than that of a two-wheeler. Says Shrestha: “It is more or less like charging your mobile phone.”

When Reva was first introduced, it was subjected to the same tax rate as petrol and diesel vehicles, making it too expensive for most Nepalis. Only diplomatic missions and international agencies who did not have to pay the tax could afford the cars.

But after intense lobbying by green groups, the Reva is now levied 40 per cent excise duty, 13 per cent VAT and is exempt from paying the annual road tax. This has meant that there are many more Revas with red number plates. The easy to drive car is a favourite among female drivers in Kathmandu.

Green groups say the cut in import duty is not enough for fully electric or hybrid vehicles, especially if they are used for public transportation.

“We have been vigorously lobbying with the state to reduce tax on zero emission vehicles. The government should not make it expensive to be green,” says Shrestha.

With the formal launch of Reva DLX last Sunday, Agni Incorporated says its promo drive is already a big success with a flood of new orders.
A caretaker government can’t offer much more than a stop-gap budget, but improving the investment climate should be a priority

The partial budget does not include new programs except for Rs 3 billion for outstanding payments surplus and forex reserves reached a record Rs 113 billion and Rs 427 billion respectively. This wasn’t because of any novel government policy or structural changes in the way the economy is functioning, but because of high remittance inflows and net transfers. There are still worrying signs in the economy: inflation is still high, the government’s projection of eight per cent for 2011-12 is a gross understimation, the trade deficit is widening, industrial woes are persistent, recurrent expenditure is rising, fiscal deficit is increasing, financial sector troubles are not sorted out, and some inefficient state-owned enterprises continue to drain taxpayer’s hard-earned money.

The budget provides no relief program for the public, who are hammered by soaring inflation. The troubled industrial sector is also not getting immediate relief. The grand plan for Nepal Investment Year 2012-13 is now out of gear, and development will suffer.

The best the caretaker government can do is ensure good industrial relations, maintain investor confidence and earnestly implement ongoing projects by plugging leakages. Importantly, the primary focus should be on sustaining growth rate given the impending impact of monsoon and fertiliser scarcity during planting season.

Chandan Sapkota, a researcher at South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), starts a fortnightly column in Nepal Times, It’s The Economy. Views expressed in the column are personal. www.sapkotac.blogspot.com
On the morning of 5 May, villagers on the northern edge of Pokhara heard an unusual noise from the Seti. Within hours floodwaters swept away settlements, farmlands and cattle along Kharapani village killing 20 and displacing hundreds.

Twenty-year-old Amrit Pun and 13-year-old Chahana Pun’s parents and baby brother along with 10 other villagers from Leknath municipality were at Sardi Khola taking hot spring baths that Saturday. Their parents and brother never returned.

“We weren’t expecting the flood, because it wasn’t the monsoon season yet,” explained Amrit, wiping tears from his eyes. Many sand miners and tourists who had come to bathe in the hot springs lost their lives after multiple avalanches triggered a sudden blockage in the Seti.

The siblings are now looked after by their aunt and uncle, who visit them every day. They have been surviving on food and money provided by the local government, the Nepal Red Cross Society and District Disaster Rescue Committee. Amrit wants to support his family and is desperately searching for employment, but having studied only till fourth grade, jobs are hard to come by. He says if his father was alive, he could have learnt technical skills from him and become an electrician as well.

Chahana is studying in sixth grade at a school 30 km away from her home. Funded by a Japanese NGO, the school provides free education and housing to children affected by the flood. Chahana hopes to study in Japan after completing her SLC exams.

Despite the ordeal, the children remain optimistic. Amrit said: “I know our parents will never come back. But our neighbours have been extremely helpful and have taken good care of us during this difficult time. And I am hopeful that once I get a job, I will be able to take care of myself and my sister.”

While Amrit, Chahana and hundreds of other flood victims try to rebuild their lives, heavy rainfall on 11 July set off another flood on the Seti. The river swelled to 15 metres, submerging squatter settlements along the bank in a muddy ooze as the rains washed down the sediments of the May flood from the mountains.

Two months after the Seti flashflood, victims struggle to overcome the disaster and rebuild their lives.
Scientists analysing the flash flood on the Seti River on 5 May, which killed nearly 80 people, have concluded that it was not caused by global warming, but a massive rock fall on the west face of Annapurna IV. This in turn triggered an avalanche which bulldozed glacial debris into the river.

