

Ladies ~~first~~-past-the-post



RSS

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Of the total 18,903,689 registered voters for Nepal's 5 March election, nearly half are women. But around 10% of the 3,484 first-past-the-post (FPTP) candidates are female.

RSP, the party that claims to represent the voice of the September protests, has the highest percentage of direct women candidates at 9%. All the other legacy parties, including UML, NC, NCP and RPP fielded just 6% female direct candidates.

The Constitution requires 33%

seats in Parliament for women, but the Election Commission has not enforced it. Political parties try to fulfil the quota through Proportional Representation (PR), but even that does not make up one-third of the candidates.

Parties allocate women in constituencies where they are sure to lose, and ironically this means women candidates from the PR list have a better chance of becoming lawmakers than those contesting direct elections.

"Most women candidates are given tickets where stronger male candidates from established parties are contesting, ensuring their loss," explains Babita Basnet of Media

Advocacy Nepal that works on improving gender representation.

The PR list was supposed to safeguard the representation of marginalised and excluded groups, but many women PR candidates are celebrities, businesswomen — defeating the whole purpose of such affirmative action.

Many parties have included relatives and cronies in the lists which means that in the grand scheme of things, women get a consolation prize at best.

Figures for women representation are slightly better at the local levels. They made up 40.95% of all elected representatives in local elections in

2017 and 41.21% in 2022 because the Local Level Electoral Act 2017 had made it mandatory for women to either be vice mayor or mayor, and ward member. Still, it did not meet the target of 50% female representation.

In both previous elections, nearly all parties fielded women only as vice mayors. Which meant that there were only seven women mayors elected in 2017, and 13 in 2022 — out of 293 metros and municipalities. The numbers were similar for female rural municipality chairs.

Says rights activist Stella Tamang: "Women need to become leaders not only for their community, but for the country as a whole. But most women candidates are made to believe that they are not capable enough to stand for the elections."

The reason for this engrained patriarchy is the belief among the leadership of parties that women candidates do not have voter support, the stamina to deal with intimidation, and that they lack campaign financing capacity.

The election commission caps campaign spending at Rs200,000 for PR candidates and Rs2.5 million for FPTP. This rule is widely flouted, but most women candidates cannot even raise that much, and parties choose men who can finance their own campaigns.

This has meant that the NC saw only one woman win in 2022: Sita Gurung from Tehrathum. But the NC under its new leadership has elected Pushpa Bhusal as party vice-president, the second woman after Shailaja Acharya 25 years ago to make it to that position.

FIGHTING WOMEN

During the conflict, one-third of Maoist guerrillas were women and fought against patriarchy and for empowerment. But the NCP's women representation in the coming elections is only 6%. The two women in direct elections are the daughter and daughter-in-law of party chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Former Maoist leader Hisila Yami acknowledges this, and adds: "We share a similar political system to India, so we may need to follow its footsteps in implementing electoral provisions related to gender."

Even in constituencies where there are women candidates in direct ballots, they are pitted against each other. The NCP's Renu Dahal is up against Shobita Gautam of RSP in Chitwan-3, and the NC's Sarita Prasai is battling RSP's Indira Ranamagar in Jhapa-2.

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Policing the Police

Police killings, abuse of power, and the lack of accountability threaten the stability of Nepal's democracy



GUEST EDITORIAL
Prashanta Khanal

Monday, 8 September marked the largest single-day, state-led massacre of protesters in Nepal's recent history. The indiscriminate firing of automatic weapons on the GenZ demonstrators for over three hours killed 21 people. Most were below 28, some waiting to fly out as migrant workers.

Postmortem reports show that the protesters on 8 September were shot directly in the chest, head, and abdomen. This sparked the violence following day that ultimately left 76 people dead.

During the GenZ protests, the Nepal Army also killed 10 prisoners who were attempting to flee jails. No one questioned the Army for taking such lethal measures.

Brutality and extrajudicial killings by the security forces are not uncommon in Nepal. They peaked during the Maoist conflict, and recur often.

During the Madhes Movement in 2015, the K P Oli-led regime was also responsible for more than 50 deaths. A 14-year-old boy, Nitu Yadav, was forced to the ground. Eye witnesses overheard police shouting, "Shoot this mother**ker." No one was held accountable for these atrocities. The state has still not released the Laal Aayog Report, which



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

investigated killings in the Tarai.

In 2026 the Armed Police Force (APF) shot and killed rickshaw driver Bijay Shah in Sunsari while he was transporting goods across the border. From 2017 to 2021, at least 22 people died in police custody alone, most of them Madhesi and Dalits.

The lack of accountability means the Nepali state has normalised killings by its security apparatus. When pressed about shooting protesters outside Parliament in September, Prime Minister K P Oli and Police Chief Chandra Kuber Khapung said, "Bullets do not have eyes."

There was no remorse or empathy, and a refusal to accept responsibility. They failed to acknowledge that the state has a constitutional mandate to protect its citizens,

including those accused of crimes.

Those in power routinely shift the blame on protesters. In reality, police often initiate intimidation and violence at otherwise peaceful protests, as seen on 8 September.

The Gauri Bahadur Karki Judicial Investigation Commission has not yet filed its report. But there will be justice only when Oli, Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak, and Kathmandu CDO Chhabi Rijal are held accountable. It should not end there -- all police officers involved in the killings must also face justice.

No government or political leader has tried to reform police and end impunity. Politicians in power and police maintain an unspoken, unholy nexus from the local

to the state level.

It is a mutual protection arrangement. Those in power rely on the police to maintain their power and even prosecute opponents, while the police depend on them for political patronage.

To be sure, Nepal Police reflects the state of the country's democracy and lack of commitment to human rights and the rule of law. Genuine reform and democratisation of the police force is needed to uphold the Constitution, and increase institutional diversity.

The APF was originally formed to suppress the Maoist armed conflict and is now used to quell public protests. It should be dismantled, and the post of Chief District Officer abolished.

The Office of the Attorney General and the National Human Rights Commission have repeatedly failed to address police killings and torture.

The argument is that holding police to account damages morale. Actually, ending impunity and enforcing accountability would enhance its public image enabling it to maintain law and order without turning into a killing machine.

We need to design state institutions to be empathetic. Only then will society embody tolerance. When a culture of killing is accepted, it fosters the kind of mayhem we saw on 8-9 September.

Police killings and abuse of power threatens democracy that the institution is supposed to safeguard. ■

Prashanta Khanal is an independent climate and transport policy researcher.

Trending Online

Nepali artists at India Art Fair

by Niranjan Kunwar
Danfe Arts, a touring art space from Kathmandu, will participate in the Galleries Section of the 17th edition of the prestigious India Art Fair featuring a booth with works by six Nepali artists. Details at nepalitimes.com

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Karnali aquatic reserve

by Shristi Karki
The Sakhi Fish Sanctuary, the first of its kind in Nepal inaugurated this month, is an initiative of Kailali's Tikapur and Bardia's Rajapur municipalities as well as the local Tharu, Sonaha and other indigenous communities. Get details online.

x Most popular on X



Proud to wear DOLPO

by Vishad Raj Onta
Deepak Acharya grew up helping his uncle sell jackets and outdoor gear. Twenty-two years later, Acharya is still selling jackets. Not international brands like he used to, but products of his own outdoor gear company, DOLPO. Read the latest instalment of the series Nepal Made on our website.

66 Most commented



Shaken, but not stirred

Editorial
Few who witnessed the 1934 megaquake are still alive, and memories of 2015 are fading. We were shaken, but have not stirred into action. We do not know how much time we have before the Next Big One, but it is not too late to start preparing. Go online to read the editorial.

