

Peace and Democracy in South Asia, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2005.

Editorial Introduction

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As editors of this issue, it was our original intention to come out with a special 'Nepal issue' of PDSA which would cover a broad range of relevant issues related to the current impasse in Nepal. Due to a limited number of quality academic submissions, however, we have been obliged to scale back our plans somewhat and settle instead for an issue with a 'Focus on Nepal'. We do hope that, in the near future, and with sufficient lead time, we will be able to solicit enough Nepal-related articles to qualify for a special issue in its own right.

In the present issue, we have a number of impressive articles with Nepal focus. We start with an article by the respected historian John Whelpton who offers some structured reflections on the causes and effects of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Being both well-versed in the machinations of contemporary Nepali politics, and yet sober in his judgements, his article makes for an interesting and comparative read. Next, Amanda Snellinger's paper offers a compelling analysis of an apparent crisis in student politics. In her ethnographically rich presentation, she focuses on the gap between politically active and non-active students and demonstrates that this is symptom of a larger political problem: the disconnection of the political parties with their support base in the general population who are their constituents. Finally, Bandana Shrestha and Som Niroula offer an informative research note on internally displaced peoples (IDPs) in Nepal, contrasting the international legal provisions for such citizens with the inability and unwillingness of the government of Nepal to take their plight seriously.

In their paper titled 'The Naga Resistance Movement and the Peace Process in Northeast India' the authors C. J. Thomas and

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H. Srikanth focus on the oldest insurgency in northeast India, and suggest that the ongoing peace talks between the government of India and the Naga insurgent group NSCN (IM) leadership have raised considerable hope for peace in the region. The authors argue that the chances of arriving at a sustainable peace proposal are bright at this time given a change in international political scenario and the recent shifts in Indian foreign policy that is beginning to look at the region as a resource rather than a liability. The paper emphasizes the need for a pragmatic approach to the contentious issues of sovereignty, unity and problems of integration of Naga inhabited areas so that the negotiating parties are able to arrive at an agreement that will be acceptable to all the stakeholders in the region.

In his paper 'Techno-Industrial Cooperation for Development in the Two Punjabs and Strategic Role of the Punjabi Diaspora', Lakhwinder Singh offers a basis for techno-industrial cooperation between the Indian and Pakistani Punjabs in order to reduce knowledge gaps. Singh argues for close techno-industrial cooperation between the governments of the two Punjabs both in the fields of industry and education and proposes that the two Punjab governments should work hard to initiate an enduring process of establishing high-tech research institutions. The other paper on the two Punjabs is by Tridivesh Singh Maini, who argues how economic integration between India and Pakistan in general and the two Punjabs in particular will surely prove to be beneficial to both the countries but more so for India, whose strategic location is yet to be exploited due to narrow security and political considerations. One of the most important stumbling blocs in this regard is the Kashmir issue, which the author argues, must be kept in the back burner if the two countries have to take advantage of the new economic opportunities that globalization offers to them. Maini notes several positive developments in this direction and hopes that one day the two countries will learn to overcome their political handicaps.

The above distribution of articles is also reflected in the book reviews included here, although not by design. The book reviews by Deepak Thapa, Manaslu Gurung & Chris Holme, and Sara Shneiderman deal with three recent and important publications on Nepal by John Whelpton, Manjushree Thapa and the Centre for Investigative Journalism. The other two reviews deal with books that discuss Indo-Pak relations. Michelle Cooksley reviews the book on cricket by Shaharyar K. Khan and Justin Jones reviews the book on Pakistan by Stephen Cohen, but the two books are tied together with a common appreciation for better relationship between India and Pakistan.

While heading towards publication, we realised that while the three research articles and the three book reviews covered important aspects of the current socio-political and humanitarian situation of Nepal, the focus of the issue would be rather limited in the absence of any analysis of the royal takeover of February 1, 2005, its impact on the various parties in the conflict and on the nature of the conflict itself. Thus, instead of writing a more traditional editorial overview, we thought it desirable and necessary to use our editorial prerogative to highlight the royal coup of February 1st and its tactical and strategic implications. We do so in the belief that the royal takeover earlier this year, and the major shifts and alignments in Nepali society and politics which it has brought about, will play a decisive role in reshaping the nature of the current conflict in Nepal and the timing and direction of its resolution in the near future.