The aftermath of that event is still visible as monsoon rains lash the Seti Basin, washing down more of the sediment deposited upstream. What is flowing down the Seti this week is not water, but a muddy white paste.

That Saturday morning, Russian pilot Alexander Maximov of Avia Club Nepal in Pokhara was flying a tourist on a sightseeing flight at 10,000ft above the Seti and filming it all from a video camera on the wingtip of his blue Aeroprakt plane. Inadvertently, he recorded the dust cloud created by the rock-ice avalanche, and noticed the flash flood coming down the Seti. He radioed a warning to Pokhara that possibly saved many lives, and then raced the flood down the Seti Valley, taking aerial pictures of the river as it tore through villages.

Maximov flew back the next day and took amazing photographs of the devastation on the ice shelf below the 7,525m-high Annapurna IV in the headwaters of the Seti. Scientists analysing those images have concluded that a rock face very near the summit of Annapurna IV broke off, taking down a part of the ice cornice of the ridge as well.

David Petley a professor at Durham University writes in The Landslide Blog: ‘It is clear that the landslide is a huge rockslope failure…on the flanks of Annapurna IV. The mass appears to have fragmented when it reached the lower angled slopes at the foot of the steep section, and to have runout as a rock and debris avalanche.’

Also taking pictures in the days after the event were the eyes in the sky of NASA’s Landsat satellite. The image taken on 6 May shows an enormous brown area below the cliff where the rock slide pulverized, and sent a cloud of dust that was carried northwards to the base of the ridgeline between Annapurna III and IV, which separates Kaski from Manang. Despite a technical glitch, the Landsat image also shows the channels through which the avalanche plunged to the Seti below and caused the devastating flash flood downstream.

Interestingly, the rockfall was not caused by an earthquake, but it created an earthquake that was detected by the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University in the US. Experts there concluded that the landslide moved from east to west and dislodged some 22 million cubic metres of rock that first fell 2,000m into the ice shelf below Annapurna IV and then another 2,000m into the Seti. There, the avalanche of rock and ice moved at 30 metres per second and pushed the water down the River at high-speed.

The Seti has seen much bigger floods in its history, one of them occurring about 800 years ago which was of biblical proportions and brought down a wall of debris 100m high to what is now Pokhara city.

Climate change and future earthquakes will exacerbate this danger. Risk management experts say it is better to be prepared with a flood early warning system, and zoning laws that discourage settlements and infrastructure along river banks.

Read also:
- David Petley’s The Landslide Blog
- Kunda Dixit’s East-West Blog, Himalayan Tsunami
- Alexander Maximov’s video of the dust cloud from the avalanche
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Kunda Dixit

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Alexander Maximov’s video of the dust cloud from the avalanche
Coffee and conversations

There are several reasons to head down to Moksh Complex: music, food, yoga, books. And now you can add one more to the list: coffee. Less than two months old, Karma Coffee is gaining popularity among the regulars at Moksh Complex.

"It was such a shame to see so many different artists walk by one another without exchanging a single word," says founder and Austrian expat Birgit Lienhart-Gyawali. "I figured coffee would bring us all together. We could talk, get to know each other and build a sense of community."

It all began in 2010 when Birgit was travelling and a coffee farm in Bagmati, run by an old married couple, caught her attention. Her interest in Nepali coffee grew and she quit her job and began Karma Trading, which exports Nepali coffee beans to Austria and Germany. The company now hopes to build a brand name under Karma Coffee.

Initially a one-woman operation, the coffee house now has two baristas and several volunteer assistants who freshly grind coffee beans for each serving. What is unique about this place is the pricing, the standard cup is only Rs 30, but donations are welcome.

"My main goal is to promote Nepali coffee and make it affordable for everyone," explains Birgit. "As long as I can run this place, I don’t care much about earning huge profits. People should be more excited about the money they might make. Proper training is necessary to make better coffee, and farmers are more excited about the money they earn from coffee beans."

Karma Coffee stresses on making best use of resources and not being wasteful. The flower pots that line the balcony are decorated with used coffee filters, which Birgit also recycles and turns into coffee paper to ship batches of beans.

When asked about the biggest obstacle so far, Birgit is very pragmatic in her response. "The coffee industry in Nepal is relatively new. Farmers are less concerned about quality and are more excited about the money they might make. Proper training is necessary so that they can recognise good quality beans."