🔥 Most visited online page

Letters

DOLPO GEAR

I am from Dolpo and happy to see DOLPO thriving as a Made in Nepal success, inspired by our rugged Himalayan homeland and tough yak herding heritage ("Proud to wear DOLPO, Vishad Raj Onta, #1294). Kudos to Deepak Acharya for capturing that spirit. Hoping the brand puts Dolpo on the national and global map alongside its top gear.

Tsewang Himalaya

■ Nepal needs more initiatives like DOLPO from local and foreign investors.

David Seddon

■ Glad to see that a Nepali brand like DOLPO is making products of international quality. The logo of the brand almost resembles the international brand

Kathmandu that has been around for many years.

Rebat35

DIASPORA DIARIES

With government neglect agriculture has ceased to be attractive and is being abandoned by farmers and the youth ('Our migrant sons', #1294). Sadly, many rural communities have no option but to look for options to migrate. New revolution is needed to promote agriculture sector and attract youth.

Bishow Parajuli

■ This is such a simple and beautiful piece, you can feel the undercurrent of emotion with each recalled incident ('Homecoming after nine years', nepalitimes.com)

Mahendralal Pradhan

MALLORY & IRVINE

This is a good article on the mystery of Mallory. ('Finding George Mallory', Dirgha Raj Upadhyay, #1293). I wonder whether the souls of Mallory or Irvine feel sorrow because the world doesn't recognise them as the first to reach Mount Everest, or pride because they fulfilled their purpose.

Seller Bahadur

EARTHQUAKE

The farther away we are from the last earthquake, the nearer we are to the next ('Shaken, but not stirred', Editorial, #1294). This is reason enough to take note.

Tony Jones

KUTUMBA

Kutumba has made not just people in Nepal proud, but connected Nepalis living abroad to their roots ('Music to our ears', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1294).

Grateful to the amazing team.

Rafael Poudel

GENZ VOTES

The poor kids will vote for ghanti unknowingly ('Which way GenZ voters?', Suman Nepali, #1294). They have no plan for the country. It will be a sad, sad election.

Meri Nembang

■ Very good and constructive responses by Pragya and Suresh in this video.

W S Hancock

FISH SANCTUARY

This is a great initiative ('Karnali aquatic reserve', Shristi Karki, #1294). It is excellent to see regional initiatives from the Lao PDR as a model for how sustainable fisheries practices can be applied by the Tharu and Sonaha communities in Nepal's Tarai region.

Albizia House

Online Package



FIRST-TIME VOTERS

Nepali Times interviewed eight first-time voters about recent political developments, their preferred candidates and their hopes for the future. Watch the video on YouTube.



LAKE RISK

Villages in Manang live directly below the Thulagi glacial lake, locally known as Dona Tal, that is in danger of bursting. Read story on page 6-7, and watch video on our YouTube channel.

1,000 Words



FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS: Former Information Minister in the interim government Jagdish Kharel, Toshima Karki and Buddha Maharjan are all contesting from Lalitpur. On Thursday, they appeared outside a temple to clasp hands below their RSP election symbol, Bell. Kharel is facing criticism from the GenZ for exploiting the ministerial tenure to propel his political career.

Times

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Nepal's election will be a referendum

No clear winner projected as personalities dominate politics in a clash between old and new



RSS

BA AND BALEN: Former Prime Minister K P Oli registering as a candidate in Jhapa-5 this week. Former Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah greeting supporters at his party office on Wednesday (right).



BALEN SHAH SECRETARIAT

In his campaign speech in Janakpur, RSP prime ministerial candidate Balen Shah asked people to vote not because of creed or party loyalty, but for the right people in the right places.

The former Kathmandu mayor is contesting from Jhapa-5 which has been former prime minister K P Oli's stronghold for decades, and creating a frenzy wherever he campaigns. Just like RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane in 2022, Balen Shah is the protest candidate against the establishment.

Jhapa-5 is being keenly watched because in this early election triggered by the GenZ protests, it is seen as a referendum between the old and new, and a chance for a generational transformation in Nepal's politics. What has thrown a small pall over the RSP, however, was the acquittal by Attorney

General Sabita Bhandari this week of Lamichhane and his at-large co-accused in the cooperatives scam. The party's support was also jolted by a PR list populated by celebrities and businessmen.

Shah's strategy in contesting from Jhapa rather than his Kathmandu base is a direct message that he is now a politician of national stature. As first choice for prime minister for GenZ activists, he represents their aspirations. But it remains to be seen how much of his vast social media support will translate into physical ballots in March.

In an interview with AFP this week Shah said: 'This should not be perceived as an egoistic decision. The ripple effect would simply be greater if I contest from Jhapa ... [it] signals that I am not taking the easy way out.'

Unlike previous polls, this time there are no announced electoral alliances, and this means no party is a clear projected winner. Most of the electoral races are between heavyweight politicians with no clear ideological differences.

RIPPLE EFFECT

The biggest impact of the September protests is seen in the NC which nearly split and elected Gagan Thapa as its new president — a clear departure from his predecessor Sher Bahadur Deuba who has been prime minister five times since 1995. The NC's electoral tickets have also gone to new faces.

The UML's K P Oli was prime minister during the GenZ-led protests that ousted his coalition. He has been the most resistant to change and has kept his tight grip

on the party. He has sidelined dissidents in ticket allocation, but has fielded new younger candidates.

However, only 16.73% of candidates fall in the 24-35 age bracket, while nearly half are between 35-50. One third of candidates are still between 51-65 and there are a handful above 65.

There are 3,484 candidates contesting in 165 constituencies, and 68 political parties are participating while 1,187 are independent candidates. Only 11.34% of candidates are women.

As elsewhere in the world, politicians have overshadowed politics and ideology. March promises to be a clash of personalities in which age and populist novelty will be determinant.

"There is a culture of male-dominated populism, and unless

representation of women is increased in the party hierarchies, gender will take a back seat," says Hisila Yami. "There is a failure of progressivism and a rightwing drift across the world."

PM Karki's interim government is called 'Ama Sarkar', and there was hope that her leadership as a motherly figure would bring change. But five of her ministers who rode GenZ support to Cabinet positions have resigned to join various parties — mostly the RSP.

Concludes Babita Basnet, "Many young girls and women today can dream of a better tomorrow and a future in politics. Prime Minister Sushila Karki has made that symbolically possible, but that ethos of inclusion has to be espoused by the political parties."

Sudiksha Tuladhar

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

NIMB AGM

Nepal Investment Mega Bank held its 39th AGM, chaired by Prithvi Bahadur Pandey. The annual report, auditor's report, and financial statements for FY 2081/82 were approved. The bank reported a net profit of Rs4.33 billion, with total deposits reaching Rs476 billion. Investments rose to Rs142 billion, paid-up capital rose to Rs34.13 billion.



Tata Maghi Exchange

Official Tata Motors distributor Sipradi Trading held an exchange festival in Dhangadhi 15-17 January to mark 1 Magh. Customers exchanged old vehicles for new ones, got discounts, accessories, lifetime free charging on Sipradi's network, and free charger installation.

Mahindra in Hetauda

Mahindra launched two Electric Origin SUVs in Hetauda. The BE 6 has 543km range and starts at Rs5.7 million. The XEV 9e has 522km range and starts at Rs6.9 million. Both come with 8-year/200,000km warranties, infinity roofs, and Harman Kardon sound systems.

Xiaomi Note 15

Xiaomi launched four phones in its Note 15 Series. Key features include durability, latest chipsets, dual speakers, and fast charging. Prices range from Rs30,000 for the Note 15 4G to Rs67,000 for the Pro+ 5G. Promotion until 14 February offers a 9 month 0% EMI plan, and discounts on Xiaomi buds.