Thirty years of single-party monarchical rule ended in Nepal in April 1990, amid great fanfare and public expectation. A decade and half later, constitutionalism and stable parliamentary democratic politics continue to elude Nepal. Successive rounds of post-1990 national politics have foundered on a bed of unresolved historical animosity. State, society, community, and economy in Nepal are caught in seemingly endless and multiple conflicts. Today Nepal stands at a perplexing and perverse distance from the heyday of democratic consensus of the early 1990s, when even

sceptics had to accept that perhaps the transition to truly representative democracy had been successfully made in Nepal.

Yet, the past decade and a half has seen a virtual political meltdown in Nepal with the country in the throes of a low intensity civil war, and the polity convulsing thanks to social, ideological and political polarisation reminiscent of states both in paralysis and heading unsteadily towards collapse.

In many parts of rural Nepal the armed Maoist insurgency has systematically phased out the little state presence that had been negotiated through five decades of 'development.' From the Maoist perspective, fully rooting out the 'state' included uprooting the uneven yet precocious and well accepted presence of the constitutional political parties in the rural parts of the country. As part of their revolutionary critique and practice, the Maoists offer a vision of a Nepal in which social, political, and economic institutions and relations are re-engineered in keeping with their normative belief in a truly socialist utopia. Backed by arms, and operating in a terrain ideal for guerrilla war, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has succeeded in deploying violence to advance their political cause beyond the limits which would have been possible for a political party using non-violent parliamentary means.

However, even critics of the Maoists who abhor their role in normalising violence in Nepali politics are forced to acknowledge that no organized political group had exposed the conditions of widespread marginality in Nepal, or espoused the cause to address such marginality, as effectively as have the Maoists. While coercion and violence have played a central role in catapulting the Maoists from a marginal left party to a formidable national armed rebel movement, it is also quite clear that they command a share of popular support among a nationwide constituency of Nepalis disenfranchised and exploited for generations.

Whether the Maoists are considered to be a political party first and a 'terrorist' outfit second, or vice versa, the insurgency has brought the entire edifice of post-1990 democratic politics to a

standstill. The last national and local elections in the country were held in 1999, and the last parliament was dissolved in October 2002. Elected local bodies across the country were dissolved by Prime Minister Deuba shortly before he was himself removed by King Gyanendra who did so by invoking Article 127 of Nepal's constitution. Political party activists and officials have left their rural bases in droves (Nepal is 70% rural by population, and over 90% rural by land area), causing the presence of the mainstream parties in rural Nepal to sink to a historic low point, perhaps even lower than during the latter half of the Panchayat period.

NGOs and the activism and development space which they created and in which they operated after 1990 has rapidly shrunk as the NGOs themselves and the people that staff them face conditions that make safe and effective operation in Nepal's rural villages close to impossible. With both security forces and Maoists monitoring their work, the fourth estate, Nepal's free press, has been under particular duress across Nepal since the start of the insurgency. Following King Gyanendra's formal takeover of February 1, 2005, the royal government has gone after the media in open defiance of the constitutional provisions of freedom of speech and expression. The royal government has not spared NGOs and INGOs from a slew of recently instituted arbitrary regulations aimed at weakening their capacity to put pressure on the state on grounds of human and civil rights, and freedoms.

The monarchy and multi-party democracy, long considered 'twin pillars' of the Nepali state, are in the process of battering each other into submission, if not oblivion. The rift between the palace and parties has progressively widened since the royal takeover, and the gulf now seems almost unbridgeable until a new constitutional and political dispensation can be worked out. How this will come about is a subject of intense interest and speculation at present, and is certain to have very far-reaching consequences for state and society in Nepal.

Even prior to February 1, 2005, the three sides involved in the conflict in Nepal – monarchy, Maoists, and political parties –

were already separated by significant ideological and political differences. February 1st has had the effect of further distancing the monarchy and the army from the political parties, while the distance between the latter and the Maoists, at least at face value, appears to have narrowed. However, there is no glossing over the fact that leading up to February 1st, the mainstream political parties were very much part of the state structure which the Maoists aimed and intended to topple. Indeed, aside from their common opposition to the royal power grab of February 1st, profound differences exist between the Maoists and the mainstream parties on substantive issues of governance.