OLIVE GARDEN: one of the finest restaurants in town serving fusion cuisine from the Mediterranean. Every Friday, 7 pm to 9 pm.

ALCHEMY: an authentic Italian restaurant which serves dishes like Pizza Quatro Stagioni and Spaghetti alla Puttanesca.

Chilli Bar and Restaurant, from Nepali to European cuisine, this restaurant serves delectable dishes along with mouthwatering Chef’s Salad.

Bhajan Griha, traditional Nepali restaurant that serves great local food with folk music and dance.

Chez Caroline, for business lunches and relaxed dinners. Babar Mahal, Revisited.

MUSIC

Monkey Temple, catch Monkey Temple’s brand new album Shades of Grey as they perform live. Rs 350, 20 July, 7.45 pm, Tritana Restro and Bar, Lazimpat.

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Chez Caroline, for business lunches and relaxed dinners. Babar Mahal, Revisited.
amazing cocktails. Hit the dance floor after your meal. Lakeside, Pokhara

BLACK AND WHITE CAFÉ, a great place to spend a quiet afternoon surfing the net with some bakery items like the Swiss Apple Pie and chocolate crépe with homemade ice cream. Lakeside, Pokhara

BISTRO CAROLINE, a highly recommended place to eat and relax. Their chocolate mouse and fish dishes are a must for bodleys. Lakeside, Pokhara

Just Baked, a cozy café with amazing pastries and a friendly ambiance. Old Baneshwor

MANGO TREE LODGE enjoy culture walks, rafting in the Kamal, wildlife exploration, jungle safari at the Bardia National Park, Shehar, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com

Hotel Landmark, made entirely from traditional Nepali brick and woodcraft, this hotel is rich not only in heritage but also in services and boasts an award winning restaurant, The Hungry Eye. 0997-671-492608/463098649687, www.landmarkpokhara.com

The Last Resort, offers canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, and mountain biking. Challenge yourself and be adventurous. 4700525, 4701477

SOMEPLACE ELSE

Pumpernickel

If you choose the name Pumpernickel to sell bread and cake in Nepal, you better do it well. Pumpernickel, the popular German black bread, sets the bar high for all tourists, expats and well-travelled Nepalis, who miss their daily dose of good bread.

But Nurbu Shrestha, the owner of the long-established bakery in the heart of Thamel, knows what he is doing. He has been to Germany and Switzerland for almost 35 years now.

I recommend trying one of the delicious sandwiches. They are quite expensive (Rs 149 to 195), but worth their price. The whole grain buns are homemade and a felicitous alternative to the flavourless white toast you often get in Kathmandu. Decorated with lettuce, tomatoes, onions and cucumber, you can choose between tuna, egg, vegetable, and various kinds of cheese sandwiches. Go for the cheese option. Try to come before noon because the bread might be sold out by then and you need to wait quite a while for a new basket of freshly made bread.

A good Western breakfast needs croissants, proper croissants. Sure, the real pain au chocolat tastes better, but compared to the small boring pastries called “croissant” that are sold elsewhere in Kathmandu, the chocolate croissants at Pumpernickel (Rs 60) are big, have flavour and fill you up.

The croissant goes really well with a cup of delicious milk coffee (Rs 115). The mango lassi (Rs 140) could be a bit cooler. A much better alternative is the broad range of homemade cakes. With classics such as black forest, cheesecake, carrot cake or linzer cake behind its counter, Pumpernickel is well equipped. I recommend the carrot cake (Rs 80). Baked with cinnamon and raisins, it tastes just like it would if you make it at home. And I have high standards, because carrot cake is one of my favourites.

The service is fast but a bit indifferent. And I was quite disappointed by the way the food was served, after all you eat with your eyes first.

You can get other kinds of breakfast – cereal, porridge and omelette – served in the homely decorated place that exhibits photographs by the owner’s friend and renowned photographer Mani Lama. Customers, mainly chatting in English, French, Dutch or German, can use WiFi and take a break from city life in the welcoming garden.