TVS holds races

TVS held the ARE GP race in Satungal to mark 20 years of the TVS Apache. Riders tried for the fastest lap times on a 10-corner track in 160cc, 200cc, 310cc categories. The top three in each category get to compete at the finals in Madras, Chennai.

US Embassy hackathon

The US Embassy is holding a nationwide hackathon, challenging participants to build tech solutions for local challenges in education, tourism, and commerce. The six-month program is aimed at students, early-career pros, and entrepreneurs. The program will connect promising projects with mentorship and investment.

Japanese Film Festival

The Embassy of Japan is organising the Japanese Film Festival 23-24 January at Rastriya Nachghar in Jamal. Five Japanese films, including Finding Calico and Okko's Inn will be shown. Entry is free, seating is first come first served.



Ncell x Bhatbhateni

Ncell and Bhatbhateni are offering 20% off on T20 World Cup Nepal merch. Ncell data packs Rs299 and above will come with discount coupons that can be redeemed through Bhatbhateni's online store to buy jerseys, tracksuits, and hats. Offer ends 31 March.



Doko Recyclers 2025

Last year Doko Recyclers began waste processing partnerships with both Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, as well as expanding offerings in Pokhara. In 2026, Doko plans to introduce e-waste management, increase sorting and recovery efficiency, and remain active in policy and awareness work.

Vape crackdown

120,000 vapes have been confiscated over the past two weeks from Imadol, Pathlaiya, Butwal Jomsom, and at the Korala border in Mustang. Despite vape imports being legal, smugglers continue to transact to avoid duties. Vapes are often caught on the southern border being illegally transported to India.

NEA monopoly ends

The Open Access Directive 2025 allows private hydro producers to sell electricity directly, ending the NEA's monopoly. The directive allows power plants above 1MW to sell to Nepali businesses. The NEA will still oversee these transactions. The GoN is incentivising private sector participation hoping to reach 28,500MW generation by 2035.

NMB Debit Cards

NMB Bank launched the Visa Platinum Delight and Platinum Debit cards, which come with perks such as access to airport lounges, discounts at premium outlets, zero withdrawal fees at any ATM, and discounted rates for cash withdrawals in India.

NTC cancels tender

Nepal Telecom has cancelled a Rs5.5 billion tender for a new real-time billing and customer support system. The company was looking to replace the existing system, supplied by Chinese firm AsialInfo, because of frequent malfunctioning and service disruptions. The two companies bidding for the project are Whale Cloud and Huawei.



Paddy down 4.4%

Nepal's paddy production is projected to reach 5.5 million tonnes, 4.2% lower than last year. The Ministry of Agriculture has identified out-migration, drought, and land fragmentation as reasons. Rice accounts for 12% of Nepal's GDP.



HBL AGM

Himalayan Bank held its 33rd AGM in Kathmandu, chaired by Prachanda Bahadur Shrestha. The meeting approved consolidated financial statements for the bank and its subsidiaries for FY 2081/82. The current auditor was reappointed.

“Just walk on”

A celebration of Ani Marilyn, a photojournalist turned Buddhist nun who spent her last days spreading wisdom in Nepal

Lisa Choegyial

The Kathmandu Valley has attracted an exceptional number of outstanding and accomplished foreigners over the decades, but few as extraordinary as Marilyn Silverstone (1929-1999).

Frances Klatzel’s book *A Portrait of Ourselves, Marilyn Silverstone: From Photojournalist to Buddhist Nun*, is a fitting and fascinating biographical celebration of this American woman whose life of unusual choices took her, as the title suggests, from an affluent Jewish childhood in Scarsdale, New York to becoming an acclaimed and adventurous Magnum photographer.

Roving the world, her camera captured many of the most iconic events of the 20th century, her images were published in *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Look*, *National Geographic*, *Paris Match*, *Vogue* and other magazines.

Following the teachings of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Marilyn Silverstone devoted the last twenty years of her eventful life to living quietly and practising Buddhism in Nepal. Ordained as a Buddhist nun, she took vows in the sanctified Solukhumbu precincts of Thubten Choling with Venerable Trulshik Rinpoche in the spring of 1977.

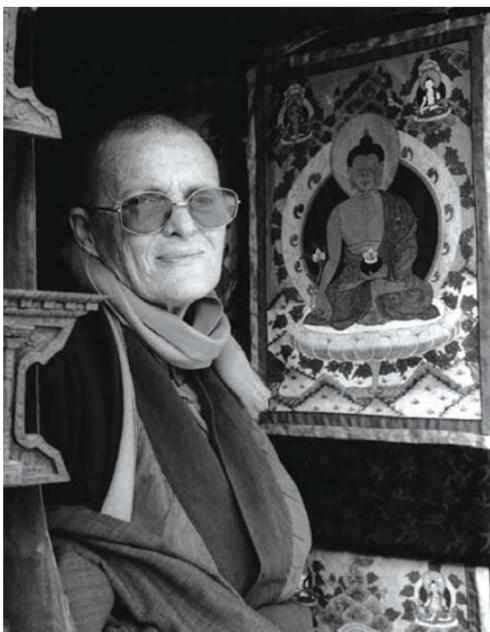
Living in Kathmandu until her death in Shechen Monastery, which she helped create, Marilyn wrote: ‘When I look back over the years, although I did not know it at the time, ending my life as a Buddhist nun was logical and inevitable.’

Ani Marilyn was a familiar figure amid the sacred spaces of the Valley, the lanes of Boudha and even Kathmandu’s drawing rooms during my early years in Nepal, a large smiling presence draped in maroon robes, dyed sneakers, slightly whiskered, robust.

As a wedding gift she gave Tenzin and I an inscribed copy of her slim volume, *Ocean of Life*, aptly named for the span of her achievements and expansive embrace – editor, translator, writer, filmmaker, photographer, journalist and Buddhist nun.



MONOCHROME DAYS: Marilyn’s picture of Jacqueline Kennedy, her sister Princess Lee Radziwell and their host the Maharani of Mewar followed by a launch of less-lucky press photographers in Udaipur 1962. Ani Marilyn as a Tibetan Buddhist nun at Shechen Monastery in Boudha (below).



Marilyn’s nephew wrote: ‘Her legacy was that she was always herself no matter what chapter of her life that she was living.’

Working with a wide range of impeccable sources, Frances Klatzel has assembled first-hand the personal recollections and unsparing insights from Marilyn’s most intimate friends. One of these, Jane Abell Coon, wrote

the Introduction. She was a well-known person in 1980s Kathmandu whose husband Carlton Coon served as American Ambassador to Nepal and she simultaneously as American Ambassador in Bangladesh.

The book begins with a rare message from the 14th Dalai Lama and a touching Foreword by Venerable Rabjam Rinpoche. It ends with exquisite excerpts from a Buddhist religious tract that Marilyn had translated from its traditional Tibetan text.

Marilyn’s initial trip to India was to photograph Ravi Shankar in 1955, the classical sitar maestro. Increasingly fascinated by ‘the complex and compassionate culture’ of Tibet, her Himalayan archives include images throughout India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The first internationally accredited photojournalist to base herself in India, from 1959 Marilyn

lived in Bombay then Delhi, with her lifelong partner Frank Moraes, the Goan journalist, writer, commentator and first Indian editor of the *Times of India* after Independence.

INDIAN INFLUENCERS

I remember being taken to meet the legendary Frank Moraes in 1973, by then politically exiled in Marilyn’s elegant but chaotic London house, a magnet for South Asian intellectuals. She was not there, but Frank’s son the poet Dom Moraes was slumped desultory on a sagging sofa. My impression of Frank was well-dressed, polite and slightly distracted.

This book is illustrated with a thrilling trove of pictures of and by Marilyn, many of which reflect the impact of Henri Cartier-Bresson who signed her up as one of the first women to join his prestigious Magnum photo cooperative.