Political and ideological polarisation in Nepal has reached a new high since direct royal rule, and the monarchy — an institution whose legitimacy was already in some jeopardy after the 2001 palace massacre — has painted itself into a corner. The King and his court will now have to depend for survival almost entirely on the active support of the old, anti-democratic aristocracy, and the Royal Nepal Army, the institutional base of the traditional Nepali ruling classes. February 1st eliminated the buffer that political parties provided for constitutional monarchy as enshrined in the 1991 Constitution. As a result, King Gyanendra has exposed the monarchy to a barrage of domestic and international attacks with no parliament and elected government to temper and deflect the onslaught. Faith in the coexistence of democracy and monarchy in Nepal has been shattered for many political party faithful and members of civil society. Not surprisingly, the Maoists' call for a republican state has gained considerable momentum among the political parties and even among ordinary citizens.

The royal takeover of earlier this year has yielded both a possibility and a predicament for the constitutional political parties. The outright breach of the contract between the palace and the political parties represented by the takeover has forced the parties, after years of infighting, to unite under a common banner (the '7-party alliance') and to launch a movement for 'full

democracy.' With press freedom and civil liberties under direct assault after February 1st, the seven-party alliance has received catalytic support from 'civil society' groups comprising of academics, journalists, lawyers, writers and other professionals who find themselves at the forefront of resisting the state's draconian measures. The united front of the political parties, with backing from ordinary citizens, is in the process of recovering some of the political capital which it squandered since 1990 through inter- and intra-party infighting and mis-governance. In this sense then, the royal takeover has provided political parties with a significant opportunity to reclaim lost legitimacy among the masses.

However, with the February 1st move also come predicaments for the constitutional parties of Nepal. With relatively little public goodwill to rely on after a decade in power, the parties are obliged to adopt the language and modality of 'civil society' in the process of building a resistance and mass protest against the royal takeover. The 'civil society' movement is itself predicated on two key ideas. First, that owing to the compromised approach of the constitutional parties when both in and out of office, political power in Nepal had migrated back to the palace. Secondly, that this shift of power back to the palace was inevitable given the 'compromised' nature of the 1991 Constitution which left large loopholes for the palace to exploit. In this line of argument, the royal takeover of February 1st, 2005, was seen as direct result of the 'incompleteness' of democracy in Nepal based on its constitution a decade and a half earlier.

The remedy on which the political parties have settled is defined around the pursuit of 'complete' (also referred to as 'full' or 'absolute') democracy. After the initial assertion of royal power in October 2004, 'complete' democracy was defined around strategies to contain and check monarch intent upon being 'seen as well as heard.' The revival of the dissolved House of Representatives became a rallying cry for the Nepali Congress and its veteran leader, Girija Prasad Koirala. Reinstating the house,

then, would become the first step to achieving 'complete' democracy.

After the first of February 2005, the 7-Party Alliance adopted the slogan of 'complete democracy', even though its political goal was no longer restricted to the revival of the Parliament. Instead, responding to the strongly anti-party platform through which the King justified his royal takeover, the 7-Party Alliance migrated steadily towards the position that the only way to achieve 'complete' democracy in Nepal was to adopt a democratic and republican political set up through the implementation of a constituent assembly. The Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) and the Nepali Congress Party (NC) soon passed internal party resolutions formalising, to various degrees, their party's disillusionment with constitutional monarchy in Nepal.

'Civil society' played a significant role in the post-February 1st radicalization of the 7-Party Alliance, as did younger party activists. Both 'civil society' and political party activists hold covert and overt palace interference since 1950 to be primarily responsible for the failure of democracy in Nepal to grow deep roots, to gain stability and to meet public expectations. Thus, post-February 1st, a three-way convergence of views between the political party leaders, 'civil society', and radicalised younger party activists has emerged about the root causes of the instability of democracy in Nepal, and its long-term redress. The Shah monarchy's long-standing reluctance to be bound within the constitution is now widely regarded as the fundamental factor behind weak and ineffectual democracy in Nepal. The growing calls for a 'democratic republic,' therefore, represent the experiences and conclusions of pro-democracy Nepalis distilled through 60 years of struggle against an 'activist monarchy.'

Interestingly, the post-February 1st ferment and introspection within the political parties has led them to the same practical conclusions that the Maoists have held for a decade, namely that people's sovereignty and monarchy in Nepal cannot

co-exist. Based on this conclusion, political parties in Nepal (again, not unlike the Maoists) have embraced a constitutional assembly and a 'democratic republic' as the definite *nikas* (outlet or solution) for the nation. This means that the long-standing tri-polar conflict in Nepal is now less tri-polar and increasingly bi-polar – the monarchy and army versus a potentially united force of political parties, 'civil society' and the Maoists. Can this mean that Nepal is now closer to peace, stability and democracy?