I have been to many bakeries abroad to satisfy my craving for real bread and quite often left them disappointed. But I highly recommend Pumpernickel bakery for good breakfast, afternoon tea and cake or just a relaxing dose of caffeine. If only it actually sold Pumpernickel
immensely in determining as the cause. So just obtaining (sometimes after a “bhoj”) is But acute diarrhoea cause of diarrhoea in ingrained in our minds bacteria and not other patients. The vast follow. The communicable boro, or so it is believed. There is no choice but to mark the beginning of the Nepali month of Shrawan when Lord Shiva is threatening cholera bacteria from water from the stone spouts in Kathmandu. When these diabetics approach the local municipality with this scary information, the news was greeted with the usual Nepali nonchalance. There is no choice but to drink boiled water. Drinking boiled water may not be practical for everyone due to lack of fuel or budget constraints. In that case, if someone is still motivated enough, chlorine tablets or liquid iodine can be used to obtain clean water. Of course changing water pipes that run parallel with sewage pipes would help fix the age-old problem of water-borne diseases once and for all in Kathmandu. Perhaps all the doctors in the health sector for a year should be channeled into changing the water pipes in Kathmandu. If we had the political will to implement this policy, it would be the single most important and revolutionary public health measure carried out in Kathmandu. But at present the sad fact is that for many of us in Nepal, the land of the great Himalayas and bountiful rivers, just obtaining drinking water is hard enough.
Attacks on private schools are a manifestation of the class divide in education

Ander a decade-long armed conflict, Nepal is not yet at peace. The class war is giving way to a caste war, and protracted conflict over identity is giving way to a caste war, and protracted conflict over identity. The attacks may be politically motivated, but there are deeper, and more disturbing, underlying reasons.

Nepal has a parallel education system based exclusively on accessibility and affordability. Government schools and colleges are cheap, but for the most part offer poor quality education. Private schools are more expensive, but have higher quality of education and show better results in state exams.

To talk about the unfair quality divide between public and private education may seem to be something really wrong with the structure of the education system in this country.

The government and donors who support the education budget may rejoice that there are more schools in remote areas, enrolment is up, and Nepal will now meet its MDG targets for primary education. But the world has changed since those goals were set 12 years ago. To understand and cope with the complexity of social, economic and political life in the 21st century it is not enough for individuals to be literate anymore.

According to the government’s 2002-2003 Economic Survey, the number of students per public secondary schools was 95.15, while the same ratio for private schools was 46.13. Similarly, the teacher-student ratio for public schools was 28, while there was approximately one teacher for every 10 students in private schools.

In 2007-2010, as the number of students in secondary public schools surged to over 500,000, the divide became even more glaring. The student-teacher ratio increased to 170 students and the teacher-student ratio increased to 31.42. Comparatively, the numbers stayed as low as 60.51 and 12.26 respectively for private schools.

Besides the numbers, there are unmeasured variables like infrastructure, logistics, quality of teachers and environment for education, which distinguish private education from public. The divide continues in higher education and is forever imprinted on certificates. What is most ironical about the system is that despite of a lifelong divide in the classrooms, the students take the same tests and are marked alike in the exams. So it is not difficult to understand who has better chances of making it to the job market.

Last year thousands of young men and women, many graduates and post-graduates, applied for the 3D (dirty, difficult and dangerous) jobs in Korea, more will be applying this year. I still meet my classmate from school who was perhaps more deserving but could not complete his higher education. The state has failed in its fundamental duty of ensuring that every citizen has the freedom to choose a life of dignity.

Every year there is a shortage of text books and medicines in the remote areas, while the government increases subsidy on petrol, runs unsustainable diesel plants to light up the cities and provides various tax holidays in the name of saving jobs and encouraging business.

During one of the frequent strikes called by the parties in May, a young graduate who was vandalising a motorcycle in Pulchok told me, “I have a certificate but no job. Instead of sitting idle I am doing some politics here.” You cannot expect civic behaviour from people in a country governed by uncivil priorities.

Violence should never be glorified in any form, for any end but these are times of soul searching for the more able sections of society. They must see the link between growing anarchism among the youth and the desperation they exhibit.

As long as the state cannot guarantee quality education and even out the playing field, thousands of disillusioned young minds will serve as political ammunition. And it doesn’t matter which political party they belong to.

No man’s land

Six years after the end of the war, land continues to be the sticking point in the peace process

ANURAG ACHARYA

In the initial 40-point demand issued by the erstwhile Maoist rebels in 1996, the party called for ‘land under control of the feudal system be returned and distributed to the landless and homeless.’ They demanded that upper class lands be ‘confiscated and nationalized.’

Less than two weeks after submitting their demand, the Maoists launched the ‘people’s war’ on 15 February 1996, attacking police stations.