Her assignments ranged across warzones in Vietnam, the Shah of Iran’s coronation, and Russian tanks rolling into Prague. Marilyn’s 1960s involved constant travel, her Magnum beat was the ‘Far East’, from Pakistan and Bangladesh to China, Korea, and Japan.

With a knack at being in the right place at the right time, Marilyn was the only western

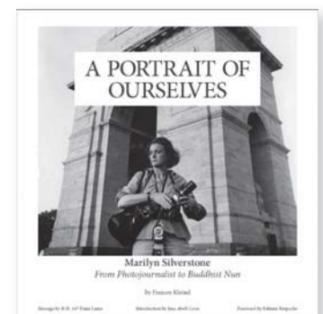
woman journalist to record the arrival from Lhasa into ‘safety and exile’ of the young Dalai Lama in 1959. She was at Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s funeral in Delhi, the Chogyal of Sikkim’s marriage to Hope Cooke, and with Jacqueline Kennedy on a small boat at the Lake Palace of Udaipur.

Marilyn snapped the Pope giving blessings in Bombay, Mother Teresa attending the poor, and the Beatles on their way to meet the Maharishi. With Frank, she travelled to Africa and shot Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, Nigeria’s independence celebrations, and a very old and solar-topped Dr Albert Schweitzer in his jungle hospital in Gabon.

A Portrait of Ourselves, Marilyn Silverstone: From Photojournalist to Buddhist Nun, is a highly recommended tribute to an inspirational life, told with discerning honesty and private perceptions by those who knew her best.

Her monastic years living in Nepal continued to feature travel, hard work, undiminished curiosity, dogged fights for right, uncompromising support for others, disdain for conformity and battles with ill health, but all with her characteristic good humour.

Marilyn leaves us with some sound advice in her own words: “I can say that I did it all. The secret though is just keep walking through life without analysing it too much or clinging to it too much. Just walk on.”



A Portrait of ourselves
Marilyn Silverstone
From Photojournalist to Buddhist Nun
Frances Klatzel
Mera Publications, 2025
132 pages
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Hotter Himalaya melts glaciers

Villages in Manang live directly below a glacial lake that is in danger of bursting

Durga Rana Magar in Manang

The pale green ice on the top of the lake gleams in the pale January sunlight. The dark waters beneath are visible through the translucent frozen surface.

This is Thulagi Glacial Lake at the foot of Mt Manaslu in central Nepal, classified as one of the most dangerous lakes to appear in the Himalaya due to climate heating.

The place is breathtaking not just because of its 4,050m altitude, but the scenery all around. The beauty belies the threat this expanding lake poses downstream along the Marsyangdi Valley.

The lake lies at the terminus of the 4.5km long Thulagi Glacier. The local Gurung inhabitants call it Dona Tal. They say it started appearing in the 1960s. Local guide Chandra Bahadur Gurung, 47, has been ferrying trekkers to the spot for about 20 years.

“Dona used to be small, but it has now grown bigger,” he says, gesturing to how the glacier has receded and shrunk. Trekkers used to be able to go to the other side, but now the glacier is riddled with ponds and boulders falling off the moraine that make it dangerous.

Gurung adds rather matter-of-factly: “The lake will burst sooner or later.”

Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has been studying Thulagi for the past two decades. Topographic maps from the 1960s and early satellite images show the lake being much smaller.

When the Marsyangdi Hydropower Project project was being built in 1994, the German Institute of Geology and Natural Resources with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology measured the lake to be already 2km in length. More recent surveys show the lake has increased its size since then to more than 1 sq km.

The lake is among 47 dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal and Tibet identified by ICIMOD in 2020 due to its size, the risk of landslides and avalanches, and the gradual collapse of the lake’s ice-core moraine dam.

In 2018 a team of glaciologists led by Umesh K Haritasya published a journal article about the evolution of three glacial lakes including Thulagi, Lower Barun,

and Imja. Even back in 1976, Thulagi was twice the size of Imja glacial lake in the Khumbu and six times the size of the Lower Barun. The team measured the lake’s depth at 79m, and calculated that it held 36.1 million m³ of water.

Since then, Thulagi has been growing at a slower rate than the other two lakes because it is shielded by shadows of mountains. There is also not as much glacial calving in the narrow valley.

Nonetheless, scientists and experts have long warned that a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) from Thulagi poses a big risk to four hydropower projects on the Marsyangdi and settlements like Besisahar and Dumre (map).

The lake feeds into Dona Khola, a tributary of the Marsyangdi where the 49.9MW Dona Khola hydropower project is being built at a cost of Rs10 billion. Another 42MW Super Dona Khola project is planned on the river.

“One of the trigger points that could lead to a glacial lake outburst could be the steep lateral moraine, which might be weakened by rapidly melting permafrost,” says Scott Watson, a University of Leeds researcher who was part of the team that conducted the 2018 study.

Locals are already witnessing what Watson describes. They say that it was easy to reach Thulagi’s headwaters even until a few years ago, but that is now dangerous because of ice and rockfalls.

GLOF WARNING

Glaciologist Rijan Bhakta Kayastha has been studying Thulagi since 1994, and was part of a team that discovered that the lake’s terminal moraine was made up of rocky soil on top and ice at its core.

In 2020, Kayastha’s team published a study that modelled the route of a possible GLOF. They found that if the lake burst, it would take 2.5 hours to reach Dharapani, and 4 hours to reach Bahundanda 39km downstream.

The surge would be 13.7m high at Dharapani and 15m by the time it reached Taal, the village most at risk because it is situated only a few metres above the Marsyangdi.

“Considering the size of the Thulagi glacial lake and its dam, it seems unlikely that a rock fall



or avalanche would cause the lake to breach the moraine dam,” concluded the study. “But an earthquake or climate change would require a separate study. At present, there is no immediate or imminent threat of this glacier bursting.”

MEMORIES OF 2021

Across Manang valley, residents are haunted by the memories of the 2021 flood on the Marsyangdi that swept away parts of Chame, Dharapani, Naso, and Taal villages.

Kamarkali Gurung, grew up on the banks of the Marsyangdi in Dharapani, and had never imagined

that the tranquil river she knew could become such a monster. She had saved up to build her own three-story property with 17 rooms.

Her family was away that June evening when the flood swept away her hotel. “Not even a spoon remained, everything was gone,” says Kamarkali. “Losing the hotel hurt like losing a loved one. The Marsyangdi flows through my house now, I can never go back.”

Surendra Gurung, also a hotelier, was in Dharapani the night of the flood, and can still remember the fear as the river roared towards the village. “I did

not know if I would live or die,” he says.

Sirantal village was merely 10m above the Marsyangdi, and was completely destroyed by the flood. Thirty-two people were rescued by army helicopters, and most of the families have now relocated to Taal.

One of them is Singha Bahadur Gurung who also ran a lodge for 20 years. “We did not have to buy anything except rice, the soil in Sirantal was so fertile,” he remembers.

Marsyangdi now flows through where Singha Gurung’s village



ALL PHOTOS: DURGA RANA MAGAR



Looking south towards Thulagi Glacial Lake and the Marsyangdi Valley.



• KATHMANDU

used to be. “Ever since the flood, I am terrified every time it rains from June to August,” he says.

The 2021 flood was during the monsoon, and was caused by unusually heavy rainfall in the catchment. A GLOF on the Marsyangdi would be much more destructive.

Roshni Ghale, 46, runs a hotel in Taal, and escaped with her family to a nearby cave as the flood engulfed nearby homes.

“We spent the next six months after the flood rebuilding our lives, going to bed hungry many a night,” she recalls. In the four years since, tourism has picked up again, but the community is still traumatised.