The answer would be affirmative if the political parties are able to successfully bring about any one of the three critical conditions outlined below:

- a) A sustained and sizeable demonstration of public support for the 7-party and 'civil society'-led peaceful movement which could turn the tide decisively in favour of the agitating party coalition and against the palace and its supporters, including the Royal Nepal Army.
- b) A major realignment in the loyalty of the Royal Nepal Army from exclusive support of the palace to actively backing the parliamentary forces that could potentially end not only the royal regime, but the institution of the monarchy itself.
- c) A credible commitment by the Maoists to lay down arms, to renounce violent politics, and enter into the mainstream as one of Nepal's many parties in a multi-party democratic setup, which might quickly de-legitimise the royal regime both domestically and internationally.

While condition 'a' (amassing sustained public support for a movement) is the most feasible of the three for the parties to implement, the experience of the past three years reveals that this would be easier said than done. In over three years of nearly continuous street agitations, political parties admit that they have had limited success in bringing masses other than party cadre and student supporters to the streets. Numerically, crowds have grown larger with 'civil society' participation. Yet the combined mass strength of the movement, so far, falls short of the numbers needed

to counter the coercive presence of the state and to carry the agitating parties to their stated political goal of a democratic republic. The movement may gain strength if the Maoists join the demonstrations peacefully. But condition 'c', discussed below, has to be met for that to happen.

Under the present power alignments, the probability that the political parties will be able to bring about condition 'b' is arguably the most remote among the three conditions outlined above. To understand why, one needs only examine the relative impact of the insurgency on the parties and on the monarchy and the military.

While the insurgency has arrested or reversed the presence, power and reach of parliamentary forces all across Nepal, it has had the perverse effect of laying the groundwork for the resurgence of an activist monarchy with the backing of a greatly beefed up security apparatus. While the insurgency has decimated (in physical ways in some cases) the numerical and moral strength of the parliamentary forces in the hinterlands, it has contributed to a massive growth in the numbers and capabilities of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and the police force. While the insurgency, until recently, created multiple rifts within and between the political parties, it has helped to draw the palace and the army closer together for reasons of survival if nothing else.

In the face of a determined insurgency aimed directly against the monarchy and the military, the palace and the army have closed ranks. Both institutions, and in particular the military, have developed a persecution complex based on their perception that the Maoists, the political parties, 'civil society', human rights NGOs and INGOs, and the press are out to 'get' them. The window of opportunity that opened briefly from 1991 until 2001 for the development of a good working relationship between the new Nepali political elite (the parties) and the RNA (the traditional elite) rapidly closed as the insurgency heated up and took on a national character. While there are certainly liberal and democratic minded officers among the younger generation in the army ranks,

the sense of being under siege from all sides has created an environment where liberal leanings are superseded and suppressed by the institutional survival instinct of the military. Hence, rather than fraying under pressure, the RNA has allied itself ever more closely with its traditional ally and patron, the monarchy.

In the last few weeks, the realisation of condition 'c' seems to have gone from remote possibility to imminent probability. Before discussing the likelihood of condition 'c', it is important to briefly review the impact, to date, of the Maoist insurgency on the constitutional political forces that are represented under the 1991 Constitution. The post-1990 Nepali state comprised of two major constitutional actors – the parliamentary political forces and the constitutional monarchy. The Maoist insurgency was conceived as an ideological and political attack on both elements of the post-1990 state. But the actual and immediate impact of the Maoist insurgency on the two constitutional forces has been uneven. In the past ten years, then, the Maoist insurgency has disproportionately weakened the parliamentary forces in Nepal compared to its real impact on the palace, monarchy and the security forces.

Despite this legacy, after February 1st and, in particular, after the Maoist's unilateral ceasefire, political parties have been under pressure from their cadre and from 'civil society' activists to forge an alliance with the Maoists against the current royal regime. The unilateral ceasefire and some recent public statements by key Maoist leaders are offered as evidence that the Maoists are fully ready for a 'soft landing' as a parliamentary political party. Stonewalled by the king, political party leaders are currently in the process of engaging with the Maoists both inside and outside of Nepal. It is equally clear that the Maoists are eager to build a coalition with the parties, now that the parties have shown themselves to be more open than ever to the two key goals of the Maoists – constituent assembly, and the establishment of a 'republic.' But there are a number of factors which would indicate

that bringing the Maoists into the mainstream is not going to be a simple or easy process.

