

Feudal federalism

Feudalism noun /'fyudl ɪzəm/
A social system in which people were given land and protection by a nobleman, and had to work and fight for him in return.

Federalism noun /'federalɪzəm/
A system of government in which the individual states of a country have control over their own affairs, but are controlled by a central government for national decisions.

When B P Koirala, as Nepal’s first democratically-elected prime minister, tried to institute land reform and dismantle vestiges of feudalism, he was deposed and imprisoned by King Mahendra in 1960.

The partyless Panchayat system for the next 30 years perpetuated feudalism, with the palace ruling by parcelling out favours in return for unquestioned loyalty to royalty.

The 1990 People’s Movement and the advent of a constitutional monarchy and restoration of multi-party democracy was supposed to change all that. But feudalism was not so easy to uproot — it continued within political parties, even as Singha Darbar replaced Narayanhiti as the centre of power.

When the Maoists launched their armed struggle in 1996, it was ostensibly to demolish feudalism once and for all and replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat. The feudocracy was not going to hand over power willingly, they reasoned, which was why violence was needed to counter the structural violence of the state.

When the war got mired in a military stalemate after 10 years, the Maoists needed a face-saving achievement to show. Devolving Kathmandu’s centralised power through federalism was one of them.

But the Maoists insisted on an ethnicity-based model of federalism with at least 14 provinces named after Nepal’s various racial groups. The Nepali Congress batted for a territorial form of federalism not much different from the Development Zones of the day, while the UML backed a hybrid model.

One of the ethnicity-based province demands was the case for ‘One Madhes One

Pradesh’ to address the long-standing struggle of the Nepal Tarai for autonomy and respect from the state. This was a demand backed at one point by India, but fiercely resisted by the dominant parties in Kathmandu.

In the end, the Constitution was hurriedly promulgated after the earthquake in July 2015 that had a truncated Madhes province in the eastern Tarai. Even the naming of the seven provinces was so contentious that they only had numbers. New Delhi was not happy and punished Nepal with a 6-month blockade.

The first elections under the new Constitution for three tiers of government were held in 2017. The idea sounded great: power would be devolved from Kathmandu to provincial assemblies and local municipalities with the central government only acting as a facilitator and handling national needs like infrastructure.

But practice was far removed from theory.

Provincial governments became proxies of Kathmandu, provincial assemblies were franchises of the main political parties. The bureaucracy and politicians at the centre were reluctant to yield political decision-making, revenue collection and control of police to provincial governments. The provinces just became a mechanism for the centre to dispense jobs and patronage. The high cost of maintaining seven provincial governments and assemblies was a waste, and corruption got decentralised as well.

Except for Madhes-based parties and those in the provinces who benefit from patronage, there is not much public support for federalism. Public opinion appears to support the idea that it is an expendable and costly second tier of government.

On 20 November, Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah pointedly refused to cast his provincial ballots. The Independent Party’s Rabi Lamichhane did not either, and his party did not even field candidates for provincial assemblies.

However, the problem is not with federalism. It has become an ‘F’ word because it was never allowed to function as designed. And in that respect, Nepal is still a feudal state.



Federalism has become an ‘F’ word because Nepal’s politicians are reluctant to devolve power to provinces.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Elusive Decentralisation

Back in 2002, king Gyanendra dismissed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and consolidated his power saying Deuba was unable to hold local elections and bring the rebels to round-table negotiations. The Maoist insurgency was still at its peak and the palace massacre had just decimated the royal family.

Writing for Nepali Times, columnist Dhawal Shumshere JB Rana, the newly elected MP from the RPP in Banke-2, said that the political parties and the palace must cooperate if they are to compel the Maoists to give up their violent ways.

Six years later the monarchy was abolished. Now, two decades on, Nepal is forming the second government under the federal structure but true devolution remains as elusive as ever.

Excerpt of the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #121 29 November – 5 December 2022:

It has taken 12 years for the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people to shatter. The blame for this goes to the gross misrule by the leaders and parties in power. Rampant corruption at all levels of government became an open and expected process, some leaders didn’t even try to hide their

unsavoury behaviour anymore.