In the wake of the floods, the government had begun talks to rehabilitate and repatriate the community, but until now, they have been empty promises. In any case, the people here, most of them experienced hoteliers whose livelihood depends on tourism, are unwilling to uproot their lives and start over elsewhere.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Even though studies have assessed the risk of GLOFs in Manang and across Nepal, and warned about the damage that such floods could cause, it took until 2021 for early warning systems to be installed on the banks of the Marsyangdi and in the town of Taal.

But beyond that, there has been little preparedness. Early warning systems and disaster preparedness are necessary not just along the Marsyangdi but also at and around Thulagi itself, say experts.



MELTING MOUNTAINS: (clockwise from left) Thulagi Glacial Lake in Manang has been identified among 47 lakes in Nepal at risk of an outburst flood because of climate breakdown.

The 50MW Upper Marsyangdi Hydropower Project station in Lamjung. A Thulagi Lake outburst would damage four hydropower projects on the Marsyangdi and its tributaries.

Yaks graze below Thulagi Himal (7,059m) and Mt Manaslu (8,163m) along the Dona Khola that drains the lake.

Most of the survivors of the 2021 flood on the Marsyangdi from villages like Sirantal have relocated to the upstream village of Taal, which itself was hit by a monsoon flood in 2021.



SURVIVORS: (clockwise from left) Roshni Ghale spent six months after the 2021 flood rebuilding her hotel in Taal. Tourism has steadily picked up in the four years since the flood.

Kamarkali Gurung's hotel was swept away by the 2021 flood on the Marsyangdi. She now operates her hotel from a rented house in Dharapani.

Singha Bahadur Gurung operated a lodge in Sirantal before the flood swept it away in 2021. Local guide Chandra Bahadur Gurung has been taking trekkers up to Thulagi Lake for 20 years.

Locals here are becoming increasingly aware of the risk posed by the expanding lake up the valley, but are reluctant to leave homes and communities that they have lived in for generations. The hydropower projects on the Dona Khola promises jobs, and the local government is upgrading the hiking trail to Thulagi Lake which has become a tourist attraction.

“Manang now gets too little snow and too much rain, and the Marsyangdi charts its own course,” says Min Rashi Gurung, chair of Ward-1 of Naso rural municipality, where Thulagi is located.

But help may be on the way. Last year, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) approved a \$36.1 million grant to help Nepal reduce risk of GLOFs in Thulagi and four other glacial lakes. The project is managed by the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The project is set to begin next fiscal year, and will reduce the water level in the four glacial lakes including Thulagi, similar to what was done in Imja and Tso Rolpa, says Dinkar Kayastha at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.  Centre for Investigative Journalism - Nepal



Events



EFS Fight Night

Kicking off with morning bouts and building up to an evening showdown, EFS Fight Night 7 brings together amateur, pro-am, and professional Muay Thai fighters. The night's highlight is a 4-man tournament for the WBC Muay Thai National Title.

31 January, 10am onwards (main fight 5pm), Tickets: Rs1,000-Rs5,000, Miteri Sports Hub & Café, Budhanilkantha

Sketch meet

Join a creative session to sketch local art, music, food, and street life for inspiration. Register through the link in the bio of @echovalleyfest.

24 January, 1pm, Khokana, Lalitpur



Changing Times

An exhibition featuring works of six artists exploring shifting beliefs, time, and transformation in contemporary art, curated by Sophia L. Pande.

15 January-14 February, 11am-8pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Center

Paubha Workshop

Learn traditional Paubha painting at this 15-day guided workshop with expert artists. Register through the link in the bio of @artgallerykathmandu.

25 January-8 February, 4:30pm-6:30pm, Rs9,000, Art Gallery Kathmandu



Art exhibition

Siddhartha Art Gallery presents a solo exhibition of paintings by Samrat Joshi, exploring themes of landscape, culture, and memory.

18 January-18 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu

Conversations in Art

The upcoming episode of Conversations in Art features contemporary Tibetan-American artist Tenzing Rigdol, who will talk about his latest exhibition Biography of a Thought at the MET in New York.

30 January, 3pm-4:30pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal



Labim Bazaar

Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and baked goodies, agro products, thrift items, handicrafts and much more at Labim Bazaar.

Saturdays, 10am-4pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok



Music

Relimai Night

Honoring the life and musical legacy of Subha Bahadur Sunam, this tribute revisits his iconic songs and enduring influence.

31 January, 6:30pm onwards, Tickets: Rs3,000, Hard Rock Cafe Kathmandu, Durbar Marg

Bhatbhatay Ma

Named after Purple x Gwalas' TikTok hit Bhatbhatay Ma, this Friday night brings their party-energy to Club 10x.

30 January, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,000-Rs1,500, Club 10x, Thamel



Purna Rai and Rockheads

A live music night blending soulful Nepali sounds and high-energy performances.

28 January, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,000-Rs1,500, Club NOVA

Rock Legends

Paying tribute to the golden era of classic rock, this live show celebrates the legendary sound of AC/DC.

31 January, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500-Rs1,000, XO Club, Thamel



Echoes in the Valley

Now in its 10th edition, Nepal's only free international folk music festival celebrates traditional, indigenous, and disappearing musical traditions from Nepal and around the world, alongside workshops, guided walks, and community-led art experiences.

23-24 January, Donation: Rs100-Rs10,000, Khokana



Getaway



The Pavilions

Luxury boutique eco resort with boutique villas, swimming pool, organic farm, restaurant lounge and bar. For refreshing morning walks, therapeutic and relaxing day-ins, authentic gastronomical experience and quiet nights.

Chisapani, Pokhara (061) 694379

The Old Inn

This B&B consists of two beautiful timber and brick Newa townhouses and traditional design, overlooking a serene, traffic-free bazaar. The view of Central Himalaya from Annapurna in the west to Langtang and beyond in the east is magnificent.

Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520110



Dom Himalaya

Dom Himalaya Hotel offers a space for visitors to indulge in traditional Nepali cuisine, relax with Tibetan singing bowls and bask in the vibrant chaos of Thamel.

Thamel (01) 4263554

Bardia Gaida Camp

Reconnect with wildlife just at a stone's throw away from the rhino zone in the central area of Chitwan National Park. Enjoy the scenic views of lush forests and the rare glimpses of even rarer wildlife.

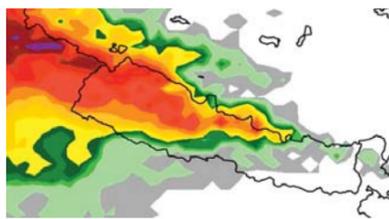
Chitwan (01) 4215409/ 4215431

The Inn Patan

What was once a traditional brick and timber Newari house has been transformed into a beautiful heritage hotel. Experience the vibrant history of Patan Darbar Square during the stay here.

Patan, 9851066897

Weekend Weather



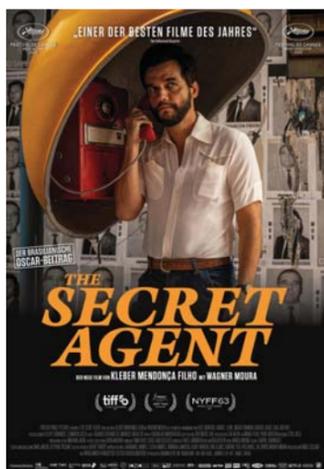
Rain & Snow

This westerly front is set to bring heavy precipitation over western Nepal starting Friday (above). The mountains of central Nepal may get snow with the rain lessening further east into Sunday. Kathmandu may get a light drizzle on Saturday morning. There is greater chance of heavier showers midweek next week. This is a much needed rain because of the wildfire smoke and smog (Thursday morning, below).



