SOWING THE WIND...

History and Dynamics of the Maoist Revolt in Nepal's Rapti Hills

Report submitted to:

Nancy Lindborg, Vice-President
Mercy Corps International

Robert Gersony
Consultant
October 2003

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ACRONYMS

INSEC	Informal Sector Service Center, a human rights organization
NC	Nepali Congress (Party)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RIM	Revolutionary Internationalist Movement
RNA	Royal Nepal Army
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UML	Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist)
VDC	Village Development Committee, a sub-district unit comprising a village center and a number of smaller wards and hamlets
WHO	United Nations World Health Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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WESTERN NEPAL CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

In March 2003, the international non-governmental organization Mercy Corps engaged the author to conduct an independent field-based assessment of the civil conflict in rural Nepal. Based in Portland, Oregon and Edinburgh, Scotland, one of Mercy Corps' principal objectives is to assist war-torn societies with emergency relief, rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction. The assessment was financed by a grant from the United States Agency for International Development and was overseen by USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios.

Since a relatively modest beginning in early 1996, an armed insurgency against the government by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (hereinafter 'the Maoists') has, to varying degrees, gradually affected most of the country. The assessment focused on Nepal's most acutely affected mid-western region, including the districts of Rolpa and Rukum, which are considered the Maoist insurgency's heartland, and included field work in four other nearby districts. This area is sometimes called the Rapti River Valley after the river which flows along its southern border (see Map D) and its tributaries. The assessment's mandate was to address:

- the root causes of the conflict;
- why the insurgency had taken root specifically in Rolpa and Rukum;
- the intersection of development programs (including a major USAID effort in the mid-western region in the 1980s and 1990s) with the conflict's origins;
- the conduct of the insurgency by the Maoist movement, including its administration of areas under various degrees of its influence or control;
- the attitude of local residents toward the insurgency;
- the degree to which Maoist policies and administration are similar to those of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge – either before or after its accession to power in April 1975; and comparisons which can be drawn with the Maoists' Peruvian counterpart, the *Sendero Luminoso*;
- the conduct of the counter-insurgency campaign by the Government and local attitudes toward its policies and actions; and
- the intersection of the role of local democratically-elected officials with evolving events.

The author conducted the assessment during March/June 2003, provided briefings on its findings and conclusions between July and October, and completed this final report in October 2003.

Assessment procedures

In all, 250 persons were individually consulted in the course of the assessment. Research began with the gathering of background information and individual consultations with fifty officials of the sponsoring organizations and Nepal specialists in Washington, D.C., Boston, Geneva and elsewhere. In Kathmandu the author consulted individually with an additional fifty experts from international and local non-governmental organizations and diplomatic missions and with others. These consultations had an average duration of about an hour.

For over six weeks between April and June 2003, the author traveled more than 3,200 kilometers by vehicle through six districts of Nepal's mid-western region, supplemented by local flights. Field research was conducted principally in the headquarters of the following six districts:

Rolpa	Surkhet	Banke
Rukum	Salyan	Bardiya

These districts were selected for study after wide consultation in Kathmandu. The dynamics of Rolpa and Rukum, which contain the area considered the Maoist heartland, are essential for an understanding of the conflict. Surkhet and Salyan are Hill districts, and Banke and Bardiya are Terai districts, which have been affected to varying degrees. Elements of the United Nations office in Kathmandu consider these six among the most conflict-affected districts of the country. According to Nepal's most authoritative human rights organization, these six districts (8% of Nepal's 75 districts) accounted for close to one-third of all conflict deaths up to mid-February 2003.*

In the field, the author consulted with about 150 individuals. The discussions were almost always conducted on a 1:1 individual basis, in a private environment, for an average of between two to three hours each, although some had durations of up to seven hours (except with Government officials, which were usually of about an hour's length). Of the 150 individuals, all but three were Nepalis. Roughly 70 (47%) of the interviewees were either residents of 66 different villages dispersed throughout the six districts or individuals who had been temporarily displaced by the conflict from those villages, while 80 (53%), including government officials, resided in district headquarters.

<u>Local interviewees</u>

- 42 (28%) of the interviewees were field staff and coordinators of local advocacy, social and economic development, and human rights non-governmental organizations;

- 35 (23%) were current or former locally-elected ward, village, district and Parliamentary representatives. They were associated with three mainstream political parties, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist)(UML), Nepali Congress (NC) Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), in descending proportion;

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* Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) data cited in *Crises of Governance and Armed Conflict in Nepal, 2001-03*, USAID, June 2003, Annex 3.5

- Â 29 (19%) were ordinary local residents, including victims of both parties to the conflict, and respected elders;

- Â 7 (5%) were local staff members of international humanitarian organizations;

- Â 7 (5%) were businessmen and commercial traders.

The caste or ethnic origin of the foregoing interviewees was:

Brahmin	17%	Newar	10%
Chhetri	24%	Terai	5%
Dalit	11%	Thakuri	3%
Magar	16%	Tharu	7%
Other	7% (including Muslim, Thakali, Gurung, Rai and Sanyasi)		

84% of these 120 interviewees were men; 16% were women.

Central government officials

The remaining 30 (20%) of the 150 field interviewees were civil service administrators and technicians appointed by the central Government in Kathmandu. These included the Chief District Officers (CDOs) and Local Development Officers (LDOs) of each district and a variety of technical officers. They were all male, 60% Brahmin, 20% Chhetri, Thakuri and Newar, and 20% Terai, Tharu and Sanyasi.

Interview venues

Although close to half the interviewees were from the small village development committee (VDC) areas which comprise the districts, almost all of the interviews were conducted in district headquarters. No interviews were conducted in rural villages, because:

- Â the amount of time which would have been consumed walking out to villages would have limited the number of interviews which could be conducted;

- Â arrival of a foreigner in small villages would attract a level of attention inconsistent with the objective of conducting discreet, private consultations;

- Â it would be difficult to find a venue sufficiently private to assure the interviewee of some anonymity;

- Â village residents who met privately with a foreigner would be exposed to questions, if not harassment or reprisals, principally from the Maoists and possibly from Government forces;

- Â the atmosphere of the areas remained tense, despite the cease-fire. Security is not assured for outside visitors, who are discouraged by the Maoists. During the same period, several multi-lateral missions assessing infrastructure rehabilitation needs were intercepted and refused entry to rural villages by Maoist forces or so closely monitored as to create an uncomfortable environment for both visitors and local residents.

Briefings

Upon conclusion of the assessment, the author provided about twenty oral briefings, each of about three hours duration, to a total of 300 individuals including staff of the sponsoring NGO and the U. S. Government which financed the study, and in Kathmandu to officials of the Government of Nepal and its armed forces; diplomatic, donor and United Nations representatives; staff of non-governmental organizations and to a small number of Nepali journalists. Feedback from these briefings helped the author to sharpen the presentation of issues and to insure that all the relevant findings of the study were included in the final report.

Limitations

Given the breadth of its terms of reference, this assessment was carried out in a relatively brief period. It was conducted principally in the field. The bulk of its findings are based on the information, views and perceptions provided by the 150 individuals consulted in the six assessment districts. Their views are supplemented in the report by excerpts from reports and publications which, in the author's view, help to illuminate them.

The author visited only six (less than 10%) of Nepal's 75 districts. Nonetheless, the districts visited included the two in which the Maoist insurgency had its rural origins as well as four others which have been affected to varying degrees in a way which seemed representative of the conflict's impact in many other districts of the country. The author's decision to not conduct interviews in rural villages, explained earlier, limited the proportion of ordinary residents who participated.

The author did not consult directly with Maoist representatives nor did he visit Maoist-controlled areas. On April 30, 2003, the United States Government, which financed this assessment, placed the Maoists, together with 37 other groups, on its international terrorist watch list, which means its actions will be scrutinized to determine whether the group will in future be designated as an international terrorist organization. Weeks later the Maoists responded with an 'All Americans out of Nepal' campaign, adding to the already-tense atmosphere.

Five days of 'stop the wheels' strikes, mainly by student organizations, and political demonstrations, rallies and flight delays disrupted the assessment schedule. The beginning of the planting season and a hailstorm in early June limited the availability of some local residents with whom the author would have liked to meet.

While the field interviews were conducted in a private, discreet manner, several of the assessment's limitations might have permitted specific biases to influence its outcome:

- Almost all the discussions were conducted in district headquarters, which are firmly under government control. Did the tense atmosphere of the cease-fire, the uncertain future of the peace process, the author's nationality or fear of government or army reprisals, combine to inhibit interviewees from criticizing government, mainstream political parties or armed forces conduct or from fully disclosing the extent of problems or abuses of either?

In the author's view, the vast majority of participants did not hesitate to comment on government and armed forces performance, as the catalogue of withering criticisms documented in this report illustrates. No limitations were placed on the author's movements by the government, nor did it appear that his activities were monitored or that his interviewees were later approached by government representatives. In his final briefings, the author felt free to provide unabridged feedback to government and armed forces participants.

- Did the same limitations described above incline the discussants to exaggerate or understate criticisms of the Maoists?

The overwhelming majority of the interviewees appeared to be using the opportunity of the discussions to neither demonize nor mythologize the Maoists. In the author's view, this report - reflecting principally their perceptions - dispels several widely-held assumptions about Maoist destructive behavior while pinpointing the conduct which has alienated many rural residents. It also includes some widely-held though limited positive perceptions of some aspects of their political program.

The author conducted a total of 250 interviews (150 systematic interviews in the field and 100 elsewhere) and reviewed scores of previous conflict and other relevant studies. Errors of fact and interpretation which in the author's view would not alter the principal conclusions of the assessment may have occurred. The track record of this methodology – intensive field-based research involving hundreds of sources – has proven reliable in the past.

The experiences and perceptions of the 150 field sources who contributed to this report provided not simply a 'snapshot' of the current situation in the mid-west region, but described their perception of more than fifty years of related dynamics in the area and a rather specific description of the immediate pre-conflict and conflict dynamics and trends of the past decade and up to the present.

Feedback from the majority of well-informed participants in the briefings suggested that *most* of the findings for the four assessment districts (excluding Rolpa and Rukum) were consistent with the situation of other rural districts of the country.

Appreciation

Two hundred and fifty individuals devoted considerable time to consultations with the author. They patiently answered countless questions, explained their perception of the conflict's history, generously shared information, opinions and suggestions, narrated their personal experiences as conflict victims, or assisted in other important ways. A few followed up by sharing painstakingly-collected chronologies and other information. Colleagues in the sponsoring institutions assisted by providing information, documentation, logistical support and sustained encouragement, while refraining from attempting to influence the results. Three hundred individuals devoted almost a half-day of their time to listening to the oral presentation of findings and provided sharp critical questioning of its results.

Because the current cease-fire appeared to be perhaps only another pause in the conflict's history (in fact it broke down in August 2003) and to protect these sources and individuals, the author decided, encouraged by the overwhelming majority of those who assisted, to not acknowledge them by name. They know who they are and some will recognize specific information they provided. The author owes them a great debt of gratitude. The interpretation of the information and views offered by these sources, and any errors he may not have detected, are the author's responsibility. This report and its conclusions represent, *within all the constraints encountered*, the author's *best estimate* of the situation in these six districts up to mid-2003.

Organization of the report

The report is organized as follows:

Section I describes the roots of the Maoist conflict, focusing primarily on the areas of the northeast Rolpa and eastern Rukum Hills which are the Maoist heartland. It addresses factors which contributed indirectly to the development of the Maoist movement and some factors which were not among its core causes.

Section II describes the two Terai districts studied in the assessment, Banke and Bardiya, focusing on the eradication of malaria, its impact on the Tharu people, and on conflict dynamics particular to that region.

Section III catalogues Maoist policies and conduct in areas in which they are present, and analyzes their degree of control or influence, the nature of their governance, and the attitude of local residents toward the movement.

Section IV compares Nepal's Maoists with two other Maoist movements: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge and Peru's *Sendero Luminoso*.

Section V summarizes the history, effectiveness and human rights dimensions of the Government counter-insurgency effort and describes some external factors bearing on the current balance of forces.

A summary of the assessment's findings and conclusions is **Section VI**.

Eighteen administrative and topographic maps, listed in the table of contents, are annexes to the report.

SECTION ONE ROOTS OF THE MAOIST REVOLT IN THE RAPTI HILLS

Maoist heartland

The revolt initiated by the Maoists in 1996 in rural Nepal had its roots in an area comprising roughly thirteen Village Development Committees (VDCs) (sub-district administrative units) which straddle the border between northeast Rolpa and eastern Rukum in the middle Hills of Nepal's mid-western region.* From this heartland, the movement's activities expanded, to varying degrees, to the other four districts which were the subject of this assessment and have affected the majority of the balance of Nepal's rural districts.

In their own national administrative designations, the Maoists refer to this heartland area as 'District Number One.' For ease of reference, the heartland area is referred to in this report as the 'Red Zone.' Although 75% of the Red Zone is in Rukum, its nominal capital is considered to be Thawang VDC in northeast Rolpa. Map L highlights the entire Red Zone in red hatching; Maps M and N show Red Zone areas separately for Rolpa and Rukum, respectively, with the same indicator.

The Red Zone is a heavily forested, mountainous area which achieves a maximum altitude of almost 6,900 meters at the northwest corner of Ranmamaikot VDC, which borders Sisne VDC in Rukum. The Red Zone comprises 1,600 square kilometers, 1% of Nepal's territory (smaller than Luxembourg or than Rhode Island, the smallest U. S. state).

Not a single motorable road serves the Red Zone. Thawang is a two-day walk along a mule track from the Rolpa District capital, Liwang. Until 2003, there was not a single road anywhere in Rukum District. In May 2003, the first road to serve the district, constructed by the Royal Nepal Army (RNA), was completed, connecting Rukum's capital, Musikot, with an existing road in neighboring Salyan District.

Since the 1980s, Rolpa's southeastern corner has had a few agricultural feeder roads connecting it to neighboring districts and perhaps one track leading to Liwang. Otherwise, the District has had no motorable or all-weather roads. Its first major road, constructed by the RNA from Dang to Rolpa's capital, Liwang (Map M), was inaugurated in 2002. Both the fractured terrain and the lack of road access made these districts, and the Red Zone in particular, advantageous for a rural insurgency.

The Red Zone's population is overwhelmingly of the Magar ethnic group. Magars represent about 7% (1.6 million) of Nepal's 23 million people**, and are its largest ethnic minority. But the terrain is so fractured, and the population so isolated, that the Magars of the Red Zone and its surrounding areas speak a different language - called Kham - which is distinct and mutually unintelligible from mainstream Magar.***

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* As Map A illustrates, Nepal consists of three distinct areas: the southern Terai, a hot, flat fertile extension of the northern Indian plains (23% of Nepali territory); the Hills (42% of its territory), including Rolpa and Rukum Districts; and the northern mountains (35% of national territory).

** Population data in this report is drawn from the 2001 census, published by the Government's Central Bureau of Statistics.

*** It is not related to the language spoken in Tibet's Kham province.

In fact, the Kham language itself has three separate dialects, not difficult to understand in an area in which one village may be a three-day walk from its neighbor. According to an analysis by Dr. David Watters of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the people of northern and eastern Rukum, (including Takasera), and of Thawang, Uva and Jailwang, speak Parbate (alpine) Kham, while Serum and Gaam residents speak Gamale Kham. Sheshi-Kham is spoken in Kot-gaun, Jankot and Korchawang, just south of the Red Zone.

For an area which has produced a movement which has had a significant national impact, and in which the Maoists' core political constituency is based, the Red Zone has a small population: only about 40,000 persons (less than two-tenths of one percent of Nepal's population), just over 7,000 families, at an average rate of 24 persons per square kilometer, live in what are the most sparsely populated, isolated parts of Rolpa and Rukum districts (the combined population of the two districts is about 330,000). These populations have resided in the same areas for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

Historically, the population of the Red Zone's northern reaches was engaged more in sheep herding than farming, and the religious faith of most is described by local residents as more animist than Hindu. Ritual sacrifice of hundreds of rams at the Jaljala Devi mountain shrine (see Maps E and M) of Kaila Baraha in northeast Rolpa, are important religious events where, according to one historical account, Magars honor ancestral spirits on full moon days of the months of Jestha (May/June) and Shravan (July/August). The mountain's skirts touch eight VDCs, and it peaks at 3,600 meters. Although Magar residents of the Red Zone are less than 3% of Nepal's Magars, some of them believe that their race originated in Komakhar and Pelmakhar caves near what today is the border between Hukam and Ranmamaikot VDCs in eastern Rukum, from where they migrated to areas throughout Nepal.

Only about 10% of Rolpa and Rukum's land is considered arable. In the Red Zone, local families farm parcels of a quarter or half hectare, eking out of poor quality rain-fed manure-fertilized soil just enough basic grains and potatoes to feed their families for three to six months. In these chronic food-deficit areas, as in most Hill areas of western Nepal, they must rely on other sources of income to bridge the food gap and to buy salt, oil, clothes and educational supplies for their children. In a country considered among the poorest in the world, Red Zone residents consider themselves among the most deprived.

The zone's most prominent VDC, Thawang in Rolpa (Map M), was reached relatively early by government health and education services, though these have at times been encumbered by its isolated location. In her exhaustive 1981 study, The Kham Magar Women of Thabang,* anthropologist Dr. Augusta Molnar, who lived in the village around 1978, notes that a health post had been opened at about that time, but that the government had been unable to find a health assistant willing to be posted there.

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* Volume II of a number of USAID-financed research papers prepared for *The Status of Women in Nepal* series prepared under the auspices of Tribhuvan University's Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA).

Dr. Molnar documents the opening in 1979 of a high school (reportedly one of Rolpa's first secondary schools). Staffed by Ministry of Education teachers, it was soon to reach the tenth grade. According to two sources, the school was actually constructed with significant community labor and materials, financed by contributions collected during the annual cultural events at the Jaljala shrine. A post office opened in 1970 served several VDCs and, according to Dr. Molnar, was "quite busy due to the large amount of mail to and from Indian army soldiers and their families."

Surprisingly for an area which has produced a communist insurgency, there are few striking inequalities in land and other property ownership. While most people struggle on less than a hectare to feed their families, the largest landowner might have five hectares, which would include mainly low-quality grazing or forest land. While most families have 10 - 25 sheep, a handful of more successful shepherds had accumulated up to 200.

Sheep

Reliable statistics concerning sheep herding in the Red Zone were difficult to obtain. It appears that some 25% of its population today, far less than historically, keep sheep, particularly in the zone's northern regions. In the summer months (roughly May/August), the shepherds abandon their families to graze their flocks at higher altitudes (about 5,000 meters), particularly in northwest Ranmamaikot and other VDCs of northern Rukum, under hardship conditions. Traditional agreements involving annual fees permit shepherds from lower altitude VDCs to graze their sheep in higher altitude VDCs.

In the winter months (roughly November/February), the shepherds, together with their families, migrate to lower altitude grazing areas, which may include moving their herds as far south as the Mahabharat range above the Dang valley (just south of Rolpa). While the men tend the sheep, the women weave blankets which are eventually sold in Kathmandu, generating sheep herding's main revenue. (A few interviewees said that in recent decades when shepherds return from Dang, they use the sheep to carry small commercial amounts of salt and rice to sell at home.)

Reports that the amount of grazing land was diminishing because of over-grazing and the expanding population, were challenged by some local sources, as was the assertion by many that the sheep population in some Red Zone areas had diminished by half since the 1970s. It may be that traditional migration routes are being diminished by expanded human settlements. But all sources agreed that the proportion of men engaged in shepherding has diminished significantly since the 1970s, as young men rejected its harsh demands and disruptive living conditions in favor of other employment, particularly in other countries. Reliable sources reported that the Maoists had confiscated (and consumed) the sheep of some of the handful of owners who had up to 200 in their herds.

Iron mining

Another traditional livelihood which declined sharply in the 1970s was artesanal iron mining. Jailwang VDC, on the southern frontier of the Red Zone, was the center of this activity. Local residents extracted iron from twenty manually excavated iron mines about six meters deep. Forest hardwoods, abundant a century ago, were used to produce the hot-burning charcoal needed to smelt the raw iron. The small local Dalit minority (Nepal's untouchable Hindu caste for some of whom blacksmithing is a traditional occupation) fashioned the iron into axes, picks and ploughs which they sold in neighboring areas.

But by the 1970s, the hardwoods needed for charcoal became scarce and deforestation affected forest products needed for housing, firewood and fodder not only for sheep but for buffalo and goats. At the same time, industrially-produced, cheaper and better quality tools from India began competing with local production. So in about 1977, the villagers and the government agreed by consensus to close the iron mines.

British Gurkha service

Some Magars - though probably not primarily from this zone – apparently fought together with the Kingdom of Gorkha in the movement to consolidate Nepal's sixty disparate kingdoms into modern Nepal. In 1743, the Kingdom of Gorkha, led by 20-year-old Prithvi Narayan Shah, began this movement with an effort to gain control of the Kathmandu Valley and eastern Nepal. His immediate successors expanded the Kingdom to the west and south.*

King Prithvi and his successors used a combination of military force and diplomacy in their efforts. History records only one major case of violent post-conflict revenge. Three assaults by Prithvi's forces failed to capture Kirtipur, a hill-top redoubt overlooking Kathmandu Valley, and the defenders inflicted many casualties on his forces. When he ultimately overwhelmed them, Prithvi ordered some of his soldiers to cut off the lips and noses of all of Kirtipur's male inhabitants, except musicians who played wind instruments. The dismembered lips and noses, collected in a basket, were said to weigh 85 kilos. He then ordered the killing of those who had, under his instructions, committed the atrocities.

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*Historical information in this section is drawn principally from

Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies/Area Handbook Series, published in 1993 by the United States Library of Congress, edited by Andrea Matles Savada, a wide-ranging reference text;

Massacre at the Palace, the Doomed Royal Dynasty of Nepal, by Jonathan Gregson, published in 2002 by Hyperion in the United States, a lively and highly readable description of the history of Nepali governance and a detailed analysis of the June 2001 massacre of the royal family; and

The Call of Nepal, by Colonel J. P. Cross, published in 1996 by the Bibliotheca Himalayica, the auto-biographical account of a British army officer whose career was closely linked to the British Gurkhas.

In the early 1800s, the expanding Kingdom of Nepal began intruding on the territory of the British East India Company, provoking the 1814 Anglo-Nepalese war, ultimately lost by Nepal. Nepal forfeited about one-third of its territory, most of it the flat, hot and fertile northern Indian plains known as the Terai. The British were, nonetheless, so impressed with the fighting qualities of the Magar, Gurung and other ethnic Nepali Hill combatants in the Nepali army that they demanded and received, as a concession in the Sagauli Treaty of 1816, the right to permanently recruit them into the British army.

In 1857 the British found themselves fighting the Sepoy Rebellion, also called the Indian Mutiny, India's first independence revolt, in northern India. The rebels included peasants, Muslim aristocrats and local elements of the British army itself. Major cities of Bengal fell into rebel hands. To assist the British, Nepal's Rana administrators, who had recently seized power from Nepal's traditional Gorkha royal rulers, mobilized 15,000 troops and inflicted decisive losses on the rebels.

Once again, the British recognized the fighting skills of the Nepali Hill ethnic groups and continued their recruitment into the British forces. As an expression of gratitude, the British returned to Nepal parts of the Terai they had acquired through the Sagauli Treaty. Until their departure from India in 1947, the British remained indebted to Nepal's Rana regime. (At Indian Independence, British Gurkha units were divided between the British Army and Indian Army, and both India and Britain continued the practice of recruiting ethnic Hill Nepalis into their forces.)

Increasingly recognizing the value of its 'Gurkhas' (a reference to the ruling Gorkha kings), the British Government employed them in the Second Afghan War (1878 - 1880) and in China in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, ultimately establishing a 12,000-man Gurkha Brigade. Of 200,000 Gurkhas who served with the British in World War I, there were 20,000 casualties. In 1919, British Gurkha forces under General Dyer were ordered to fire on Indian independence protestors outside the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, where they killed 300 persons and wounded 1,200 others.

Another 200,000 Gurkhas served in World War II in the Middle East, Burma and North Africa. Colonel J. P. Cross, a British officer who led the Gurkhas for several decades, describes them as the backbone of the successful British counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya in the 1960s. The announcement that they would be deployed in the 1982 Falklands campaign, some said, made the Argentine forces tremble.

Known for their discipline, tenacity, courage, loyalty and ferocity, the Hill tribes produced thirteen Gurkha Brigade winners of Britain's highest award for valor -- the Victoria Cross. Six of the recipients were Magars, the second most prominent ethnic group in the organization after ethnic Gurungs.

Only a small minority of Kham-Magar families, mainly in VDCs along the Red Zone's southern skirt (including Thawang, Iriwang and Jankot) actually participated in British Gurkha service, though more served in its Indian Army counterpart. The Red Zone was not a significant feeder area for these services, nor did it ever enjoy the presence of satellite recruiting centers, which served other areas of Nepal. Nonetheless, salary and pension remittances traditionally contributed to the Red Zone's cash flow. In recent decades, as recruitment for the Gurkha and Indian army counterparts diminished, so too has this traditional income.

There is no evidence that former Gurkhas support or participate in the Maoist revolt, nor does their background suggest this is likely. To the contrary, it is widely believed that many former Gurkhas have migrated from their home areas to larger cities to avoid Maoist taxation of their pensions. Still, there are anecdotal reports which could not be confirmed that a handful may have joined or been coerced into advising the Maoists.

Sheep herding, iron mining, and British Gurkha and Indian army service began to diminish as traditional livelihoods in the 1970s. The Red Zone communities did not blame the Government for these social and economic changes, although the economic burdens on local families increased. But a series of government decisions and actions, described below, aggravated these problems, gradually alienated local residents and prepared the ground for the current conflict.

Hashish

Asked about their economic standing today, residents of the Red Zone and others knowledgeable about their condition describe them as being among the poorest communities of rural Nepal. But local residents insist that once they had a good standard of living.

Thirty years ago, they said, theirs was the most prosperous area of Nepal's western Hills. They defined this prosperity as having sufficient cash to bridge the annual food deficit, to buy salt, oil and several sets of clothes each year for their families, to acquire the silver-coin necklaces and bracelets and gold jewelry which Magar women liked to wear, and being able to remain at home, rather than migrating, to acquire the cash these required.

Beginning at least in the 1930s and through the 1970s, the Red Zone, they assert, was the principal producer of Nepali hashish, whose quality was renowned throughout the world. During World War II, Nepali hashish was already commanding premiums in India, its traditional export corridor.

The marijuana plant grows wild in the forests of the Red Zone as well as in all of sparsely-populated northern Rukum, most of northern Rolpa, and a few small pockets of eastern Salyan and of Surkhet. The plant's rough bark was traditionally used for rope; rough fiber produced carrying bags; and its fine thread was woven into traditional Magar clothing. The plant's seeds were ingredients in chutney and pickling.

The Magar people reportedly consumed little or none of the hashish themselves, nor were they accustomed to using marijuana as a narcotic. But beginning sometime in the early 20th Century, they harvested the gum which crowns the plant and processed it into 11-gram hashish balls. The majority of the Red Zone population - including women, children, elderly and adult males – participated in hashish production during harvest season. During the interviews, local residents spontaneously rubbed their hands together, demonstrating the processing technique. Hashish was gathered like many other forest products; there was no perception that it was illegal. [In fact, until the mid-1970s, according to several reliable sources, there were about twelve acknowledged hashish shops and restaurants in Kathmandu.]

While the raw materials (including thread and hashish) from the plant were produced in the Red Zone, the production of traditional Magar clothing and hashish marketing also involved a smaller proportion of the population of southern Rolpa. Local agents bought the hashish balls, which were sold to purchasing agents who came into the area and ultimately sold them in Kathmandu and in India.

Hashish demand grew to the point where families were competing for the wild forest plants. So in some places, to assure a reliable supply, they began to cultivate marijuana on their own land. According to the great majority of interviewees, hashish was the main source of cash income for those who participated, at least in its active seasons if not year-round.

Then in 1976 the Government of Nepal enacted the Drug Trafficking and Abuse Act, prohibiting the production, sale and distribution of hashish. There had never been a significant government security or administrative presence in the Red Zone before the 1970s. Nonetheless, the police enforced the ban effectively by interdicting the trafficking and sale of hashish along established trade routes. Scores of small local dealers and traders were arrested, and the demand for hashish in the villages diminished. When ordinary farmers carried hashish to market, for example to Nepalganj at the Indian border to trade for salt or cooking oil, they too were arrested.

According to one source, land registration was being conducted during this period. Private property which had marijuana growing on it was classified as ‘forest land’ and thereby forfeited to the State. When such surveys were conducted, owners were forced to eradicate their own marijuana plots.

Legal restrictions soon produced police corruption, and the trade, while diminished, did not disappear. Also, some areas like Ranmamaikot VDC were so remote and beyond the reach of the law that production and harvesting continued, though in a clandestine manner. Today, hashish remains an important source of income, but with less benefits to fewer producers. Police corruption which taxed the trade in the 1980s yielded to Maoist taxation in the 1990s. But hashish production has not increased and is not, apparently, an important economic engine of the Maoist movement.

For most Red Zone residents, the hashish ban was the first substantive action of any kind by the remote Kathmandu government which affected them directly. Between 1976 and 1980, the ‘standard of living’ of which they had spoken had given way to grinding poverty in which food was shared among neighbors just so they could survive. Women liquidated their silver necklaces and gold jewelry; men migrated in greater numbers to earn the money they needed for their families’ survival. In their perception, by banning hashish the government had literally taken the food out of their children’s mouths.

The government provided no explanation for the ban (enacted "on a whim," one interviewee asserted), which was perceived as arbitrary and imposed without local consultation. Even today, only a few interviewees could speculate on the reason for the ban. (One thought it was due to a United Nations convention; another speculated that the Indian Government had paid the Nepali Government to stop hashish production so that India could take it over.)

Three written petitions by local leaders to the Palace for some type of relief or alternative development went unanswered. Although King Birendra visited Takasera by helicopter in around 1983 and again in 1988 and declared the zone a national development priority, almost no results were forthcoming.

The hashish ban, while more than two decades old, has not been forgotten and remains a source of bitterness. In the local perception, even though the government did not succeed in completely eliminating hashish, the fact that it attempted to do so left an enduring political imprint. Small pockets in Salyan and Surkhet districts where the Maoists are more embraced also tend to coincide with former hashish production zones.

Yarcha gumba

The harvest and sale of what is described as 'an insect' called *yarcha gumba* is rapidly overtaking hashish as a source of local cash income. The tiny 'insect,' which grows underground in high altitude meadows, sprouts a small above-ground 'flag' through which it is detected. The flag has no value, but the 'insects' are reportedly sold locally at about US$0.40 each and then marketed to China, local residents say, as a remedy for impotence.* In its season, thousands of residents of both northern Rukum and Rolpa (as well as Dolpa District) flock to the highland meadows to harvest them. The Maoists charge the harvesters an 'entry fee' of 200 Nepali rupees (US$2.50); then they tax the agents who purchase the product.

At one point several years ago, local Maoists inserted themselves as intermediary dealers and profited from the larger transactions. When the Maoist leadership learned of this practice, they stopped it, returned the trade to its traditional private dealers, and confiscated and remitted the ill-gotten gains to the Maoist central treasury.

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* One environmental specialist believes that *yarcha gumba* may be Cordyseps Sinensis, also known as Dongching Xiacao. A description of this item on the "Himalayan Herbs Trader" website is identical to the interviewees' descriptions. The substance is "created when a type of fungus parasites the larvae of the Chongcao Bat Moth and forms a fungus/larva composite body. The larva forms a cocoon in the winter and hibernates in the ground. Because the fruiting body of the fungus emerges from the head of the larva in the summertime and trembles a grass sprout, [its] Chinese name means roughly 'winter insect, summer grass.'" The website describes the substance as an energy enhancer which relieves coughing, which may mitigate the effects of toxic antibiotics and enhance cellular immune functions to combat Hepatitis B, but makes no mention of the use of *yarcha gumba* as a treatment for impotence.

Transfer of Rukum district capital

The Power Triangle

Before the entire Red Zone's attention was focused on the hashish ban, a local issue in eastern Rukum had also angered residents. To explain their concern, some history is required:

In the course of Nepal's 18th Century consolidation by King Prithvi and his successors, Nepal's sixty disparate kingdoms were either persuaded by diplomacy to submit to the central authority of the new king or destroyed by military means. In most cases, the influence of the previous royal families declined in importance or disappeared over time.

But in western Rukum, three families, the descendants of Jumla and Jajarkot kingdoms to its east, mainly members of the Thakuri caste, retained vigor and influential contacts. For example,

- Until the 1970s, Rukum was governed from its district capital, Rukum-kot, in what was then called Bahun-thana ("Brahmin Hill") VDC. The current King Gyanendra's sister, Princess Shobha, a survivor of the June 2001 Palace massacre, married Prince Man Bahadur Sahi, a descendant of the Rukum-kot rulers. When Princess Shobha visited Bahun-thana where her husband was born, the village's name was changed to Shobha in her honor.

- The original royal descendants of Musikot, the current capital, are now ordinary citizens. At one point in history, when the Musikot royals were weak, the royal family from neighboring Jumla migrated and took refuge there. The Jumlis began growing in number and influence and gradually became leaders and finally kings, and Musikot is also called Jumli Khalanga after them. The current King Gyanendra's other sister, Princess Sharada, married Prince Khadka Bikram Shah from Musikot, a descendant of the Jumli royals (the Prince was killed in the Palace massacre).

- The descendants of the Jajarkot kings migrated to Baflikot VDC. Their political role grew and they developed strong relations with King Mahendra. Dhruba Bikram Shah, one of their prominent descendants, was twice a national Panchayat member. His son, Army General Vivek Shah, is King Gyanendra's chief military advisor, a powerful position, as the King has the strongest influence on military matters. [The Musikot and Baflikot families are related by marriage.]

Thus, in western Rukum, a power triangle (see Map N) developed. Despite the group's prominence in the Palace, few benefits were perceived to have accrued to their home areas. Most notable, most widely resented, and generally attributed to the representation offered by these prominent families, not a single road was built in Rukum until the RNA connected an existing Salyan District road to Musikot town in May 2003, the eighth year of the Maoist conflict.

Instead, there is a deeply embedded perception that, using their positions as district-level authorities and as national Panchayat members, these power centers jockeyed for influence and financial advantage for themselves. In some ways, aspects of the 'feudal' system, the isolation upon which it depended, and government indifference survived longer in this area than others, some believe, because of this 'power triangle.' A few people argue that this group actually blocked road building because increasing contact with the outside world would have diminished its influence.

There was no such residual royal influence in Rolpa. The Gajul Kingdom in south-central Rolpa was destroyed by arms. The Khungri Kingdom, at its southern border, negotiated a settlement and until about 1997 received government allowances. The surviving prince, a Bombay university graduate, resides outside the district. According to one source, while he did participate in the Panchayat system and retained some ties with the Palace, he reportedly prefers not to participate in public life.