Factionalism, horse-trading, personal and political scandals became the order of the day. Then came the violence--Nepal’s tranquility was shattered by unprecedented levels of murder and mayhem. Nepal is killing each other like animals gone berserk, we are destroying what little infrastructure we have, all this for power in the garb of a political ideology.

If we don’t look for solutions, a Khmer Rouge-type future is not inconceivable. Things couldn’t drag on like this. On 4 October, King Gyanendra sprang a surprise on the nation, sacking the government citing incompetence, taking upon himself the executive powers, pledging to uphold multiparty democracy and hold fresh parliamentary polls at the earliest possible time. Political leaders have said they see a "grand design" to reverse multi-party democracy and have announced rallies and mass meetings in the coming month. The Maoists have detected an ideal opportunity to drive a wedge between the king and political parties.

From archive material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



ONLINE PACKAGES



International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)’s Deputy Director General, Izabella Koziell, recently won the UN Women Rise and Raise Others Award. In this edition of Nepali Times Studio, Koziell spoke about the importance of women in the climate space and ICIMOD’s strategy to empower women to meet the challenges raised by the climate crisis. Read story online and watch full interview.



Heritage Conservationist Anil Chitrakar takes a look at a time when there were no aeroplanes through the journeys of Manjushree, Emperor Ashok and Jung Bahadur Rana, who traveled from Wutaishan to Kathmandu, Pataliputra to Lumbini and Kathmandu to London respectively. Watch full video only on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for more original multimedia content.

VOX POPULI

I hope the trend for new, younger, fresher candidates continues (‘The Nepali people have spoken’, Sonia Awale, #1137). The established musical chairs leaders have failed consistently, they are all slogans and very little if any positive impact for the general populace. The old geezers should be voted out as they have only demonstrated incompetence and corruption. A perfect example was mentioned in the article: the Maoists who were voted in after the revolution and became mirror images of the ruling stooges they had fought against.

Roger Ray

Change is welcome. It is time for the likes of Deuba, Prachanda, and Oli to retire. The younger generation must be given a chance to transition. Nepal will face a similar situation like Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan if nothing happens. Power to the people.

Gyurme Dondup

KATHMANDU MANIA

The Bagmati floodplain has completely changed from sandy riverbanks with lots of water to green “parks” (The cost of living in a big city’, Ramesh Kumar, #1137). Nakkhu Khola is completely invisible. This is what happens when you have one metropolitan center that is the political capital (Nepal’s Washington DC), the financial capital (Nepal’s New York City), the tech capital (Nepal’s Silicon Valley), the residential capital (Nepal’s most populated city/ LA + NYC + SF + Boston + Washington DC area + Dallas + Chicago + Atlanta + New Orleans + Philadelphia), the spiritual/ religious capital, the tourism capital and the one with the only real international airport. Given all this I’m surprised Kathmandu is not more crowded. There was talk of moving the political capital out of Kathmandu but what has come out of it?

Etrnal Seeker

Facilities must be decentralised. Education, health, job opportunities must be allocated equally all over the country, in villages and cities. We must encourage people to stay in their own place.

Arun Parajuli

RELOCATING CAPITAL

Because I have been running awareness about the relocation of the capital, I want some of my questions answered (‘Relocating Kathmandu’, The Ass, #1137). When will urbanisation slow down in Kathmandu? When will other cities of Nepal compete with Kathmandu regarding job opportunities and infrastructural development? When will Kathmandu not be densely populated, get rid of its pollution and not be a politic al hub? You don’t wear the same clothes forever. So how can you expect a same capital city forever? It is already unliveable.

Milan Joshi

COP27

I think the creation of the loss and damage fund to help poor countries was welcome, but the failure was the lack of new commitments to cut emissions to keep global temperature to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (‘COP27 a Success or a Failure?’, Felix Dodds and Chris Spence, nepalitimes.com).

Ajay Pradhan

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) was a total failure. There was no real commitment, no implementable action plan. It was just a jamboree.

Lal Bahadur

BON PO

So much for these religions being labeled primitive (‘Bon voyage’, Sonam Choekyi Lama, nepalitimes.com).

Himali Upadhyia

AIR POLLUTION

Do not always blame the crop fires in India, but also look to the Nepali farmers who also burn their crops.