First, the insurgency is a movement comprising of tens of thousands of individuals organized into armed political cells spread throughout Nepal. The real test of the parties' ability to bring the Maoists into multi-party parliamentary democracy will be played out in the countryside where armed Maoist political cadre have held sway since 1996. So far, the situation in the countryside is not one where parties might exercise the prerogative of making room for the Maoists. To the contrary, the situation on the ground is one where organised and armed local Maoists are in the driving seat: they are in a position to decide whether, when, and how much space will be ceded to the parties. It is up to the local Maoist cadre to allow parties to revive their political and organizational presence in areas where they have been institutionally inactive for up to a decade. These stark realities of the current architecture of power in the countryside, rather than symbolic overtures between top leadership of the Maoists and the parties, will decide whether or not the Maoists will enter the parliamentary mainstream.

Second, for the best part of a decade, the leaders of the insurgency have preached the language of 'capture of total state power' to their cadre and militias. Eventually agreeing to come within the fold of parliamentary democracy has not figured prominently in Maoist rhetoric or practice at any level. The Maoist insurgency has been about deploying violence to implode the post-1990 Nepali political 'mainstream,' not about 'joining' it under terms offered by the parliamentary parties. These are the standard expectations on which Maoist cadres have been raised and retained since their battle began. These expectations may well prove to be insurmountable barriers against the Maoists entering into the parliamentary mainstream in any ordinary understanding of that concept.

Lastly, party collaboration with the Maoists to revive democracy in Nepal is a proposal filled with landmines for the

parties. Tactical or strategic, if the alliance between the parties and Maoists does achieve its goal of a democratic republic, successfully managing the key contingencies arising in the ensuing political void may well overwhelm the structural capacity of the parties to keep the country from getting bogged down in yet another indefinite and destructive power struggle. For whatever reason, if the proposed party-Maoist alliance fails, the monarchy and its allies in Nepal, which includes a military of nearly 100,000, may exploit the attempted merger to further marginalize political parties. In either case, there is a clear danger that the political parties will back themselves into an impossible corner in the process of trying to negotiate this potentially Faustian political bargain.

There is an argument that the percolation of the three-way conflict in Nepal into an increasingly two-way conflict might render the impasse more amenable to a final settlement in favour of democracy. However, for reasons outlined above, a bi-polar conflict will not necessarily help to resolve the political impasse. Much depends on whether a provisional agreement ends up painting the protagonists into even more irreconcilable corners, or whether it changes the terms and dynamics of the conflict in such a way as to galvanize national politics decisively in favour of liberal multi-party democracy.

In the latest developments, the political party-Maoist alliance seems to be coming to a head with India assuming a large role in hammering out an agreement between the two. Initial reports coming out of New Delhi hint at the possibility that the Maoists have agreed to the major demands put forth by the parties before an agreement can be signed between them. On the part of the Maoists, these include a commitment towards multi-party democracy, an agreement not to direct violence against the parties and their cadres, and the laying down of arms under UN auspices. The parties, for their part, have apparently agreed to not work with the king, to reject elections called for by the king, and to endorse elections to a constituent assembly.

The expectation of the political parties from this possible agreement with the Maoists is that it will enlarge and galvanize nationwide protest and opposition against the King's February 1st takeover. Furthermore, they will hope that the provisional agreement will neutralize the armed threat posed by the Maoists in return for helping them make a 'soft landing' back into the political mainstream. The political parties hope to retain most of their pre-insurgency electoral clout and a presence in the new parliament commensurate with their pre-insurgency election results.

On the part of the Maoists, if we hope for a moment that this is not a tactical move reminiscent of Mao's classic 'united front' (i.e., unite with lesser enemy to deal with greater enemy), the Delhi-brokered deal with the parties can be expected to help them accomplish several of their aims. First and foremost, the alliance with the parties promises to legitimize the Maoists as a 'normal' political party, while simultaneously further de-legitimizing the monarchy in national, regional and international contexts. Second, the alliance makes elections for a 'constitutional assembly,' a core Maoist demand, a near inevitable outcome of a successful party-Maoist joint political movement against the monarchy. Third, the Maoists expect to find a respectable outlet for their armed fighters, whether this be through re-entry into civilian life or through individual transfers into a future national army and police. And, lastly, the Maoists may even expect to have a realistic shot at forming a national government by winning elections held under the new constitution.