Magar communities in both eastern Rukum and throughout Rolpa were, in principle, subordinate to these Thakuri kingdoms. Local residents suggest, however, that there was little contact between the power triangle of western Rukum and the Magars of eastern Rukum. In Rolpa, one source said that the Gajul and Khungri Kingdoms received tribute from Magar 'principalities,' which administered Magar areas in their behalf. The Kalashesh Magar Kingdom was based, according to this source, in Jankot VDC, and Darya Jaitam was said to be its last ruler.

Capital transferred

Eastern Rukum before the 1970s was part of Baglung District, whose capital was 75 to 90 kilometers distant across difficult mountain terrain (Baglung's capital is indicated by a dot on its eastern border on Map B). For years eastern Rukum's leaders had advocated that their area be attached to Rukum District. Rukum's Chhetri-dominated capital, Rukum-kot, was literally at their door-step. It was the Magars' main trading post. They had positive relations with the town's population, who had favorable regard for them and did not consider them 'wild, primitive tribals' as they were perceived in parts of Baglung and western Rukum. All of their administrative functions would be facilitated if Rukum-kot were designated as their capital. In the early 1970s, perhaps in response to this demand or perhaps for other reasons, the Palace decided to attach what are today the VDCs of eastern Rukum (and the Red Zone) to Rukum District. Rukum-kot became their capital.

But just as the Magars of eastern Rukum were celebrating their success, the families of the western side of the power triangle (Musikot and Baflikot) united against the Rukum-kot family to persuade the Palace to transfer Rukum's capital to Musikot, in western Rukum. Once that decision was published in about April 1973 in the official government gazette, Palace-appointed Zonal Commissioner Laxmi Raj Bhakta, who was based in Tulsipur in Dang District, dispatched the police, accompanied by scores of Musikot civilians, to remove the government's furniture and files to the new capital. After a brief skirmish in Rukum-kot, the move was effected.

Residents of eastern Rukum still argue bitterly that, aside from the inconvenience to eastern Rukum residents, the transfer of the capital was unjustified for other reasons. Rukum-kot offered a wide, flat site suitable for expansion, and was well-known in the region for its 52 lakes (some since evaporated) and 53 mountain peaks. Employment opportunities associated with the capital's location were lost to Rukum-kot's Chhetri residents, as were commercial sales of fruit from eastern Rukum and other produce from the surrounding farmers.

On the other hand, Musikot was closer to the slightly larger population of western Rukum and was located along a mule trail from Salyan which – thirty years later – was expanded into Rukum's first motorable road.

Whatever the merits, local residents were angered by the move. At the local level, the issue took on magnified importance. In early April 1973, young men throughout eastern Rukum went house to house warning the population that its future depended on returning the capital to Rukum-kot and recruiting at least one member from each household for a protest.

On April 13, 1973, a single-file column of thousands of protestors (some say more than 10,000) stretching fifteen kilometers set off along the mule track to Musikot. Carrying sixty shotguns, fifty traditional Nepali *khukri* knives and countless wooden poles, the procession arrived on the following day at the Patuwakhola River, today located between the Musikot airport and the town center.

Posted signs ignored by the crowd advised that Musikot was under curfew. Sub-Inspector of Police Nar Bahadur Khadka met the procession, fired his gun in the air and warned the protestors not to move forward, but they would not be deterred. Some nearby officers and local residents began firing at the crowd. A 23-year-old Chhetri man from Rukum-kot, apparently one of the organizers, was killed. A Magar woman was wounded and died shortly thereafter. A Sanyasi man and another Chhetri man were wounded. Then Musikot residents and police occupying higher positions in the surrounding hills stoned the crowd, and it dispersed and retreated.

Soon thereafter the government issued warrants for the arrest of nine of the procession's key organizers. A year later, on the procession's anniversary, Rukum-kot youths circulated anti-monarchy pamphlets, and warrants were issued for their arrests as well. Most of the indicted individuals were not apprehended, but went underground or fled to India, where they met Communist Party activists. The Fourth Communist Convention in 1974 included among the issues it addressed the movement of Rukum's capital. Resentment persists to this day and a breach between the Maoist-dominated east and the anti-Maoist west is part of the district's political landscape.

The Rise of Christianity

During this same general period, a small Christian movement was emerging in Takasera, the social center of eastern Rukum. In 1969, the Government of Nepal, through Tribhuvan University, contracted the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a sister organization of the Wycliffe Bible Society, to classify Nepal's scores of languages and dialects. The SIL is a world-wide missionary organization devoted to the translation of Christianity's New Testament into indigenous languages.

SIL project director Dr. David Watters reviewed the work of Dr. John Hitchcock, a University of Wisconsin anthropologist, who in the mid-1960s had studied the Magars of Palpa District. Dr. Hitchcock had also trekked towards, but never actually reached, eastern Rukum. But Magars who lived nearby told him that the northern Magars spoke their own language, different from mainstream Magar. With this clue, the SIL's Watters decided to investigate further.

In 1969, Dr. Watters flew into Jomson airstrip in Mustang District headquarters, originally built to serve a nearby Tibetan refugee camp. From there he trekked into Takasera and other VDCs of eastern Rukum. Using the descriptive linguist's standard list of one hundred common words, he compared the languages and concluded that, indeed, the Magar-related speech which is known as Kham Magar is a distinct language.

Intrigued by this linguistic discovery and attracted to the small Magar community of Takasera, Dr. Watters and his family moved into the center of the village. Takasera in those days was a small settlement comprised of long rows of densely-populated, closely clustered wooden barracks. In the beginning, as they were learning the Magar language, the Watters family lived in the barrack-style village, then later established a separate home.

The Watters provided rudimentary primary health care. In the off-season each year after corn harvest, an idle field was converted into a landing strip which accommodated a single-engine aircraft which SIL used to deliver its own supplies and for medical evacuation, communications and other services for the local community. (The Honda motor-scooter they flew in to facilitate local transport worked less well.) They introduced apple seedlings (to provide nutritional inputs, not for commercial purposes) and a variety of potatoes from the United Kingdom which was widely adopted.

Dr. Watters meanwhile translated New Testament texts and hymns, working together with a handful of local Kham-speaking villagers, including one charismatic leader. A handful of local residents had converted to Christianity by the time the SIL's government contract ended in 1976 and the Watters family left Takasera.

Thereafter, a few of the Kham-Magar speakers who had worked with the SIL team sang translated hymns by candlelight in the Takasera evenings, and by 1980, about four years later, perhaps a few hundred local residents – a small fraction of the sparse Takasera population – had become Christians.

The authorities in the new capital, Musikot, heard about these Christians. Conversion to Christianity is considered a crime in the legal system of Nepal, the world's only Hindu kingdom. Police dispatched to investigate reported (inaccurately) to the Chief District Officer that Christian conversion was widespread among the Magars of eastern Rukum.

In response, the authorities ordered the arrest of the Christian leaders. Nine leaders confessed that they had converted to Christianity and were sentenced to a year in prison (they denied and were acquitted of the charge of proselytizing, which would have carried an additional six-year term.) Later, scores of additional Christians were harassed or arrested. Eastern Rukum's Kham-Magars, including some non-Christians, were angered by these arrests, particularly as many did not consider themselves mainstream Hindus in the first place and therefore not subject to the statutes restricting conversion.

In prison, one of the nine Christian leaders who had a talent for music and composition wrote Christian hymns and songs in Kham which were smuggled to Takasera, where more local residents became interested in Christianity. Thus, persecution may have actually attracted more converts. (One of the nine original Christians arrested is reportedly a Maoist. But it appears that the Kham-Christians are not active within the Maoist movement. In fact, as the feudal government did, the Maoists also oppose Christianity and have destroyed Christian texts.)

Takasera water mill

In about 1983, some Christians abroad heard about the Takasera prisoners and collected funds for family relief. But the Takasera Christians felt that the money exceeded the needs of the families and decided to use them for the area's first economic development project. After lengthy community consultation and study, they decided to purchase a Swiss-produced appropriate technology water mill, a small hydro-driven plant which would grind grain, press seeds for oil, and power a small saw-mill. But the equipment was located in Kathmandu, a far distance from the isolated village of Takasera.

To overcome this problem, the community sent a small group of men to Kathmandu. Over a period of months, they learned how to dismantle and re-assemble the plant. Then a large delegation of Takasera men carried the dissembled plant, and the cement and steel needed to construct a building to house it, on their backs from Kathmandu to the village. The community's first economic development project worked efficiently. The mill served Christians and non-Christians alike and collected a small in-kind commission for grain processed to pay for its maintenance; each six months the surpluses were distributed to the poor. A two-storey building at a river gorge accommodated the mill below and a church meeting hall above.

In 1984 a regional official wrote to the Takasera community ordering that the mill be closed. In a letter to the official, the village headman refused. The Governor threatened to destroy the mill if it was not closed, allegedly because the community – and presumably the illegally-converted Christians – in undertaking the project had usurped the role of the King. The Christians decided to close the mill and not risk more trouble.

But the non-Christians, the majority of the mill's beneficiaries, opposed its closing. When the police came to shut it down, the non-Christian villagers ambushed them, took their weapons, forced them to undress, pulled out their moustache hairs, smeared them in dog feces and ashes, put ropes around their necks and led them around Takasera chanting, "Behold our Government."

Somehow the confrontation with the government was defused and the mill was permitted to continue to operate. Nonetheless, the incident was perceived as another example of attempted government interference with the livelihoods and development of eastern Rukum. Some may have drawn the conclusion that violent opposition to arbitrary government policies had yielded some success.

Royal Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve

Within the sparsely populated Red Zone, Ranmamaikot VDC (see Map L) in its northern sector – itself about one third of the zone's territory - has only four inhabitants per square kilometer, a total of 2,300 residents or about 380 families, 15% the density of Takasera, 7% of Thawang. That is in part because in 1976, after some initial surveys by a joint UNESCO/World Wildlife Fund (WWF) team, much of it was designated as a hunting and wildlife reserve.

In the late 1980s, UNESCO and WWF conducted another survey, finding that the Himalayan Blue Mountain Sheep was in danger of extinction because of overpopulation of the adult males. Thirty of the oldest rams, which also had the most elaborate horns and were thus of greatest interest to hunters, had to be culled each year to insure the herd's survival.

In the world of wildlife hunting, enthusiasts in the United States try to achieve a 'Grand Slam' trophy, which requires them to kill four mountain sheep species, such as the Rocky Mountain Bighorn and California Bighorn. There is also an 'International Grand Slam' award which requires the hunter to kill twelve of the 43 worldwide species, such as the Marco Polo argali, the Transcaspian urial and the Gobi argali. The Dhorpatan reserve is home to the Himalayan Blue Mountain Sheep, one of those 43 species. Hunters paid significant sums to hunt in the reserve.

The eastern Rukum Kham-Magar community, in conjunction with UNESCO and WWF, drew up a proposal under which it would host hunters in return for a fee which would be used for drinking water systems, schools and other local development projects. Then-Prince (now King) Gyanendra reportedly approved the plan. But either shortly before or just after it went into effect, the government rescinded the agreement and the reserve was turned over to private tour operators. The local population perceived that the government had once again interceded against them. At some point, the community intercepted a hunting party and confiscated their rifles and, in the context of the Maoist insurgency, it appears that hunting in the reserve has sharply diminished or disappeared entirely.

Migration to Kalapahar

Diminishing income from traditional livelihoods, the hashish ban which largely eliminated their main source of cash income, and the lack of roads and economic development (in their perception aggravated by attempted government interference with their own development initiatives), left the communities with increasing gaps between what they produced and what they needed to survive. Generation after generation, the small parcels of land they farmed were systematically sub-divided among their children, further impoverishing them. Prosecution (some would say persecution) of the organizers of the Rukum-kot/Musikot procession and of the Christians forced some of their participants underground, and at times to India.

For most, economic hardship led to increased seasonal economic migration to the Kalapahar region of northwest India's Himachal Pradesh province, in the general area of Shimla. Before the Kingdom of Nepal was reduced to its current boundaries by the British, this area was part of Nepal and is a destination for many economic migrants from Nepal's hills.

A small proportion of migrants from the Rapti Hills travel to South Korea, Malaysia and the Middle East to accumulate savings to buy land, build a good house or educate their children. Seasonal labor opportunities in Kalapahar for Rolpa and Rukum migrants, however, produce only enough money for bare survival. Earning less than their Indian counterparts, Nepali laborers manually break stones into gravel, carry heavy loads of it to road-building sites, and work in fruit orchards and farms. Their earnings barely bridge the annual food gap, enable them to buy a bit of oil and salt and perhaps an annual change of clothes. The migration takes them far from home and family, and the rewards are meager though essential.

Because such migration is so undesirable, the government's perceived interference with the livelihoods of Red Zone residents, its failure to provide roads and its attempted interference with their economic development was resented even more.

Rukum and Rolpa airports

In the absence of road access to the capitals of many highland districts, the government financed the construction of unsurfaced airstrips, rudimentary control towers and modest passenger terminals in or near their district headquarters. While not intended for mass transportation, these facilities offered the possibility of emergency medical evacuation, expedited mail delivery, and transport at least for elected and administrative officials and commercial travelers, the elites of the areas.

Musikot's airport was inaugurated in January 1996, one month before the Maoists declared their People's War. The airport continues to function, though its control tower and terminal have since been destroyed by the Maoists. Until its construction, Rukum depended on the airport which served the capital of neighboring Jajarkot District. For logistical reasons, Jajarkot's airport is actually located in Bijayshwari VDC in western Rukum (see Map N), close to Jajarkot's capital (Map B) but far distant from Musikot.

More than two decades earlier, in about 1980, the Government of Nepal constructed a standard small airport in Rolpa, including control tower and passenger terminal. For reasons which are unclear, the airport was constructed in Wadachaur VDC in southeastern Rolpa (Map M), instead of near the district capital, Liwang. Despite the significant investment in the facility, its location was impractical. It was used only a few times just after its inauguration, and then abandoned. It has been neither used nor maintained since. Even during the 15-month State of Emergency - the height of the conflict - it was never used by the armed forces.

Some interviewees asserted that its location was chosen because it was close to Mijhing VDC (see Map M), the residence of Rolpa's most influential national Panchayat member, an individual who had served as a government minister over a period of three decades.

Liwang hospital

In the absence of road and air access, the district's next highest priority was a regional hospital. In the mid-1980s, funds began to be appropriated to build one. Over a period of about ten years, the hospital was completed.

The regional hospital, located on a two-hectare site ten minutes from the center of Liwang, comprised fifteen small concrete and steel modules, including wards which could accommodate up to 45 in-patients, an operating room, laboratory, doctors and nurses quarters, and a morgue. The turn-key contract required the builder to provide the furniture, refrigeration, X-ray equipment and even surgical tools, to make the hospital immediately operational. In fact, the hospital was completed and ready for service in about 1995. The Ministry of Health had set aside an operating budget and personnel positions for three doctors and a complement of nurses and other staff.

When the contractor presented his invoice for completion of the facility, the district hospital management committee inspected the work. It found a few minor and easily corrected deficiencies - a small walkway between two of the modules was not complete and an access road to the rear of the site was missing. Nonetheless, the invoice was never paid and therefore the contractor never released the work.

The contractor's work crews were not paid. Unknown persons vandalized and looted the furnishings, equipment and tools and removed the doors and windows, exposing the interior of the buildings to the elements. A few steel roofing sheets were torn from one module. Abandoned and unmaintained for almost a decade, the buildings became a shelter for wandering livestock. Their floors and walls are caked with the excrement of cows, goats, bats, birds and occasional human visitors.

The airport and hospital failures were added to the catalogue of perceived government neglect, mismanagement and broken promises of the 1970s and 1980s: the hashish ban, the transfer of Rukum's capital, the persecution of the small Christian movement, the attempt to close the water mill, rescission of the Dhorpatan hunting agreement, and the failure to provide roads. All became deeply embedded local grievances.

The area's isolation and the decline of traditional livelihoods added to the frustration. Economic migration to Kalapahar, simply to earn survival income, was the undesirable option chosen by many families to bridge the annual food gap and to purchase essential supplies.

Such problems are not unique to what became the Red Zone. Hashish trade, though on a far smaller scale, was banned in other pockets of Surkhet and Salyan. Pyuthan reportedly had a similar issue concerning the transfer of its district capital; other districts of the mountains have hospitals which never opened. Men in many hill areas were increasingly obliged into seasonal migration to India in order to survive. Nonetheless, it seems that the Red Zone had an unusual concentration of such problems. Yet without a crucial catalyst, the conflict might never have found a geographic and political base there.

The Rise of Communism

By the early 1950s, a regime of powerful Rana hereditary prime ministers had ruled Nepal for over 100 years since the 1846 Kot Palace Massacre. The King and royal family were figureheads. In November 1950, just after Indian independence, the Nepali Congress Party launched an effort to restore the monarchy and to initiate democratic rule. By January 1951, King Tribhuvan had been reinstated with full authority and public elections were scheduled. But although the King owed his power to the democratic forces, he remained hostile to them. The scheduled elections were long-delayed and, shortly after they took place, in effect nullified. Beginning in 1959, then-King Mahendra ruled through what was known as a Panchayat 'partyless' system of local and national advisory groups in part indirectly elected and in part selected by him and whose judgments, in any case, were not binding.

In that same decade, Nepal's literacy rate was 2%. Infant mortality was 60%. Some 200,000 people, mainly children, died from malaria each year. The country, never colonized and subjected to a policy of self-imposed isolation, had virtually no roads.

M. B. Singh

Against this background, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) was founded in Calcutta in September 1949. At that time, Mohan Bikram (M. B.) Singh, a young teacher from Pyuthan who was to rise to prominence in the movement, was still a member of the Nepali Congress Party, which had strong influence in his home district.

According to an M.B. Singh associate, his father was a land owner in Pyuthan who had reached a certain prominence through opposition to some Rana regime policies. When he migrated to Pyuthan from Jumla, his original name was Khem Bahadur Ghartee Chhetri. Contrary to the restrictions of the time, he changed his name to Khem Bikram (K. B.) Singh, which signified a higher social standing. The Ranas fined him for the change. Singh paid the fine but did not abandon his adopted name.

In those days the Ranas had built an elaborate house for themselves in Bhaktapur with fifty-five windows which became a symbol of national prestige. Others were not permitted the privilege of building such homes. But K. B. Singh built a lovely traditional red brick house – also with fifty-five windows. Police dispatched to investigate this violation were warmly received by K. B. Singh. They advised him on the evening they arrived of their intention to check the number of windows. During the night, a few windows were covered and the next morning's inspection concluded that the house had fewer than fifty-five windows. K.B. Singh had prevailed again.

According to the same source, M. B. Singh (hereinafter simply 'M.B.') was born in Kathmandu, where his parents were pursuing court cases concerning land transactions. His parents brought M.B. back to Pyuthan, where he had a nanny and special tutors. Then he returned to Kathmandu for primary and high school studies. Disputes with teachers concerning student rights caused him to transfer schools several times. Ultimately he spent his last year of high school in Palpa, then an educational hub, where he met Communist leaders.

Through his acts of defiance to the Ranas and his economic success, K. B. Singh was known to King Tribhuvan's family when it was restored to power in 1951. Because of the family connection and because M.B. had completed high school, in about 1953 he became the youngest person to be offered a position on the Royal Advisory Council which the King was establishing. At first M.B., who had joined the Communist Party a year earlier, refused the appointment. But the Party's Secretary General, Man Mohan Adhikari, prevailed on him to reconsider so that he could use his influence to persuade the King to permit the Communist Party to operate openly. M.B. acceded and told the Palace he was prepared to accept the appointment. But by then the Palace had learned of his Communist affiliation and withdrew the invitation.

M.B. was briefly imprisoned in 1952 in connection with an anti-corruption demonstration and for organizing a public protest against the transfer of the capital of Pyuthan District. From November 1953 to February 1954 he conducted a training camp for Communist Party activists and helped to establish the Pyuthan District Communist Party. In those days, eastern Rolpa was considered a part of Pyuthan (western Rolpa was attached to Salyan).

In 1954 M.B. was arrested again and served eighteen months in jail. The first six months were spent in a Pyuthan prison, where he organized prisoners to demand better conditions. Perhaps in part because of these activities, he was transferred for the final twelve months to a prison in Salyan's district headquarters (see Map K). For reasons which will now be described, this historical accident may have been in large part responsible for the Maoist movement finding a political base in what became the Red Zone.

When he was released from prison in about 1955, M.B. had to walk back from Salyan to his home in distant Pyuthan. A lover of hiking and nature, M.B. followed a circuitous route which took him through Thawang VDC in northeast Rolpa (see Map M). M.B.'s father had friends in Thawang who welcomed him. From earlier activities, he may already have known Burman Budha, a prominent local resident who later became an elected Communist Party Member of Parliament (MP) from that area. Though reportedly not an inspiring public speaker (and not a Kham speaker), M.B. enjoyed meeting people individually and had a winning personality in private discussions and in small groups.

M.B. spent six months in Thawang. He helped to organize the local Communist Party cell, established a branch of the Kisan (Farmers) Organization, and helped the people to 'resist the influence' of traditional tax-collectors and other 'feudals.' He was embraced by the isolated and neglected Thawang Kham-Magar community, which had little direct contact with government or other political parties. (M.B. gave his girlfriend of the time, who came from Kathmandu to stay with him in Thawang, the affectionate nickname 'Jaljala' after the Kham-Magar shrine.)

After he returned to Pyuthan, M.B. dispatched young Party members to Thawang as volunteer teachers. Living in these remote communities, the teachers also assisted families with administrative paperwork, personal letters and advice on many subjects, permitting them a political platform from which they could influence the way in which public affairs were perceived. (A few sources indicated that in those days the Ministry of Education would also dispatch left-wing teachers to the most remote and difficult locations such as Thawang, which in this case complemented the Party's strategy.)

The Communist Party, undisputed in Thawang by other political parties, gained considerable influence there over the years. Until the early 1980s, M.B. Singh was one of the most respected figures in the area. What was to become the Red Zone was the focus of a sustained, fifty-year geographically-targeted Communist Party political project. The Party was present to interpret and exploit the extensive catalogue of the area's deeply-embedded grievances.

Communist influence increases

According to one source who was present in Rolpa District for almost a decade, allegiance to the Communist Party increased from a nominal 10% to 60% in the four years following the hashish ban. The area's 'standard of living' collapsed. People were hungry, without money to buy clothes and, during this adjustment period, without ready alternatives. An individual from Dang District who as a young man participated in a high school exchange program at about this time was startled when his hosts in Thawang argued that only through violent Communist revolt would the neglect and injustices of Nepal's governing system be overcome. By the 1980s, what would become the Red Zone was solidly anti-government and many were convinced that only violent opposition would lead to solutions to their problems.

M.B. himself was made a member of the Communist Party Central Committee in 1957. In the first democratic elections of 1958, he stood for Parliament for Pyuthan District in behalf of his party and came in second to the traditionally dominant Nepali Congress Party. But in Thawang his Communist Party won 700 (99.6%) of 703 votes. Nation-wide, the Communist Party won only 7% of the vote, which yielded four (about 4%) of the seats, while the Nepali Congress Party achieved an overwhelming victory with 74 (68%) of the 107 seats.

The NC Government, led by Prime Minister B.P. Koirala, abolished *birta* (royal land-grant) tenure in the Terai (described later) and the authority of remaining feudal principalities in the western Hills. These measures made the Palace and the landowners - already uneasy with the democratic process and with the (admittedly limited) presence of the Communist Party in the Parliament - even more concerned.

Thus, on December 15, 1960, King Mahendra, citing the nation's chronic violence (which some believe was orchestrated by the Palace itself), dissolved the Cabinet and arrested its leaders. B.P. Koirala spent the next eight years in prison. In 1962 the King declared political parties illegal and created the partyless Panchayat system.

M.B. spent much of the 1960s in prison for political activities and at some point in the 1960s he was reportedly elected to the Party's Politburo. In 1974, he became Secretary General of the Party's Fourth Convention, where he assured that the transfer of Rukum's capital from Rukum-kot to Musikot was included on the agenda.

In May 1971, a group of young Communist Party activists launched an uprising in Nepal's eastern-most district, Jhapa. The group managed to kill eight 'class enemies' before a quickly-dispatched armed police unit eliminated them.*

In May 1980, King Birendra held a referendum on national governance. An 'improved' Panchayat system (which won by a small margin) and an option for multi-party democracy were the choices. Thawang boycotted the elections and replaced the portraits of the King and Queen in some government offices with photos of Marx and Lenin. Responding to this political challenge, in October 1981 the government mobilized the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) from Pyuthan for a symbolic show of force (which did not occasion any deaths).

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* The movement had been inspired by a Maoist revolt which originated across the Indian border from Jhapa in the nearby West Bengal town of Naxalbari, where in March 1967 a peasant land invasion sparked violent clashes with the police. The Naxalbari uprising, in turn, took as a model "the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution…[which] attacked [China's] revisionist ossification and distortions of Marxism."

According to Deepak Thapa in his 2002 article, "The Maobadi of Nepal" (in State of Nepal, ed. Dixit and Ramachandaran), the Communist Party Fourth Convention characterized the Jhapa uprising as "a form of semi-anarchy." Meanwhile, in various parts of India, the Naxalites remain an active insurgent force, most prominently around Andhra Pradesh but also in northern India. They maintain active links with today's Nepali Maoists. Their own history is recorded in "30 years of Naxalbari: an Epic of Heroic Struggle and Sacrifice," which can be found at http://www.maoism.org/misc/india/cpiml/cpiml-pw/30years/30_Years.htm

The local population expected M.B. Singh to help them mobilize a political response to the RNA. But since the mid-1970s, he had been censured and exiled to India by the Communist Party, ostensibly on moral grounds related to his relations with women. Whether due to exile in India, imprisonment in Nepal or simply neglect, M.B.'s absence left the community without his leadership at a critical moment.

At the Party's Fifth Convention in 1985 in India, it split into two factions. M.B. Singh formed the CPN (Masal), and one of his former students with more radical inclinations, Mohan Baidya Kiran, formed the CPN (Mashal) faction. Coincidentally, both leaders could be referred to as 'M.B.' According to A Kingdom Under Siege by Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, published in 2003,

> …under Mohan Baidya [Kiran]'s leadership, the CPN (Mashal) adopted the doctrine of a violent movement in the hope of instigating a mass uprising.

After some acts of CPN (Mashal) violence in the late 1980s misfired, Mohan Baidya Kiran was replaced as leader by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, today known as Prachanda, Chairman of today's Maoist movement. Both Prachanda and key national Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai are Brahmins. Five of the seven Standing Committee members are Brahmins and Chhetris. Mohan Baidya Kiran remains a senior leader of the Maoist revolt.

According to an M.B. Singh associate, at some point in the 1980s, taking advantage of M.B. Singh's absence, Kiran traveled to Thawang and met with the local population. Citing M.B. Singh's absence at a critical time after the October 1981 RNA show of force, and describing him as morally unfit to lead, M.B. Kiran is said to have stated, "I'm the new 'M.B.' now," and, in effect, he filled the leadership vacuum left by M.B. Singh's absence.

Because of M.B. Singh's less radical approach to political advocacy, today's Maoists describe him as a muddle-headed revisionist. On the other hand, had it not been for his early efforts in Thawang, it is not altogether certain that the Maoists would have had a base from which to launch their revolt. According to a variety of sources, M.B. remains skeptical of the intentions and strategy of the Maoists, their People's War and their leaders.*

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* At the time of this writing, the Maoists reportedly abducted nineteen non-Maoist Communist activists in Pyuthan District. On October 6, 2003, M.B. reportedly predicted a public revolt against Maoist excesses would originate in Pyuthan and expand throughout Nepal.

After eight years of conflict, at least hundreds of Magar on both sides have died, with few (if any) palpable social or economic benefits. Some Magar leaders have raised this issue. French anthropologist Dr. Anne de Sales,* who lived in Takasera for six months during the early 1980s and follows events there, reports the views of a Nepali national ethnic activist, himself a Magar:

> Kham-Magar peasants [are] fighting a war which is not theirs…once again the Magars [are] victims of high castes since the leaders of both the [Nepali] Congress Party and of the [Maoist] revolutionary movement [are] both Brahmins. The Maoist conquest has been made at the cost of Magar blood, just like the conquest of 'great Nepal' by King Prithvi Narayan Shah.

The Kham-Magar people of the Red Zone may remain steadfast in their support of the Maoists or may gradually re-evaluate their adherence to the strategy of violent revolt. The assessment produced no clear indication of the direction of current thinking of Red Zone residents.

Slow government reaction

The Maoists launched their People's War in February 1996 with violent attacks against police outposts. From February 1996 until November 2001, the RNA was not mobilized to combat the Maoist force. During this six-year lapse, the Maoists conducted over 1,000 assaults on isolated, poorly armed police posts, killing many police officers.

While not a root cause of the conflict, the decision to not mobilize a substantive challenge to the revolt permitted the Maoists to multiply their forces, skills and geographical impact exponentially. For example:

- Â As the Maoist armed force was virtually unchallenged, there was little danger in joining them and, to some in isolated rural areas, they may have appeared invincible, which may have enhanced their recruitment levels.

- Â From relatively modest beginnings in the Red Zone, the Maoists were able to methodically develop their political, military and intelligence networks throughout the country, enabling this Red Zone-based insurgency to wage war and create havoc across the country during the 15-month State of Emergency period.

- Â Through trial and error during the six-year period, the Maoists sharpened their recruiting strategy, political messages, military training systems, attack plans, ability to use explosives, and other technical elements of their overall program. They consolidated their ability to use access routes to and from India and avail themselves of local smuggling networks.

- Â Moving swiftly through rural districts, the Maoists were able to establish their presence in hundreds of locations, projecting an image of power (though this may have been less a sign of their success than of government absence).

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* in "The Kham Magar country, Nepal: Between ethnic claims and Maoism," a study of identity issues in eastern Rukum published in the Autumn 2000 *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, Volume 19.

The few previous armed challenges to the government in Nepal's modern history had been met swiftly and effectively with armed force, at times followed by negotiation.

- In November 1950 the Nepali Congress Party launched a struggle based in India to restore the monarchy and initiate democracy. The rebels were able to capture some Terai towns and Pokhara town, but not to hold them against RNA counterattacks. The conflict was resolved through negotiation a few months later, in February 1951.

- In 1961 the NC Party launched 'hit and run' armed attacks from across the Indian border on police posts and government offices, apparently supported by India, whose independence struggle had been supported by the NC Party. Up to 130 were killed and 100 wounded in scores of small incidents. According to a November 2001 USAID report, Democratic Governance under Threat, India was soon distracted by the October 1962 war with China and withdrew its support. The RNA had responded effectively and the NC called off its struggle in November 1962.

- The 1971 Jhapa Communist uprising (described earlier), inspired by a similar movement in neighboring Naxalbari, was crushed by armed police even as it began.

- In 1974 the NC attacked a few police posts and may have been responsible for an attack on King Birendra in an eastern district. Its attempted capture of the military barracks of Okhaldhunga District (at the border with neighboring Solukhumbu District) in east-central Nepal (see Map B) was met with an immediate RNA response. Ultimately, the NC reconciled with the King.

A rapid challenge to the Maoist People's War would likely have contained the conflict at an early stage. The six-year lapse is not a root cause *per se* of the initial conflict in Rukum and Rolpa. But it can be understood as facilitating the national scope and intensity which the current conflict has been permitted to achieve.

Why the six-year lapse?

Therefore, the question arises: why did the government, and particularly the Palace which has substantial authority over the armed forces, not mobilize the RNA to combat a threat far greater than any the establishment had faced before? In earlier armed challenges to its authority, police and RNA force had responded swiftly and decisively. The assessment could not reach a conclusion concerning this matter. Few interviewees in the mid-west region and in Kathmandu speculated on the reasons. But some asserted that:

- the RNA's mission is to defend the country against external threat (for example, a Chinese or Indian invasion), while the Maoists were an internal threat and therefore the responsibility of the police to combat.

- Nepal's economy depends heavily on tourism. By mobilizing the army, the civil conflict would have been acknowledged, which would have discouraged tourism and affected critically-needed revenue.

- that the police continually claimed that, if properly armed, they could re-establish security. In fact an ‘armed police’ was established but it failed to control the situation.

- that at one point (perhaps in the July 2001 Holeri incident in southeast Rolpa, described later) during the conflict’s sixth year, it appeared that the government had at last decided to mobilize the army, but this did not happen. For historical reasons, civilian politicians may have resisted delegating too much authority to the RNA until the situation became desperate.

According to a few authoritative sources, the army agreed at various times to engage the Maoists but insisted that a State of Emergency be declared to acknowledge the extreme circumstances and, in its perception, to shield it from the chaotic partisan politics of the time. It may also have been seeking legal immunity for the violence which was sure to follow. The political parties apparently did not concur with this request. A State of Emergency was not declared until the end of the first cease-fire in November 2001, when the Maoists for the first time carried out wide-scale surprise attacks against the RNA.

In the minds of some mid-westerners and other observers, there are two additional sub-texts to this debate:

- that the Palace purposely discouraged the RNA’s mobilization. Under this theory, within the royal family and its advisors, there was widespread skepticism, if not outright opposition, to the multi-party democratic system to which King Birendra had acceded in 1990 and which was eroding the monarchy’s powers.

To disrupt the multi-party system, the Palace allowed the Maoist movement to flourish into a serious challenge which that system would be incapable of addressing. Some conspiracy theorists suggest that the Palace maintained active relations with or even may have materially assisted the Maoists. Under this theory, when the situation was on the verge of getting out of hand, the Palace and its military would intervene, rescue the nation and demonstrate that the monarchy, rather than democracy, was the option which could best safeguard and guide the country.

- a companion theory is that the Government of India was at least neglectful of the active use which the Maoists were making of its territory for the acquisition of arms, ammunition and explosives; for training; for liaison with like-minded Indian insurgencies; for recuperation of wounded combatants; and for waging the political war (at one point the principal Maoist spokesman gave a televised interview in India to CNN). It seems unlikely that the Indian Government would not have been aware of such activities.

Since the State of Emergency, India is perceived by mid-western residents to have taken some initial steps toward reducing Maoist access to its territory. While the 1,700-kilometer, porous border is acknowledged to be a difficult one to control, some observers believe that additional measures could yet be taken to safeguard them from such use.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND NON-CAUSES

The first section of this report described perceptions in the mid-west of a half century of dynamics which led the Red Zone of Rolpa and Rukum to serve as a political and geographic base for the Maoist revolt. Initial interviews outside Nepal and in Kathmandu yielded some assertions of fundamental causes of the conflict which, in the course of the assessment, were perceived in the six districts more as contributory factors or even non-causes, issues which neither define the conflict's essential character nor rise to the level of root causes.

Caste and ethnicity

Over half of Nepal's 23 million citizens are either members of the untouchable occupational caste known as Dalits or of nearly sixty ethnic groups comprising roughly 35% of the national population, who reside mainly, but not exclusively, in the Hills. An in-depth description of the status and grievances of these groups is beyond the scope of this assessment. But some aspects of caste and ethnic issues germane to the six assessment districts need to be briefly summarized.