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 4°	21° 5°	21° 5°

Our Pick



Set during the Brazilian military dictatorship, Kleber Mendonça Filho's 2025 neo-noir political thriller *The Secret Agent* follows Armando Solimões, a former professor and widower who returns to his hometown of Recife in 1977 to escape his complicated past. Soon after he arrives, he befriends political dissidents at the place where he seeks refuge. And as the people around him begin to watch his every move Armando realises that the city he sought to start a new life in might not be able to offer him peace after all. Stars Wagner Moura, Carlos Francisco, Maria Fernanda Cândido, Gabriel Leone, and Udo Kier.



Dining

BARC

BARC is an intimate speakeasy with dark, moody interiors perfect for a relaxing night out. Inspired by grand arches and lesser-known Nepali art, the space feels both familiar and otherworldly. Its Titaura cocktail is the talk of the town right now.

4pm onwards, Bluestar Complex (01) 5357894

Gyakok at Nook

Winter calls for something warm, shared, and comforting. Gyakok at Nook offers a cosy dining experience, ideal for leisurely lunches and relaxed evenings filled with meaningful conversations.

Till 28 February, Fridays & Saturdays, 12pm onwards, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel



The Workshop Eatery

Forget about calories and indulge in an assortment of doughnuts, fries and burgers. The Nutella Doughnut and the Workshop BBQ Chicken Burger is a must.

Jhamsikhel, 9860431504

Koto

Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karage, Katsu Don, anything to satisfy one's Japanese food craving is right at the restaurant.

Darbar Marg (01) 4220346



Hankook Sarang

Enjoy a variety of Korean dishes like Tteokbokki, Gimbap and Bibimbab. You can also try various Banchan (Korean side-dishes) with Korean BBQ. You can cook the meat yourself and enjoy the tempting sizzling of pork and chicken while you wait.

Tangal (01) 4521711

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Turning trash into sculptures

Broken glass from the 9 September attacks metamorphose into fish fins and insect wings

Vishad Raj Onta

A mighty metal bird, 'Heron on Hunt' spreads its wings and unhinges its mouth. It looks down at 'The Defending Crab' which has windshield wipers for legs and opens its pincers defiantly at the heron, daring it to attack.

The crab shell is made of a ceiling fan, the blades of which have been cut up to form the bird's wings.

"The story is that you are what you eat," explains artist Saurab Koirala, whose solo exhibition 'Metamorphosis' at Taragon Next has sculptures made of material retrieved from garbage warehouses.

Koirala was in the studio when protestors ransacked the adjacent Hyatt Hotel on 9 September. The windows of the iconic museum designed by architect Carl Pruscha in the 1960s were shattered. He used the broken glass to make fins for his fish sculptures and wings for insects.

Metamorphosis is a reference to the transformation of trash into art, but it is also fitting because many of the repurposed items are insects: a firefly, a dung beetle, a spider, a dragonfly, a queen ant.

The most striking are the pair of praying mantises, the smaller one is black, made of windshield wipers, and the larger one of a motorcycle silencer, bicycle parts, and a fluorescent tube holder.

"The mantises are mating," Koirala explains. "The female mantis will cannibalise the male afterwards, and the dragonfly witnesses the whole scene."

It is possible to look at each installation and immediately recognise what it is meant to be, but on looking closer we see what the parts are made of, and how.



EARLY BEGINNINGS

Koirala thinks of himself as primarily a painter and a caricature artist, and not a sculptor. His mother was a teacher, and would make miniature animals for students.

"Seeing how happy she was doing that made me want to do it too, although she did not want me to be an artist," Koirala recalls. Some of his mother's creations are also on display at the exhibition.

Koirala got experience working with 3D models digitally in his work at Incessant Rain animation studio, especially animals.

He participated in the WastArt Competition in 2018, where his Danphe

sculpture made from colourful coke and soda cans was so striking that it became a part of the permanent collection at the Sagarmatha Next Art Gallery in Syangboche. Koirala worked in the studio in Khumbu, fashioning yaks and bees out of trekking trash.

His studio is a small shed a short walk from the exhibition which is littered with metal spare parts for future art. He has gone through three bicycles with a power saw.

Koirala alters the scrap as little as possible, and it is uncanny how well some of it fits the pieces. The aerodynamic fuel tank of a Bajaj Avenger motorcycle becomes the abdomen of a gigantic queen ant. A mosquito



repellent becomes the green body of a spider. A stapler and a coconut turn into a snail. The steel legs of a rolling office chair curve exactly into the legs and paws of a fox in motion.

"I did not want the animals to be in static poses. I wanted to capture dynamic movement," says Koirala. Fittingly, most of the parts he has chosen have come from bicycles, motorcycles, scooters, car horns.

While Koirala's work in his Sagarmatha Next residency was about waste encroaching into nature in the mountains, his work in Metamorphosis is a nostalgic memory of a happy childhood in Biratnagar.

"There used to be lots of dragonflies in my hometown," writes Koirala in his description. The message about the degradation of nature is more valid than ever.

The world is seeing the mass extinction of insects, and uncontrolled urbanisation of polluted Kathmandu Valley means only ants and some spiders survive. 🇳🇵

Artist in Studio #9: Metamorphosis
Taragon Next
Till 30 January
10AM-5:30PM



Sudiksha Tuladhar

Bhairav is the fierce manifestation of Lord Shiva, and his strength is depicted in a fearsome face but he is also a protector and guardian.

There are eight forms of Bhairav in Kathmandu, and they are all

featured in Mukesh Shrestha's exhibition Bhairav Bhav at Gallery 108 in Darbar Marg. The artist was moved to contemplate the violent September protests through this series of paintings.

"The GenZ protests exposed the greed and aggressive side of leaders in which many young Nepalis lost their lives. Bhairav

The power of peace

By rendering Bhairav avatars in paintings, artist shows serenity can overcome stress



Says gallery manager Pooja Mahato, "This is so visitors focus on the artwork rather than surroundings."

MANY FACES OF BHAIRAV

Each painting depicts Bhairav's face in the real form but the bodies are imagined. This distinction is also made by the use of colours. As Bhairav is one of Lord Shiva's forms, serpents are an essential part of the portraits.

The pieces on Kal Bhairav (the Lord of Time) of Kathmandu Darbar Square and Bagh Bhairav of Kirtipur ooze power. Unmatta Bhairav, also known as Digambar, sacrificed

the greed for life and is depicted naked.

Then there is Batuk Bhairav, the childish god with a happy face. The blue here creates a vibrant, ritualistic visage even as it emotes calmness. "It is believed that Bhairav came in this child-like form to fool the demons to destroy them," explains Mahato.

Shweta Bhairav's face is similar to his big figure at Kathmandu Darbar Square. This avatar was wrongly identified as the Akash Bhairav when it was chosen as the motif for Royal Nepal Airlines 60 years ago. Even so, aircrafts still carry the wrong Bhairav on their fuselage.

Shanta Bhairav, meanwhile, entered Kathmandu Valley in the form of a human to meet his beloved, Lassi. After agreeing to take the role of the protector for children as many were lost, he was allowed to live in the Valley.

The paintings also represent peace and tranquility: lotus flowers emerging from the heads of a male and female body, and military tanks below them.

Says Shrestha, "Each work is a journey from ignorance to knowledge. We are whatever we think. If we think of peace, we become peaceful, if we think of destruction, we become destructive." 🇳🇵

Bhairav Bhav
Gallery 108, Darbar Marg
Until 31 January
11AM-7PM (Mondays by appointment)

Moonie money in Nepal's

Seulki Lee in Seoul

Leaked emails from Korea's Unification Church have revealed its extensive involvement in buying political and media influence worldwide, including links to Nepal's parties and politicians.