The man who drafted that 40-point demand is now the prime minister of the country, and it is supreme historical irony that he was handed the same demands by landless people aligned to a faction that has split off from his party.

The 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and subsequent political agreements committed the Maoists to return the seized land to its owners, and a government commitment to land reform. However, in a recent report The Carter Centre was found that the land claims were still only partially fulfilled. While most of the land seized in the hills, mountains, and parts of the eastern and central plains have been returned, in the Mid and Far-Western Tarai where the largest number of seizures had reportedly occurred, they have either not been returned or given back conditionally.

Baidya was where large tracts of private farms were captured by the Maoists, especially around the Rajapur area in the western parts of the district. Officials figure show 604 hectares were captured in 24 VDCs, but local politicians and civil society believe the area could be up to 1,422 hectares.

In Bara district, around 5,000 people are living in seized land while another thousand houses have been built illegally in occupied plots in Chitwan. Similarly, in Dang an estimated 1,829 hectares of land belonging to Nepal Sanskrit University, Mahendra Campus, Ratanath Temple and Sworgadwari Temple have been occupied by the landlords, and squatters.

The report calls for a comprehensive land policy to return the seized land to its owners, and a government commitment to land reform. However, while most of the land seized in the hills, mountains, and parts of the eastern and central plains have been returned, in the Mid and Far-Western Tarai where the largest number of seizures had...
Sangita Rasai was too young to understand what was happening when the conflict reached her hometown of Pokhari Chauri, a Maoist stronghold in Kavre. But when the army killed her brother, a Maoist, and her sister, Sangita became an unwilling participant of the conflict.

Phadindra Luitel’s father, Guru Prasad Luitel, a teacher in Okhaldhunga, was abducted by the Maoists in 2003 when he was returning from school. They killed him, tied him to a tree and left his body there.

Sangita was a victim of state atrocities and Phadindra suffered from Maoist excesses. But years of pain and an unrelenting demand for truth, justice and compensation have brought them together. Sangita admits that even a few years ago there was a clear divide in the movement for justice. ‘Army victims’ and ‘Maoist victims’ would meet separately, organise separate protests and approach the state as two distinct groups.

She says the only time both sides met was during meetings and trainings. When they started talking, they realised how much they had in common. No matter who carried out the killings, they have lost family members and friends, endured immense grief and have similar objectives. It made sense to work together as staying divided only weakened their demand and made it easier for the state to ignore them.

Phadindra agrees that victims should not be divided. “I think victims on both sides are equal,” he says.

The other thing they have in common is a legal system that doesn’t penalise but rather enables impunity. Six years after signing the comprehensive peace accord, relatives and friends of nearly 2,000 disappeared and 16,000 killed by either side are still struggling for answers.

Unlike other post-conflict countries where some form of transitional justice has been applied, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Nepal is still at a draft stage. The dissolution of the CA in May has stalled the process once again. Despite the apathy shown by all the political parties, and overcoming their own hardships, both Sangita and Phadindra have not given up on their personal quests for justice.

After the Maoists captured their family land in Okhaldhunga after killing their father, Phadindra Luitel, his two younger siblings and mother fled to Kathmandu. He quit his job two years ago and now works as the vice chairman of the Conflict Victim Orphans Society. “My job was not as important as justice,” he says.

The family borrowed money from friends, neighbours and banks to file a lawsuit against the killers and finds itself in debt. Although the case is now before the Supreme Court, the police is reluctant to pursue the perpetrators, and they receive death threats.

The trauma of losing two children has left Sangita’s mother psychologically scarred. Like the Luitel’s, the family also migrated to Kathmandu after her father was regularly harassed and
and justice

questioned by the police and army. Sangita Rasaili, however, moved back to Kavre and currently volunteers at the Local Peace Committee. Both families have received some compensation from the government and legal help from private organisations. But neither is satisfied.

Sangita says the government equates financial assistance with justice. She argues that the government uses money to shut down a case because people within the government are responsible for many of the killings and it’s in their interest to close the investigations.

The money helps the family in the short-run, but justice in its true sense has not been given. They still don’t know who killed her brother, how they did it and why.

Sangita, Phadindra and thousands of surviving families from both sides want an independent, powerful TRC where victims are part of the decision-making process. They want to know who the perpetrators are, why their loved ones were killed, raped or tortured, where the disappeared are, and they want war criminals to be punished. Despite suffering, the lack of support and the political deadlock, Sangita says one has to be optimistic because otherwise there is nothing you can do. They will keep asking for justice, she says.