Dalits

Dalits represent about 20% of Nepal's population. The 2001 census officially categories 14% of Nepalis as Dalits. But, in the view of Dalit organizations, endorsed by others, this figure does not include all groups which could be categorized as Dalit. They are the lowest caste in the mainstream Hindu religion and culture of Nepal. They have been historically limited to such occupations as tailors (Damai), blacksmiths (Kaami), shoemakers (Sarki), and jewelry makers (Sunuwar). The Badi, who are concentrated in the mid-western region, are traditional entertainers, 40% of whose families depend on the sex trade. Some Dalits are landless farm workers. In most Hill areas of the six assessment districts, many have their own land, though their parcels tend to be smaller on average than those of other castes.

Although they are Hindus, Dalits are restricted in many of their activities. They may not enter Hindu temples for prayer. They may not draw water from taps used by non-Dalits. They may not enter the homes of upper caste families nor may upper castes consume food which Dalits have prepared or touched. An upper caste person who is touched by a Dalit must undergo a purification ritual.

The practice of untouchability was enshrined in Nepali law in its first Civil Code (the Muluki Ain), implemented by Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana in 1854. While discrimination based on untouchability in public places was made illegal by King Mahendra in a new Civil Code in 1963, Nepal is a country led in this regard more by social customs than by laws. Discrimination in schools, employment and commerce are commonplace.

In his richly-detailed May 2002 report, *The Ethnic Dimension of the Maoist Insurgency*, Sudheer Sharma documents the fact that compared with average national per capita income of US$210, Dalit per capita income is US$40, 80% less. Compared with a national literacy rate of 50%, only 10% of Dalits are literate.

None of the Dalit interviewees foresaw short-term solutions to this complex problem. The practice of untouchability appears to be slowly diminishing, to a greater degree in urban areas.

As traditional rural service castes, Dalits in the Red Zone are a small acculturated Kham-Magar-speaking minority. There was no suggestion in the assessment that their perceptions were different from those of the zone's Magar population, though the added burden of untouchability may further disaffect some members of the Dalit group.

Despite the magnitude of their problems, Dalit interviewees in the six districts unanimously reported that only a fraction of their group are Maoist adherents. An August 2003 study prepared by Lama-Tamang et al for the UK Department for International Development, Social Change in Conflict Affected Areas, reports that

> While the Maoists have not disclosed the actual proportion of their cadres by ethnicity and caste, informal sources have revealed that only about 5% of Maoists are draw[n] from the Dalit population.

This estimate was made after eight years of conflict, during most of which momentum was on the Maoist side, which was virtually free to recruit throughout the country. Yet if Lama-Tamang's estimate is accurate, Dalits have joined the Maoists at a rate far smaller than their proportion of the national population. One Dalit expert reports that only two (5%) of the 37 Maoist Central Committee members are Dalits.

Most interviewees agreed that the Maoists accurately depicted (and at times brought useful public attention to) their problems, but felt that the Maoist program was an undesirable alternative. A few suggested that, despite their rhetoric, many upper caste Maoists and their families continue to adhere to the practice of untouchability. That most of the Maoist leadership is upper caste, reflecting the social structure of the society in general, has not escaped the attention of many Dalits and other minorities.

Magars

Representing more than 7% of Nepal's population, the country's 1,600,000 Magars are its largest *ethnic* minority. The distribution of the country's main ethnic groups is described in Map C, which illustrates districts where a particular group represents at least 5% of the total population. In addition to the sixteen districts highlighted on the map, Magars are present in another dozen.

The grievances of the 40,000 Kham-Magars of the Red Zone were described earlier in this report. But this group represents less than 3% of Nepal's Magars. The combined Magar population of four contiguous western districts (Palpa, where Magars are the majority, plus Nawal Parasi, Tanahu and Syangja) (Map C), is about 400,000, almost 25% of Nepal's Magars. In Nepali terms, these four rural districts are relatively prosperous, located near a good road which is a major commercial route (which also means less feudal influence), with better education and employment opportunities. From all accounts, the Magars of these districts do not support the Maoists.

The Kham-Magars of the Red Zone, on the other hand, live in such isolated areas that, as Anne de Sales reports, southerners refer to them as *Shes* and *Sheshini* ("those who live high up, hidden away"), which distinguishes them from the majority of mainstream Magars who live in more accessible areas.

Tharus

The Tharu people, who originated in India, are the longest-standing residents of the Nepal's fertile Terai area, of which Banke and Bardiya Districts, included in this assessment, are a part. They are Nepal's second largest ethnic group, with over 6.75% of the national population, about 1,500,000 persons.

Beginning in the 1960s the Tharus were displaced from or manipulated out of their traditional land holdings by recipients of Royal land grants and their descendants, some of whom still own, by local standards, larger farms. Many Tharus became trapped in a system of permanent indentured (bonded) labor, while others are among the poorest landless class in the Terai.

Nonetheless, the great majority of the Tharu people – including the bonded laborers recently freed of their debts by national law – do not appear to support the Maoist movement. Until about 2001, the Maoists had been largely inactive in Bardiya and Banke, which should have been fertile recruiting areas. The history and problems of the Tharu people are described in more detail later in this report.

Exclusion from civil service

In addition to individual ethnic and caste minority issues, there are grievances which affect minorities as a group. For example, according to one university expert, an 1854 survey revealed that 98% of civil service posts were held by Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars, the country's three dominant castes. A similar survey published in the Nepal Press Digest in 1991 reported that 93% of these jobs were held by the same groups. In 137 years, the lower status half of the Nepali population gained only a 5% share of these sought-after positions.

Ethnic/caste dimension of conflict

The overwhelming majority of the Red Zone are Kham-Magars. However, as noted above, they represent less than 3% of Nepal's Magar population, the great majority of whom appear not to support the revolt. The Maoist movement has its heartland in a predominantly Magar area – in part because of historical accidents like M. B. Singh's six-month sojourn there in the 1950s. But at its core it is not predominantly a Magar ethnic movement. It also appears that the majority of Dalits and Tharus, important low-caste and ethnic groups in the six assessment districts, do not support the Maoist revolt.

In a country in which the majority of the population comprises ethnic and low-caste groups, it would be virtually impossible to launch a nation-wide effort of this kind without some participation by these groups. But that does not necessarily mean that the Maoist revolt, led by traditional upper castes, and though it channels some ethnic and caste grievances, is at its core a low-caste and ethnic movement.

Virtually unopposed for the first six years of its violent uprising, the Maoists were able to travel to all of the corners of Nepal. In most villages and districts they found at least some ethnic and low-caste persons and others who joined the Maoists in concluding that only an armed revolt and the ideology they offered could alter the grinding poverty, government neglect and corruption, and marginalization which many, perhaps the majority, of rural residents perceived. Inflicting heavy casualties on the police while suffering few themselves, the Maoists may have appeared to have momentum on their side and the attraction and risks for joining may have seemed different than they became.

Sudheer Sharma catalogues in detail CPN (Maoist) initiatives, beginning with its July 1995 First National Conference, to promote a vision of autonomy and education in the mother tongue for areas with predominant ethnic populations and a kind of affirmative action program for Dalits. The January 1997 Maoist Politburo meeting added self-determination for ethnic minorities to its program. But Sharma accurately reflects some sentiments expressed by this assessment's interviewees that the Maoist program "has accepted the [right] of self-determination in principle but is unlikely to allow [the exercise of] this right if it reaches…power."

The alcohol ban (described later), the Maoists' most popular (though failed) social initiative, illustrates on a small scale the contradiction between its approach and the culture of its principal ethnic constituency, the Kham-Magars of the Red Zone, whose cultural autonomy it advocates. The Maoist aim of a one-party state and its actual conduct in rural villages outside the Red Zone (described later) may have persuaded ethnic minority members that its stated commitment to ethnic autonomy and self-determination might not be fulfilled. Were the Maoists to come to power, these promises might soon be subordinated to more important Maoist ideological goals.

In the author's view, the ethnic and caste dimension is a contributory, facilitating factor of the Maoist revolt, not a principal, core or defining element of the movement.

Election abuses

In 1989, the nation-wide *Jana Andolan* (Spring Awakening) movement signaled a popular demand for multi-party democracy. Despite reported reservations by some prominent Palace personalities, King Birendra acceded to this demand and promulgated a new Constitution in February 1990. Elections for the National Parliament were held in May 1991; elections for ward, VDC and district offices were held in May 1992.

In Kathmandu and abroad, some interviewees suggested that from the beginning these elections had been plagued by violence and fraud, particularly by the Nepali Congress Party against the Communist *Samyukta Jana Morcha* (United Peoples Front - UPF) Party from which the Maoist faction eventually emerged; and that this persecution had contributed decisively to the Maoist decision to launch its People's War about four years later.

Interviewees in Surkhet, Salyan, Banke and Bardiya reported that violence and turmoil were not factors in the 1991/1992 elections. Vote-buying and small-scale voter fraud may have been present but did not, they believed, influence the overall election outcome.

According to the Rolpa and Rukum interviewees, those elections fairly reflected the will of the voters. No party was politically persecuted. There were some incidents of violence in Rolpa and Rukum, provoked by several parties including the *Jana Morcha*. But, they said, these did not affect the election's outcome.

The seat in eastern Rolpa sought after by Balaram Ghartee Magar from Mijhing VDC in southeast Rolpa, a national Panchayat member and prominent government minister over a thirty-year period, was hotly contested. But Balaram was a member of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), not the Nepali Congress Party, which was not a major challenger for that seat.

According to one source, in about April 1991, a month before the elections, RPP party worker Kumba Ghartee Magar, a supporter of Balaram's, was beaten so severely in eastern Rolpa's Gaam VDC (Map M) by *Jana Morcha* activists that he died several months after the elections. Prem Budhathoki, a Chhetri RPP field worker, was allegedly beaten and left for dead. Balaram's media representative, Ganesh Gurung from Siuri VDC, coming to observe the election count, was allegedly chased to the river and beaten by *Jana Morcha* activists. The Maoists accused the Balaram camp of buying votes.

Also during April 1991 in western Rukum, according to a knowledgeable source, Gopal Jung Shah of Bijayshwari VDC (see Map N), who had been a Panchayat State Minister and was running for Parliament with the Nepali Congress Party, had his face blackened and was physically chased out of Rugha VDC (in southern Rukum) by *Jana Morcha* activists in what may have been the first incident of election violence in Rukum.

One of *Jana Morcha*'s complaints was that civil service teaching positions were denied to its members. During the election period, Rukum District Education Officer Abdul Ali was en route from the old airport at Chaur-jhari in Bijayashwari VDC to Musikot passing through Kholagaun VDC (Map N) when he was pulled off his horse, attacked with knives and seriously wounded, apparently by *Jana Morcha* activists.

These same sources suggest that *Jana Morcha* activists were also beaten. But they stated that the violence was generally (not exclusively) initiated by *Jana Morcha* members and that the majority of it was that party's responsibility. Nonetheless, they say, the violence was not widespread and the election's outcome was probably not affected by it.

In fact, the outcome of the election appears to challenge the claim that *Jana Morcha* was deprived of a fair opportunity to participate. Three of the four Parliamentary seats at stake in the 1991 Rolpa and Rukum elections were won by the *Jana Morcha*. Eastern Rukum gave 16,000 votes to the *Jana Morcha* and 6,000 to the NC Party. Burman Budha and Krishna Mahara, today a prominent Maoist spokesman, prevailed in Rolpa. The *Jana Morcha* party won the hotly contested eastern Rolpa seat with about 11,000 votes to the RPP's 9,900.

In the 1992 local elections in Rolpa, *Jana Morcha* won 27 (53%) of the 53 VDC chairmanships, and control of the District Council chairmanship and was as successful in eastern Rukum.

Post-election persecution

While the *Jana Morcha* party did well in the 1991/1992 elections in Rolpa and Rukum, it polled poorly at the national level, winning only 9 (4%) of the Parliament's 205 seats, about the same as the Communist Party had done in 1958. The Nepali Congress Party was elected to national office with 110 (54%) of the seats, while the left-of-center UML, which does not support the Maoist revolt, won 69 seats (34%).

From 1993 to about 1995 the spiral of violence in Rolpa and Rukum escalated. Key *Jana Morcha* leaders were reportedly severely beaten and left for dead by NC or police thugs. The NC Government instructed the police to arrest *Jana Morcha* activists involved in violence during and after the elections. Some of those arrested had been involved in specific attacks. But in some cases where the perpetrators were not known, *Jana Morcha* leaders and members, as well as other completely innocent people, were arbitrarily arrested based on no more than general suspicion. Petty infractions normally ignored by the police were selectively prosecuted as crimes – only when *Jana Morcha* members were implicated. Violence or infractions by supporters of other parties were not pursued.

Bench warrants for hundreds of accused *Jana Morcha* members required them to report to the court over and over again, yet their names were never cleared and their cases never adjudicated. Some of the accused simply stopped obeying the warrants and, along with top *Jana Morcha* leaders, went underground.

In late-1994, about the same time as the mid-term Parliamentary elections, at the annual cultural festival in Iriwang VDC/s Chapka village in northwest Rolpa (Map M), the police killed three young *Jana Morcha* activists who may have had warrants pending against them and wounded now-prominent Maoist leader Nanda Kishore Pun (a Magar) in the arm. People who considered themselves potential targets of such actions went underground as well.

Many interviewees who commented believe that the NC leaders took the opportunity to use the power of government to arbitrarily persecute the *Jana Morcha* Party in Rolpa and Rukum, in part with the aim of strengthening NC's political position in the districts.

According to some local sources, *Jana Morcha* activists also kept the pressure on. In 1993, three years before the People's War was declared, one small local Magar businessman near the Red Zone who was not politically active was brutally beaten by *Jana Morcha* thugs, had both arms broken, and required a lengthy period of hospitalization. His home was looted and he was not permitted to return.

According to one source whose information could not be independently confirmed, Amar Singh, a Gairigaun VDC NC activist, had been beaten by *Jana Morcha* people in his village. Returning one night from Liwang where he had filed a criminal case against his attackers, he was ambushed and killed with a rock. Suke Budha Magar, an NC activist from Jailwang VDC was also killed in a similar incident. In about 1994, Ganesh Shah, a Kholagaun NC leader en route to a Musikot meeting *after* the by-elections, was pulled off his horse while passing through Simli VDC and killed.

As time progressed, it appeared that *Jana Morcha* members assaulted and killed popular local figures who refused to support their cause. Several reported incidents were similar to one in Rukum in 1995, when the Maoists asked the Khara VDC Chairman, Tek Bahadur Oli, a Nepali Congress Party member who had a small medical shop in the village, to desist from political activities and to join the Maoist cause. When he refused, they broke his hands and legs and left him for dead. He eventually recovered and returned home in February 1996, just before the People's War was declared. (Six months later he was attacked again near his shop, apparently by the Maoists, stabbed nine times and cut nearly in half at the waist before he died.)

One report claimed that *Jana Morcha* activists, waving black flags and shouting, attempted to prevent NC Prime Minister Girija Prasad (G.P.) Koirala's helicopter from landing in the area. The police managed to clear the landing zone and the visit proceeded. But that event increased the bitterness between the parties. *Jana Morcha* thugs also allegedly intercepted, intimidated and sometimes manhandled officials of other political parties.

SIJA campaign

During 1994, the Maoists began a long-term consciousness-raising and political mobilization campaign in much of what would become the Red Zone and other areas of Rolpa. The campaign was named 'SIJA' after **Si**sne mountain (see Map F), which at about 6,000 meters is the highest peak in the zone, and the **Ja**ljala shrine (Map E). It was organized by one of the most senior Magars in the Maoist movement, military commander Ram Bahadur Thapa, known as 'Badal,' a native of Gulmi District.

Dr. de Sales comments that, "the Maoists have skillfully appropriated certain traditional techniques in their strategy for conquering the Kham Magars' territory" for use as their insurgency base, including the use of traditional Kham-Magar symbols, sites and cultural concepts, among them the name assigned to the 'SIJA' campaign.

By 1994 the launching of the People's War had already been conclusively decided. The Maoists boycotted the 1994 Parliamentary elections and as the SIJA campaign was implemented, recruitment and mobilization for armed conflict began.

Operation Romeo

In November 1995, the coalition Government of NC Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, under the supervision of Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka, a native of Rolpa's neighboring Dang District, initiated a police campaign known as Operation Romeo. Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai described the operation as a 'reign of terror' against Rolpa's peasants. One human rights report characterized the operation as 'state terror.' USAID's Democracy Under Threat report prepared in November 2001 described the operation as one of "massive brutal retaliation…[with]…widespread human rights abuses including torture, rape, detention and murder." In Kathmandu and abroad, Operation Romeo is perceived by many as a highly violent, scorched earth assault involving systematic extra-judicial executions coupled with a campaign of rape and other atrocities whose geographic scope went far beyond Rolpa.

The assessment's interviewees and other respected human rights experts, however, assert that:

- Â Operation Romeo was conducted, and its impact overwhelmingly felt, mainly in Rolpa District. The INSEC (Informal Sector Service Center, a respected Nepali NGO) Human Rights Yearbook for 1995 reports that the operation was concentrated in eleven of Rolpa's VDCs. Some areas of Rukum District close to the Rolpa border may have been affected. Salyan, Dang and other districts received some civilians displaced by the operation.

- Â There were apparently no documented cases of deaths in connection with the operation. But several thousand people fled or were displaced, and some did not immediately return or were not specifically traced. Thus, it is possible that there could have been a small number of deaths. One respected human rights expert estimated the total number of such deaths, if they occurred, would have been less than twelve.

- Â Rapes by the police took place. But rather than the use of rape as an instrument of systematic degradation of the Magar race which some suggest, the incidents are described by several reliable sources as multiple individual criminal acts (one knowledgeable interviewee estimated 40 such cases) carried out with impunity – none of the perpetrators were punished.

The INSEC Human Rights Yearbook for 1995 is reported to state that 6,000 people left their villages, most presumably temporarily, and 132 persons were arrested without warrants. That the police physically abused or tortured prisoners, confiscated chickens and goats, and stole personal property and jewelry from houses they searched, is not disputed. Nonetheless, Operation Romeo could not be characterized as a 'reign of terror,' 'state terror,' or 'massive brutal retaliation' in comparison with similar conflictive operations elsewhere, neither could it be described as the disciplined and orderly effort to restore order which its defenders would suggest.

But the course of conflict had already been set. In 1994, the Communist Party again split into two camps. Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai led the faction that urged immediate initiation of an armed uprising. In March 1995, their "Third Plenum" foreswore elections and decided to take up arms. In September 1995, before Operation Romeo began, their Central Committee adopted a plan to initiate a protracted people's war. Moreover, in February 1996, just three months after Operation Romeo began, the Maoists declared their People's War, an action which would have required a lengthy period of preparation inconsistent with the assertion that Operation Romeo was a core cause.

The preceding pages have reviewed the election and pre-conflict dynamics of the five-year period (1991–1995) in Rolpa and Rukum preceding the February 1996 declaration of the Maoist People's War. In synthesis, the author has concluded that:

- Â The 1991/1992 elections in Rolpa and Rukum were marred by a few incidents of violence and other irregularities. At least half were initiated by the *Jana Morcha* Party itself. But it is difficult to argue that the Party was deprived of a fair chance to compete since it actually prevailed in most of those contests. The elections in the other four assessment districts appear to have been relatively orderly and pacific.

- Â Following those elections, the spiral of violence and persecution increased. From 1993, the *Jana Morcha* continued to use violence against political opponents and murdered some local political activists. The governing NC Party, alleged to have committed similar acts, also used the police and judicial system to prosecute *Jana Morcha* perpetrators. But more frequently it used bench warrants to harass and arrest hundreds of *Jana Morcha* supporters for petty violations which it ignored when committed by adherents of other political parties.

- Â Many innocent people were swept into a judicial system from which there appeared to be little chance of acquittal. *Jana Morcha* leaders went underground. The NC neither succeeded in intimidating their supporters nor gained adherents to its cause. While reflecting escalating tensions, these actions were contributing factors, but not themselves core causes of the conflict.

- Â Operation SIJA was a well-organized next step in Maoist preparations for its People's War, whose course was probably determined before it was initiated in 1994.

- Â Operation Romeo, which affected mainly Rolpa District, was not a 'reign of terror' as that term is generally understood, and did not involve large-scale killing, rape or destruction of property. It heightened tensions, projected a negative image of the police, and alienated ordinary rural residents. But it was conducted in the context of what by then was an inevitable armed conflict. Just months after Operation Romeo began, the Maoists declared their People's War, an action which would have required a lengthy period of preparation inconsistent with the assertion that Operation Romeo was one of its significant causes.

In February 1996 the *Jana Morcha* Party, under the leadership of Baburam Bhattarai, submitted a list of 40 demands to the coalition government led by NC Prime Minister Deuba. Nine days later the Maoists began the war.

From its declaration in February 1996, the Maoist revolt continued unabated for over five years until the first cease-fire of July 2001.* Local residents throughout the six districts unanimously perceived that the Maoists were not committed to the peace process at the time of that first cease-fire and, in fact, used the opportunity to prepare a major assault on government forces. A few months later, In November 2001 the Maoists launched surprise attacks on police and RNA forces throughout the country.

The RNA was mobilized. The war's most intense period, confirmed by the declaration of a State of Emergency and involving its highest casualty rates (75% of the conflict's 7,400 deaths), took place in the 15-month period between November 2001 and January 2003, when a second cease-fire began. Eight months later, in August 2003, the peace process failed, the Maoists withdrew from the cease-fire agreement, and low-intensity fighting began again.

Disillusion with multi-party democracy

Numerous interviewees in Kathmandu and abroad asserted that the principal cause of the conflict was widespread disillusion with the corruption, ineptitude and failure to deliver material benefits of the multi-party democratic process which began with the elections of 1991/1992, four years before the conflict began.

The leadership in Kathmandu of the main political parties had few defenders among the assessment's 150 interviewees, including most of the 35 local elected officials of the three main political parties. The governance process in Kathmandu is perceived as chaotic. The Government has changed hands a dozen times in the twelve years since the 1991 elections. Many criticized the refusal of their own party leaders to participate in peace talks with the Maoists which took place during the 2003 cease-fire.

Nonetheless, most of those same local residents argued that dissatisfaction with that leadership and the system's defects has not translated into disillusionment with the promise of the democratic process. They conceded that in the 1991/1992 and later elections, some corrupt officials had been chosen (though it seems the magnitude of corruption is less than what some in Kathmandu perceive). Others elected because of name recognition which had its origins in pre-democratic times were not vigorous or effective advocates for their constituents.

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* The cease-fire followed soon after the June 1, 2001 Palace massacre, in which Crown Prince Dipendra shot and killed his parents, King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, their younger son Prince Nirajan and only daughter Princess Shruti, the King's younger brother and his three sisters, and six other royal relations. The Crown Prince then shot himself and died from his wounds several days later. The dead included Prince Khadka Bikram Shah from Musikot, mentioned earlier in this report, the husband of current King Gyanendra's sister, Princess Sharada. A thorough and well-written account of the massacre, and a detailed history of Nepal's royal family, appear in Jonathan Gregson's Massacre at the Palace, the Doomed Royal Dynasty of Nepal, referenced earlier.

Still, interviewees explained, the democratic system is barely a decade old in a country which had been administered by autocratic rule for hundreds of years. The electoral and governmental process has been disrupted for most of that decade by the Maoist revolt. Maoist election 'boycotts' meant not only that their own candidates did not participate but that local residents in some areas were warned against casting their votes. Candidates in a number of areas were abducted and held incommunicado. Several elected officials (including two interviewees) had literally been cut to pieces by the Maoists and left for dead; scars on their faces and severed limbs bore witness to the risks they had taken for holding public office in remote rural villages.

The Maoists expelled or pressured the majority of elected VDC Chairmen in the six assessment districts into abandoning their constituencies. (Even in the 2003 cease-fire, most were not permitted to return, or were allowed to do so only on condition that they not initiate development efforts or engage in political discussion.) For years in most rural areas of the six districts, the Maoists refused to allow implementation of hundreds of development projects with the R.500,000 (US$6,500) annual block grants for local infrastructure made available by the central government to each VDC.*

Under such circumstances, some interviewees reasoned, it was not possible for the democratic system to develop the stability, track record and public understanding on which its progress depends. Conceding the ineptitude of some local officials, the majority of local residents seemed strongly attached to the concept of having freedom of expression and a choice in the election of their ward, VDC, district and Parliamentary representatives. Eventually they hope these officials will overcome the morass of the Kathmandu government and the indifference to their problems of current Kathmandu political party leaders.

In some districts, a number of interviewees challenged the assertion that the multi-party democratic process had not brought material benefits to their areas. Despite the instability occasioned by the Maoist revolt, they stated, for example, that the number of road projects underway had tripled or that school construction had been accelerated. With or without the democratic process, these projects would eventually have been carried out. They credit that process, however, with accelerating their implementation.

Failure to extend the tenure of local officials

In mid-2002, the tenure of the nation's elected officials was about to lapse. The conflict had reached its highest intensity and mortality levels, and a State of Emergency had been declared. Clearly, new elections were not feasible in most places.

Nonetheless, in May 2002, NC Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved the national Parliament in anticipation of elections. Seven weeks later, during July, with the conflict still raging, he dissolved all local elected bodies, leaving not a single elected representative in office throughout the country. It was determined almost immediately thereafter, predictably, that elections could not be held.

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*Begun by the NC Government in 1992 at a level of R10,000 (US$125) per year, these annual grants had been increased under the UML 1994 government to R300,000 (US$4,000) and ultimately in 1999 to R500,000 (US$6,500).

PM Deuba could have chosen another alternative. When elections cannot be held due to natural calamity, economic disarray or other special circumstances, the Constitution provides that the Government may make arrangements for the performance of the function of local elected officials by either extending their tenure for up to one year or by any other manner.

However, the Prime Minister decided not to exercise that alternative. Two of the 150 interviewees defended that decision on the basis of corruption in the administration of the US$6,500 VDC block grants. The vast majority of those who commented dismissed this pretext. In fact, most locally elected officials were affiliated with the UML. Prime Minister Deuba, did not extend these officials, they say, in the hope that in future elections their disenfranchisement would help his NC Party to win more of these seats.

In the author's view, the decision to not extend the tenure of the local elected officials was a major political setback for their constituencies, for the democratic process and for the government's counter-insurgency program, some would say a colossal blunder.

Local elected official salaries typically begin at about R. 1,000 (US$14) a month. The District's top elected official, the District Development Chairman earns R7,000 (US$90). Many of these representatives had served throughout the worst days of the conflict at considerable personal risk. Some had been severely tortured. Others had their homes destroyed, and still others were expelled, displaced or pressured to abandon their homes for the safety of the district capitals, where they continued to serve their constituents.

Local elected officials are the sinews which link rural villages with the government. They are the backbone of the democratic system. The government's administrative and technical officers, on the other hand, are civil servants assigned by Kathmandu to these areas for tours of one or two years. As a group (with exceptions), their expertise concerning the area and its people, their network of contacts and particularly their commitment to the area's development are not comparable to those of the elected officials. (Dr. David Seddon, in a June 2002 paper cited later, comments that these authorities "look like ambassadors from Kathmandu rather than local government officials.")

By failing to extend their tenure, the NC government caused the collapse of the representational system of the six districts, leaving a political vacuum in the midst of an armed political struggle. Through this measure, it achieved what the Maoists had been attempting to accomplish since the outset: to empty the rural areas of the local elected leaders who opposed them and to diminish the government's presence at a moment when it was most critically needed.

Despite this blunder and other weaknesses of the multi-party democratic process, some interviewees stated explicitly what was implicit in comments of others: that the Maoists were not able to take greater advantage of this mistake because they are not generally perceived to offer a better alternative to the autocratic feudal system which the people believe the democratic system is replacing. Rather, the insurgency's own autocratic, single-party approach and its widespread use of intimidation are more similar to – or in some cases worse than - the feudal system under which these areas have labored for centuries.

USAID INTERSECTION WITH THE CONFLICT'S ROOT CAUSES

Over the past fifty years, the United States Government has provided Nepal over US$650 million in bilateral assistance and US$700 million through multi-lateral organizations, a total of over US$1.3 billion. About US$50 million (8%) of the bilateral assistance financed a geographically-targeted development program in Dang, Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and neighboring districts, an area often called the Rapti River Valley after the river which runs across its southern belt (see Map K). Because this project was carried out within the same general region where the Maoist conflict originated, a few policymakers in Washington and some observers in Kathmandu have hypothesized that:

- Despite the significant investment in the Rapti program, it did not forestall the conflict and was therefore a failure;

- The program activities themselves were such a failure that local residents lost hope in future development, sparking the armed conflict; and

- The activities were such a success that they raised local expectations for future Government efforts. The Maoist revolt was provoked by the failure of those efforts to materialize.

These assertions suggest that the USAID program could have forestalled the conflict, or that its activities (either by success or failure) were at the core of dissension that provoked the revolt.

The assessment included a focus on some Rapti program activities to the degree that they could have intersected with the conflict, mainly through the optic of local residents. But it was not a comprehensive evaluation of all of its elements.

Rapti Integrated Development Program

The USAID Rapti program was carried out in two phases:

- Phase I, from 1980 to 1988, invested US$30 million mainly in small community infrastructure, for example building 46 drinking water and 14 irrigation systems; 180 kilometers of all-weather farm-to-market roads and 160 kilometers of mule tracks; and 15 suspension and other bridges. Some 40 VDC headquarters buildings and a number of multi-service (principally agricultural service) centers were also built.

- Phase II, from 1989 to 1994, maintained the work completed under Phase I. It also built a 31-kilometer farm-to-market road from Ghorahi (in Dang District) to Holeri (see Map M) in southeast Rolpa District and another 37-kilometer road from Kapurkot in southwest Salyan (Map O) to Jinabang in western Rolpa (Map M). Phase II also included construction of a bridge across the Madi River at the Pyuthan/Rolpa border in southern Rolpa (Map M).

Many of the foregoing activities were implemented through government technical offices. USAID assistance permitted them to engage the personnel and procure the supplies necessary to carry them out.

Phase II also included the Vegetable, Fruit and Cash Crop (VFC) program, implemented by a number of NGOs and Nepali consulting firms as well as some government offices. The program promoted off-season vegetable and vegetable-seed production, and cultivation of apple orchards.

Both phases included community-based forestry components. The program helped to facilitate activities in 355 locations, expanding community-managed forests from 3,000 hectares (1% of the forests in the target area) to 27,000 hectares (10% of forested areas). Some of these community forestry projects, particularly in Salyan District, continue to show sustainable success.

Thereafter, USAID's Market Access for Rural Development (MARD) program, which began in the mid-1990s, a follow-on to the VFC project, was to provide US$8 million in technical assistance to an expanded, 15-district area.

But in May 1998, Rabindra Shrestha, a Nepali field worker for Chemonics, a U. S. contract firm, was killed in a Maoist ambush in the vicinity of Chaklighat village, Siddheswari VDC, in central Salyan just north of the district capital (see Map O).* At that time Chemonics maintained an office in nearby Tharmare VDC. As a result of this incident, the project was withdrawn from the Rapti region.

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* According to some accounts, the Chemonics vehicle - well-known in the area - was ambushed and the tires shot out from under it. The driver escaped over a nearby ridge. But Shrestha remained in the back seat, where he was killed by a bullet at point-blank range. The Maoists first explained that their combatants mistook the Chemonics car for a police van. Later some Maoists conceded that the Chemonics staffer was executed, but because of a complaint they had received about his personal conduct.

Chaklighat, a local intersection, was also the scene of an encounter in which four Ministry of Education-World Food Program-associated local staff (and a farmer carrying his grain to market) were killed. In about November 2001, a WFP-donated dump-truck was returning from a food distribution one afternoon. Earlier along the route, the truck had been stopped by the Maoists and asked to carry ten of their armed combatants, and in the circumstances the driver felt unable to refuse. As it was driving along a slope on the road near Chaklighat, the WFP truck unexpectedly passed an RNA truck. Apparently the Maoists on the WFP truck fired on the army truck. In the ensuing encounter, the WFP-associated staff, the farmer and one of the Maoists were killed. The nearby WFP road-building project was suspended for a year. In general, the WFP road-building projects are respected by all parties to the conflict and have been immune from interference.

Rapti project successes

Some of the Rapti project activities were completed two decades ago. Because so much of the program was carried out by government offices (whose civil servants rotate throughout Nepal each few years) or by outside NGOs, there is little local knowledge about the USAID effort.

But when asked about the best development projects carried out in the area in the past twenty years, local residents familiar with such efforts described two which had enduring value. They were vaguely aware that one had been a part of the Rapti program, but could not identify its donor. The two projects were:

- **The Madi River Bridge**. Located in southern Rolpa right on the Pyuthan border, this 40-meter concrete and steel bridge stands some 20 meters (60 feet) above the river bed on substantial concrete pylons. Its construction preceded the creation of the all-weather road which today connects Pyuthan District with Rolpa's capital, Liwang. The Madi River's current is a strong one and, for much of each year before its construction, Rolpa was cut off from its main trade routes to the south.

The construction of an all-weather road to Liwang - Rolpa's top priority – would have been almost pointless without such a bridge. Roads are at the core of both the political and development agenda of Rolpa. This bridge, built with a future vision in mind, has played a critical role in reaching that aspiration. It has not been attacked thus far during the conflict.

- **Vegetable, Fruit and Cash Crop (VFC) Program** To stimulate economic development in the Rapti zone, the project first engaged private firms to research potential markets in northern India for Nepali produce. The teams realized that rains in Nepal's Hills began a few months earlier than in the northern Indian plains. Under the right circumstances, Nepal could produce and deliver fresh vegetables to the Indian market months before India's own production came on stream.

Armed with this idea, the VFC program encouraged and assisted farmers in the Rapti Valley to initiate commercial cultivation of fresh 'off-season' vegetables (small amounts had previously been produced for local consumption). Mainly in southern Salyan and southeastern Rolpa, farmers began producing vegetables for export to India and to the Kathmandu market. A major vegetable market developed in Kapurkot in Dhanwang VDC in southern Salyan (Map O). That market ships an estimated 200 to 300 tons of vegetables weekly for the two- to three-month high market 'off-season.'

The marketing research team also found demand for radish seed (for Bangladesh) and onion seed (for India). Certain ecological zones unsuited for the more profitable off-season vegetable production could produce these seeds. The Rapti project fortified the Rukum Vegetable Seed Production Center in Musikot (Rukum District). From there, seed was distributed to southern Salyan (the main seed production area) and to pockets of western Rukum and southeastern Rolpa, with great success. Seed production for export grew from zero to 120 tons a year in a short time.

As a direct result of the Rapti project, the income of thousands of families in the Rapti Valley doubled and tripled.* Off-season vegetable production and marketing continue unabated and still cannot fill India's demand. But after a decade or more, the seed sector appears to be declining because:

- during the State of Emergency, security constraints made it difficult to transport the foundation seed from the Musikot seed center to the local farmers.

- seed purity – its most important quality – could not be effectively monitored by the buyers during the conflict because of security concerns. As a result, Nepal's excellent reputation for purity declined.

- India now produces cheaper seeds, taking advantage of mechanization and cheaper fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides. Its prices are not burdened by the additional transport costs required by Nepal's land-locked geographic position.

- Many farmers are turning to hybrid seeds. Re-tooling the Musikot seed center to produce hybrid seeds would be a costly undertaking, probably not feasible during the conflict.