Documents obtained by the Korean Centre for Investigative Journalism (Newstapa) contain correspondence to and from the controversial religious movement whose leader, 82-year-old Hak Ja Han, is currently on trial in Seoul for allegedly bribing the wife and associates of disgraced former president Yoon Suk Yeol.

The letters and direct messages referenced in the investigation mention three former prime ministers: Madhav Kumar Nepal who has now joined the Nepali Communist Party, K P Oli of the Communist Party of Nepal UML (Unified Marxist-Leninist), and former Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai.

The documents detail financial support from the Unification Church (now known as Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) to Nepal Paribar Dal (Nepal Family Party) and its founder Ek Nath Dhakal, who is a staunch ally of the UML. On Sunday, Dhakal signed an MoU with K P Oli of the UML to cooperate in the March election and beyond.

The leaked correspondence concerning Nepal spans the period between the first federal elections in 2017 till the 2022 polls and contains emails between Dhakal and Yong Jeong Shik, Regional President for Asia of the Unification Church, with urgent requests for funds for campaigning and to support the UML.

'Regarding funding, I am truly sorry, but a minimum of \$500,000 is required,' one of the messages to Yong in the report says. 'Furthermore, as the election is scheduled for December 7th [2017], I would be very grateful if I could receive it as soon as possible. The initial \$500,000 was used for overall election expenses, and the additional \$500,000 is intended for campaign activities for the Family

Party and supporting key leaders.'

In addition, there are also letters requesting an additional \$20,000 per month in 'maintenance costs for the Nepal Family Party and preparations for the 2022 election'.

Asked for a reaction to the allegations, Govinda Nath Mishra of the Nepal Paribar Party said: "This is an unnecessary smear campaign against our party. Parties doing good work are always linked to some foreign powers in Nepal to discredit them."

Ek Nath Dhakal has also denied that his party's affiliation with the UML has anything to do with Unification Church donations. He told Nepali Times in an interview in 2016: "The party has links to all faiths, as it has with the unification movement. The Nepal Family Party is a kind of conservative party with a manifesto that promotes family values, interfaith dialogue and harmony. There are 11 political parties supporting Prime Minister Oli. Nepal Family Party is just one of them."

In another update to Yong, Dhakal describes the UML's election campaign in 2017 as 'proceeding very successfully ... it appears certain the Unified Marxist-Leninist will achieve a landslide victory'. Dhakal was not contesting directly as a candidate, but piggybacking on the UML which had put him on the proportional representation list, ostensibly in return for campaign financing.

He continues: 'It is certain that I will be elected as a proportional representation member of the National Assembly due to a shortage of female candidates. I discussed the possibility of my election with Prime Minister Madhav and Prime Minister K P Oli ... both have confirmed that I could be moved from 5th place [on the PR list] to 1st or 2nd if necessary.'

After the 2017 election, the UML formed a coalition with the Maoists and Prime Minister Oli appointed Dhakal Minister for Peace and Reconstruction overseeing Nepal's post-conflict and post-earthquake activities.

During his tenure, Dhakal organised an 'Asia-Pacific Summit 2018' in Kathmandu presided over by Hak Ja Han, wife of Rev Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church and Universal



Peace Federation (UPF). The couple are known in the movement as 'True Parents' and Hak Ja Han is referred to as 'True Mother'.

Oli addressed the Kathmandu summit (pictured above) which was attended by 1,500 delegates, including Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. The gathering drew criticism for being a proselytisation exercise, prompting Oli to decline attending a 'blessing' ceremony by Hak Ja Han.

Ever since, the 'Holy Wine' has entered Nepal's political lexicon, and is still used derogatorily to label politicians involved.

Nepal Paribar Party's Govinda Nath Mishra says: "Ek Nath Dhakal has become a member of the House of Representatives twice, and our party has since its inception been close to the UML. We are just continuing that cooperation for this election as well."

The Unification Church has said that the leaked documents are not authentic and were unofficial records created by former Director General of the Unification Church's International Headquarters

Yun Young Ho to 'flaunt his influence'. The Japanese branch of the Unification Church said in a statement this week: 'After reviewing the documents believed to be the report in question, we have found factual inaccuracies were added or content modified.'

Milan Kumari Rajbanshi, deputy General-Secretary of the Nepal Paribar Party and former MP denied her party was funded by any outside source, and she was not aware of any correspondence between Dhakal and anyone else.

She told Nepali Times: "After the September street protests we spoke to many political parties, including GenZ activists, but the UML was the closest to our values." Rajbanshi will be campaigning in Jhapa-5 on behalf of K P Oli who will be contesting against former Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah.

The Newstapa leak show Dhakal and the Unification Church worked behind the scenes in the 2017 election to influence the elections. One email from Dhakal references this: '(If

we can secure a majority in next year's general election ... our wish is to educate all parliamentarians for two years until 2020 and create a constitution centred on Cheon Il Guk.'

Cheon Il Guk (천일국) means 'One Heavenly Kingdom' and is the vision of a spiritual nation proclaimed by Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church, and emphasises family values instead of individualism for global unity under a 'Heavenly Parent'.

The emails reveal that the Church was planning to convince Madhav Nepal and K P Oli to take all 150 coalition legislators to Bangkok to introduce them to its beliefs. That trip did not materialise, but the Church had earlier taken 20 Communist MPs to the Philippines and Thailand for 'principle education'.

In another email to Yong Jeong Shik, Dhakal describes Baburam Bhattarai as being 'disillusioned with communism' and that he proposed 'gathering all minority parties to join



Both Koreas in Nepal

Buddhism spread northwards across the Himalaya from Nepal to China and Korea 1,000 years ago, but in the past decades two of Korea's powerful ideologies have come to Nepal.

Nepal's leftist movement, most notably the Nepal Workers Peasants Party (NWPP) inspired by North Korea's Kim Il Sung's Juche Idea espouses a nationalist agenda, and has a strong base in Bhaktapur. Meanwhile, South Korea's Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon has influenced Nepal's political, administrative and religious spheres.

After establishment of Moon's Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in 2005, the Church has a sizable presence in Nepal. The movement's leader is Ek Nath Dhakal of the Nepal Paribar Party (right) who is affiliated with the UML and even served as a minister in a UML-Maoist coalition after being nominated as a PR member to Parliament.

He told this paper in 2016: "I am a Hindu, associated with the



Unification Movement.

The UPF staged one of its mass weddings at Dashrath Stadium in Kathmandu in 2017 (right). The movement recruits public figures like former president Bidya Devi Bhandari, Madhav Kumar Nepal and others as Ambassadors for Peace. Before he died in 2012 at age 92, Rev Moon had picked Nepal as a 'model peace nation of God'. The Church says it embraces all religions, and does not even display the Christian cross at its places of worship.

While young Nepalis follow South Korean pop culture fever, in Bhaktapur it is Kim Il Sung's Juche Idea that is the dominant ideology. The Nepal Workers Peasants Party has won just about every district and local election from Bhaktapur, not so much for its politics, but because its representatives have performed well.

Bhaktapur's following of Kim Il Sung is based on Bijukchhe's vision that his town be self-reliant and deliver development equitably.

politics

Leaked letters show micromanagement of parties and politicians by Korea's Unification Church

BIG NAMES: Prime Minister K P Oli addressing the Asia Pacific Summit 2018 that was attended by Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi and Cambodia's Hun Sen (left). Madhav Kumar Nepal led a delegation to North Korea in 2018 organised by Nepal Paribar Party.



Yun Young Ho, the former Director General of the Unification Church's International Headquarters, the organisation's second-in-command.

This suggests church affairs were reported directly to Hak Ja Han. Korean investigators are now focusing on whether Han merely received these reports or issued specific directives based on them.