But the push for Maoist-parties alliance runs into real practical difficulties in the heartlands of Nepal where the conflict has taken on an intractable character in which local political conflict has life and death implications. In the past few weeks, a sizeable contingency of UML cadre and activists descended upon the UML party headquarters in Kathmandu to question the top party leadership about the nature and extent of UML's investment in forging an alliance with the Maoists. A portion of this concern is based on cadre perception that the top UML leadership was

rushing into a strategic relationship with the Maoists without extracting the requisite concessions from them on issues that have a direct bearing on the safety and security of political party work and workers in the districts, towns and villages of Nepal. The predicament of the constitutional party cadre operating in the rural areas is aptly captured in the following line spoken by a Nepali Congress activist from Arghakhanchi District: 'Maoist words are directed against the King and palace, but their actions are directed against the party cadres' (*Himal Khabarpatrika*, vol. 15, # 14, Nov. 2-15, 2005: 28).

Hence, alongside the party leadership's determination to reach out to the Maoists in order to build a robust movement against royal autocracy, there is deep and abiding distrust of the Maoists among rural party cadre, the organizational backbone of the parties. While the Maoist ceasefire has lowered fatalities sharply, its inconsistent and arbitrary enforcement has done little to inspire the confidence of rural party workers who continue to live and work only by accepting and accommodating the dictates of the local Maoist commanders.

Assuming that the Maoists adopt multi-party democracy as their only strategic goal, there are three circumstances under which the party-Maoist alliance can lead quickly to peace and democracy in Nepal. First, if India (or any other major player) can extract tacit approval from the King for the 'soft landing' that India and the Nepali political parties are extending to the Maoists in return for their demilitarised participation in the mainstream. Second, this may also happen if the party-Maoist alliance is successful in transforming the nature of the domestic political equation in the direction of galvanizing a massive and sustained national movement for democracy which receives immediate international endorsement. And finally, peace and democracy may result if the King and the RNA, faced with a direct popular and internationally-supported threat to their existence, quickly agree to fully abide by a constitution drafted by an assembly of elected constituents.

Alternatively, there are three circumstances under which the party-Maoist coalition will lead to greater violence, less democracy, and likely more autocracy.

First, if the Maoists use the alliance with the parties as a mere tactical advantage, then, even if a powerful popular movement succeeds in neutralizing or unseating the King, major violence and renewed conflict is a certainty in the ensuing struggle to fill the power vacuum. In this situation, power can only migrate to the Maoists, or to a military dictator, rather than to the political parties who would advocate the restoration of democratic order.

Second, if the Maoist-party alliance does indeed spark a powerful popular movement, which the King and the RNA decide to face down and repress with force, the situation may descend into full-blown civil war where Nepalis can expect to witness unpredictable and unprecedented levels of violence with no guarantee that democracy will win out in the end.

Lastly, if for whatever reason, the party-Maoist alliance does not succeed in generating a powerful and sustained nationwide movement in its favour, the King and the various forces supporting active monarchy in Nepal will have no incentive to rehabilitate the parties, the Maoists, or democracy in the short run. In this scenario, violence will remain endemic, but limited to pockets and the future for liberty, democracy and respect for human rights in Nepal will be bleak. In this scenario, with the political parties gravely weakened and entirely sidelined in the process of affecting a dramatic political shift in the country through an alliance with the Maoists, it will take years to rebuild the democratic middle ground in Nepal.

For all the trauma that it has brought to democracy and civil liberties in Nepal over the past ten months, the King's February 1st move may yet turn out to be the catalyst that starts the process which will ultimately heal Nepali society, the body politic, and a national psyche sustained only by its yearning for peace.

Note

This editorial was written prior to the November 22nd announcement of the 12-point agreement between the 7-party alliance and the CPN (Maoist). However, the editors have opted not to revisit the editorial before publication. This decision is based primarily on an understanding that the original editorial discussion anticipates and analyses at length many of the more significant contingencies raised by the '12-point agreement' between the 7-party alliance and the CPN (Maoists).