The small infrastructure projects, such as the drinking water and irrigation systems, remain in place. Some are still functioning. The water sources for others have dried up during the past few decades. Some are not functioning because the conflict has impeded their maintenance or repair. A few elected officials familiar with the Rapti project stated that the project should have been implemented in closer coordination with the local communities, rather than through government offices and outside NGOs, whose officials were in the region just temporarily. (The Rapti project preceded the multi-party democracy era, during which local elected officials would have been the lynchpins of such an effort.)

Rapti project failures

Apple production on a small scale had been introduced to northern Rolpa and eastern Rukum generations ago by migrant laborers employed in fruit nurseries in northern India, to supply a limited local demand.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the Government's Agricultural Development Bank was promoting commercial apple production in what became the Red Zone as well as other Hill areas. The climate and soil combined to produce good quality apples. The Rapti project added resources which enabled the bank to expand the number of loans it could offer. Interest rates were a highly subsidized 14% per year, with a five-year grace period until the first harvest. One project report suggests that as part of the Rapti initiative, 22 apple-producer groups were formed and up to 200,000 seedlings were distributed.

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* Onion seed producers made windfall profits for a short period during the 1999 onion crisis in India's Delhi Province. In part because of drought and an onion disease, and in part because of an ill-advised export license policy during the same period, the price of onions increased tenfold in Delhi, creating a political crisis which brought down the provincial government.

The project was reported to have succeeded in Jinawang VDC, in northwestern Rolpa (Map M). Farmers were close enough to the Tharmare/Chaklighat road in neighboring Salyan District to permit them to market the apples through that route.

But the Red Zone has no road access. When the apples were ready for sale, there was no way to transport them to market. Traditional transport by human porters and mules bruised too much of the fruit. Local demand for apples, even in district capitals, was limited. According to most local sources, including a few larger growers, at least 60% of the remaining apples rotted.* In a relatively quick time, the farmers abandoned the trees or chopped them down. What apples remain are used to feed the pigs or for alcohol production. (According to a few sources, alcohol consumption has not increased; but the apples have replaced some basic grains previously used for home-brewed alcohol, which makes more grain available for local consumption.)

Asked why ordinarily cautious farmers had participated in the apple program, some said that the loans were cheap and that they had been assured by their national Panchayat representatives (some, for example, associated with Rukum's Power Triangle) that a road running east and west through nearby Hill areas (perhaps between Pokhara town and Surkhet District) would be constructed by about the time the apples were ready for marketing. Some participating farmers blamed the Agricultural Development Bank's bureaucracy for encouraging farmer participation despite the obvious transportation constraints. Many loans were never repaid.

Roads: the development denominator

The Madi River Bridge was probably the most appreciated and durable of the Rapti infrastructure activities, reflecting Rolpa's highest development priority - roads. Its best economic activities, the off-season vegetable and vegetable seed initiatives, which sustainably multiplied the income of thousands of families, illustrate why roads are so important.

Off-season vegetables, for example, must be delivered to market within 24 hours of harvest. The harvest takes places during the rainy season. Thus, to be viable, a producing area must be relatively close to an all-weather road. Seed farms need to be visited by agricultural technicians who can advise on the quality and purity of the product, which also requires road proximity. Apples produced under project loans were of good, commercial quality but could not be sold because of the lack of roads.

All of these activities suggest that Rapti's farmers are enterprising and skillful, able to rapidly adapt to new commercial opportunities, even when they involve substantial changes in their traditional practices. The development denominator for the area, in their perception, is road access.

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* Another mid-western district, Jumla, northwest of the Red Zone (see Map B) produces large quantities of good quality apples. Although the government subsidizes air transport for apples, one source asserts that half the apples there rot as well.

Although demand for Rapti seeds may be diminishing, there is still unmet seasonal Indian demand for the more profitable off-season vegetables. This opportunity cannot be exploited because of the absence of all-weather farm-to-market roads. The viability of commercial apple *production* has been amply demonstrated; several sources believe that economical road transport would unlock existing markets.

Advocates of road projects as a top development priority point to other economic advantages as well: social, economic and infrastructure development activities become more economical and more sustainable once roads are built; the disposable income of local families increases the moment road access is established – the products they buy are cheaper, and they receive more income from what they sell. "Without roads," concluded one interviewee, "everything else fails."

The World Bank is financing an ambitious Government of Nepal road-building effort through Surkhet District to hitherto isolated (and conflictive) northern districts such as Dailekh and Jajarkot. The project, already well-advanced, will open up new markets and development possibilities and may have substantial future conflict prevention impacts.

Roads: the catalyst for social progress

Even more important than the economic arguments, some said, is their importance as social catalysts. Roads encourage people to think in a forward-looking manner. One source asserted that they give people the courage to change things. But most interviewees placed highest emphasis on another impact of the roads: they diminish the power of traditional 'feudal' leaders and other well-known but corrupt old-time leaders to retard progress. At the same time, they make the communities less isolated and therefore less vulnerable to manipulation by the Maoists and others who would seek to dominate the populations in what they perceive is a similar manner. Some explicitly link the failure of influential traditional ('feudal') leaders to bring roads to their areas with Maoist obstruction of road building: both, they say, realize that their dominance of isolated local populations diminishes once roads are established.

This report earlier observed that areas within the assessment districts where the Maoists are more influential tend to coincide with former hashish production zones. It can also be said that areas within the six districts which are served by roads have the least Maoist influence, while areas most distant from roads have greater Maoist influence.

Roads were the very top priority for future development expressed by most assessment interviewees. They are at the heart of their political agenda. Drinking water was probably the most frequently mentioned second priority. Some criticized donors for channeling money into a large variety of micro-projects, what they referred to as 'chicken, goat and advocacy' efforts which had little durable impact. The Maoists did not originate this criticism but have reinforced it.

Nonetheless, in the author's view, a few of these advocacy projects have contributed to key social reforms, such as the freeing of bonded laborers, discussed later. UNDP-sponsored information services carried out by the District Development Committee in Rukum usefully highlight the district's unusual development potential and can effectively facilitate projects. In some districts the UNDP provides assistance through local NGOs to the widows and children of those killed by both sides, a community-based, reconciliation approach which if financing were available could usefully be expanded.

There have been some assertions originating in Kathmandu that the USAID Rapti project aggravated the conflict by increasing the incomes of off-season vegetable and seed farmers, particularly in southern Salyan, thus widening the gap between rich and poor in the Rapti Valley. But it appears that non-beneficiaries of the project in southern Salyan are not notably Maoist activists or adherents; it is one of the less conflictive areas of the region.

Finally, while it did not appear to be a contributory cause of the conflict, several development specialists in the Rapti region expressed a concern about the Rapti project which they applied to all other donor projects: most of the funds raised in the name of their region do not actually reach their intended beneficiaries. A significant proportion, they believe, is repatriated or absorbed by donor implementing institutions through management, overhead, vehicle and office construction costs, while some of the funds, in projects channeled through the government, are diverted by corruption.

The Rapti project and the conflict

The Rapti project, made several durable and sustainable contributions to infrastructure and economic development in its target area. Where the Rapti project implemented more activities and was more successful, conflict and Maoist influence are less present. But the key variable does not seem to be the Rapti project as much as the presence or absence of roads, an issue which transcended the scope of the USAID effort and upon which not only the Rapti project but the entire social, political and economic development of the region depended.*

Neither of the two (internally contradictory) charges that the USAID program was at the center of the political dynamics which provoked the Maoist revolt is accurate. The war began neither because the project's activities were such a failure that local residents lost hope nor because its activities were such a success that they raised expectations which were not later met. The failed apple initiative in the Red Zone was a small effort with limited participation. As described earlier, the Maoist conflict has its origins in a different set of historical events.

* The USAID malaria eradication effort of the 1960s in the Terai region, which had a profound development and conflict mitigation impact, is described later in this report.

SECTION TWO BANKE AND BARDIYA (THE TERAI)

The report thus far has focused on the most conflictive districts, Rolpa and Rukum, and to a lesser extent on the affected neighboring districts of Salyan and Surkhet. The next section will describe Banke and Bardiya, the least conflict-affected of the six assessment districts.

The western Terai, including Banke and Bardiya (Map B), was forfeited by Nepal to the British under the terms of the Sagauli Treaty of 1816, described earlier. After Nepal's Rana regime decisively assisted the British to suppress the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the area was returned. But by 1960, almost one hundred years later, the Terai was still largely undeveloped. Widespread malaria made the Terai and most of the fertile Surkhet Valley (Map H) uninhabitable for all but the indigenous Tharu people and affected most of Nepal's major river valleys as well.

Today, just a few decades later, with 23% of Nepal's territory, the Terai is home to almost half of Nepal's population. About two-thirds of its land is cultivated and produces a similar proportion of Nepal's food grains and cash crops. More than 3,000 industries and businesses are based in the Terai. How did this transformation take place?

Malaria eradication

In 1950, malaria was Nepal's most serious public health problem. According to some sources,* up to 25% of the population was infected. As noted earlier, about 200,000 people, mainly children, died from the disease each year.

In November 1952 the predecessor of the USAID program, the U. S. Operational Mission, in cooperation with the Government of Nepal's Insect-Borne Disease Control Bureau, began an ambitious fast-moving pilot eradication effort. Rapti Valley eradication was assigned to the World Health Organization (WHO), which focused on training personnel, a slower, longer-term approach. After six years, the WHO strategy proved to be more successful. So USAID adopted the WHO approach and, under the Nepal Malaria Eradication Organization, implemented a decade-long Terai-wide eradication program.

By 1973, USAID had provided nearly US$14 million in bilateral assistance for malaria eradication. It financed all of the DDT, spray equipment and anti-malarial drugs, training costs, and 75% of the operating expenses for the program. From two million in the mid-1950s, malaria cases were reduced by 1968 to 2,500 a year, reducing mortality by a factor of 1,000. Malaria has been successfully controlled, although never completely eliminated.

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*Background information concerning malaria prevalence and eradication is based on accounts of a half-dozen Terai interviewees and relies heavily on Half-a-Century of Development: The History of U. S. Assistance to Nepal, 1951 – 2000, ed. Joel Isaacson, published by USAID in Kathmandu in 2001, for dates, program and statistical information.

By the mid-1960s, settlers from the overcrowded Hills were streaming into the fertile, flat Terai plains. Between 1963 and 1978, close to two million people may have migrated to the Terai. Residents of the Hills surrounding the Surkhet Valley who had previously relied on Tharus to work on their valley properties, moved to the valley floor. A major east-west highway was built across the Terai with Indian and Chinese assistance. By 1971, 41% of Terai land was cultivated, compared with 9% in the Hills and 2% in the mountains.

The USAID-financed eradication campaign saved a million or more lives. It opened the Terai to agriculture and industry, transforming it into an economic development engine which provides almost two-thirds of the country's food and is home to nearly half of the national population. It diminished the volume of seasonal migration to India's Kalapahar region. Perhaps most importantly, it created an escape valve for the pressure of acute land shortages in the Hills (where 44% of the national population still lives). In so doing, it may have prevented violent conflict from arising decades ago. It may also have limited the ability of the Maoists to involve a more significant proportion of the population in its revolt. In fact, the conflict has had the least impact on Banke and Bardiya among the six assessment districts.

…except for the Tharus

Though malaria eradication had these profound positive impacts, it also occasioned the expansion of a pattern of exploitation, established during earlier feudal periods, of the region's indigenous Tharu population. A part of this problem may have been historically inevitable, as the social forces of the modern Nepali State in combination with the region's feudal elements sought to open the Terai to modern development.

The Tharus are Nepal's second largest ethnic group, with over 6% of the national population, roughly 1,500,000 persons, concentrated mainly (see Map C) in the Terai region. Tharus are the majority of the population of Bardiya District but are far less a proportion of neighboring Banke district. Originating in India, Tharus have lived for such a long period in the Terai that they are considered virtually indigenous. They survived in the area because of a partial immunity to malaria.*

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* Tharu and other interviewees believe that significant consumption of garlic, chili and alcohol rendered the Tharus partially immune to malaria. Research suggests, however, that Tharus have a genetic resistance to the disease through the á-thalassaemia gene, which decreases malaria morbidity up to tenfold.

See Terrenato et al: "Decreased malaria morbidity in the Tharu people compared to sympatric populations in Nepal," Annals of Tropical Medicine Parasitology 1988; 82: 1-11; and Modiano et al: "Protection against malaria morbidity: near-fixation of the alpha-thalassemia gene in a Nepalese population,' in American Journal of Human Genetics 1991; 48: 390-7.

While historically Bardiya District had an indigenous Tharu population, more Tharus were concentrated in Dang District, to its east (Map B). The arrival of new landowners from the Hills, facilitated by the malaria eradication program, displaced these Dang Tharus from their homelands, many to India. A traditional indigenous people not familiar with the administrative mechanisms of modern Nepal, their land was not properly registered during land surveys and sometimes they were cheated out of their property. Some migrated simply to escape poverty.

A substantial number moved west from Dang and settled in Bardiya's fertile and naturally irrigated Rajapur Delta (see red triangle, Map R), whose population today is about 93,000. The delta area has the most pronounced Maoist presence in the district and was a main focus of the assessment in Bardiya District. The delta's eleven VDCs are bordered on the east and west by the Geruwa and Karnali Rivers, which converge again just across the Indian border, and is veined by many small rivulets (see Map J).

Most of the delta land had been granted to favored military leaders and allies, first by Nepal's kings and later by the Rana regime, as perpetual land grants known as *birtas*. which also gave their beneficiaries feudal control over the people who lived on their properties. *Birta* owners were absentee landlords. Eventually they sold off or divided their estates, often to relatives or friends of the same caste. For that reason, some VDCs are known as predominantly Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar or Thakuri. As malaria eradication opened the delta to settlement, ex-*birta* parcels were also sold to Hill migrants of other caste and ethnic backgrounds. Naraguan VDC is reported to have had a traditional group of Tharu landlords who own parcels of about 10 hectares.

As the *birtas* were being subdivided, the Government allocated land throughout Banke and Bardiya, in units of 4 *bighas* (2.5 hectares) per family, to Hill migrants. The heavily-forested parcels were sold at subsidized prices with grace periods to permit the owners to clear them for farming. Because of their unfamiliarity with administrative systems and social marginalization, Tharus were left out of the process.

The Rajapur Delta was rich in fertile land and water, but had little labor. Many of the larger (25 – 50 hectare) landlords were absentees. Tharu straw bosses known as *Lekhandars* administered the properties and Tharus did the manual labor. Tharus of Dang origin, commonly known as *Dangarus* or *Dangaha-Tharus,* became the predominant labor force. *Dangarus* were characterized by some interviewees as somewhat more dynamic, education-conscious and assertive than the local indigenous Tharu communities.

Bonded labor

Tharu laborers (some even before they left Dang) had difficulties feeding their families with what they earned. To solve this problem, they borrowed rice or money from their employers. Some loans were faithfully documented with standard 50% annual cash or in-kind interest. But some employers took advantage of Tharu illiteracy by having them sign repayment notes which overstated the amount of food or cash actually provided or charged even higher interest.

Once indebted, the laborer *and his heirs* were 'bonded' to remain in the landlord's employ and to actually reside on the landlord's property until the debt was repaid, which seldom happened. In fact, the laborers had to take more loans to survive and interest was compounded year after year until many Tharus fell into a state of permanent indentured servitude and were commonly called 'bonded laborers' or *Kamaiyas*.

Most estimates suggest there were, until recently, 10,000/12,000 Kamaiya families, which was more common in Bardiya and neighboring Kailali Districts (Map B) than in Banke. According to some local sources, the majority of Bardiya's Tharus own one to two bighas (about a hectare) of their own farmland, while about 20% are farm workers who own only their own homes.

In time, the bonded laborer's wife, and sometimes his children, were obliged to work on the landlord's property. The wife worked in the fields; the daughters worked in the house or took care of the landlord's children. Even so, the debt continued to accumulate. (Dalits could not become bonded laborers because they would not be permitted to interact in such close proximity with the landlord's family or in his home.)

A substantial proportion of young Tharu girls, particularly in the predominantly Thakuri-caste VDCs of Patabhar and Daulatpur in the northern delta (see Map R), were reportedly obliged to have sexual relations with their landlords. According to several sources, the sexual abuse of Tharu girls virtually disappeared with the advent of multi-party democracy and later with the conflict. The proportionate degree of influence of each of these political developments on this change was not clear.

Like the Red Zone, the delta was particularly isolated from the rest of its district. It is an island which has no connecting bridge. It has traditionally depended on small boats for transport across the Geruwa River. A pontoon bridge which once served the area was disabled by the Maoists. A motorized barge which could carry two vehicles connected both sides for a few months in mid-2002 until its engine was also destroyed by the Maoists.

Several sources spoke of a Government effort, apparently more than 40 years ago (perhaps even before malaria eradication) to address the Tharu land issue, the details of which are not clear. Apparently 27,000 *bighas* (18,000 hectares) were to be taken from the landlords and distributed to the bonded laborers. According to one source, a two-person Government inquiry commission determined that the Tharus were indeed being exploited and proposed this reform. Under this system the bonded laborer would have been entitled to receive at no cost one-quarter of the land he actually worked.

But there was little government presence at the time and many landowners were themselves government bureaucrats. One source alleges that, to defeat implementation of the measure, some landlords sold the indebtedness of bonded laborers to other landlords. This required the bonded family to move onto the property of the new landlord, ultimately disqualifying them from the reform. Unused entitlements reverted to the landlord. Though well-intentioned, the reform produced few durable results.

Tharu resistance

In about 1960, an anti-landlord movement developed in the Rajapur Delta. Tharu workers began harvesting and keeping food from the landlords' fields. At one point in Belwa Village, Manpur-tapara VDC, Tharu villagers called a strike and surrounded the food warehouse. In an initial police response, three men were killed on the spot and seven wounded. Later the Indian army was called in to re-establish order.

In 1996, at about the same time as the Maoist revolt began but reportedly not directly related to it, Tharu workers carried out a work stoppage. Its objective was to increase the proportion of the crop allocated to the workers. In general, in many areas the workers provided the seeds, manure and labor and in return received 25% - 35% of the crop, while the landlord received as much as 65% to 75%. The workers demanded a 50/50 division of the crops, which many interviewees characterized as a fair share. Some, but not all, achieved this concession as a result of the stoppage.

Western Bardiya politics

From the 1950s, the Nepali Congress Party was the Delta's leading political force and an advocate of Tharu rights. In those days, the NC advocated that "he who ploughs the land has a right to it." Radha Krishna Chaudhary, a well-known Tharu leader whose father was an affluent landowner, had been involved in Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement in India. He was elected as the area's first Member of Parliament in the 1958 elections but was exiled to India when that system was dissolved by the King. A lifelong advocate of Tharu rights, Rada Krishna refused several opportunities for high Government office in order to continue his work in behalf of his people, though ultimately he accepted an appointment in the NC administration of Prime Minister B. P. Koirala. Rada Krishna died in the late 1980s. His statue stands in the central intersection of Bardiya's capital, Guleriya.

In the 1991 Parliamentary multi-party elections for the western Bardiya constituency ('Constituency Number Three,' which includes the Rajapur Delta's eleven and three nearby VDCs), the UML nominated Govinda Gyawali, whom they described as "an exemplary Brahmin landlord." He won the seat.

In the second Parliamentary elections, the UML put the bonded laborer issue at the top of its agenda. It chose Kasi Ram Chaudhary, himself a bonded laborer, as its candidate. Kasi Ram walked through the district (according to one source often wearing shorts and looking a little like Mahatma Gandhi himself) and won the election against the NC candidate, a Thakuri landlord.

Expectations of Kasi Ram by the Tharu populace were high. Tharus arrived in Kathmandu in large numbers seeking his help and support. At one point he advocated a land invasion of a cotton plantation in Kalika VDC in southeast Bardiya (Map R) and the takeover of government forest land. At that moment, the UML headed the national government and the NC opposition objected to the seizures. The UML was forced to oppose the land invasions. According to one source, at Konra Village in Taratal VDC in south-central Bardiya (Map R) near the Indian border, the government used elephants to scatter the squatters, dealing a blow to Kasi Ram's program.

Nonetheless, the UML Parliamentarian won international recognition for his efforts. He reportedly received a US$25,000 award for his human rights advocacy, which he pledged to use in behalf of the children of his constituency and to educate his own children. But according to one source, most of the funds were invested in new homes he built in Kathmandu and in Magara-gadhi VDC town center, disappointing the Tharus who had placed their faith in him.

In the third Parliamentary elections, the NC put up an aggressive candidate, Khem Raj Bhatta, a Brahmin who had been a pro-democracy militant for many years and who was expected to energize politics in the district. He won his seat, and, under his leadership, the NC recovered nine of the Delta's eleven VDC's, and the District Development Council chairmanship. But some sources said that his tenure was a disappointment in that he spent little time in the district.

Still, multi-party democracy yielded an historic reform for the Tharu bonded laborers: in July 2001, under the NC Government of Prime Minister G. P. Koirala, the Government's 'Kamaiya Abolition Act' dissolved the debts of the bonded laborers and freed them of their indentured relationships with their employers. Much credit in the region is given to BASE, a local Tharu NGO, for the vigorous advocacy and coalition-building which resulted in this measure, which was opposed by a landlord group organized in neighboring Kailali District. Though the Tharu and bonded labor issues were on the Maoist political agenda, the Maoists are not generally perceived as having been instrumental in the reform.

More than twenty NGOs currently provide material, social and developmental assistance to the former bonded laborer families, who are eligible for a grant of a small parcel of land, a lumber package sufficient to build a house and several job training programs.

Rice production

The Rajapur Delta is reputedly Nepal's most productive rice growing area. It is also the home of the 'Modern Rice Mill' of Rajapur VDC. The mill is owned by the Ministry of Supply's Nepal Food Corporation. The fully-automated plant, a joint project of the Governments of Japan and Nepal, was inaugurated in 1997. It is by some accounts the most modern rice mill in South Asia. Capable of processing two tons of rice an hour, it had been producing about 11,000 tons of husked rice each year.

In May 2002, the Maoists removed 340 tons of rice from its warehouse, including some which had been set aside for the World Food Program. In an all-night operation using tractors from around the Delta, they delivered the rice to locations in many of the Delta's eleven VDCs. During the night they also disabled the plant by detonating an explosion which destroyed its automated control and monitoring panel and did some collateral damage to a nearby grain elevator. During the ensuing months, the Maoists returned several times and damaged a warehouse, door locks and wooden pallets and bags.

According to some knowledgeable sources, the plant was attacked at a time as a reprisal for RNA blockades on the shipment of noodles, rice and other staples to the Hill areas where the Maoists are more present.

It appears that the five privately-owned rice mills in the Delta were left unharmed, and some were in operation at the time of the assessment. Reports concerning one of the private plants were contradictory: one knowledgeable source associated with the owners (a prominent family) reported that the plant had been destroyed by the Maoists; two other knowledgeable sources, one of whom lives near the plant, said that the plant was obsolete, had not functioned for more than fifteen years and had not been attacked. The author could not reconcile the contradictory reports.

Maoist presence

Both western Banke and eastern Bardiya, while not immune from the conflict, are the least affected and have the least Maoist influence of the six assessment districts. (In all the assessment districts, there is little support for the Maoists in the district headquarters and Banke and Bardiya are not exceptions.) The Maoists have been unable to maintain much presence in western Banke, where 75% of the district population lives. The spacious, well-forested but sparsely-populated thirteen VDCs of eastern Banke east of the Dunduwa-khola River (Map Q), where 25% of the district population resides, have varying degrees of Maoist presence. The Maoist main objective there may be to maintain a logistical support corridor between India and the Red Zone.

The notoriously porous border between the Rajapur Delta and India has served for decades as a corridor for smuggling sugar, alcohol and other commodities between the two countries and for cross-border water buffalo rustling. During 2002 Nepali authorities arrested a group of Indian and Nepali Tharus as they attempted to smuggle one hundred kilos of gunpowder, fuse wire and sulphur from India to Bhimmapur VDC (see Map R), apparently for the Maoists. Recently Indian authorities have tightened border controls but the frontier remains insecure.

The isolation of the relatively remote Rajapur Delta, an island accessible only by boat, enabled the feudal system to perpetuate itself until recent years. It now permits the Maoists its most influential base in the Banke/Bardiya region. But in contrast to the absence of gross economic inequalities in the Red Zone, inequities between social and economic classes in the Delta are striking: there is a landed class with origins in the feudal system and a displaced, disenfranchised, exploited class of landless indigenous agricultural workers, some of whom until mid-2001 lived in a condition which some described as a modern form of slavery.

Yet, in comparison to the Red Zone, the Maoists were virtually inactive there until about 2000/2001. Dr. de Sales also comments on this phenomenon:

> Far more than the Magars, the [Tharus] are a people who have suffered from the exploitation of large landowners belonging to the high Hindu castes for whom they have to work in a kind of feudal relationship. Perhaps the Tharus' reputation for timidity – they do not share the warlike character attributed to the hill populations – has played a part in the Maoists' not taking this option.

SECTION THREE MAOIST PRESENCE AND CONDUCT IN RURAL VILLAGES

Although the Maoist movement had its rural origins almost exclusively in the Red Zone, its presence today is common in most rural VDCs of the four Hill districts included in the assessment and in the more remote areas of Banke and Bardiya districts. This presence does not necessarily mean that the movement *controls* these isolated areas (an issue addressed later). But it permits it to influence day-to-day life rather considerably. This section of the report describes the nature of Maoist presence and conduct in such areas.

External optic

The nature of Maoist conduct in these remote areas has been the subject of much debate in Kathmandu and abroad. Some report Maoist reforms in land tenure, money lending, Maoist-administered elections, greater local control of governance, and the resolution of long-standing grievances, almost mythologizing their aims and actions. Others demonize the Maoists and compare their conduct to the excesses of the Khmer Rouge.

This report attempts to disaggregate and evaluate some factors underpinning one not-uncommon set of perceptions reported, for example, in a May 8, 2002 Time Magazine/Asia report by Alex Perry, "Return to Year Zero":

> Since November [1991], the Maoists have instituted a systematic 'purification' campaign: to reduce their territory to chaos and rubble and eliminate all opposition. As well as crippling and killing government supporters, they have turned their terror on anyone who might represent stability or an alternative authority. Postmen, health workers, moneylenders, landowners, teachers, all have become public targets for flogging or executions…Bands of rebels are descending on villages and dragooning a child from each family into joining their ranks… State infrastructure – power substations, telephone exchanges, village administration offices, bridges, clinics…irrigation and drinking-water projects…are being leveled. Their aim, the Maoists admit, is to achieve Year Zero, a reference to the Khmer Rouge genocide that was to clear the way for a socialist utopia.

A Maoist village leader "deep in rebel territory" in Dang District, which is contiguous with Rolpa, Salyan and Banke, three districts included in the assessment, claimed to Time's reporter that

> …Then we decided to block any access to the villages by blowing up bridges – one time we hit 48 in one day. Inside our land we also attack the water projects or cut the drinking water or hit the electricity supplies because it is symbolic. We have to make these sacrifices to protect the people.

In this section of the report, information from the assessment's 150 field interviewees is synthesized to describe their perception of Maoist behavior toward local rural residents in areas where they are present *outside the Red Zone*. It is a selective and representative, not an exhaustive, catalogue of its conduct.

Alcohol and gambling

One of the first policies imposed by the Maoist movement in areas where it is present was a ban on the production, sale and consumption of alcohol and on public drunkenness, chronic problems in many isolated rural areas. Alcohol use is perceived by many as a waste of scarce income which also provokes physical abuse of women, which the Maoists have also attempted to diminish. The alcohol ban was viewed as a positive initiative *in principle* by all of those who commented on it, including both men and women. Even those who object to the autocratic manner of its imposition or the beatings used to enforce it were sympathetic with its intention.

Nonetheless, almost all the interviewees reported that the ban had failed and been abandoned several years ago. Ultimately, the prohibition could not be enforced because of the desire of the public - including the Maoists themselves - to consume alcohol.

The ban also violated cultural practices of the Magar and other ethnic groups. For the Magars, consumption of alcohol is a time-honored practice which is part of their cultural identity. It is consumed at celebrations of births, marriages, and deaths, and at traditional healing and religious ceremonies. Dr. Augusta Molnar's 1981 report on the Kham-Magar women of Thawang notes that the ancestor spirits are believed to oversee the fermentation process. In cold weather Magars sip alcohol to keep warm. Jesuit priest Casper Miller, who lived in a rural area of predominantly Magar Palpa District, reflected in Decision-making in Village Nepal that,

> No matter how early in the morning I paid a visit to a Magar household, I would be presented with a tumbler of village liquor at some time during the interview. Once emptied it was always refilled a second time as a mark of generous hospitality, never to be omitted.

Alcohol is an important source of income for women. In Thawang, according to Dr. Molnar, young unmarried women, widows and divorced women who cannot subsist without added income, and older women who live with their daughters-in-law, make and sell liquor. Since their greatest profits are realized at fairs, women pool their resources to make larger amounts, since they can often sell as much liquor as they can carry. Dr. David Seddon* estimates that 30,000 people in Nepal, including industrial workers, make their living brewing alcohol. Many of these are women in poor households who do home brewing.

There have been several unsuccessful initiatives by Magars themselves to alter or eliminate alcohol consumption. Dr. Molnar reports that in late-1970s Thawang, an aspiring male leader

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* in "The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolutionary Theory and Practice" presented at the University of East Anglia in June 2002.

> tried to convince the villagers to ban the sale of local liquor and replace this enterprise with the sale of government-distilled liquor… He and a friend obtained a license giving them exclusive license to sell [the government-distilled liquor] in the village. He argued that the ban would cut down on the use of grain for liquor-making and channel more grain into…general consumption…[But] the women who make their living by…the sale of liquor were outraged. Their main source of income was about to be cut off without provision of any alternative.

The women decided to present their arguments in a public debate, and in particular argued that,

> Since liquor formed the basic ingredient for hospitality, ritual, festivals and gift exchange, its ban was ridiculous. (One woman asked if they were supposed to bring [government-distilled liquor] instead of home brew to [the aspiring leader's] funeral ceremony and anger [his] ancestor spirits…) After some discussion, the ban was voted down…Women for the first time [had] banded together as a solidarity group and publicly influenced the decision.

Relying on the research of Nepali ethnographer K. R. Adhikari, Dr. de Sales' article describes a number of unsuccessful Magar-based campaigns against alcohol led mainly by Magar World War II British army veterans. In 1956, the Reform Association of the Magar Society was established in 63 districts with the aim of "root[ing] out the evils" of Magar society, particularly over-spending (on cultural ceremonies) and over-drinking. Eventually, the group added to its agenda opposition to "excessive belief in ghosts and spirits and the custom of sacrificing animals in the name of gods and goddesses instead of offering just flowers and food."

Alcohol consumption has always been an upper-caste Hindu taboo which distinguishes this group from Nepal's ethnic groups. So central is alcohol a distinguishing custom that, as Dr. de Sales explains, the 1854 Muluki Ain (Civil Code)

> assigned each group to a very precise position in the hierarchy of castes…The tribal [ethnic] groups [like the Magars] occupy a middle position…between the Twice-Born or *Tagadhari* who are ritually superior to them, and the Untouchables who are inferior. They form the group of *Matwalis* or 'alcohol-drinkers' [ed. note: which also includes Tharus].

Commenting on Magar initiatives to ban alcohol, diminish spending on rituals, and curtail animistic practices, Dr. de Sales comments:

> The image of Magar culture that is revealed here is the negative side of high-caste Hindu values: to tribal excesses, the Brahmin opposes his own preference for economizing, his rejection of alcohol, and his worship of pure and vegetarian Hindu divinities. Most important of all, communal rituals – the very activities which are precisely the context in which tribal culture comes into play – are picked out as threatening to it. That which activists propose to suppress (or weaken) in order to save Magar culture is the very thing that constitutes it.

Through Maoist-formed ethnic associations and public pronouncements discussed earlier, the Maoists have advocated respect for the culture of ethnic groups and autonomy – even self-determination – for them. Yet in its first administrative policy, it challenges a custom which is at the core of Magar and other ethnic cultural identity. Uneasiness with the imposition of Hindu values led many Nepalis, including members of ethnic groups, to join the largest public demonstration at the time of the 1990 Constitution, which opposed the designation of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom rather than a secular state in which their religions and traditional cultures would have equal standing.

In its economic consequences, the alcohol ban may have had a similar, if more diffuse, economic impact as the hashish ban, affecting as it did a large numbers of primarily female producers dispersed throughout the rural areas who are dependent on this income for their livelihoods.

Nonetheless, the intention behind the ban was understood, not condemned, by the assessment's interviewees. The Maoist ban on local gambling has been more successful, they said. Physical abuse of women has declined and in some areas Maoist administrators have imposed sanctions on polygamy which are stiffer and more widely-enforced than the government's.

Civilian infrastructure

The assessment interviews did not produce reports consistent with the systematic, wholesale destruction of civilian infrastructure which has reduced these areas to "chaos and rubble." An estimated 95% or more of civilian infrastructure has not been affected by the Maoists. Nonetheless, the Maoists have done significant infrastructure damage. None of the attacks were justified in the perception of the interviewees, and all destroyed the fruits of years of hard-fought efforts to bring about these development projects, which are at the heart of local aspirations and which will be difficult to replace.

The Maoists have attacked symbols of government authority and dual-use communication and transport systems which, while serving the civilian population, also facilitate counter-insurgency efforts. Some Maoist attacks are reprisals for government armed forces measures to weaken them. A 'Year Zero' program is not apparent in the six districts. The level and type of infrastructure damage inflicted in these areas, pointless and tragic as it appears to local residents, does not seem very different from the actions of scores of similar insurgencies around the world.

A difficulty in gauging the precise degree of such damage was the tendency of government officials and local residents to use the word 'destroyed' to describe facilities which were only *partially damaged but reparable* as well as those which were 'reduced to rubble,' i.e., completely destroyed.

Infrastructure damaged or destroyed

Country-wide government reports suggest that 1,500 (35%) of the 4,000 VDC administrative offices around the country have been destroyed. These offices, usually small two- or three-room buildings, are the most prominent symbols of government presence and administrative services at the village level. Many such buildings have been completely destroyed. But it was difficult to gauge the damage to such buildings in the six districts because sources for the data used the word 'destroyed' to describe not only buildings reduced to rubble, but also those in which the furniture and papers had been removed and burned but where the buildings had been left virtually in tact.

Agricultural multi-service development centers, some built by the USAID Rapti project, have been destroyed. At least one of them had not been serving its original purpose, but instead was being used as an army barracks for several years before it was attacked. Some food warehouses, including one at Musikot airport in Rukum, have been destroyed, in that case on the pretext that the police stored their food there.

The Maoists in these six districts have attempted to destroy many concrete bridges which provide crucial commercial links. But their explosives have not detonated and damage has been negligible. Dozens of suspension bridges have not been destroyed but disabled: for example, one of the two cables has been weakened so that local residents can use the bridge but the army, with its heavy equipment, cannot cross efficiently. The Maoists disabled the Rajapur Delta's pontoon bridge and apparently destroyed the engine of its motorized barge. The destruction of tele-communication relay towers and airport facilities (both also considered dual-use) in the six districts was also confirmed.