Phadindra too believes his family and others like them will get justice. “We are still hoping. One day, justice will come,” he says.

United by loss

Laxmi Devi Khadka and Devisara Wali make a formidable pair, working together as activists campaigning on behalf of families of the disappeared. They know what it is to have a loved one taken away. They have lived through the nightmare. In the ten years since their husbands were disappeared by the Maoists and the state, they have knocked every door for answers, only to be sent back with false hopes and assurances.

Victimised by opposing sides of the war, one would not expect the two women to be good friends. But that is what they have been to each other through these difficult years, when friends, relatives and even family turned their backs on them.

“We may have been victimised by different groups but the pain is still the same,” Devisara says. Her husband, Suresh was last seen in the district police office in Bardia. Laxmi’s husband was taken by the Maoists when they were about to sleep. “They said they would send him back in 15 minutes, but we never saw him again,” she says.

Laxmi and Devisara have continued to search for their missing husbands even as the men who took them threatened them to stop. “How can I give up on my husband? I have kept all his clothes and belongings in the hope that he would be back one day,” Devisara says.

Two days after Laxmi’s husband was abducted, a local paper in Nepalgunj carried a report that he was executed. But since there has been no official confirmation, Laxmi continues to live in limbo.

“I can’t believe he is dead until I see his body,” she says. “I keep searching for his face in the crowd. At night when the dogs bark, I still get up to see if it’s him.”
“We never demanded ethnic states”

Interview with Rajkumar Lekhi, president of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, Kathmandu, 15 July

What prompted the decision to establish an ethnic party? The country needs a mainstream political party that gives voice to all ethnic and indigenous groups. The dissolution of the CA showed how little the top three parties care about our needs. This is why we want a political party that accommodates people from all communities so that mainstream parties accept our collective agenda. However, I don’t agree on having a party that only represents a single group. It’s not practical.

It seems like every ethnic group wants to start its own party. Don’t you think this will destroy national harmony? Like I said, I don’t believe in a party based on singular identity. The only way we can take the country forward is by recognizing and celebrating our diverse languages, cultures and people. Since many organisations are already working to address the demands of various ethnic groups, a political party for each group is not necessary.

If there was no demand for ethnic federal states, why were the proposed names based on ethnic groups? The fear of sharing power made certain leaders uncomfortable. They spread lies about states based on single ethnicity, and used it as an excuse to slash all hopes of a federal Nepal. That was never our demand. All we wanted was an inclusive federal structure where we could assert our ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities and where we would be treated equally.

Where is the indigenous movement headed towards? The cultural and social agendas raised by indigenous groups since 2007 has now become a political agenda. If the political parties fail to address them, then the country cannot progress.

“Why aren’t we given visa on arrival?”

Devendra Bhattarai, Kantipur, 18 July

At the recent Women of South Asia and South-East Asia Development conference in Kathmandu, human rights activist and member of Afghanistan’s National Assembly, Shinkai Zahine Karokhail questioned the Nepali government’s discriminatory visa policy for Afghan nationals.

“As members of the SAARC we talk about mutual co-operation and share the same platform. So why can’t we be given visas on arrival at Tribhuvan International Airport?” she inquired. She wanted to know whether Nepal had blacklisted Afghanistan because of the ongoing conflict and terrorist activities. She said, “Afghanistan doesn’t produce terrorism but it is a victim of terrorism,” she explained and added, “thousands of Nepalis currently work in Afghanistan, the Nepali government should ease diplomatic relations for their safety.”

In an effort to promote tourism, Nepal offers visa on arrival to visitors from all but 11 countries, which include Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Cameroon, Swaziland, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Somalia, Nigeria and Ethiopia. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these nations are not eligible for visa on arrival because of war and terrorism in these lands or the fear of illegal immigrants.

According to an official from the immigration department at the Home Ministry, the decision to not provide visa on arrival to Afghans doesn’t fall under the SAARC’s jurisdiction. “There are many countries that don’t provide us visa on arrival. It’s a question of bilateral ties and not a regional issue. We can be liberal with our policies, but if the other country does not reciprocate, then what’s the use? It has to be a two way relationship,” said the official.

