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## Editor's Notes

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## **Editor's Notes**

This issue marks the beginning of our first year of editing a journal dedicated to providing an academic forum for deliberative ideas that promote liberal democracy in Nepal.

The main focus of this journal is to publish academic discourse on development and democracy in the form of essays, commentaries, comments, notes, and letters. Priority is given to pieces that are analytical without being technical or mathematical, and that can be read both by specialists in the social science or policy fields and the general public.

This journal is published by the *Nepal Study Center* (<http://nepalstudycenter.unm.edu>) at the University of New Mexico (UNM). However, many of the articles published here originated from discussions on the online forum *Liberal Democracy Nepal* (LDN). The primary interface of LDN is through its web site (<http://www.liberaldemocracynepal.org>), which includes selected contributions, articles, discussion materials, and constructive comments. The LDN Bulletin (LDNB) is a journal published in accordance with the editorial policies of the *Nepal Study Center* and has become an important academic outlet.

The journal acknowledges important contributions by Dr. Anup Pahari for his insightful inquiries and for framing the questions for policy makers. The journal has also benefited immensely from Ms. Mallika Shakya's dedication to editing and revising these pieces. The articles achieved their fine editorial quality from Matt Ingram. The editor also thanks Prakash Adhikari for his help in creating this journal. Finally, the editor expresses his sincere thanks to the many members of the Nepali diaspora for their moral support and encouragement.

The theme of development and democracy has been a topic of interest among the many members of the Nepali diaspora. What started out as an informal email discourse and private conversation among a few members of the diaspora began to take a larger conceptual shape by the end of 2004. Eventually, the LDN project evolved into a productive collaboration between UNM's *Nepal Study Center* and the members of the North American Nepali diaspora. The academic focus of the Center and its intellectual assets, such as this journal and a research base at UNM, will help LDN become a dynamic forum for scholarly exchange on the issues of development and democracy. LDN derives its scholarly strength from its affiliation with these academic units.

In 1991, after much struggle, this tiny Himalayan country of 23 million impoverished people got an opportunity to elect a government of

its own choosing under a new multiparty democratic system. But quickly, like many other emerging democracies around the world, this new nation began to experience difficulties. Despite some improvements and a positive development trajectory in education, communication technology, free market philosophy, free press, transportation, and social awareness, the country became more volatile and unstable. Governments changed frequently, corruption rose, and the people's apathy also began to rise. Within a short period of time, the armed Maoist guerrillas began an insurgency that spread very quickly throughout the countryside, resulting in significant displacements, misery, deaths and destruction. As in any conflict-ridden region of the world, innocent people have become victims of the violence and human rights violations perpetrated by both sides. In the name of peace and security, the King stepped in, imposed a state of emergency, and seized power on February 1, 2005. The casualties of the Royal intervention have been the political process, the parliamentary practices, and the press freedoms won in 1991.

Still, the fact remains that since 1996, 12,000 people have died as a result of Nepal's violent conflict, and there is a general consensus that there is no military solution. In spite of this, Nepal's three political protagonists – the King, the political parties, and the Maoists – have not shown the courage, resolve, or conciliatory gestures necessary for a negotiated solution. They continue to place their own narrow interests and strategic calculations ahead of the interests of the people and of the country. Importantly, real threats to peace and democracy remain.

### *In This Issue*

The articles, notes, and comments in this inaugural issue of the Liberal Democracy Nepal Bulletin (LDNB) address the following issues facing Nepal in 2005: 1) the constitutional crisis created by the King's authoritarian seizure of power on February 1, 2) the Maoist insurgency, 3) governance problems during the brief tenure of democracy from 1990 to 2002, and 4) foreign relations with India. A theme that is the focus of two articles but that is present in all of the pieces is the peaceful and democratic resolution of the current crisis and the Maoist rebellion. Peace and democracy must return to Nepal.

First, the principal political actors in Nepal must agree to come to the table and talk. Once this happens, however, the negotiations will involve complicated issues regarding the presence of international parties, power sharing, institutional design, social and economic restructuring, and policies towards ethnic communities. In this regard, several points raised

by the contributors resonate with broader arguments regarding conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the fields of comparative politics and international relations.

The areas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding emphasize the importance of both achieving peace and ensuring that a country does not return to conflict. Towards this end, scholars have considered the role of third-party interventions in order to provide effective security guarantees, different geographic or ethnic districts, electoral formulas, the vertical separation of powers in federal systems, as well as the horizontal separation of powers among the various branches of government. Other studies highlight social and ethnic divisions, socioeconomic inequality, state capacity, and even the size of electoral districts.

There are no magic formulas. What Nepal must do, however, is commit to at least discussing the best options, implementing a democratic course of action, and re-examining that course of action at a later date. There will be mistakes and changes, but none worse than the present violence and authoritarianism that grip the country.

The editors of LDNB hope that these articles and comments contribute to a productive debate in Nepal that speeds the country's return to peace and democracy. Along the way, we also hope the conflict and crisis in Nepal can be considered in a comparative perspective, and that the painful lessons learned from similar crises and conflicts in other countries are not wasted on us today.

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