This report earlier described the Maoist disabling of the Rajapur Delta's Modern Rice Mill, which had been reported as completely destroyed. There were also contradictory reports about the 'destruction' of a private sector rice mill in the Rajapur delta; as already noted, several local sources asserted that it had not been damaged at all and in fact had not been used for fifteen years.

The Maoists damaged or destroyed a small bulldozer used to scrape sand out of the intake of the Rajapur Delta's main irrigation system and burned the government irrigation office in Rajapur VDC. One informed source states that the Maoists had called a nationwide 'stop the wheels' strike. Inherent in the strike is the threat that any vehicle utilized during the strike period will be destroyed. To enforce the strike in the delta, the Maoists dug trenches in some local roads. A government agent mobilized the irrigation system tractor during the strike to refill those trenches and the Maoists retaliated by destroying the bulldozer.

The Jimrhuk electricity plant in Nayagaon VDC of Pyuthan District, completed in August 1994 with Norwegian Government aid, was described as destroyed by the Maoists. It served some areas of Rolpa, though most of its customers were in Pyuthan. In early 2002, the Maoists inflicted US$650,000 of damage to the equipment, apparently mainly to the turbines. In similar cases, some alleged that attacks took place when the plants refused to make protection payments. One source reported that a micro-hydro facility in eastern Rukum's Morabang VDC was destroyed because it was built with external assistance to which the Maoists objected.

It is not unusual for insurgencies to disable or destroy dual-use infrastructure or even projects which symbolize government presence or services. But even before the war, the mid-west and far-west regions (Map B) already suffered an endemic infrastructure deficit compared with their eastern neighbors. The interviewees found no justification for the destruction of scarce development facilities whose construction was the core of the political agenda of their communities.

Infrastructure not affected

The most prominent type of public infrastructure throughout the rural areas of the six districts, are its thousands of government schools and health posts. Of these, only a handful of government schools have been damaged, and it is not certain whether these cases were primarily the effect of the Maoists or the product of other local differences. (Private schools which serve thousands of students have been harassed, blackmailed, closed and several destroyed by the Maoists.) A handful of health posts were affected when they were attached to VDC headquarters buildings destroyed by the Maoists. Throughout the conflict, even in its most intensive State of Emergency phase, the government education and health systems have worked 90% or more normally, but not perfectly:

- the Maoists collect a 5% tax on the salaries of all teachers and health workers;
- the Maoists make routine use of the health posts for their own health needs, but on a handful of occasions (not significant to the overall health program) have stolen medicines;
- they have disrupted some school days with strikes, obligatory political meetings or Maoist student association activities, sometimes intruding on classes to intimidate teachers;
- parents have sometimes feared to send their children to school, lest they be recruited for Maoist student association activities; in this sense the schools and health posts have lived under the tension and intimidation of conflict prevalent throughout the rural areas.
- they have forbidden the singing of the national anthem and in some cases the teaching of Sanskrit.
- A handful of (mainly NC) teachers who have refused to accommodate Maoist demands have been tortured or had their hands cut off. But this is a problem for Maoist opponents throughout the community, not only teachers.

While their interference has been minimal, the Maoists appear to have contributed nothing new to the education and health systems, nor have they created their own systems or trained their own personnel to provide these services.

Irrigation systems and drinking-water systems - another of the most common types of civilian physical infrastructure - have rarely been affected. The Maoists have removed metal pipes, usually from warehouses or from non-functioning water systems, to manufacture home-made socket-bombs. In a few instances they have temporarily disrupted functioning water systems by removing such pipes. The Maoists refused to allow the government water department to make critical repairs to one VDC's water system, which ceased to function a year ago. They defecated in one system which supplied a temporary military encampment. According to one source, one unusually fanatical Maoist in eastern Rukum disabled four earthen irrigation canals, which had not been working very well from the start, after announcing that "Government development shouldn't exist."

A relatively small number of private homes, usually belonging to prominent government officials, landlords, military or police personnel, have been destroyed, damaged or taken over by the Maoists for their own purposes.

National reconstruction estimate

One March 2003 preliminary assessment of Maoist infrastructure damage which occurred during the 15-month State of Emergency may not be exhaustive and excludes damage incurred since then. It concludes that reconstruction of airport facilities, tele-communications relay towers and VDC buildings destroyed by the Maoists would cost over US$20 million, while rebuilding other public sector infrastructure (not including power facilities) they destroyed would cost an additional US$10 million. These figures exclude emergency repairs already financed by the Government. But they help to put in perspective the magnitude of Maoist infrastructure destruction.

Nonetheless, in the mid-western and far-western region, these estimates do not include several factors: the conflict has delayed the maintenance and repair of hundreds of rural water supply systems; flooding in recent years has damaged irrigation systems and some unsurfaced roads are barely passable. There are partially completed infrastructure projects whose implementation was halted because of security concerns. And finally, Nepal's mid-western and far-western development regions remain in infrastructure deficit compared with other regions. Once the conflict is resolved, road building, at least in the mid-west, will be a costly, urgent and essential economic development and conflict mitigation requirement.*

Impeding new projects

The Maoists' refusal to allow new development projects and completion of projects already begun was more frequently criticized than their destruction of existing infrastructure. The Maoists have blocked implementation of hundreds of village development projects, including farm-to-market roads, financed by the US$6,500 annual block grants by the central government to the local VDCs.

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* The damage estimates do not , of course, include conflict impacts on the national economy, such as declines in tourism revenues.

Other government road activities have been obstructed as well. The Maoists have destroyed several sets of government-mobilized heavy equipment for road building. They confiscated the tools and expelled a team of road surveyors in Rolpa who were laying out a new farm-to-market route.

Many substantial NGO development programs have been expelled or pressured by Maoist threats to leave the six districts, reducing independent information flows and alternative systems of social mobilization. Projects providing integrated infrastructure and technical assistance, community-based forestry initiatives, and efforts to enhance local governance have been made unwelcome. In some areas, the movement of non-governmental organizations whose activities had been permitted by the Maoists in areas of their influence during the State of Emergency (the fifteen-month period from November 2001 – January 2003 in which the conflict reached its highest intensity) were more tightly restricted during the cease-fire period which followed.

Some sources reported that NGO personnel who remain active must provide to the Maoists a routine 5% tax on their salaries. A number of sources alleged that organizations permitted to continue their work must, in some form, pay a tax of 2% to 10% of project funds to the Maoists. (It appears that the World Food Program food-for-work road building effort has been spared this requirement.)

INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Center) consultant Jonathan Goodhand, a development studies lecturer at the University of London, in his June 2000 Nepal Conflict Assessment, suggests this is a nation-wide Maoist policy:

> According to police records 18 offices of international donor agencies have been attacked between 1996 and 2000. There have been numerous other incidents, including threatening letters and anti-NGO processions, aimed at intimidating agencies and their field staff. One suspects there is an under-reporting of incidents because of the sensitivity of such information.

Maoist-sponsored development

There were few reports of substantive development initiatives by the Maoists outside the Red Zone in these six districts. The principal development activities reported were shrines, resting places and 'triumphal' gates dedicated to Maoist martyrs, mainly political symbols of the Maoist presence. Some mule tracks were reportedly maintained, one or two unsurfaced farm-to-market roads were widened and some small pedestrian bridges inside of villages were built.

Most interviewees believe that, unlike traditional development activities, what distinguishes the few Maoist projects is that coercion, rather than voluntary community mobilization, is usually used to provide the labor component. Several interviewees asserted that this was the method also used by the old feudal system. Moreover, virtually no significant development work as this term is commonly understood – i.e., creation of new roads, bridges across rivers, drinking-water and irrigation systems, schools, health centers or health systems, or the introduction of improved agricultural techniques or crop diversification - were reported.

In the June 2002 paper referred to earlier, Dr. David Seddon observes that

> On the whole, to date, the Maoists have devoted relatively little attention in their revolutionary theory and strategy to building demonstrable alternatives themselves in advance of overthrowing the existing regime and establishing themselves in power, although there are clear plans to declare an alternative central government when the movement reaches a certain point. Discussions during October-November 2001 with members of the [Maoist] Politbureau suggest that pioneering 'prefigurative institutions and practices' or initiating progressive development activities themselves are not seen as a crucial part of their task, at least at this stage.

In summary, local residents condemned the destruction of civilian and dual-use infrastructure for whose construction they had struggled so hard. The extent of such destruction, however, falls far short of the charge that all of their infrastructure has turned to rubble. They reserved their harshest criticism for Maoist obstruction of government and NGO projects, a practice aggravated by the Maoists having contributed virtually nothing to local development efforts themselves.

Land issues

The relatively more limited inequalities in land ownership in the Hills makes it more difficult for the Maoists to effect reforms there. But both Banke and Bardiya, and the particularly the Rajapur Delta, offer some significant reform opportunities for them. The Maoists have pressured hundreds of larger (25 – 50 hectare) landowners to leave their land or, at least, to not collect their customary share of the harvest.

In most cases, however, it appears that the landlord/sharecropper relationships have not been reformed. Instead, the Maoist movement has simply been collecting the landlord's share of the crop. In a few cases in the delta, where larger farms are worked to a greater extent with tractors rather than manual labor, some reports suggest that land has neither been distributed nor collectivized. Instead, the Maoists have obliged local residents to work the land and the Maoist movement has taken an even greater than customary share of the crop. On small parcels in some remote areas of eastern Banke, sharecroppers have apparently been permitted to keep both their own and the landlords' customary shares of the harvest.

The external perception that displaced farmers were principally larger landowners may also be incorrect. A recent Misereor-financed study* analyzed data from questionnaires completed by 2,300 displaced farmers from 53 districts.

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* "Impact of Conflict on Agricultural Production and Small Landowners in Nepal," by Pradeepmani Dixit and Shrawan Sharma, Center for Economic and Social Development (CESOD), January 2003.

The average reported size of pre-displacement landholding in the mid-western region was roughly one hectare. While country-wide 55% of the displaced farmers did their own farm work and did not employ agricultural laborers, this percentage decreased to about 40% in the western region. (Over 40% said they left their land when the Maoists threatened their lives; over 30% said they left when they refused to make involuntary donations to the Maoists, while 5% left when their homes were looted and burned. Most of the balance were displaced for more traditional political reasons, i.e., membership in mainstream political parties, accused of being government spies, disobeyed or organized opposition to the Maoists, relatives employed in armed forces or police, or accused by the RNA of being Maoist supporters.)

In his June 2002 paper, Dr. Seddon observes that,

> [I]n the Hill areas, where the Maoists have mainly operated until quite recently, there are not generally the large landowners of the 'semi-feudal' kind; nor are there the large estates to confiscate and redistribute. In fact there have been very few attempts by the Maoists to introduce any kind of 'land reform' or 'land re-distribution' in the areas under their control. The few attempts made proved extremely difficult to manage and were abandoned…
>
> …Early statements of the objectives of the [Maoist] armed struggle include references to the appropriation of land from feudal landowners and distribution to the landless and poor peasants. But relatively little has been made of this in ideological and strategic proclamations, and limited action taken at the grass roots outside 'secure areas' where they have established effective control. It could be argued that if and when a 'base area' is established and the people's Republic of Nepal declared there will be more attention paid to such measures…

The Maoists have apparently carried out no substantial collectivization initiatives in these six districts (there have been reports of collectivized farms in Jajarkot District and some land reform efforts in Dang, both of which were outside the geographic scope of this assessment and could not be confirmed). In most cases, the landlord/sharecropper relationship, which is based on and recalls the feudal landholding system, appears to have been maintained.

The pronouncements of local Maoist leaders are of little aid in clarifying their intentions: to landowners they promise that when the conflict is over their land will be returned; to the sharecroppers they promise that the current phase is just temporary and that when they prevail the landlord's property will be distributed among them. (Before the conflict, some mainstream politicians also engaged in this type of rhetoric, encouraging land invasions with the promise that they would be ratified if their party won the elections.) But in the meantime, in the Rajapur Delta, in a certain sense, a new class of 'Maoist landlords,' perhaps temporary, has been created among its armed militia and party leaders which may pose a problem in a post-conflict environment.

Commerce

The Maoists have reportedly made virtually no changes in the traditional commercial systems of these six districts. Farmers appear to be free to buy and sell in their traditional marketplaces. During the State of Emergency, the Maoists required villagers to obtain permission from their authorities before going to major market centers, just as the RNA maintained check points along major trade routes. But the core character of the commercial system was not altered.

The Maoists did not introduce intermediary institutions in traditional commercial arrangements. They did not replace private shops with collectivized or cooperative stores. They did not replace individual initiative with collectivized harvests or communized crop distribution. Individual property ownership was not replaced by communized ownership. Individual Maoists did not introduce themselves as intermediaries in traditional commercial relationships. In the one contrary instance cited earlier in *yarcha gumba* collection, higher Maoist authorities intervened to stop the practice.

The fundamentals of property ownership and commercial relations were not altered. As described later in this report, the Maoists expelled or silenced prominent alternative leaders in rural areas, in part to enhance their own influence in the VDCs. But they did not go to the extent of altering traditional commercial practices to sever normal communication through market networks.

In a singular instance in Ghatgaun VDC in northwest Surkhet (Map P), however, the commercial system was substantially altered. Private shops operating informally around the VDC were forced to re-locate to a central market, which was regulated and taxed by Maoist authorities. The prices of staples, as well as chicken and fish, were fixed by the market authority. A Maoist fish and poultry ‘controller’ monitored economic activity for ‘lawless fish and chicken sellers.’ Whether this unusual policy reflected market dynamics unique to that VDC, the political orientation of a particular local Maoist leader, or whether it was a pilot project upon which future policy would be based, is unclear.

Interest rates

Local residents are apparently advised by the Maoists to not repay government loans. Customary interest rates charged by moneylenders in rural areas of the six districts vary from area to area. In most, 5% a month has been the traditional standard. In some places, 5% is the rate for activities involving travel to another country, while there is a 3% rate for ordinary loans for borrowers who remain at home.

According to interviewee accounts, in some areas Maoists have attempted to reduce interest rates, at least to 3%. Where higher rates have been prohibited, some lenders have stopped making loans available. In others, lenders have been afraid to make loans lest the borrowers make false accusations about them to the Maoists as a way of escaping loan repayment.

One source reported that the Maoists have an internal loan program for their own active members at 18% annually, but that repayment has not always been reliable. Dr. Seddon, citing the 2001 University of East Anglia doctoral research of A. Karki, "The Politics of Poverty and Movements from Below in Nepal" adds that

> The Maoists have destroyed all kinds of legal and illegal loan documents and freed people from debts owed to village moneylenders and landlords where these appeared excessive and exploitative…In Rolpa at least, the Maoists established a rural cooperative bank (the Jaljala Financial Cooperative Fund) two years ago, which offers loans to the poor and needy at 15 per cent a year including a 5 per cent contribution to the Party.

It was not possible to reach a conclusion on the scope and effectiveness of Maoist efforts to reduce interest rates or whether, on balance, these have benefited rural residents.

Forced donations

In almost all areas where the Maoists are present they have imposed a new form of tax on local residents. From each of their two annual harvests, each family is required to donate roughly 10 to 20 kilos of grain, which amounts in a year to 20 to 40 kilos. Especially in the Hills, most families produce only enough food to supply their families grain needs for three to six months a year. So what may seem to the external observer like a small donation is perceived as significant by most families, who must replace it by some other means. In addition, at times families are required to provide and prepare food for armed militia and visiting Maoist officials. (According to most reports, the Maoist Red Army, its more conventional armed force, does not impose such requirements on the civilian population.) Policies of arbitrary tribute recall practices of the feudal era.

Government employees such as teachers and health workers in rural areas, and in Rolpa in the district capital, are obliged to remit 5% of their monthly salaries to the Maoists. It appears that most NGO staff permitted to work in such areas must pay similar taxes. (Most NGOs deny that the Maoists tax their project budgets as well, though the contrary is widely believed.) The families of police and army members are taxed on their salaries as well. Shop-keepers and traders are taxed on a case-by-case basis. Trade in hashish and *yarcha gumba* is taxed as described earlier.

Taxes levied on small farmers are the most widely applied and resented measure initiated by the Maoists. The donations are involuntary and sanctions for refusal to contribute include forced labor, beatings and may even include death. As Dr. Seddon observes, the Maoists "demand taxes from local inhabitants…with little or no possibility of resistance.…They may be dissatisfied with the way the Maoists operate but no one dares risk opposing them.…In remote mid-western villages where most people lead a hand-to-mouth existence, having to provide food and shelter to 10 to 12 Maoist rebels has become an inordinately tough burden to bear. No one dares raise a voice in protest for fear of inviting 'people's action.' The memory of [someone] being killed because of his refusal to feed the Maoists is all too fresh."

Recruitment

According to the assessment's interviewees, Maoist combatant recruitment is conducted among all ethnic and caste groups, including Hill Brahmin and Chhetri communities. But it is focused in somewhat greater proportion on the Magar, Tharu and Dalit populations. It appears that it also targets particularly young single men and women aged 15 – 25 without children who still reside with their parents, rather than married adults with family responsibilities.

The Maoists make clear to young people in the target group that they may not remain on the sidelines. They must either join the Maoists or leave their villages. (By remaining in the village they may also attract the RNA suspicion.) This dilemma has accelerated economic migration among young people to India, where their stays have become longer to avoid entanglements in the conflict. The absence of this young population may have caused a slight decline in agricultural production.

Maoist forces are commonly estimated by informed non-Maoist sources at 5,000/6,000 Red Army combatants, their most qualified, best trained and disciplined conventional military force; and 15,000 combined armed militia (in less disciplined looser local units) and dedicated political agents and activists. The Maoists themselves claim that these groups, taken together, number about 100,000 persons.

The Maoist policy is that each family must contribute one member to their cause. But according to all the assessment's sources, the policy is not uniformly or strictly implemented, and some families have provided no members. A family member in some areas may satisfy the requirement by attending occasional mass rallies, local political meetings or student association mobilizations.

The author received conflicting reports and could not reach a conclusion on whether ordinary Red Army members receive more than a small amount of spending money as cash salary, an issue not central to the assessment's purpose. Maoists have used as a recruitment incentive for the Red Army the promise that when they 'soon' come to power, their combatants will have full-time jobs in the national army. During the recent cease-fire, they apparently intensified the use of this promise to retain their troops and as a recruitment incentive.

Parents reportedly kept their children out of school when Maoist 'recruitment' was being conducted. Such recruitment in schools was apparently mostly for political activities, such as the formation of Maoist student associations or brief travel to other districts for student meetings.

No reports of attempts to transform the family structure or family relationships were received. There were no indications of a pattern of young children being separated or purposely disaffected from their parents for political indoctrination or other interference with traditional family relationships.

Porterage and human shields

Some interviewees reported that the Maoists mobilize ordinary local civilian residents, as needed and often on an involuntary basis, to carry weapons, ammunition, food and supplies on long treks to their military targets. On the return trips, the porters carry the wounded as well. (Arbitrary recruitment to provide labor mirrors a well-remembered feature of feudal life.)

The assessment did not focus on the alleged use of such civilians as 'human shields.' A number of well-informed Kathmandu sources claimed that during their attacks the Maoists regularly shielded themselves from gunfire behind rows of innocent unarmed civilians they arrayed before them. The assessment reached no conclusion concerning this allegation. In one highly conflictive district, however, a credible source stated that upon investigation, allegations of a few such cases turned out to be unfounded.

Attendance at political rallies

Numerous sources credibly reported that attendance at mass Maoist political rallies, even when they are conducted far distant from the villages, and at local political meetings, is obligatory. Failure of a family to send a representative to such meetings - even those which took place during the recent cease-fire - is punished by cash fines, forced labor or even beatings. Conversely, the Maoists prohibit and punish attendance at memorial processions for victims of their violence. (Government forces have reportedly used similar sanctions against processions memorializing government victims.)

Control of population movement

Until the November 2001 State of Emergency, almost all the interviewees stated that VDC residents in areas where the Maoists were present were free to travel to their customary markets (often the district headquarters) without seeking authorization from local Maoist leaders. 'Public figures' (political party activists, local elected officials, more prosperous residents) about whom the Maoists were likely to be skeptical, to the degree that they had decided to remain in some VDCs, were monitored or required to check in with Maoist authorities when they traveled.

During the November 2001 – January 2003 State of Emergency, most residents were required to obtain oral permission to travel to their customary market towns, which was seldom refused. At the same time, the armed forces maintained checkpoints where they monitored local travelers as well. None of this seems different from conditions in rural areas in most civil conflicts.

Intimidation and violence

Outside of the Red Zone, as well as in some (mainly contiguous) VDCs in Rolpa and a few small isolated pockets of Salyan and Surkhet, the assessment detected neither a critical mass of support sufficient to have initiated the revolt nor a substantial political constituency for the Maoists, their ideology or manner of interaction with the civilian population. Even within the Red Zone, it is not clear that support for the Maoists is unanimous, but opposition is surely muted.

Yet outside the Red Zone and the other isolated pockets mentioned above, and outside district headquarters, Maoist presence, apparently unchallenged, is widespread in the Hills and even in eastern Banke and Bardiya's Rajapur Triangle. To what can this widespread influence be attributed?

First, the majority of interviewees from isolated rural VDCs reported that both before and during the conflict there has never been a stable police or military presence in their home VDCs. Most said that the police and army had never visited their VDCs during the conflict and, if they had, they had remained for a day or two (usually without an encounter with armed Maoists) and then returned to their bases. Their reports suggest, in effect, that the Maoists entered these rural areas, most of them isolated by broken terrain and heavy forests, virtually unchallenged. The decision of the government not to mobilize the army for the first six years of the conflict cleared the way for this kind of Maoist expansion.

Second, the overwhelming majority described in detail a pattern of Maoist intimidation which made obedience to their instructions the only logical choice from the beginning. Armed Maoist elements, usually from other districts and often relatively few in number, administered rules and taxes with little opposition. Those who failed to obey or opposed their policies were dealt with severely: scores of detailed cases of beatings, abductions, amputation of limbs, knifings and murders carried out with impunity were recounted by the 150 interviewees. These cases illustrate a pattern of Maoist sanctions inflicted without government challenge against an isolated, unarmed civilian population whose only recourse was to abandon their farms and flee to district headquarters. The need for such measures tends to support an assertion by the great majority of interviewees that the Maoists are viewed in these isolated rural area not as liberators, but as occupiers.

The victims included ordinary local residents, including Dalits, Tharus and Magars as well as others who defied the alcohol ban, refused to donate grain, were accused of being police informers (including apparently a few innocent children), defused Maoist landmines in front of their homes, tried to collect bills from Maoists who had purchased goods on credit, local political activists and teachers who refused to remain silent or join the Maoist cause, and candidates for public office during elections and elected officials.

There were also a small number of cases widely known within the six districts which transcended simple beatings and executions to include a type of prolonged torture which this report calls 'mutilation atrocities.' The punishments were inflicted by a small number of young Maoists over a period of many hours while a larger mixed group of 30 to 80 young Maoist men and women surrounded the victim and encouraged the perpetrators. These incidents began with severe beatings followed by systematic breaking of almost every bone in the (always male) victim's body using rocks and (while the victim was alive) some of the following practices:

- Â skinning them alive;
- Â cutting off the tongue, ears, lips and nose;
- Â gouging out the eyes;
- Â hammering the victim's teeth out of his mouth;
- Â sawing or, using knives, virtually cutting the victim in half at the waist (final step);
- Â burning the victim to death (final step).

In one particular gruesome case involving a Chhetri man in eastern Salyan, the victim's children were forced to watch as their father was tortured to death in this manner, inflicting permanent mental damage on them. The author was also able to confirm one identical incident described in the Time Magazine/Asia May 2002 article mentioned earlier, which took place in Arghakhanchi District of the western region (see Map B).

The author tried, without success, to find a precedent for these mutilation atrocities in Nepali culture and history. Some 250 years ago, King Prithvi ordered his soldiers to sever the lips and noses of hundreds of Kirtipur's male inhabitants, but did not have them killed. Nepal's police are reputed to have inflicted severe physical abuse on prisoners, but nothing approaching these atrocities. Civil conflict in Nepal has been limited to a handful of short-lived uprisings with relatively low mortality and no such practices by either side. It appears that in Nepal mutilation atrocities are a creation of the Maoist movement. Synthesizing the accounts received from the interviewees, three characteristics stand out:

- Â The purpose of the mutilation atrocities is to decisively demonstrate the punishment which may be inflicted on those who disobey or oppose the Maoist forces, particularly locally prominent individuals. Within the six districts, the number of killings which would fall under this category reached perhaps a few dozen. Such killings do not need to be numerous to achieve their objectives.

- Â At least within the six districts, the mutilation atrocities are carried out in an almost identical pattern, suggesting that they are not the random acts of undisciplined Maoist adherents, but rather the product of a policy coordinated at senior command levels. (Reports of mutilation cases around the country suggest this may be part of a wider pattern of similar Maoist conduct.)

- Â While their principal purpose is demonstrative, the atrocity events are also conducted in an almost ritualistic manner. They may be used to prove the commitment of the perpetrators to the Maoist cause, or qualify them for membership in a trusted, perhaps more radical, inner circle (some interviewees reliably report having met Maoists in the field whose particularly extreme views contrast with those of most of their comrades). Anne de Sales reached a similar conclusion:

> It is also said that in order to rise up in the hierarchy of the [Maoist] revolutionary army…it is necessary to kill a 'class enemy.' The fighters are informed about their victims by their contacts in the village, but they do not know them personally. This is how ancestral conflicts, rarely fatal until now, have become so.

Civil administration

Where they are present and government authority absent, the Maoists establish People's Committees, in principle a parallel system of representative village government. According to the interviewees, some such Committees are established by Maoist appointment. Others are the product of elections in which all of the candidates are nominated or approved by the Maoists. In others, a freer process permits even individuals associated with the NC or UML to participate. In fact, such individuals are sometimes elected, in which case the committees are acknowledged but not empowered. The conduct of 'instant justice' by a parallel judiciary system, the 'Peoples Courts' (comprised in part of Maoist combatants and party officials) is a much-discussed administrative mechanism which was not a focus of the assessment, nor was the remote, virtually inaccessible government judicial system it seeks to replace.

Mortality

Maoist atrocity mutilations are striking for their gruesome character. Extra-judicial executions by the armed forces, described later, are more numerous yet less gruesome. How many deaths has the conflict caused thus far?

Nepal's most authoritative human rights organization is the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), founded in 1988. Through five regional offices and 50 local networks, it monitors human rights dynamics at the grass roots level, particularly killings. Its annual Human Rights Yearbooks and its quarterly reports are used as references by many Nepali and international organizations

According to its April 2003 quarterly report (page 41), 7,400 persons (all figures are rounded) were killed by both sides in the first seven years of the conflict. Two-thirds were killed during the State of Emergency between November 2001 and January 2003. Of those, about a third took place in the six assessment districts.

Of the 7,400, nearly 2,000 (27%) were reportedly killed by the Maoists, including almost 1,000 police and 225 army soldiers. The balance of 775 were farmers (the largest group), political workers, teachers and other unarmed ordinary civilians.

Some 5,400 killings are attributed to the army, of which 4,800 (89%) are categorized as 'political workers.' However, there is no statistic for Red Army or armed Maoist militia killed in combat with government forces. Once their combatants are killed, says a leading human rights advocate, the Maoists retrieve their weapons, and after the fact it is difficult to distinguish the bodies of civilians caught in crossfires from those of armed Maoists.

In just the six assessment districts, the author received multiple, credible reports of armed encounters in which collectively *at least* many hundreds of armed Maoists were killed, yet they are not disaggregated in the statistics. This could lead the reader to misunderstand that all 5,400 killings were extra-judicial killings of political activists by the RNA, which would not be true and which, the author understands, is not INSEC's intent.

In the absence of disaggregated statistics, it seems prudent to estimate that one-third or more of the total 7,400 deaths over seven years were armed combatants of the two sides. If this is true, up to 5,000 unarmed civilians or less were killed in the first seven years of the conflict. This would include at least 760 (15%) killed by the Maoists, and probably (in the author's view) more than double that number executed by the RNA and police, with the balance killed in cross-fires. To the extent that human shields are used by the Maoists, it is not clear where and with what attribution their deaths are included in the 7,400 figure.

In comparison with many other civil conflicts, this tragic loss of life would might be considered in the lower range of mortality.

Mass and individual displacement

The assessment detected no efforts in the six districts by either party to the conflict to provoke mass displacement. In particular there were no reported:

- mass killings of civilian dependents aimed at causing displacement;
- burning or wholesale destruction of villages;
- forced resettlement of villages by the Maoists to work camps or new locations;
- concentration by the army of civilians deemed sympathetic to the Maoists (for example from the Red Zone) into displaced persons camps;
- abandoned villages.

Large-scale traditional seasonal migration (in some cases of up to 90% of adult males) from the Hills to India has continued during the conflict. Most conflict-generated displacement has taken place on an individual basis, according to the interviewees, mainly in two categories:

- young men (and some young women) migrating mainly to India to avoid the twin dangers of Maoist conscription and armed forces suspicion, which affect younger people of draft age; and
- people who perceived pressure or received explicit threats from the Maoists or who were physically assaulted or forced to leave the villages by them. These include local elected officials, mainstream political party activists, traditional leaders, larger landowners, moneylenders, business people subject to extortion, persons considered to have a 'feudal' character, and those who refuse to obey or who oppose the Maoists. These displaced individuals and families have migrated to district capitals, to Nepalganj, to other Nepali cities and to India.

In her June 2002 "Conflict-related Displacement in Nepal" report, prepared during the State of Emergency for USAID, Dr. Esperanza Martinez concludes that many targeted persons have moved to district headquarters, leaving their families behind, and that thereafter the families were no longer threatened.

Numerous interviewees said that during the February/June 2003 cease-fire period, displaced persons were returning from India for short visits to see their homes and to appraise the prospects for future return. But at the same time some residents who had remained in their villages during the State of Emergency were taking advantage of the pause to depart to India to await further conflict developments.

The March 2003 "Nepal IDP Research Initiative Findings" report,* a collaborative effort involving four organizations conducted during a six-week period in December 2002/January 2003, does its best to sort out different sets of somewhat disparate information about displacement.

The report cites INSEC data, which although not comprehensive, suggests that about 20,000 people have been displaced, roughly two-thirds from the mid-western region. UNDP data shows Nepalganj, the main regional captation town for the mid-western region, with the highest urban population growth rate in recent years. About 25% of displaced people surveyed stated that insecurity prompted their displacement. For the balance, disruptions in employment and education at least partly attributable to the conflict caused them to leave their homes. UNDP estimates an accelerated nation-wide urban drift of 80,000 migrants in the last two years.

Maoist 'control'

All 75 district capitals are under government control. The Maoists have, from time to time, launched attacks against district capitals but have not been able to capture and hold them.

In Kathmandu and abroad, some interviewees asserted that the Maoists control 40, 60 – even 72 – districts. In one May 2002 report, "Conflict in Nepal: Perspectives on the Maoist Movement," London School of Economics author Liz Philipson characterized the Maoists as "the undisputed force in 65 of 70 districts and to all intents and purposes the government in many of those districts." On the other hand, a 13 October 2003 *New York Times* article by Amy Waldman, "Nepal Maoist Rebels Move Their Attacks Into Cities," reports that the Maoists "roam freely in the countryside and effectively control about 6 of 75 districts, but have never taken a district headquarters."

In this report, the word 'control,' as applied to both sides, signifies sufficient predominant military strength in a given geographic area so that the opposing force can attack but will likely sustain considerable personnel and equipment losses and will be unable to maintain its presence beyond the relatively brief period of the attack. Under this definition, what is the Maoist degree of control in the six assessment districts and how can the nature of the Maoist presence be most precisely defined?

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* Information concerning the report can be obtained from Leonard van Duijn at lduijn@snv.org.np.

…in the Red Zone

The Red Zone, as described earlier, comprises 1,600 square kilometers, 1% of Nepal's territory. It has no motorable road access whatsoever, and the terrain and climate favor the insurgency. For historical reasons, the Maoists clearly have a significant political constituency there.

The Government has succeeded in attacking the Maoists in the Red Zone. For example, according to one knowledgeable source, RNA Operations Gorakh I and II mobilized forces by night from Rolpa, Rukum and Baglung to target Thawang itself. Initially the Maoists blocked the army, killing several soldiers and guides. According to this single source, the RNA feinted a retreat towards Musikot, then returned and surrounded a Maoist unit, killing up to 35 Maoist combatants. But after a brief period the RNA withdrew.

Based on the accounts of interviewees from Rolpa and Rukum, it appears that the Red Zone is relatively impenetrable to the RNA, suggesting that the Maoists could be said to control that area.

In middle-Rolpa, the Maoists are said to have political support but not the type of control they exercise in the Red Zone.

…outside the Red Zone

Outside of the Red Zone the Maoists expanded unchallenged into many isolated, mountainous and forested areas. If the VDC residents' accounts described earlier are accurate, there has never been a stable police or military presence in most of their home areas before the conflict. And if they visited during the war, the RNA and police remained for a day or two, *almost always without armed resistance from the Maoists,* and then returned to their bases.

These reports suggest the absence of government security which permits a Maoist presence. But outside the Red Zone in the six districts, not a single report suggested that the RNA could not occupy virtually any location it chose and maintain its presence for as long as it wished. Such operations were constrained not by the force of the Maoists but by the sheer number of isolated villages. Maoist armed forces in most of these areas are limited and widely distributed.

During their insurgencies, groups like the FMLN in northern El Salvador, RENAMO in parts of northern Mozambique, the Charles Taylor forces in western Liberia, the TPLF and EPLF in parts of Ethiopia, even the FARC in parts of western Colombia could claim predominant control of fairly extensive areas. The Maoists appear to have such control only in the Red Zone.

Dissecting the nature and definition of 'control' in the rural areas may seem like splitting hairs. But it has implications for the manner in which the balance of forces is perceived and for other issues addressed later. For some in Kathmandu and abroad, the assertion that the Maoists 'control' a vast proportion of the districts translates into a movement with traditionally-defined military control and momentum, besieging and capable of blockading the main cities, and imminently overrunning them.

In the author's view, the Maoists have no such control nor such military prospects. Moreover, at least in these six critical districts, sometime during the last year of the State of Emergency the momentum appears to have shifted in favor of the RNA.

Maoist governance

Are the Maoists also, in essence, the predominant government in these areas, in some manner the equivalent of the national government? For these most-affected six districts, in which the Maoists have greater influence than in other regions of Nepal,* this question could be applicable only to the rural areas, and not to the district capitals, which are under firm government control.

Outside the Red Zone, the Maoists are present to varying degrees with a small armed militia and Party delegation in the majority of the rural VDCs of the four Hill districts, in Bardiya's Rajapur Delta and in the remote forest areas of eastern Banke. In the absence of government security, the Maoists have considerable influence on the life of its rural residents, but much of this is the result of intimidation. They are more tolerated and obeyed because of fear than embraced as a constructive new force. Even the few Maoist policies perceived as positive were imposed autocratically. Rural residents in most areas perceive the Maoists as occupiers, not liberators. They did not emerge from the local populations themselves in the way they did in the Red Zone.