“We have become a whole”

Naya Patrika, July 18

A month after the split in the Maoist party, senior leaders of the UCPN-M have said that they are committed to end factionalism within their ranks. “We became liberal and allowed anarchy to spread. We will put an end to this, strictly abide by Leninist principles and complete our revolution in a new manner,” said chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal at his party’s seventh extended plenum. 4500 people were present at the meeting, half of whom were representatives of ethno-federal units.

The party’s earlier policy encouraged members to form ideological factions, but if the new proposal tabled by Dahal is passed, such policies will cease to exist. Dahal also admitted that among the 12 mistakes his party made after signing the 12-point accord, his involvement in the Katuwal case, his party’s inability to take others into confidence, and misunderstanding of the Madhes issue were the worst mistakes.

“We have become a whole and will now focus solely on concluding the peace-process and restarting the constitution writing,” added party’s vice-chairman, Baburam Bhattarai.

Bulldozer: Broadcast fee

Batsyavan in Kathmandu, 15 July
Rafting versus hydropower

Bikash Thapa, Annapurna Post, 18 July

The construction of the 102MW Middle Bhotekoshi project, which is a subsidiary of Chilime Hydropower Company, has hit a roadblock after protests from the owners of The Borderlands Resort. They argue that building a hydropower plant on Bhotekoshi will destroy the adventure tourism industry. The resort has even managed to attract locals against one another.

The proposed site at Jambu village for the new power house of the 102MW Middle Bhotekoshi project.

While neighbours, India and China post impressive double-digit growth rates, the decade long war has stunted Nepal’s development. And with the country reeling from acute power shortage, the need for hydropower plants cannot be stressed enough. If this project gets aborted, we risk losing Rs 30 rupees for every unit of electricity that is not produced. We cannot let the vested interests of some private companies jeopardise the nation’s progress.

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The proposed site at Jambu village for the new power house of the 102MW Middle Bhotekoshi project.
Extending the Extended Central Committee

This was bound to happen. After blowing up government buildings with employees inside for a decade, the MaoBuddies are now terrorised by bomb threats in their own offices. After an improved explosive device was found in their lair in Chitwan, the Mao Party is blaming Kaka Kiran and his followers for the attempted blow-job. The Big Buddies now have a lot more to worry about as Comrade Matrix launches his own New Improved Revolution, and Kiran Kaka scoots off on a junket to Kathmandu to extort anything that moves while he is away.

Kiran Kaka divorced Chubby Lal, but he is already flirting with Comrade Matrikulum. However, Kathmandu’s up-ed communists and anal-ists are only two ways the Great Grounds are to blow rings in the air. He just wanted the Janajatis to defect to his party, not to set up their own. PKD had been backfired on beneath them to lure away their Janajati netas. But all his behind-the-scenes machinations seem to have backfired on PKD.

Jay Pee has just shown us that he can strike back from almost anywhere. You have to give it to the guy for chairing his Central Committee meeting from behind bars and dumping his deputy Rajkishor. When the Ass tried to get a reaction, the expelled Minister for Disinformation lived up to his reputation and told us not to believe such lies. Most politicians wait till they are released from detention before they write their jail memoirs, and the latest is Chiranjiji Waggle. But JP has written while still inside. What is this, a writer’s retreat?

You can criticize Prime Minister Bhattarai for being dour and uninspiring, but he sure had our welfare at heart when he enforced the seatbelt law, the anti-drink-and-drive drive, and ordered the demolition of half the city so pedestrians are not mowed down.

This is a man who between 1996-2006 could have killed you, now he doesn’t want you to die. The latest edict from Baburam Raiya carry on till Dasain and beyond. Since elections are not going to happen in November, Baidya believes there is no particular hurry to stake a claim to prime ministership.

The two parties are in such a state of stupor that they haven’t noticed Comrade Ferocious beavering away beneath them to lure away their Janajati netas. But all his behind-the-scenes machinations seems to have backfired on PKD.

The most demoralised parties these days are the Kangrejis and the Eh-maleys, and they seem to have resigned themselves to let Baburam Raiya carry on till Dasain and beyond. Since elections are not going to happen in November, Baidya believes there is no particular hurry to stake a claim to prime ministership.

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He just wanted the Janajatis to defect to his party, not to set up their own. PKD had even promised them positions vacated by Baidya’s Boys, but now he is worried the new Janajati Party will undermine the ethnic politics he has so carefully cultivated as his powerbase.