Yun testified during the trial in Seoul that the Church's regional leaders and local partners would send daily field reports which he would synthesise into a 'Special Report' format to provide oral briefings to Han.

Hak Ja Han therefore may have been personally involved in the Church's operations in granular detail. Korean special prosecutors are viewing these documents as critical evidence in her trial to prove that she was directly involved in political lobbying.

Last week, during a hearing on the Hak Ja Han bribery case, a regional Church leader admitted to personally drafting segments of the 'True Parents Correspondence Report' featured in the document.

The 'TM Special Report' appears to be a compilation of internal documents reprocessed into a single file and includes emails and direct messaging. Certain periods are missing, leading to gaps in the narrative, raising the possibility that specific portions of the report may have been selectively curated or redacted. 📌

nepalimes.com
Watch 2016 Nepali Times Video.

the Family Party'. Bhattarai left the Maoists and is contesting from the Pragatisheel Loktantrik Party from his Gorkha constituency in March.

Despite its connections with Nepal's Communists, the Unification Church is known to support conservative politics around the world including through ownership of media like The Washington Times newspaper.

Founder Sun Myung Moon was deeply involved in pushing for Korean unification, and the Church has worked with Asian countries that have ties with North Korea.

Documents show that the Unification Church had tried to get

then UML Chair Madhav Kumar Nepal to Pyongyang, but the Nepal government supposedly under pressure from the South Korean, Japanese and US ambassadors got him to call it off. Madhav Nepal had also insisted that he meet Kim Jong Un, but the North Korean side had said it was not possible.

But after Nepal left the UML to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) he met the North Korean Ambassador in the presence of Ek Nath Dhakal to plan a visit in order to work towards Korean unification. A 11-member delegation composed of Nepal, Dhakal, MPs and a newspaper

publisher visited North Korea in 2017 (pictured above).

METICULOUS ARCHIVE

An extract from correspondence is indicative of the former prime minister's links to the Unification Church: 'Madhav Kumar Nepal ... maintains a very close relationship with us and could become Prime Minister again at any time. There is no one who knows us as well or respects the Parents as much as former Prime Minister Madhav does ... he is someone who regards the True Parents like God.'

The internal documents of the Unification Church obtained

by Newstapa is called the 'TM [True Mother] Special Report' and appears to have been prepared for Hak Ja Han. The 3,212-page text provides a chronological account of the Church's management of politicians internationally, its handling donations, and plans to expand political influence through its affiliated media outlets.

The document is a meticulous archive apparently compiled by



A worldwide web

In 2022, the Unification Church (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) arranged a meeting between Yoon Suk Yeol, who was then presidential candidate, and former US Vice President Mike Pence just before South Korean elections. The visit was timed for the 'World Summit 2022' hosted by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a Unification Church affiliate.

The visit was widely covered by the media at the time, but a Newstapa investigation last year confirmed that the Church paid Pence \$550,000 to visit Seoul. The visit was designed to bolster Yoon's diplomatic and security credentials and appeal to religious voters. Yoon knew Pence was a devout Christian, and media at

the time reported that both prayed before the meeting.

Just like the UPF's World Summit 2018 in Kathmandu, Cambodian PM Hun Sen was in attendance as was former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The welcome remark at the Summit was delivered by Yun Young Ho, then-Director General of the Unification Church's World Headquarters. South Korean Special Prosecutors are currently investigating Yun for allegedly bribing former president Yoon Suk Yeol's wife Kim Keon Hee.

Newstapa also dug up Pence's financial disclosures filed with the US Office of Government Ethics and the Federal Election Commission and found that Pence reported receiving \$550,000

from the UPF for 'a speaking engagement' in Seoul in 2022 — an unusually hefty fee.

Cambodian Premier Hun Sen has hosted K P Oli several times in Phnom Penh, once as prime minister in 2019, and again last year in August. There seems to be a similar nexus between Hun Sen, the UPF and former President Yoon and his wife Kim Keon Hee.

When he became president in 2022, Yoon visited Cambodia with his wife, and South Korea doubled its development assistance to Cambodia to \$1.5 billion. The Special Prosecutor in Seoul is investigating allegations that the Unification Church provided funds to Kim Keon Hee in helping a Mekong River project in Cambodia.

IN MEMORIAM



Birat Simha, born Nov 24, 1955.
Died, Jan 10, 2026.

Class of 1970, St. Xavier's School, Kathmandu, Nepal

Break, break, break

By Alfred Lord Tennyson

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.



Driving young Nepalis up the wall

Kalpana Maharjan combines her passion for sports climbing with activism



TOP-DOWN APPROACH: Kalpana Maharjan on Mt Everest for the first time in 2018 (left). A year later she summited again from the north side. Maharjan being greeted in Lalitpur after her second ascent of Everest in 2019 (above).

family. "My son helps out a lot, he is very independent and busy, but convincing my parents and husband was a lot of work," she admits. Her husband only found out that she was going back to climbing Everest after her coma through the news.

"I understand their concern. After all, the doctor had given me only a 15% chance to live," she says. "I couldn't tell them I was going back to the mountains."

Kalpana's father even threatened to disown her. But she had already set her mind to it, and was willing to risk any opposition from her parents, and even separation.

While training for her first attempt, she would wake up at three in the morning to get all of her housework done. Then she would leave the house to train at a climbing wall in Balaju, and then go to her journalism job or meet potential sponsors for the climb.

"As the eldest daughter-in-law in a traditional Newar household I had a lot of chores when I got home in the evening," she remembers.

As part of the Jyapu farming community, Maharjan is also proud that after working as a journalist producing videos, on the weekends she is at her family's paddy field in Dhapakhel with a doko on her back.

Eventually, Maharjan's goal is to have her trainees win medals in international competitions, and develop a reputation for Nepal in the sports climbing world. 🇳🇵

Vishad Raj Onta

Kalpana Maharjan is the first female journalist to climb Mt Everest from both the Nepal and the China sides. But the Lalitpur native doesn't climb mountains just to break records.

In 2014, Maharjan was attempting Mera Peak in the Khumbu region when she was struck by severe cerebral oedema that put her in a coma for eight days.

"After regaining consciousness I believed that God had given me a second life," recalls Maharjan. "So I decided that I would live the rest of

my life for the public good."

Her first summit of Everest was in 2018, when Maharjan was 34. She climbed from the South Col route with four other Nepali women journalists. Exactly a year later, she summited again, this time from the North Col route, naming her expedition 'Back to Everest: A Campaign Against Child Marriage.'

Now, Maharjan combines her activism with training young Nepalis in sports climbing.

Maharjan runs awareness programs against child marriage and human trafficking in schools in Lalitpur. Her first goal is to make Lalitpur free of child marriage. She does this by introducing and training students in sports climbing

which includes speed climbing, lead climbing, and bouldering.

"There are only one or two Nepali athletes dedicated to the sport. So it is possible to train for 3 to 4 years and become an international level climber," says Maharjan, who trains 150 young athletes, some as young as 7.

Maharjan is committed to the sport. She completed judging and route-setting training from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, is the president of the Bagmati Province's Sports Climbing Association and is fundraising to build a climbing wall in Imadol.

For the moment, Maharjan's students use the Pasang Lhamu

climbing wall in Dhumbarahi, twice a week and daily during vacations.

"The kids are excited about the wall in Imadol, which would allow them to train more often," says Maharjan. "Interestingly, the ones who are scared of heights often perform the best."

With programs such as 'Tij on the Wall' during the annual festival for women, Maharjan makes sure the parents are involved too, and that they understand and feel what climbing is like.

BALANCING ACT

Maharjan has always had to balance her passion for mountaineering, activism, and sports climbing with the duties and expectations of her




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