The Maoists have expelled elements of the community who could oppose them, which has heightened the feeling of vulnerability of the remaining population. Through physical intimidation including mutilation atrocities, they have demonstrated that resistance or disobedience to the Maoist movement may incur swift and final punishment. But beyond their mostly symbolic rallies and political events, there is little evidence that they have significantly engaged the population in political education or indoctrination.

The key reference point for the rural areas where the Maoists are present continues to remain the traditional government and market systems. Essential functions - schools, health posts, land tenure and sharecropping arrangements (in the Rajapur Delta), and traditional market networks - continue largely unchanged where the Maoists are present. Mainstream local officials elected since 1992 in national elections are more recognized than those of the People's Governments. In fact, the standing of those mainstream elected officials was affected less by the Maoists than by the central government's July 2002 failure to extend their tenure. Even without formal recognition, most local elected officials continue to enjoy respect and influence in their constituencies.

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* At least up to 2000, the Maoists appear to have acknowledged this point. In his February 2000 interview with reporter Li Onesto, Maoist Chairman Comrade Prachanda stated "This great feeling [of revolutionary empowerment] among the masses is mainly in the Western Region. In the Eastern and Middle Region this feeling is also developing. But the situation for the [government] in these regions is very favorable." See http://www.humanrights.de/doc_en/archiv/n/nepal/politics/200200_prachand_interview_b2.htm

The Maoists in selected areas outside the Red Zone are reported by some to administer land transactions and to have prohibited the recording of such transactions and the payment of fees and taxes to government authorities. But once the State of Emergency ended in January 2003, one Hill district land office reported that land registration applications increased by a factor of forty from 20 to 800 monthly. Payment to the local VDC government authorities of the mainly symbolic land tax (about US$0.03 per year for small parcels) grew from 25% of normal during the State of Emergency to 60% in the first few months of the cease-fire and was increasing.

The Maoists have neither attempted nor achieved meaningful reforms nor undertaken new development activities. But through intimidation they have stopped most other development efforts, extracted grain taxes from small farmers and cash from small shop owners, levied taxes on teachers, health workers and remaining development personnel. They have prevented the repair of roads and drinking water systems and have damaged or destroyed such signs of progress as communications systems, power stations and airport facilities.

The Maoist influence over these civilian populations is based more on intimidation than assent. The Maoists neither provide routine services nor promote creative social or economic transformation or development. These factors call into question whether the label 'government' in the ordinary sense of that word is properly applied to Maoist conduct in the rural villages. Despite its profound flaws and errors, reported with withering criticisms by the interviewees, the existing government, and not the Maoists, appears to be the principal point of governmental reference for the rural population.

Political support

As a result of the above factors, in the author's view, the Maoist political project has not translated into political support by the vast majority of the population outside the Red Zone. In the six districts (outside the Red Zone), there was no sufficient critical mass of support nor conditions which would have permitted the Maoists to initiate the revolt. In the Red Zone and central Rolpa it appears that rural residents fear mostly the police and RNA, who are often perceived as outside occupiers even in pockets unsympathetic to the Maoists. In western Rukum and in the balance of the six districts, however, rural residents fear principally the Maoists. These are geographic areas into which the Maoists have expanded from their heartland but the people there have generally not been persuaded to their cause.

The Maoists have been present for some years in many rural areas while they have forcibly excluded mainstream political parties. This would give them an initial advantage in future elections. A proper election, however, would be free of Maoist and other party intimidation and would permit alternate voices which have been absent for years to be heard once again.

Should the government somehow succeed in re-empowering the most recent cohort of local elected officials (whose terms lapsed in mid-2002), that too would have an important impact on the political equation.

Under such circumstances, outside the Red Zone and parts of Rolpa, the author believes that the Maoists could win an average of up to 15% of the votes. Unless the mainstream parties remain fractured and each breakaway faction fields separate candidates, it seems unlikely that the Maoists could win much more than the few local offices they did in 1991/1992. (In the Nepali system, the candidate who receives a plurality of the votes wins the office.)

The UML, a left-wing party which does not endorse Maoist violence and methods, has become popular in the six districts and has won most of the local seats in recent elections. Their leaders are young, vigorous, progressive and development-oriented. While the Maoists have devoted their efforts to occupying geographic ground through violence, the UML has been capturing the corresponding political space. In a proper election, it seems more likely that the UML would continue to win most seats. The UML may also have eclipsed Maoist long-term political prospects in a multi-party scenario in many of these areas. If true, joining the democratic mainstream as a political party may hold few prospects for the Maoists.

The NC Party, at the same time, consists of highly experienced political activists who have shown the ability to wrest some unlikely areas (like the Rajapur Delta) back from the UML. The NC, which crusaded against the Rana regime and for multi-party democracy so valued in the six districts, cannot be written off in this area.

The conflict has not occasioned mass mortality, mass displacement or mass economic disruption. Thus, given a free choice, the voters will not support the Maoists simply to insure that the conflict does not continue.

But if the Maoists retain their arms, they could use their widely feared intimidation skills to subvert the intent of a free election and, instead, influence its outcome in their favor. If an electoral choice which is free of intimidation is the objective, in the author's view:

- a fair election is not feasible as long as the Maoists do not put aside their weapons.

- a minimum of a six months 'cooling off' period before elections, after Maoist disarmament and an RNA return to the barracks, is required.

- Long-term monitoring *based in the VDCs* of the six-month run-up to the elections would be essential to insure that the Maoists are not intimidating voters *and* to insure that the Maoists are given a full, unobstructed opportunity to present their candidates and platforms to the voters and that their voters are not being intimidated by the forces of the State or the other political parties. This type of independent, pro-active monitoring is essential in the many areas from which the mainstream parties have been excluded for almost a decade.

- Such monitoring would need to involve human rights organizations and a corps of independent international observers, if possible Nepali speakers, present for a continuous six-month period, frequently trekking out to the remote villages. High-profile urban-based international monitoring in the week before the elections will do little to insure that the multi-party democratic system reinflates in the rural areas.

SECTION FOUR COMPARISON WITH OTHER MAOIST MOVEMENTS

CAMBODIA'S KHMER ROUGE

Legitimacy of the question

The Time/Asia May 2002 article excerpted earlier, and statements by the Maoists themselves, raise a threshold question for many diplomats, policymakers and humanitarians: to what degree is the conduct of the Maoists analogous to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge before or after they took power; and could the Maoist movement evolve into a similar phenomenon? The question itself is raised by several factors:

- The Khmer Rouge, which held power for forty-four months from April 1975 until it was toppled by the Vietnamese Government in December 1978, caused the death of at least one million Cambodians. It is the only Maoist movement to have exercised governmental power outside the People's Republic of China.

- Like the Khmer Rouge, the Maoists subscribe specifically to the philosophy and strategies of the Chinese Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, in which millions of Chinese perished. Jiang Qing and the 'Gang of Four' who led that movement advised and supported the Khmer Rouge – over the objections of more moderate figures like Premier Zhou Enlai.

- The Nepali Maoists have implied that reports of the death of more than a million Cambodians attributed to the Khmer Rouge may be inventions of the western media. In March 2003, the Nepali Times, in "Kampuchea on Our Minds" by Puskar Bhusal, reported

> For years, Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai has been equating…apprehensions [about the Khmer Rouge analogy] with a lack of awareness of either movement. 'First, there is no independent and authentic account of events in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge available so far,' he said in an interview with The Washington Times late last year. 'Whatever is emanating from the Western media appears to be highly exaggerated to us.'

While the number of millions who perished during the Khmer Rouge period may remain a source of debate, the mass mortality suffered by the Cambodian people under the Khmer Rouge is, in the author's view, an internationally-acknowledged fact. The Maoists have refuted the comparison with the Khmer Rouge. But when they raise doubts about the Khmer Rouge's human rights record, they generate doubt about their own motives and intentions.

- Â The considerable role played by intimidation in the relationship between the Maoists and civilian residents in most areas outside the Red Zone raises similar questions.

- Â The gruesome Maoist mutilation atrocities, previously unknown in Nepali culture, compound these concerns.

The foregoing factors suggest that questions about the possible analogies between the Maoists and the Khmer Rouge are legitimate and reasonable.

In February 2002, U.S. Ambassador Michael Malinowski made reference to the Khmer Rouge in an address to the South Asia Peace Operations Seminar in Kathmandu:

> Nepal is currently plagued with a terrorism that is shaking its very foundation as a nation. These terrorists, under the guise of Maoism or the so called ‘people's war,’ are fundamentally the same as terrorists elsewhere -- be they members of the Shining Path, Abu Sayaf, the Khmer Rouge, or Al Qaeda.… They are radicals who seek to impose their narrow views and beliefs on others, despite the popular will of those they seek to influence or convert.…Having failed to receive the popular support of the Nepali people at the ballot box, the Maoists now seek to achieve their aims through the use of force, violence, extortion, intimidation, and murder.

A year later, Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia Donald Camp, in March 2003 public comments, added that

> Recent Maoist statements defending the Khmer Rouge give one indication of the kind of instability and humanitarian catastrophe that might follow a [Maoist] takeover.

A month later the United States Government placed the Maoists, together with 37 other groups, on its international terrorist watch list.*

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* Three Nepali staff associated with the US Embassy have been killed by the Maoists. This report earlier described the May 1998 Maoist killing of a development program employee in Chaklighat, Salyan. In December 2001 near the USAID Mission in Kathmandu, Ramesh Manandhar, a security guard employed by the US Embassy in Kathmandu was killed, apparently by the Maoists. About a year later, in November 2002 in Kathmandu, another Embassy security guard, Deepak Prasad Pokherel, was also killed by the Maoists.

Khmer Rouge background

To better understand the comparison between the two groups, the author spoke with and reviewed two documents written by Dr. Kenneth M. Quinn:

> "Political Change in Wartime: The Khmer Krahom Revolution in Southern Cambodia, 1970 – 1974," published in the Naval War College Review in 1976, recorded Kenneth Quinn's findings as a young U.S. Foreign Service Officer stationed from 1969 to 1974 in Chau Doc Province, in southeastern Vietnam near the Mekong River, contiguous with the Cambodian border. From his post, he observed events in Cambodia (from some hilltops he could actually observe the burning of Cambodian villages) and interviewed dozens of Cambodian refugees fleeing Khmer Rouge-controlled areas before they came to power in April 1975. His article catalogues the type of Khmer Rouge polices and actions they reported; and,
>
> The Origins and Development of Radical Cambodian Communism, Dr. Quinn's 1982 doctoral thesis at the University of Maryland.* Dr. Quinn's thesis traces the origin of the Cambodian Communist movement and describes in detail how it gained power and later carried out the program which has made its name notorious.

The author has relied on these two reports to compare Maoist conduct to date with that of the Khmer Rouge, both before and after they gained power; and to compare a few of the factors which have influenced both groups in their efforts to attain power. With Dr. Quinn's kind permission, his reports are paraphrased in the following two sections.

Khmer Rouge pre-1975 conduct

The 1976 Quinn report catalogues numerous types of Khmer Rouge conduct in areas of southern Cambodia under its control beginning in about 1973 until it came to power in April 1975. According to Dr. Quinn, mainly from 1971 to 1973, "in the newly 'liberated' areas, the [Khmer Rouge] dealt with the population much less strictly than after a year of control." In its most radical 'signature' conduct between 1973 and 1975 included:

- Â Mass destruction and total uprooting of communities through the burning down of all the houses in target villages and forced abandonment of all personal property and family heirlooms;

- Â Mass resettlement of such communities to work camps or new locations where the new Khmer Rouge society would be built, with no schools or health facilities;

- Â Replacement of the traditional pattern of individual homes with communal barracks living;

- Â Intense twice-monthly (night-time) political indoctrination of civilian population, following long arduous days of farm labor, to which each family had to send a representative;

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* Dr. Quinn served as U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia from 1996 to 1999.

- Radical transformation of the economy, including collectivization of agriculture, communization of harvest distribution, common ownership of the means of agricultural production, elimination of private trade and its replacement by Party-controlled cooperative stores;

- Assault on the basic family structure and intensive political training away from their homes for youngsters beginning at age twelve. Youth returning from these sessions fiercely condemned religion and traditional culture, rejected parental authority, and were passionately loyal to the Party. Some were indoctrinated into violence through the use of torture games using monkeys and small animals as victims;

- Social leveling, in which previously affluent or university-educated people were assigned menial tasks such as tending pigs and manual farm work;

- Banning of the Buddhist (and Muslim) religions (all monks defrocked and forced to work); ethnic and religious festivals and traditional dress were strictly forbidden;

- From 1967 to 1973, the 'feudal' elements of society were the target – landowners, moneylenders and merchants against whom the peasants might hold grudges;

- However, from 1973, there were large-scale disappearances and killings of 'class enemies' and regime opponents carried out by new cadres "never seen before," fanatics who allowed no dissent or even questioning of directives. Fear of punishment and death was a key ingredient in securing obedience from the civilian population. Dr. Quinn adds that "the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that the peasantry was opposed to almost all of the [Khmer Rouge] programs…and had to be coerced and brutally forced into participation;"

- Highly-disciplined organization in which dissent and opposition were suppressed by harsh and brutal punishments through a local government apparatus at the village and hamlet level which allowed them to exercise tight control over every family; and

- Rigid enforcement by constant police and militia patrols of a system of permits for travel outside one's immediate village; travel outside the district required District Party Secretary approval.

All these measures resulted in the exodus of tens of thousands of refugees who, even at that time, were telling outsiders about this Khmer Rouge conduct.

These types of policies and actions, using terror and internal purges, were intensified and carried out nation-wide from 1975 to 1978. How had the Khmer Rouge achieved the power necessary to carry out this program?

Khmer Rouge route to power

From 1930 to 1945, the Cambodian Communist Party existed as part of Ho Chi Minh's Indochinese Communist Party. In Cambodia, the Party focused on organizing the many Vietnamese who had moved to Cambodia. In 1941, the Party approved establishment of a separate independent Free Khmer (Issarak) movement for Cambodia, including communist and anti-colonial non-communist elements. For about six months in 1945, its Japanese occupiers allowed the Issarak movement to lead the Cambodian government. Thereafter, from 1945 to 1947 the movement conducted a limited jungle-based opposition to the return of the French colonial power, financed in part by Thai Prince Pridi, who was overthrown in a 1947 coup.

By 1949, the Issarak were working together with the Vietnamese communist movement. With 54 cadre, the Cambodian Communist Party had its first congress in 1951, and later that year decided to begin armed resistance. But promises extracted by Prince Sihanouk from the French undercut the only mobilizing issue they had – national independence. After the 1954 French collapse at Vietnam's Dien Bien Phu, most of the communist leadership withdrew to Vietnam. The rest formed the Pracheachon Group and participated in national elections, winning 3% to Sihanouk's 82% of the vote. Years later Pol Pot said this result convinced him that the parliamentary road would lead nowhere.

At about this time, Saloth Sar (later known as Pol Pot), Ieng Sary, Son Sen and others were young students returning from studies in Paris, where they had been influenced by the French Communist Party in its most Stalinist period. While they worked as teachers, they secretly moved to take control of the Cambodian Communist Party. By 1960, Saloth Sar's thinking was linked to the Great Leap Forward currents in which millions of Chinese perished. In 1962, the Cambodian Communist Party Secretary 'disappeared,' and the young students from Paris took complete control of the Party, consolidating it in later years by a number of wide-scale violent purges.

From 1963, the movement concentrated on promoting a peasant revolt among the ethnic minorities of Cambodia's forests and mountains. "There were no enemies at all in some villages while in others only two or three policemen…were posted," Pol Pot commented in 1977. He had discovered the untapped power of the uneducated, disaffected mountain peasants with little stake in the monarchy and little communication with mainstream society, who could be convinced of his plans.

The new Party leaders also spent considerable time in China between 1963 and 1967, during the period of the Cultural Revolution. In 1967, the Cultural Revolution Red Guards took over the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing and concentrated on fomenting the Maoist cult in Cambodia and Burma. At the same time, Zhou Enlai, the ostensible Foreign Minister responsible for government-to-government relations, supported Sihanouk. (Chinese policy remained divided until the demise of the Gang of Four in 1979.) Though in 1968 Pol Pot and his cohorts launched an insurgency against the Sihanouk forces, they were failing to the extent that they soon "appeared to be on the verge of oblivion," according to Quinn.

The decisive boost to Pol Pot's forces, however, came with the 1970 coup d'etat which displaced Prince Sihanouk and brought Lon Nol to power. Sihanouk was revered by rural Cambodians, and "suddenly, the catalyst for building a popular based patriotic movement was there…Without this issue, it is debatable whether the Cambodian Communist Party would have achieved power in the time frame that it did," Quinn concludes.

Sihanouk withdrew to Beijing and formed the United National Front, which had three distinct participants: Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge; ethnic Khmers loyal to Vietnam (called Khmer Hanoi); and the politicians, bureaucrats and peasants loyal to Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge, in the name of restoring Sihanouk, gradually expanded their areas of operation. At that time, they were under strict orders not only to not interfere with the ordinary life of rural Cambodians but to assist them in their agricultural chores, which won support for them wherever they went.

In 1971 the Khmer Rouge began to move against their Khmer Hanoi allies, expelling most of them and executing some. Then in June 1973, the radical inner-core of the Khmer Rouge started to carry out the 'signature conduct' catalogued in the preceding section, in areas under their control. New young cadre used terror, force and violence to impose the new rules. Fleeing into neighboring Vietnam, refugees described the new Khmer Rouge 'outsiders' as zealots and fanatics. Those who resisted were subdued with harsh punishments and executions. To destroy the symbols of the old regime, they destroyed some schools and public buildings. Opponents were tortured and publicly decapitated; entire families were executed. Cadre and village officials associated with Sihanouk were purged, all before the Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975.

Using the restoration of Prince Sihanouk as a mobilizing issue (though the issue was discarded as they gained power), the Khmer Rouge had gained control of Cambodia. Pol Pot had engineered a national victory in just over five years from a moment when the movement seemed "headed for oblivion." He captured Phnom Penh two weeks before the North Vietnamese entered Saigon, accomplishing in five years what it took Hanoi thirty years to do.

After that victory, Pol Pot imposed the practices described earlier throughout the nation. Perhaps seeking to avoid the urban-based opposition to the Cultural Revolution which China had experienced, almost all residents were force-marched out of Phnom Penh and Cambodia's provincial cities and resettled on communes. This carefully-planned strategy, Pol Pot explained in Beijing in 1977, "was decided before victory was won."* One source estimates that 400,000 people, mainly children, elderly persons and hospital patients, died during this operation alone.

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* According to a 1980 publication of Prince Sihanouk, at the time of the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, a Khmer Rouge delegation spoke with an ailing Zhou Enlai in his hospital room. Zhou asserted that China had experienced disastrous setbacks by trying to make a giant leap forward and urged the Khmer Rouge not to follow that bad example, but rather to take things slowly, step by step. When the Khmer Rouge leaders returned to Phnom Penh, they announced, "We will be the first nation to create a completely Communist society without wasting time on intermediate steps."

Comparison with the Maoists

The comparison between Maoist actions up to the present and Khmer Rouge 1973/1975 conduct seems more rhetorical than substantive.

There are 'trace elements' in Maoist conduct of the kinds of actions taken by the Khmer Rouge before it attained power. The Maoists have used intimidation and violence to influence civilian behavior and have targeted 'feudals,' as the Khmer Rouge did during its earlier period, but in a fractional proportion. The killing of class enemies, traditional leaders or supporters of the State is not an unusual practice for insurgencies. Neither is intimidation of the civilian population unusual for insurgencies lacking political support in their areas of operation. The Khmer Rouge demonstrated that a small, well-disciplined cadre making extensive use of violence and terror can impose its will on a vast reluctant majority. But *until now*, in the six assessment districts, there is little comparability in the practices of the two groups.

Like the Khmer Rouge, the Maoists are led by an educated (in this case also a high caste) group which developed a political base among an isolated disaffected ethnic minority in a remote, mountainous area where it was difficult for the government to monitor them. On a rhetorical level, the Maoists have adopted the policies and outlook of the Maoist Cultural Revolution, which also guided and supported the Khmer Rouge.

But a fundamental difference is that outside their heartland, the Maoists have not yet found a compelling issue with which to mobilize a mass national movement. In Cambodia, the movement to restore Prince Sihanouk had been a critical vehicle for Khmer Rouge expansion. The Khmer Rouge were part of a three-party coalition, which lent strength and legitimacy to their efforts. The Maoists are not a part of any such national coalition.

Khmer Rouge history, however, suggests that its extreme transformational program, and the intention to achieve it through widespread violence, were deeply embedded in plans known only to the leadership for years before they were first implemented in 1973, two years before they attained power. In earlier years, Khmer Rouge cadre were instructed to interact harmoniously with the populations and to support their traditional social and economic systems, concealing the intentions which they implemented so violently beginning in 1973 once they had sufficient power to do so.

The issue of the Maoists' relative degree of control outside the Red Zone therefore assumes still another important dimension: if the organization's leadership intends to follow the Cultural Revolution model they espouse, or even to accelerate and perfect it as the Khmer Rouge attempted to do, they may, as the Khmer Rouge did, be awaiting a moment when they have sufficient control. The assessment has concluded that no such control exists at present and that, in fact, the military and political momentum has shifted against them. But the question of the Maoists' ultimate intentions remains legitimate and warrants continued monitoring.

PERU'S *SENDERO LUMINOSO*

International links

The collapse of the Soviet Union has been denounced by Nepal's Maoists as a capitulation to western capitalism. They have also declared that their People's War should follow the same strategy as Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) Maoist insurgency, although *Sendero* has been in steep decline since the early 1990s. Both groups are linked to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), founded in 1984 by 13 parties and organizations (many of which have ceased to exist). The RIM aims to regroup the Maoists and establish Maoism as the command ideology and guide for world revolution, while sweeping away "the colossal garbage heap of revisionism."*

Nepal and Peru have roughly the same size populations and topography (though Peru is nearly ten times larger than Nepal); both have a variety of ethnic groups based in the mountains dominated by external cultures and languages (Spanish and Hindu/Nepali).

A brief comparison

Professor David Scott Palmer of Boston University has studied the *Sendero Luminoso* in depth** and has visited Nepal several times. In discussions and e-mail communication with the author, Dr. Palmer has compared some aspects of the *Sendero Luminoso* revolt with those of Nepal's Maoists. With his kind permission, they are paraphrased as follows:

- Â The *Sendero Luminoso* revolt originated in the isolated mountain regions of Ayacucho Province (total population 550,000, according to the 1980 census) of southern Peru, which has a largely Quechua-speaking ethnic population of about 300,000 (about 1% of Peru's population of 24 million) which has resided in the area for thousands of years.

- Â The area had a history of neglect, broken promises, failed projects and other grievances which helped to create an environment favorable for the insurgency, including the 1890s Huanta salt tax war; the failure of the railroad to arrive in Ayacucho in 1924 as promised; the long-promised Rio Cachi irrigation project (finally implemented after the conflict began by the Fujimori administration); the failure of the military government's 1970s agrarian reform, which worsened conditions for the peasants; and a gradual decline of Ayacucho's share of federal resources from 3% to 1% in the government budget.

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* see "Maoist Documentation Project" website, http://www.maoism.org/misc/rim/index.htm

** see Dr. Palmer's Shining Path of Peru, 2d Edition (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) and "The Revolutionary Terrorism of Peru's Shining Path," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., Terrorism in Context (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, pp. 249 – 308).

- Police repression of a 1969 protest against proposed public school fees galvanized creation of a radical teachers union, for years under *Sendero* influence.

- The Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Society), which had been active in eastern Rukum, had also been active in Ayacucho, where it established 34 Quechua/Spanish bilingual primary schools and a teacher training center in the late 1960s and early 1970s under a contract with the Ministry of Education. Under pressure from the teachers union and *Sendero* leaders, the Ministry of Education closed the schools and terminated SIL's contract in about 1974.

- *Sendero's* leaders are provincial intellectuals. Its senior national leader, Abimael Guzmán Reynoso (also known as Comrade Gonzalo), like M.B. Singh, made a poor isolated rural area a sustained geographically-targeted Communist Party project for seventeen years (1963 – 1980) before the conflict began.* Through the university extension system, he prepared for the conflict by building up support networks. Teachers were catalysts for introducing left-leaning approaches in the communities. As the only educated people in those villages, they became their gatekeepers and intermediaries.

- The *Sendero Luminoso* never ran candidates in national elections and never won control of the Peruvian Communist Party. In the multiple divisions of communist ideology in the 1960s, Guzmán chose to follow the Maoist line and by 1968 had established the Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path).

- The *Sendero Luminoso* leadership traveled to the People's Republic of China (as did the Khmer Rouge leadership) between 1969 and 1976 and was influenced by the Gang of Four and the Cultural Revolution.

- In its early years, the *Sendero* targeted police, government employees and teachers, to clear out political space and obtain weapons. It used selective violence and mutilations in small numbers to intimidate the civilian population.

- In an earlier 1965 Cuban-inspired revolt in Peru, the armed forces were deployed promptly and with immediate success. However in *Sendero*'s case, the Government of Peru did not mobilize the armed forces to deal with the Maoists for almost three years after *Sendero's* declaration of a People's War in 1980.

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* The initiator of Nepal's Red Zone project, M. B. Singh, separated himself from the Maoists in what some perceive was a generational succession before the conflict began. But in Peru, Guzmán retained control through the conflict and until his capture and imprisonment in Peru in September 1992, a decisive turning point in the Peru conflict, which took place over three years before the Maoists declared Nepal's People's War.

- While the *Sendero Luminoso*'s was not primarily an ethnic conflict, it used Quechua symbols and terms to better relate to the local population. One of Guzmán's *noms de guerre* was *Puka Inti* (Red Sun). He also used indigenous concepts like *Pachacutic* (periodic world transformation) to explain his developments in the *Sendero* movement.

- *Sendero* filled the vacuum left when the government abandoned these areas. When the government returned with security and development services, the momentum shifted to the government, in part because *Sendero's* intimidation tactics with the local population had backfired. *Sendero* propaganda effectively portrayed the group as having a powerful widespread presence around the country, concealing the relatively weak nature of much of this presence.

- Over 30,000 Peruvians were killed between 1980 and 1992 in the *Sendero* conflict (four times the number killed in Nepal's conflict thus far).

The Nepal Maoist/*Sendero* link has invited comparisons between two insurgencies being conducted halfway around the world from each other, both avowedly Maoist. *Sendero* representatives may have visited and advised the Nepali Maoists during the early years of the conflict. Nonetheless, comparisons between insurgencies have limitations, and there is considerable overlap between the tactics of all insurgencies, whether or not they are Maoist.

SECTION V CONDUCT OF NEPAL'S ARMED FORCES

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this conflict was the Government's decision to not mobilize the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) during its first six years. The burden for opposing the Maoists during those years fell on an under-manned, poorly armed (in some cases unarmed) civilian police force which was periodically overwhelmed and which has lost almost 1,000 officers in the conflict.

Once mobilized in November 2001, the military faced a far greater challenge than it would have in earlier years. In 1996, the Maoists were based mainly in the relatively limited Red Zone, a small fraction of the country. Although the terrain was heavily-forested, mountainous and inaccessible by motorable roads, the challenge would have been more manageable. But in the war's seventh year, the RNA faced an insurgency which had six years of experience, had expanded its forces and geographic scope and could launch attacks in many parts of the country.

Khara massacre – February 2000

Up to the conclusion of the assessment in mid-June 2003, according to the interviewees, there was no pattern of RNA, police or Maoist massacres of civilian dependents in rural villages in the six districts.

The most serious single incident on the government side in the six districts took place in February 2000 in Khara VDC in southwestern Rukum (Map M). According to detailed accounts, a Maoist force was returning from western Rolpa, where it had attacked a police position, reportedly intending to attack the regional *(ilaka*) police post in Khara. Warned of the possible attack, at around 3am the police began an intensive search for the Maoist force. They spotted them at around 5am in Khumshiri in Ward 6. There was no armed engagement and the Maoists fled. But in the process the Maoists called out to one of their supporters, whose name happened to be the same as one of the police officers. When the officer answered to his name, the Maoists shot and killed him.

Shortly thereafter, the police captured a Maoist who turned out to be a resident of Ward 6. They obliged him to point out all the houses where in the past the Maoists had been given food. In these rural areas, the Maoists require local residents to feed them, and the residents cannot refuse. So during that day the Maoist prisoner pointed out numerous houses which had provided this assistance.

The District Superintendent of Police was absent at that time. The inexperienced young inspector responsible for the operation, angry about the shooting of his officer, ordered the execution of at least seventeen local men, including one fifteen-year-old boy. The police burned down 25 houses, 35 animal sheds, and five grain warehouses and grinding mills. It later turned out that almost all the victims were Nepali Congress Party supporters.

According to one of the sources, the community did not blame the Maoist prisoner who informed on the victims and, at its request, he was ultimately released. The Government apologized for the incident and each victim's family was awarded financial compensation. The families insisted that the police officer responsible for the killings should be punished. He was transferred to another district but reportedly never prosecuted. People were bitter toward the police but did not change their basic allegiances. Some reasoned that the Maoists had brought the problem down on them in the first place.

After the incident, the police were withdrawn to Musikot. But during the State of Emergency a police platoon was reassigned to the station. In mid-2002 the Maoists launched a major attack on Khara. Approximately 150 Maoist combatants were killed. Forty-two of the corpses were laid out in a circle in Khara VDC center. Seventeen were dark-skinned men alleged by the armed forces to be Indian mercenaries. More likely, asserted several sources, they were dark-skinned Tharus and Dalits from the Terai.

Holeri incident – July 2001

Holeri, a market town in Jhenam VDC, southwest Rolpa (Map M), is connected by an all-weather (USAID Rapti project-financed) farm-to-market road to the southern district of Dang. The town was the scene of the first encounter of the conflict between the RNA and the Maoists. Newspaper, military and local accounts about the incident differ slightly but are synthesized as follows:

Just before dawn one day in mid-July 2001 (about six weeks after the Palace Massacre, during the first days of the reign of King Gyanendra), hundreds of Maoist combatants attacked and overran the Holeri police post. One police officer was killed, one wounded, and almost seventy were captured. The Maoists took their prisoners to a heavily-forested area of nearby Nuwagaun VDC and were rumored to be preparing a second attack on Dang District.

The RNA was mobilized to negotiate the release of the hostages. Fearing landmines and ambushes, the RNA used air transport to deploy its troops. A first platoon, delivered by a helicopter which landed without incident, took a position overlooking the hostage scene. But the Maoists fired on the second helicopter, wounding the pilot and two soldiers and, in the meantime, Holeri was fogged in for four days. Ultimately the release of the hostages was successfully achieved and the Maoists were given safe passage out of the area.

This was the first time the RNA was deployed in the conflict, although its mandate was to negotiate, not attack. Press reports indicated that both the UML and a Communist Party splinter group (the CPN-ML) had urged restraint on both the government and the Maoists.

The first national cease-fire between the government and the Maoists began later that month. It lasted about four months before it was broken by the Maoists with country-wide attacks against the RNA. It was after these attacks that the RNA was mobilized and the State of Emergency was declared.

RNA performance in State of Emergency

During the State of Emergency, the police, considered less disciplined and professional than the army, were subordinated to RNA command. Most interviewees in the six districts perceive that after a weak start in November 2001, the RNA gained traction. Since mid-2002, the momentum of the military struggle appeared to be shifting in favor of the RNA. The army was better prepared to defend its positions against Maoist attack and was more aggressive in pursuing the insurgents, including into the Red Zone itself.

During the same period, the RNA constructed all-weather unsurfaced roads to the capitals of Rolpa and Rukum, fulfilling the long-held desire of local residents. According to interviewees from those areas, the roads had immediate social and economic impacts. Execution of the projects has been rapid and low-profile and has generated local employment. The quality of work is rough but serviceable. There is a great deal more scope for such roads in Rolpa and Rukum.

In some other conflicts, faced with a hostile population like that of the Red Zone, the local armed forces have forced the civilian population into displaced persons camps where they can be better monitored. In principle, this deprives the insurgents of civilian intelligence, sources of recruitment and logistical support, and a larger population within which they can conceal themselves. The evacuated areas are declared to be 'free fire' zones. The camps are permitted by the Geneva Conventions when absolutely necessary as long as their residents are properly protected and cared for (often they are not). The camps create a lot of misery, increased mortality from childhood diseases, disrupt the entire economic life of the displaced population and have not always been effective. The RNA has (wisely, in the author's view) not adopted such measures.

Human rights

In seeking to weaken the Maoist insurgency, the police (for example during Operation Kilo Sierra II which began in about 1998/1999) and the RNA have collected information about individuals in the rural areas reported to be Maoist political or intelligence operatives. During operations in rural VDCs, they have attempted to arrest these unarmed individuals, though as local residents express it, 'their eyes have fallen on' others as well, sometimes arbitrarily. Many of their detainees have been arrested and imprisoned; (allegations of harsh physical treatment and lengthy periods of detention without hope of due process are documented by human rights organizations).

A substantial number, sometimes two or three at a time, have been taken a short distance away and executed on the spot. In more conflictive areas, when the district jails are filled beyond capacity, groups of ten to fifteen men have reportedly been executed and buried in shallow graves, though the number of such incidents is unknown.

An earlier section of this report attempted to disaggregate the total number (7,400) killed by both sides in the eight years of the conflict. It reached an extremely rough estimate that of unarmed civilians killed, at least 760 were killed by the Maoists, more than double that number were killed by the police and RNA, and the balance were killed in crossfires.

Interviewees with wider knowledge of this issue, while not condoning armed forces extra-judicial killings, estimated that 75% of the unarmed civilians killed by the police and RNA were directly associated with the Maoist movement. Conversely, they believe, 25% of the victims - meaning many hundreds of innocent people with no connection to the Maoists – were killed as well. These have included young men fleeing through the forest to India to avoid Maoist forced conscription, cases of mistaken identity, and individuals wrongly-accused of links with the Maoists.

In comparison with other civil conflicts the numbers tragically killed by both sides would fall into a lower range of deaths. More troubling is the impunity with which both the government forces and the Maoists have carried out such murders. Senior RNA commanders have expressed understanding of the human losses the police and RNA have suffered in the field and the harsh conditions their troops must contend with. A danger for the RNA is that lower command levels will mistake this understanding and the impunity permitted thus far (even in the Khara massacre) as a license to commit even greater abuses. In the author's opinion, sooner or later, larger-scale tragedies will take place. They will occasion not only greater injustices but will also affect the effectiveness of the RNA in the field, part of the political dimension of the struggle. The international support and assistance the RNA is currently receiving will not be immune to such developments.

The military's performance, and adherence to human rights standards, will be crucial elements its strategy to overcome the insurgency. The Maoist's political and military position at the moment does not suggest the possibility that it will prevail. But because of the terrain and the nature of the insurgency, the conflict will not likely be susceptible to final conclusion through military victory.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Both the military and political momentum of this conflict appear to have shifted against the Maoists. This conclusion, if accurate, is compounded for Maoist prospects by several external factors:

- The Government of India has been gradually tightening its control of the international border with Nepal, reducing Maoist use of its territory as a sanctuary for medical treatment, a source of smuggled ammunition and explosives, and a safe haven for political activities. Since November 2001 it has labeled the Maoists as 'terrorists.'

- The People's Republic of China has made clear on a variety of occasions that it repudiates the Maoist movement. Author M. R. Josse, in his June 2002, Nepal: Politics of Stalemate, Confusion and Uncertainty, states that there have been no reported contacts between the Maoists and China. Neither have there been reports of Chinese assistance or offers of sanctuary to the insurgents. In the six assessment districts, it is widely believed that China provides no support to the Maoists. Mr. Josse quotes Chinese Ambassador Wu Congyong's post-November 2001 categorical statement that,

  > First of all, China labels the insurgents as 'anti-government outfits,' and we never call them 'Maoists.' They misuse the name of Chairman Mao, which impairs the image of the great leader of China.…
  >
  > Secondly, (the) Chinese government consistently opposes terrorism in any form [and] upholds international cooperation. In this context, we condemn the violence and terrorist acts unleashed by the anti-government outfits in Nepal.

- Counter-insurgency military training and assistance are being provided by the United Kingdom (which in February 2003 appointed a Special Representative to Nepal, Sir Jeffrey James), India and the United States. In the post-September 11, 2001, environment, concern about the Maoists among these donors may have been increased by their widely circulated April 2003 manifesto describing the program they will implement if they come to power, in part as follows:

  > A strong relationship shall be extended with different revolutionary groups and national freedom movements that are fighting against the Indian expansionist, the main external enemy within South Asia.…
  >
  > Political asylum shall be given to the citizens of any foreign nation who were compelled to leave due to their involvement in revolutionary activities [as long as] they live in Nepal [in accordance with] Nepalese law.

SECTION VI FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

…concerning the root causes of the revolt

The Maoist revolt originated in parts of Rolpa and Rukum Districts, called the Red Zone in this report, which is the Maoist heartland. A relatively small, isolated, barely populated corner of the Hills, its heavily-forested, mountainous terrain favored the insurgency. Since the 1970s, the area's traditional livelihoods – sheep herding, artesanal iron mining, and British Gurkha service – had been declining. Hashish was the main income for most families and provided what they perceived to be a good standard of living. Within four years of the 1976 government hashish ban, the first interaction for most with the remote Kathmandu government, that prosperity yielded to grinding poverty. The ban was perceived to be imposed arbitrarily with no effort to replace the lost income or even to provide a road so they could market alternative crops, and generated enduring bitterness. Red Zone residents blame still-influential 'feudal' leaders for failing to build those roads or to promote economic development.

A series of lesser incidents compounded anti-government resentment: the transfer of Rukum's district capital to Musikot; the persecution of Christian converts; the government's attempt to close the area's first economic development project, the water mill; and abrogation of the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve agreement. All of these economic setbacks forced many local residents to migrate to India for jobs breaking rocks into gravel with hand tools, earning barely enough to feed their families. The failure of Rolpa's airport and hospital projects added to anti-government cynicism and resentment.

Rolpa and Rukum may have had more than their share of such problems. But without the crucial catalyst of a sustained, fifty-year geographically-targeted Communist Party political project, the conflict would not have found a political base there. While the government and other political parties were absent, the Party was present to interpret and exploit grievances and persuade local residents that only a violent overthrow of the government would solve their problems. Although the Communist Party in 1958 and again in 1991 won only 4% of Parliamentary seats nation-wide, the Red Zone elected Communist Party candidates in both elections.

The Maoists launched their People's War in February 1996 with violent attacks against police outposts. Until November 2001, the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) was not mobilized to oppose them. Appearing invincible during the six-year lapse, the Maoists attracted recruits while expanding their operations throughout the country. In four previous anti-government insurgencies between 1950 and 1974, the government had mobilized armed force swiftly and decisively.

…concerning contributory factors and non-causes

Despite the justified grievances of the 55% of Nepal's population who are low caste and ethnic minorities, the Maoists have failed to win much support from them. Ethnic and caste factors are not core or defining elements of the Maoist revolt.

Some external observers argue that election irregularities, persecution and early government attempts to control the Maoist movement in Rolpa and Rukum between 1991 and 1995 were core causes of the revolt. However, the assessment found that the 1991/1992 elections in Rolpa and Rukum, while marred by a few incidents of violence and other irregularities, were relatively fair. At least half the violence was initiated by the *Jana Morcha* Party (from which the Maoists emerged). But it is difficult to argue that the Party was deprived of a fair chance to compete since it actually prevailed in most of those contests. The elections in the other four assessment districts were orderly and pacific.

Following those elections, the spiral of violence and persecution increased. From 1993, the *Jana Morcha* continued to use violence against political opponents and murdered a number of local political activists. Local Nepali Congress activists reportedly engaged in similar violence. The Nepali Congress-led government used the police and judicial system to prosecute only *Jana Morcha* perpetrators. More frequently it used bench warrants to harass and arrest hundreds of *Jana Morcha* supporters for petty violations which it ignored when committed by adherents of other political parties, in an apparent (though failed) attempt to suppress political opposition.

Operation Romeo was not a 'reign of terror' as that term is normally understood nor did it involve large-scale killing, rape or property destruction. It reinforced the police's negative image because of criminal actions conducted with impunity by some policemen and alienated ordinary rural residents. But it was conducted in the context of what by then was an inevitable armed conflict. Just months after Operation Romeo began, the Maoists declared their People's War, which would have required a lengthy period of preparation inconsistent with the assertion that Operation Romeo was one of its causes.

Nor was disillusion with multi-party democracy, which began only in 1991, a core cause of the conflict. Local residents offered withering criticisms of some of the twelve national governments of the past decade. But in their view the democratic process is new and was disrupted by the conflict just a few years after it began. The majority of local residents seem strongly attached to freedom of expression and a choice in the election of their local representatives. Eventually they hope these officials will overcome the morass of the Kathmandu government and the perceived indifference to their problems of Kathmandu's political party leaders. Local residents perceive multi-party democracy as the only viable alternative to the twin autocracies – the old feudal system and the Maoists, both of which offer them little freedom or hope for the future.

The Nepali Congress-led administration's dissolution in mid-2002 of Parliament and all the local elected officials, the sinews which link rural villages with the government, was a colossal blunder which achieved what the Maoists had sought from the outset: to empty the rural areas of the local elected leaders who opposed them and to deflate the government's presence at a moment when it was most critically needed. An indication of Maoist political weakness is that they were unable to fully capitalize on the vacuum the decision created.

…concerning USAID's intersection with the conflict's root causes

The $50 million USAID Rapti Integrated Development Project's successes produced sustainable economic benefits for thousands of families. In the areas in which the project was most active, the Maoists are barely present. Where the project was not successful, the impediment was the absence of major roads, a larger central government issue which transcended the scope of USAID's activities. Roads are at the core of this region's political agenda, both for the immediate economic benefits they bring and, more importantly, to reduce the influence of both 'feudal' and Maoist forces which thrive on their isolation.

USAID's malaria eradication campaign of the 1960s and 1970s, which may have saved a million or more lives, opened Nepal's southern Terai belt (23% of the country) to agriculture and industry. The Terai today is home to nearly half of Nepal's population and produces two-thirds of its food, rendering the country largely food self-sufficient. Internal migration to the Terai has been an escape valve for land shortages in the Hills which may have had a historical conflict prevention impact.

The anti-malaria effort may have indirectly disadvantaged the indigenous Tharu population, by intensifying its displacement and traditional exploitation, though this problem may have been historically inevitable in any case. More Tharus became 'bonded laborers,' tied to their employers by debts which could never be repaid and which were finally dissolved under a 2001 act by the Nepali Congress-led government.

…concerning Maoist presence and conduct in rural villages

The nature of Maoist conduct in remote areas has been the subject of much debate. Some report Maoist reforms in land tenure, money lending, greater local control of governance, and the resolution of long-standing grievances, almost mythologizing their aims and actions. Others demonize them, asserting they are reducing their areas to rubble in a 'Year Zero' campaign reminiscent of the Khmer Rouge.

The Maoist bans on alcohol and gambling were universally supported in principle. But the alcohol prohibition failed because of public demand for liquor, including by Maoist activists themselves. It also surfaced an internal Maoist contradiction: while espousing autonomy – even self-determination – for ethnic minorities, its first administrative act banned a substance at the core of ethnic cultural identity and deprived (in a more diffuse but similar way to the hashish ban) thousands of women of the income from alcohol brewing.

Some 95% of civilian infrastructure has not been affected by the Maoists. They have disabled or destroyed village headquarter and other government buildings and dual-use infrastructure such as communications towers, airports and suspension bridges valued, one recent assessment suggests, at over US$30 million. Most local government schools, health posts, drinking water systems, irrigation networks and other civilian infrastructure are intact. Local residents are more angered by Maoist refusal to allow implementation of hundreds of government-financed roads and water systems and their expulsion of most NGOs. At the same time, there were almost no reports of Maoist development initiatives. The Maoists have blocked the development agenda – which is at the heart of local political aspirations – for eight years.

In areas where expulsion of landowners has made larger farms available, the Maoists usually take over the role of the landlords, collecting their share of the crop, rather than distributing land to landless peasants. They have also made no changes in the traditional commercial market system – no changes in the pattern of small privately-owned shops, and no collectivized stores, harvests, or communized crop distribution. They have not inserted themselves into the normal commercial process nor have they impeded normal contacts between farmers and their usual buyers or sellers.

But they have imposed on small farmers forced donations of grain, their most widely applied and resented measure, as well as a 5% tax on the salaries of teachers, health and NGO workers in areas of their influence. The donations are involuntary, and refusal is punished by forced labor, beatings and even death. Local civilians are required to attend political rallies and sometimes to serve as porters of ammunition and supplies for troops en route to battle (and of wounded on the return). They target primarily unmarried men and women aged 15 to 25 in their recruitment campaigns. While their stated policy that each family must contribute one youngster to the cause is not widely enforced, it appears that most of their recruitment is involuntary.

Outside the Red Zone, the assessment detected little support for the Maoists, even though they have a great deal of influence in most rural villages, attributable to two factors: first, government forces had either never visited most villages during the conflict, or, if they had, they remained only for a day or two (usually without challenge from the Maoists). The Maoists entered these areas unopposed, in part because the government did not mobilize the army for the first six years of the conflict. Second, Maoist intimidation makes obedience to their instructions the only logical choice from the beginning. Interviewees detailed scores of cases of beatings, abductions, amputation of limbs, knifings and murders carried out with impunity.

There were also a small number of cases of mutilation atrocities with no precedent in Nepali history involving the breaking of every bone in the victims' bodies, cutting out their tongues, gouging out their eyes, hammering the teeth out of their mouths and then cutting them in half or burning them to death, in one case all in front of the victim's children. The atrocities appear to be carried out in an identical pattern, suggesting that they are not random acts of undisciplined Maoist adherents. They are also conducted almost ritualistically and may be part of the perpetrators' induction into a trusted, perhaps more radical, inner circle.

In the seven years of the war, 7,400 people, including about 2,400 armed combatants and 5,000 civilians, have been killed. But there have been no mass killings of civilian dependents, burning or wholesale destruction of villages, or forced resettlement of civilians by either side.

While the Maoists have firm control in the Red Zone, their presence in most rural areas is due mainly to government absence. Outside the Red Zone in the six assessment districts (the most conflict-affected in Nepal) not a single report suggested that the RNA could not occupy virtually any location and maintain its presence for as long as it wished.

Such operations were constrained not by the force of the Maoists but by the sheer number of isolated villages. The military momentum of the conflict appeared to shift in the RNA's favor sometime during 2002, about six months after it was mobilized. The Maoists do not have the 'control' of these vast rural areas which is sometimes attributed to them.

The key reference point for the rural areas is the traditional government and market system. Essential functions – government schools and health posts, land tenure and sharecropping arrangements, and traditional market networks - continue largely unchanged where the Maoists are present. Mainstream local officials elected in national elections are more recognized than those of the Maoist People's Governments. In fact, the standing of those mainstream elected officials was affected less by the Maoists than by the central government's incomprehensible July 2002 failure to extend their tenure.

Maoist influence over these civilian populations is based more on intimidation than assent, and lacks creative social and economic transformational, service or development dimensions. These factors call into question whether the label 'government' in the ordinary sense of that word is properly applied to Maoist influence in the rural villages.

The Maoist political project has not translated into loyalty or support by the vast majority of the population outside the Red Zone. While Red Zone residents fear principally the RNA, rural residents of the remainder of the six districts fear principally the Maoists. Outside the Red Zone, the author believes that the Maoists could win an average of up to 15% of the votes in a free and fair election.

While the Maoists have devoted their efforts to occupying geographic ground through intimidation, the UML (a left-wing party which rejects Maoist violence) has captured much of the corresponding political space, which augurs poorly for long-term Maoist success in the political mainstream. Because the conflict has not occasioned mass death or displacement, given a free choice, voters will not support the Maoists simply to insure that the conflict does not continue. But, in the author's opinion, for elections to be free and fair, they can be conducted only following a six-month lapse once the Maoists have laid aside their weapons and the RNA has returned to the barracks.

…concerning Maoist/Khmer Rouge comparisons

To what degree is the conduct of the Maoists analogous to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge? The question arises because the Khmer Rouge (who in 44 months caused over a million deaths) is the only Maoist movement to have exercised governmental power outside the People's Republic of China. The Maoists subscribe, as the Khmer Rouge did, to the strategies of the Chinese Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, in which millions perished as well. The Maoists have implied that the death of more than a million Cambodians attributed to the Khmer Rouge, in the author's view an internationally accepted fact, may be inventions of the western media.

Nonetheless, up to now Maoist conduct in comparison with the Khmer Rouge in the two years before it came to power, is significantly different: the level of violence against civilians has been much lower, and the Maoists have implemented none of the radical social and economic policies which the Khmer Rouge applied throughout areas under their control. A fundamental difference is that outside their heartland, the Maoists have not found a national issue with which to mobilize a larger movement. In Cambodia, the movement to restore Prince Sihanouk was a critical vehicle for Khmer Rouge expansion.

Khmer Rouge history, however, suggests that its extreme aims, and the intention to achieve them through widespread violence, were planned years before they were implemented. In earlier periods, Khmer Rouge cadre interacted in a friendly manner with rural populations, concealing the intentions which the leadership implemented so violently once they had sufficient power to do so. It may be that such plans are not within the Maoist program or that they simply do not possess the control necessary to begin implementing them. The question of their ultimate aims remains legitimate.

…concerning the conduct of Nepal's armed forces

Once mobilized in November 2001, the military faced a far greater challenge than it would have in February 1996, when the Maoists were active mainly in the relatively limited Red Zone. But in the war's seventh year, the RNA faced an insurgency which had six years of experience, had expanded its forces and geographic scope and could launch attacks in many parts of the country.

In seeking to weaken the insurgency, the police and the RNA arrested unarmed civilian suspects, the majority of whom may have been Maoist operatives. A substantial number, sometimes two or three at a time, were taken a short distance away and executed. In more conflictive areas, when the district jails were filled beyond capacity, groups of up to fifteen men were reportedly executed and buried in shallow graves, though the number of such incidents is unknown. In comparison with other civil conflicts the numbers killed by both sides would fall into a low range of mortality. More troubling is the impunity with which both government forces and Maoists carry out such murders.

A danger for the RNA is that lower command levels will mistake the impunity permitted thus far as a license to commit greater abuses. Sooner or later, larger-scale tragedies will take place, occasioning not only greater injustices but also affecting the RNA's effectiveness in combating the Maoists. The international support and assistance the RNA is currently receiving will not be immune to such developments.

At the moment, the Indian Government is gradually tightening up border controls, reducing Maoist access. The Chinese government repudiates the Maoists and provides them no support. The British, Indian and United States governments are providing military assistance to the government. In the post-September 11th, 2001, environment, the recent Maoist pledge to make Nepal an asylum country for foreign revolutionaries and to maintain strong relationships with anti-Indian insurgents may have increased concerns about the Maoists among these donors.

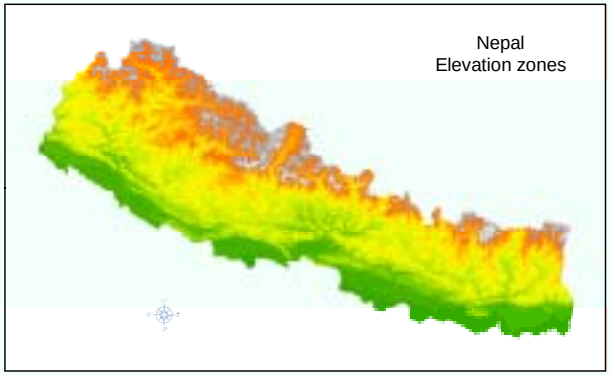
…concerning future prospects

The Maoist political and military position at the moment does not suggest the possibility that they will prevail in the conflict. This is particularly striking because they were virtually unchallenged militarily for the first six years of the war, while since mid-2002 the entire democratically-elected political apparatus of the country has been dismantled, creating just the political vacuum the Maoists had sought. One of the Maoists' main strengths remains their ability to hold Nepal's economic progress hostage.

Despite the RNA's increasing effectiveness, the conflict will not likely, in the author's view, be susceptible to final conclusion through military means alone. A political track, including re-empowerment of local elected officials and seizing on serious negotiation opportunities which may arise, would be crucial elements of government and political party efforts to resolve it.

MAPS

NEPAL



Perspective view from 582 Km height,
South-West
Vertical Exaggeration: 5

Chandragadhi (Jhapa)
Inaruwa (Sunsari)
Biratnagar (Morang)
Rajbiraj (Saptari)
Siraha bazaar (Siraha)
Janakpur (Dhanusha)
Jaleshwor (Mahottari)
Kathmandu
Malangawa (Sarlahi)
Kalaiya
Gaur (Rautahat)
Birgunj (Parsa)
Bharatpur (Chitwan)
Parasi (Nawalparasi)
Bhairahawa (Rupandehi)
Taulihawa (Kapilbastu)
Tribhuvan Nagar (Dang)
Birendra Nagar (Surkhet)
Nepalgunj (Banke)
Gulariya (Bardiya)
Dhangadhi (Kailali)
Mahendranagar (Kanchanpur)

Legend

Terai	Churia/siwalik	Middle mountains	High mountains	High himal (Snow area)
52 - 100	401 - 500	1001 - 1500	3001 - 3500	5001 - 5500
101 - 200	501 - 600	1501 - 2000	3501 - 4000	5501 - 6000
201 - 300	601 - 700	2001 - 2500	4001 - 4500	6001 - 7000
301 - 400	701 - 1000	2501 - 3000	4501 - 5000	7001 - 8443

Elevation values are in meter. The elevation range assigned to each physiographic zone is approximate.

aZ

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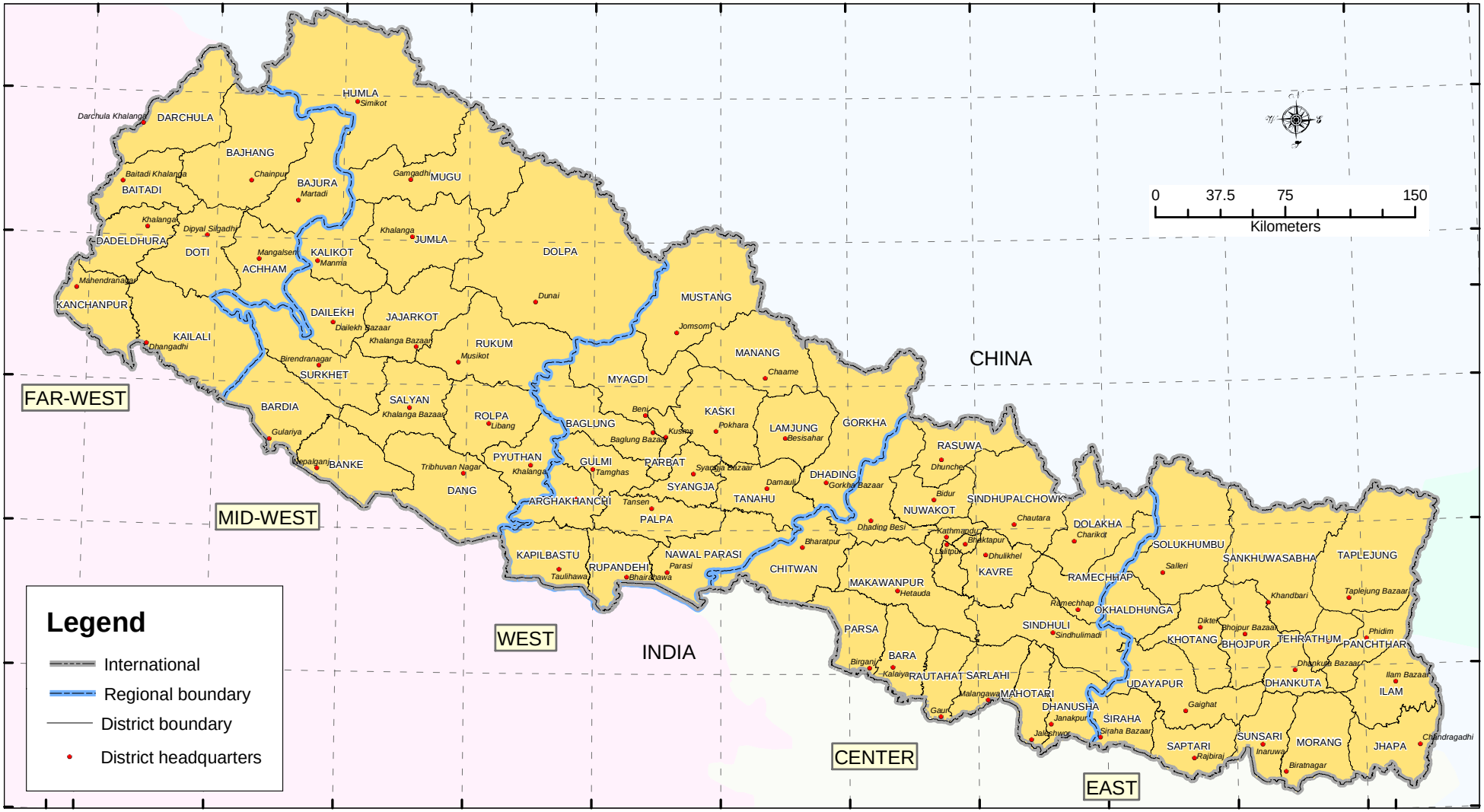
NEPAL



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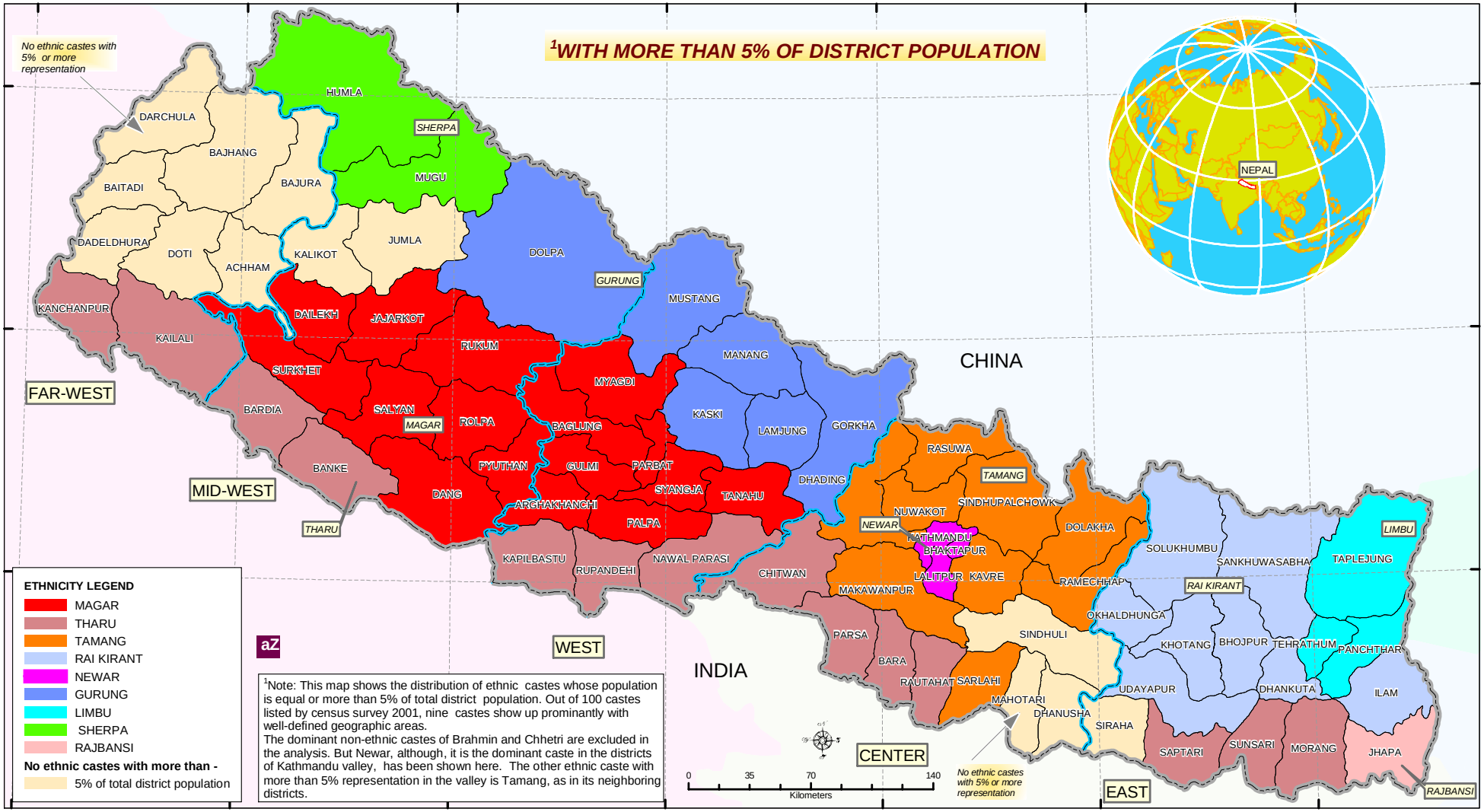

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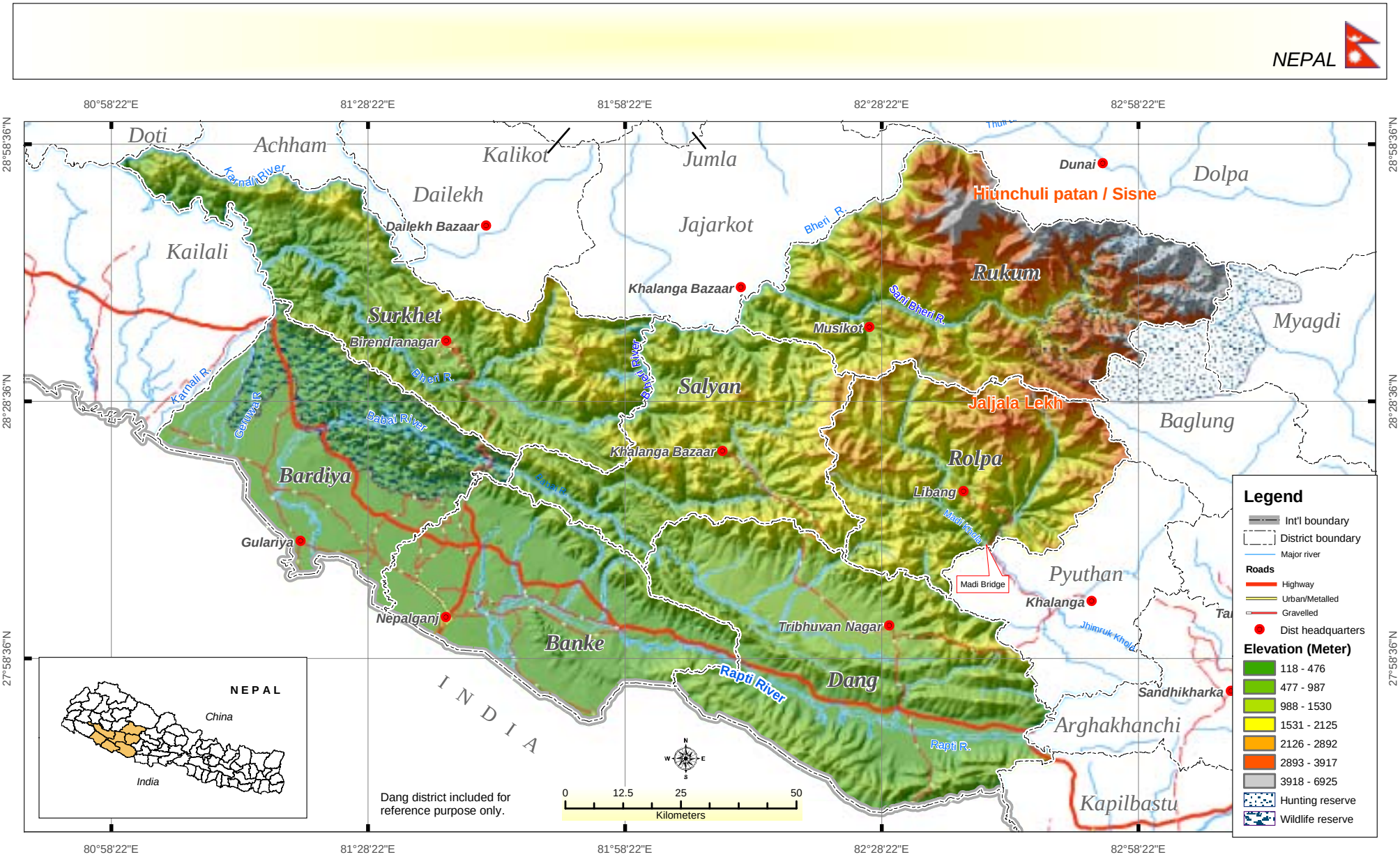
Data source: Census 2001, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government. 2001



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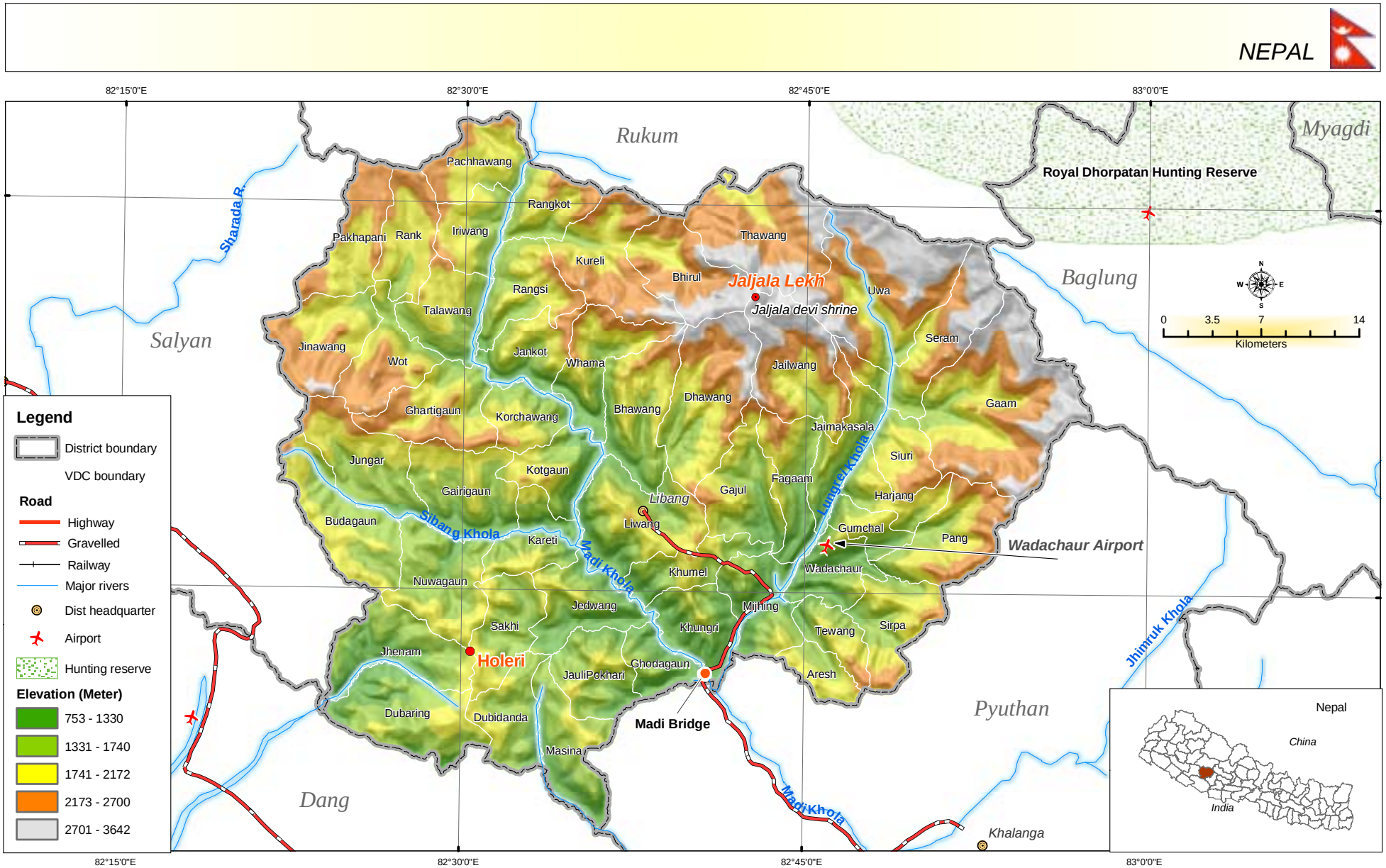

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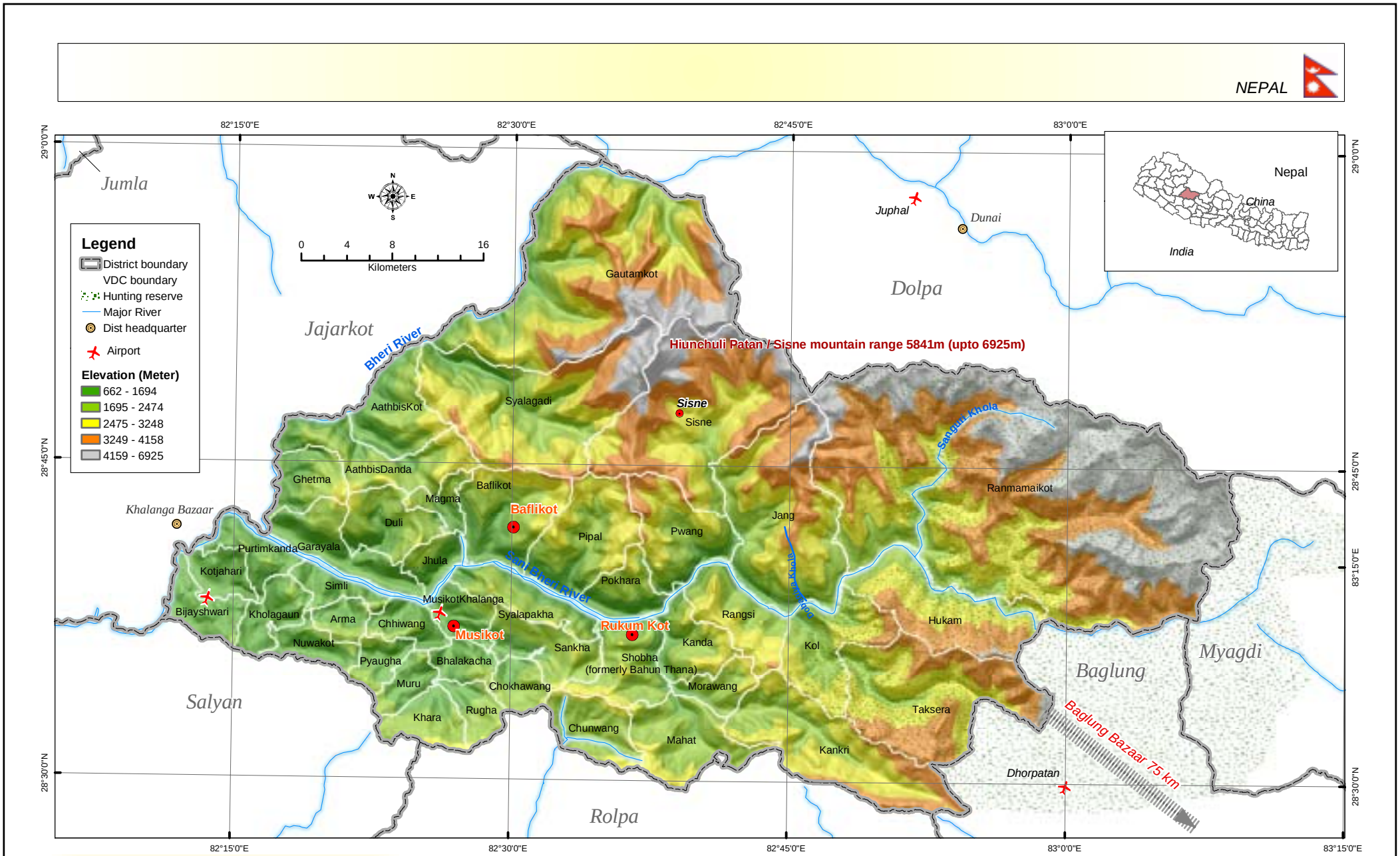

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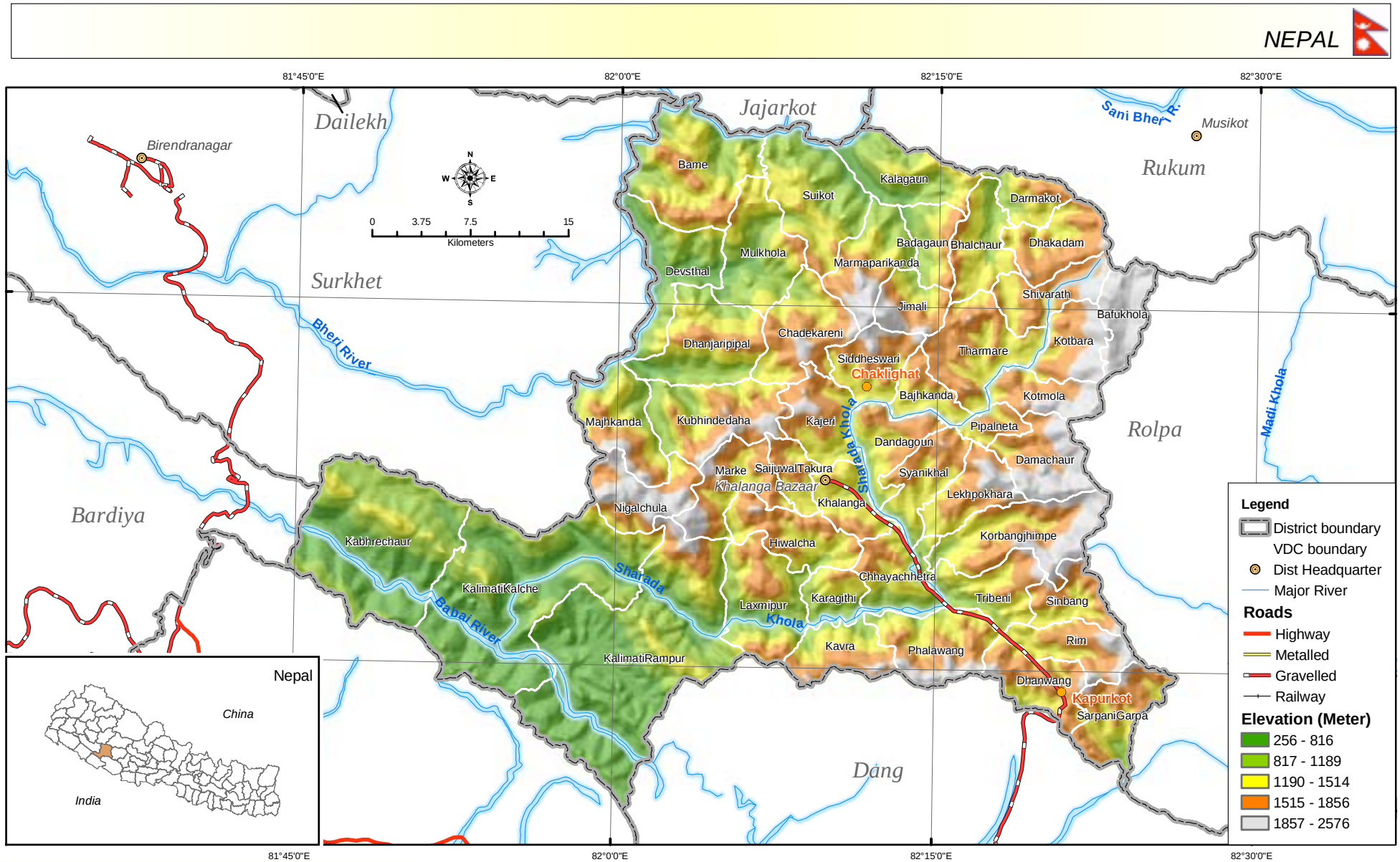

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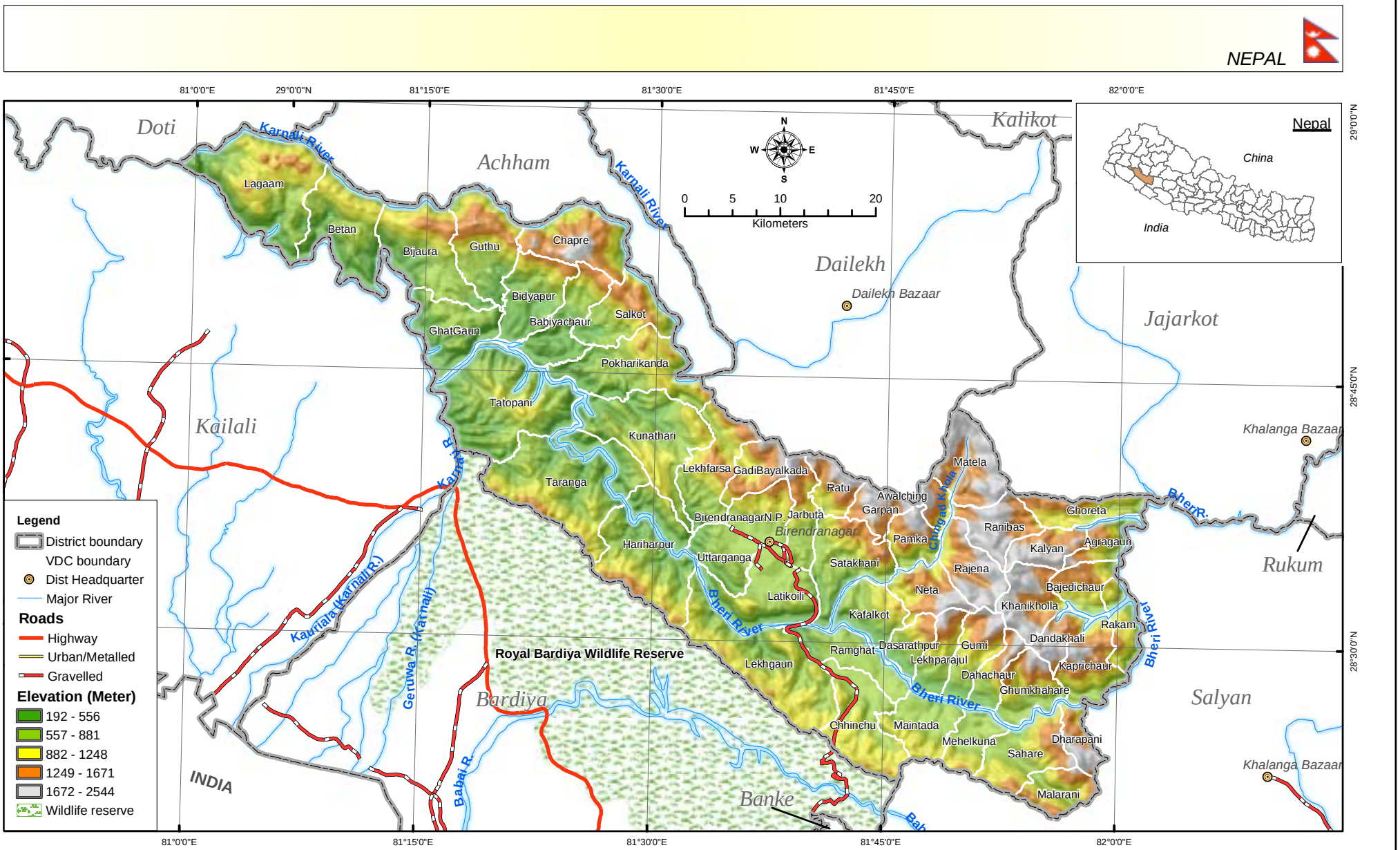

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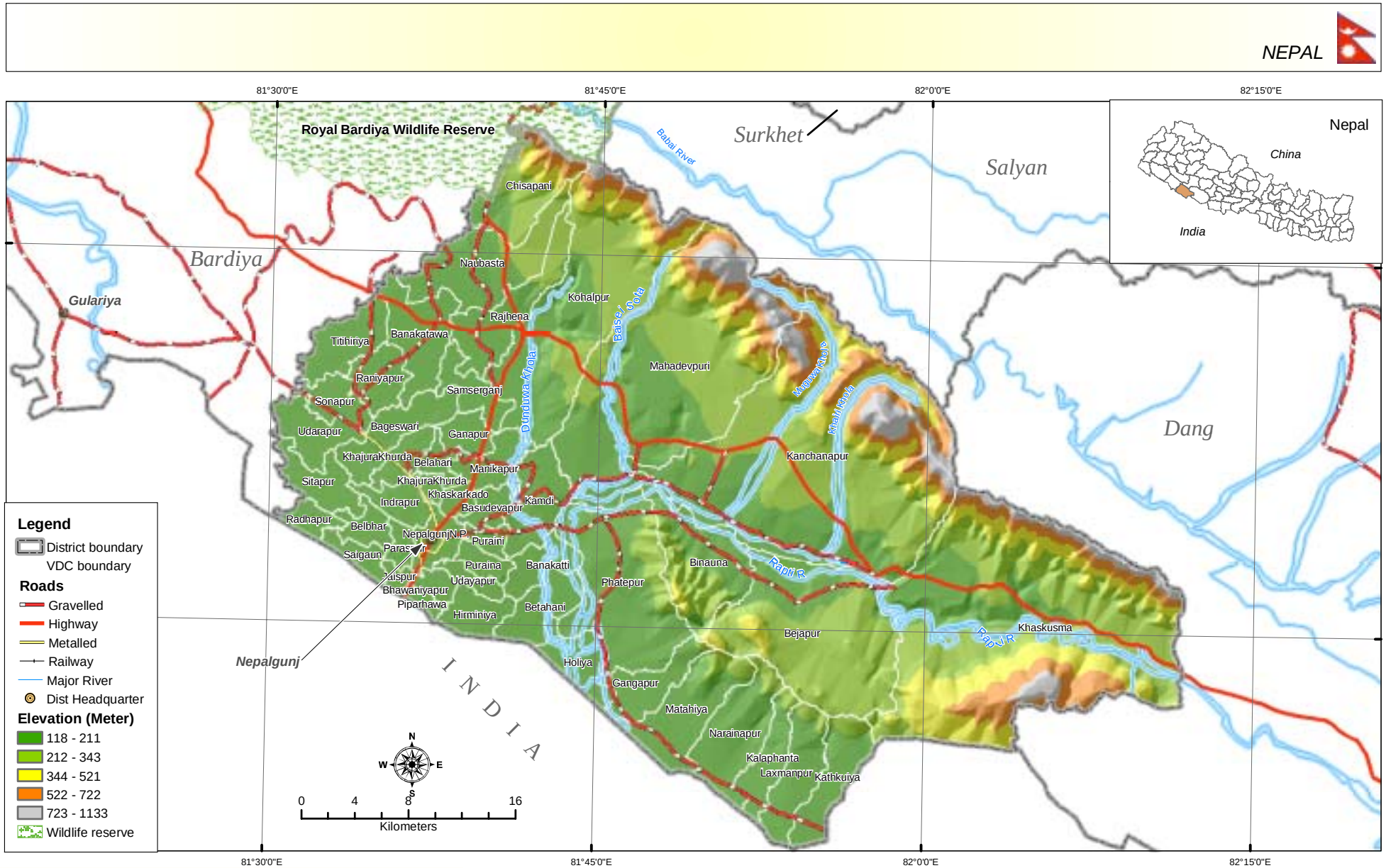

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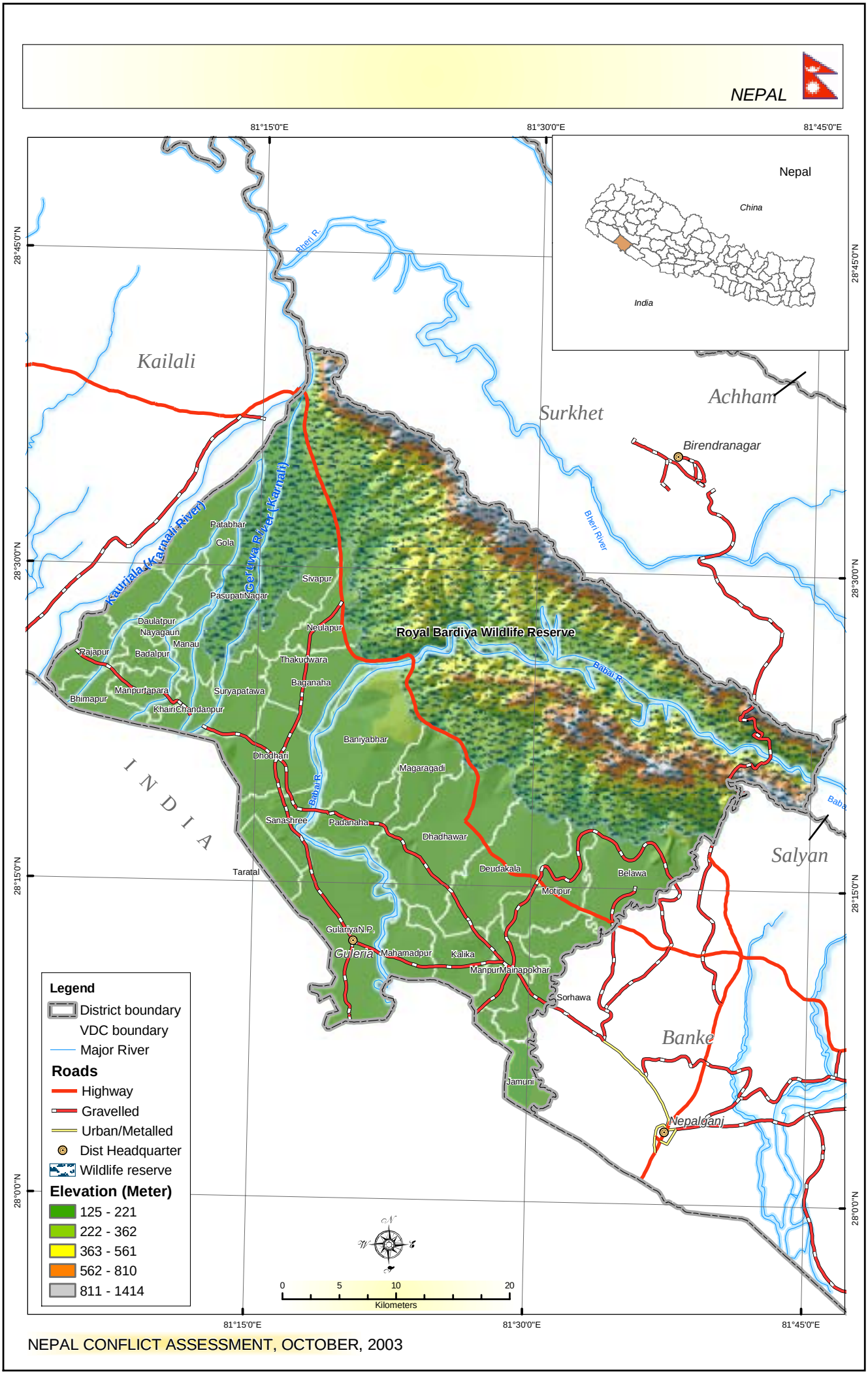

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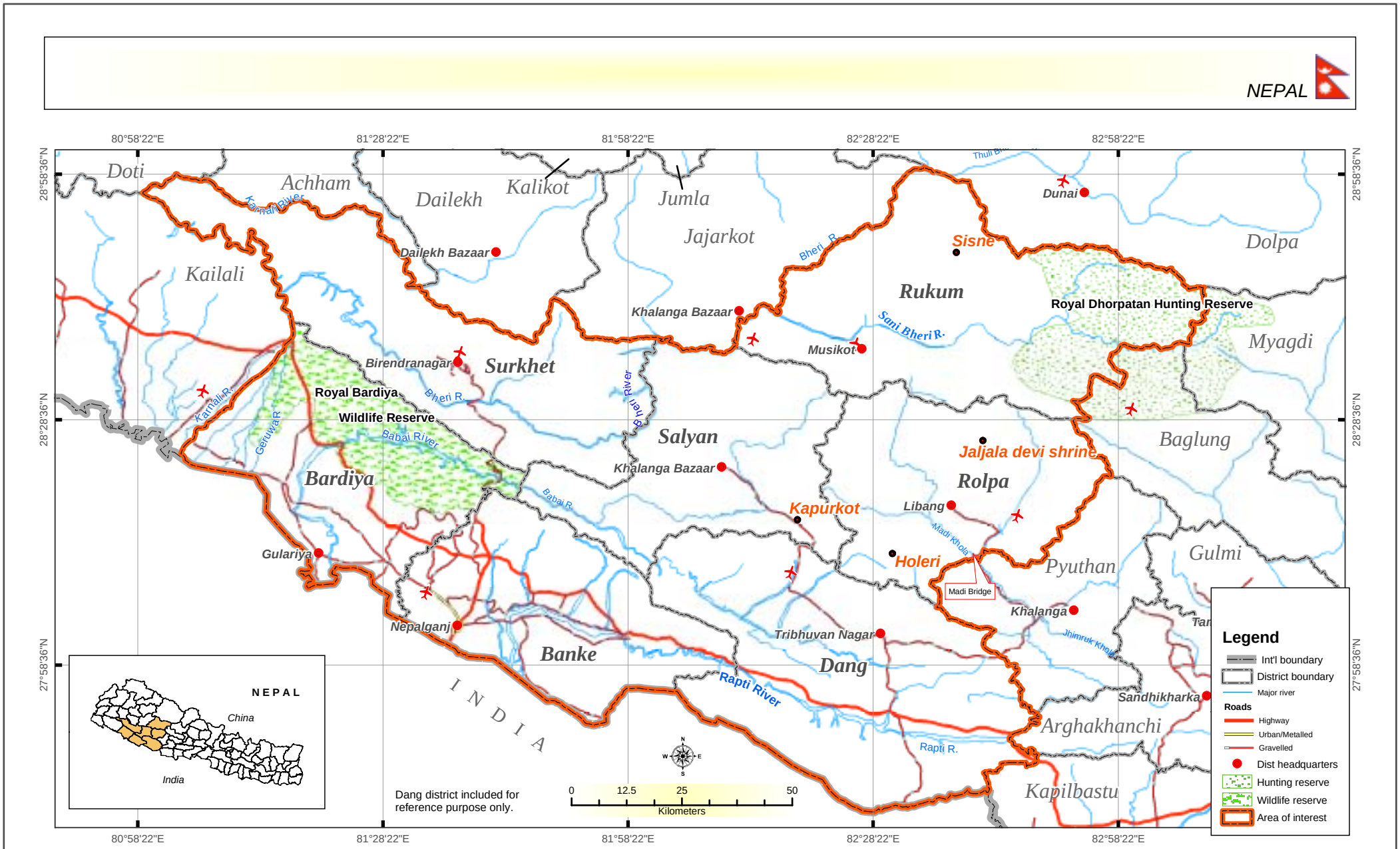

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NEPAL

82°15'0"E
82°30'0"E
82°45'0"E
83°0'0"E
28°45'0"N
28°30'0"N
28°15'0"N
28°0'0"N
N
S
E
W
0 3.5 7 14
Kilometers
Jajarkot
Dolpa
Myagdi
Baglung
Gulmi
Pyuthan
Salyan
Dang
Dunai
Khalanga Bazaar
Tribhuvan Nagar
Khalanga
Nuwakot
Rukum
Rolpa
Gautamkot
Syalagadi
Sisne
AathbisKot
Ghetma
AathbisDanda
Maghna
Purtimkanda
Garayala
Duli
Baflikot
Jhula
Pipal
Pwang
Jang
Ranmamaikot
Kotjahan
Simli
Syalapakha
Bijayshwari
Arma
Chhiwang
Pokhara
Rangsi
Kholagaun
Musikot
Khalanga
Hukam
Pyaugha
Bhalakachha
Sankha
Sobha
Kanda
Kol
Muru
Rugha
Chokhawang
Taksera
Khara
Morawang
Churwang
Mahat
Kankri
Pachhawang
Rangkot
Pakhapani
Iriwang
Rank
Kureli
Thawang
Bhirul
Uwa
Talawang
Rangsi
Jinawang
Wot
Jankot
Whama
Seram
Gaam
Jailwang
Ghartigaun
Korchawang
Bhawang
Dhawang
Kotgaun
Jaimakasala
Siuri
Jungar
Gairigaun
Libang
Gajul
Fagaam
Harjang
Gumchal
Budagaun
Liwang
Wadachaur
Pang
Kareti
Khumel
Nuwagaun
Mijhing
Jedwang
Khungri
Tewang
Sirpa
Jhenam
Sakhi
Ghodagaun
Aresh
Jauli
Pokhari
Dubidanda
Dubaring
Masina
Legend
District boundary
Road
Gravelled
Highway
Dist Headquarter
Population density
4 - 53
54 - 97
98 - 147
148 - 238
239 - 350
Maoist heartland
Note: Figures on map are population densities (>6 years age)
RUKUM DISTRICT SUMMARY
Population:
Total population: 158617 (M/F = 1.03)
Min population: 1174 (Sisne VDC)
Max population: 8011 (MusikotKhalanga VDC)
Population density (persons / Sqkm):
Min density: 4 & 7 (Ranmamaikot & Sisne VDCs)
Max density: 350 (MusikotKhalanga VDC)
Average density of VDC population: 115
ROLPA DISTRICT SUMMARY
Population:
Total population: 171307 (M/F = 0.91)
Min population: 1500 (Seram VDC)
Max population: 7016 (Liwang VDC)
Population density (persons / Sqkm)
Min density: 32 (Seram VDC)
Max density: 207 (Gumchal VDC)
Average density of VDC population: 100
NOTE: Darker intensities of color on map indicate high population densities and lighter intensities of color indicate low population densities. Population of age 6 years above only is taken for analysis.
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Nepal
China
India

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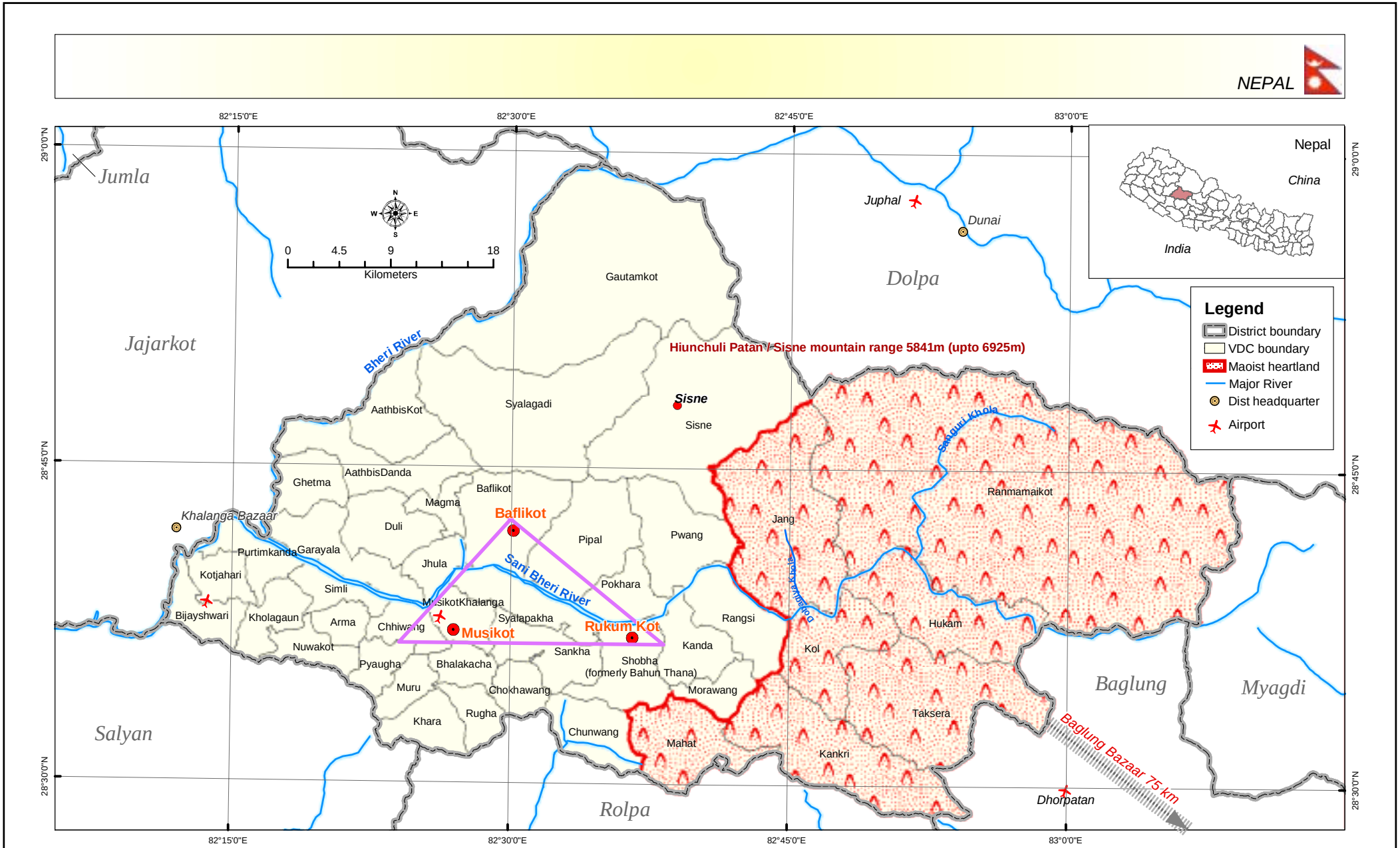

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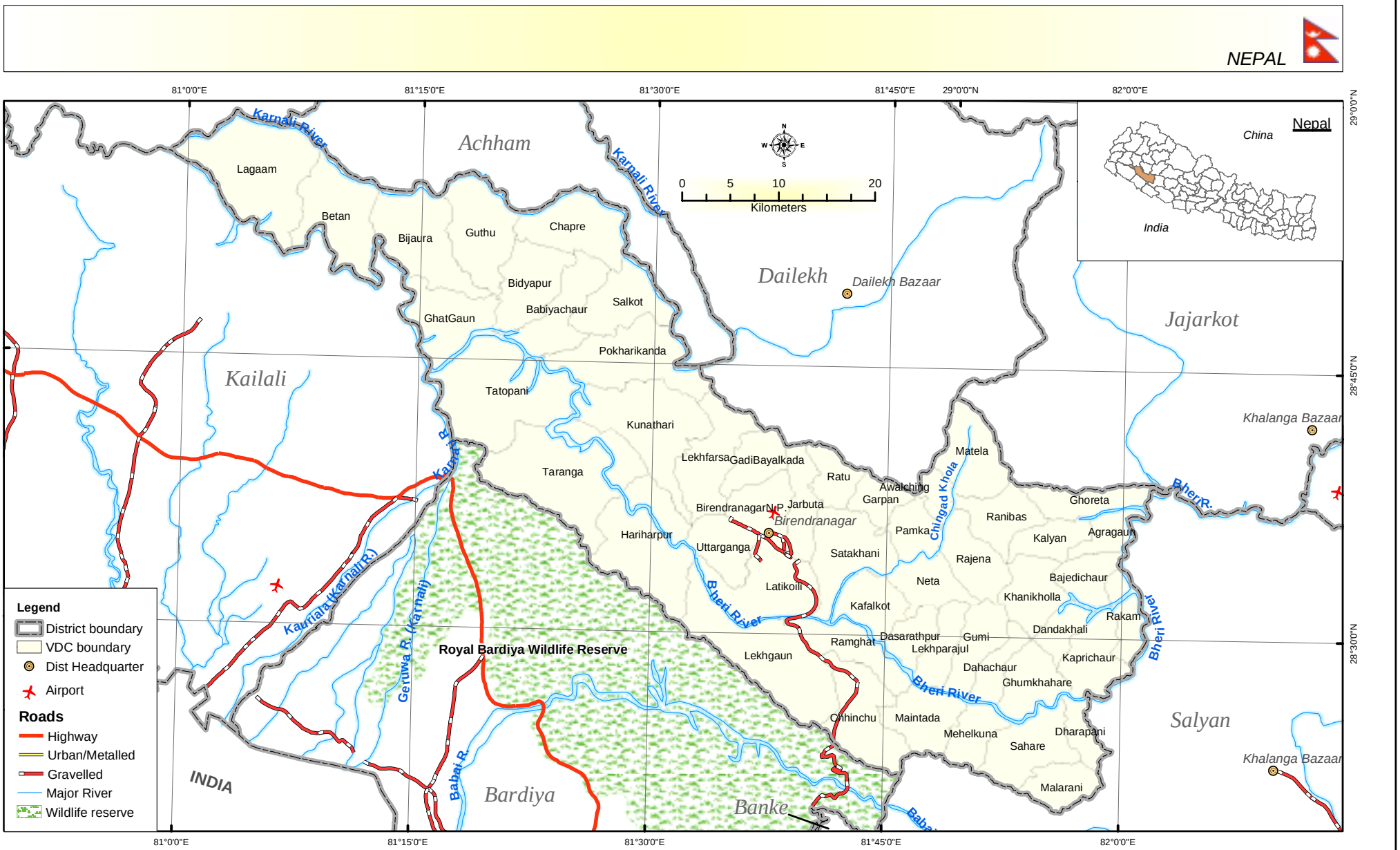

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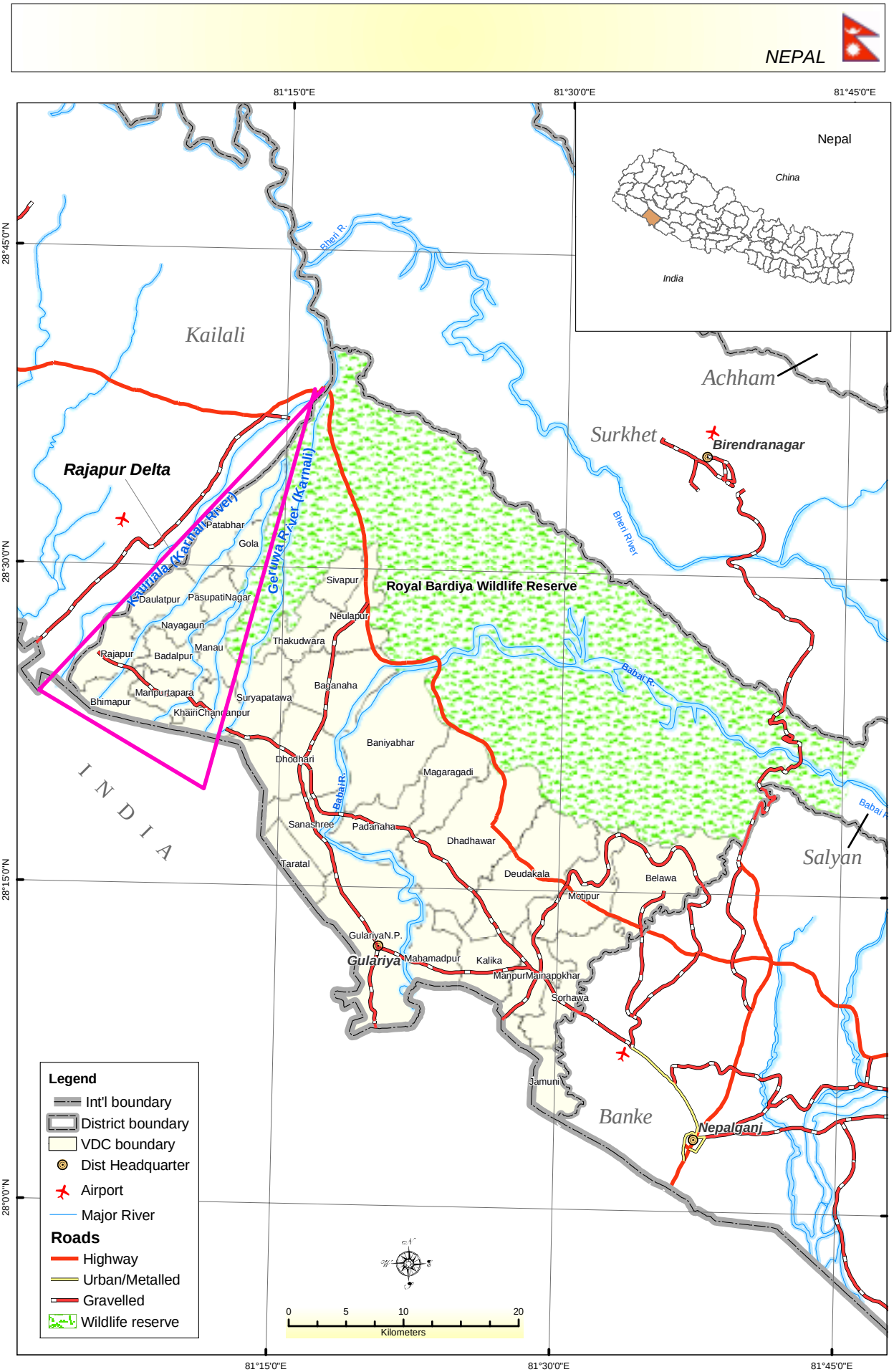

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