Jurgen Callewaert

WHAT'S TRENDING



The Nepali people have spoken

by Sonia Awale
Antiestablishmentarianism. That new word has entered Nepal’s political lexicon. Kathmandu has elected a lawyer, Lalitpur a doctor, both women under 35 from the independent Rastriya Swatantra Party which was formed just five months ago. Follow us for the latest updates on Nepal Elections and the discussion online.

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Kathmandu from space 60 years apart

by Kunda Dixit
From ground level, residents of Kathmandu Valley know how crowded the city has become. This is now visible in satellite images thanks to the declassification of American spy satellite imagery from 60 years ago. Visit nepalitimes.com for dramatic before and after juxtaposed satellite images.

Most popular on Twitter



Cost of living in a big city

by Ramesh Kumar
Nepal’s socio-political transformation has led the country from an agriculturally dependent rural nation to a country with expanding urban spaces but not necessarily inhabitable. Read full story on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
On Tuesday, devotees thronged Pashupati temple to sow satbeej and light oil lamps to honor their deceased family members. But days later the prescribed route is filled with discarded plastic bags, flowers, and other paraphernalia from the ritual.

Bajjnathv @NaarayanShakti
It is easy to impose prohibition on plastic bags, but it is VERY DIFFICULT to impose self-consciousness or discipline!

Victoria @Victori84604362
Nepal really needs to clean up their act. Rubbish collection should be a priority. There should be more bins available. Children should be educated from an early age not to just chuck their rubbish on the floor. Nepal is a beautiful place. Preserve it!!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
We live in a country where the youth is deprived of Nepal’s #history. There is scant record keeping for the future generation to get a glimpse of what #Nepal once looked like.

Aleksandr Verkovsyn @xander_fero
History is substantially more than what things looked like.



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Winter is rum time

One of Nepal's most famous brands, Khukri, is synonymous with dark rum

Winter is here, and that means it is time for rum anyway you like it to warm us up. Few know that rum is the first spirit to be made and imbibed for sheer pleasure.

Originating in Barbados in 1650, the liquor used to be a legitimate currency to pay sailors, and was adopted by the colonial owners of sugarcane plantations. Pirates often attacked ships carrying barrels of rum because of their worth.

In the 1800's, rum was even used as a shampoo and to this day beauty bloggers swear by it as a conditioner to make hair thicker. But most people would rather mix rum in their cocktails, and it is also healthier than other spirits since it contains no fat, cholesterol or sodium.

In Nepal, rum was popularised first by returning Gurkha soldiers. They preferred hot rum punch when fighting in the trenches in winter, and Khukri rum became the perfect drink for cold winters in the mountains of Nepal.

Rum is also strongly associated with music, right from Bacardi's overlying theme of freedom depicted through dancing and music, to the fact that *Rum and Coca-Cola* composed by Lionel Belasco in 1945.

In Nepal, Nepal Distilleries which makes Khukri has also been holding trendy concert tours to celebrate the country's ethnic diversity which is reflected in its music, including folk rock, classical, pop, and Nep-hop.

Khukri rum's iconic Coronation edition comes in a dagger-shaped bottle and is a popular gift item, and has won international awards in rum tasting.

The month-long nationwide Khukri Music Tour in 2018-19 was held all over the country, including Illam, Birtamod, Itahari and 22 other cities of Nepal. The artists included Indira Joshi, Sugam Pokharel, Shiva Pariyar, Sandhya Joshi and comedian Sandeep Chhetri. Khukri Music Nights have also been held in various restaurants.

During the pandemic, the 'Khukri Music Nation' virtual contest was held in December



2020. The contest was judged by Bipul Chhetri, Sambriddhi Rai and Sabin Rai with the Top 16 awards.

"Khukri Rum takes pride in Nepali Music and talents," says event manager Shrida Shah. "We hope to give a platform for emerging Nepali artists to exhibit their talents."

Rum has often been associated with defiance and rebellion. It was the most smuggled liquor during the American prohibition. Mixing it with Coke became Cuba Libre. In Brazil, Cachaça is distilled from fermented sugarcane juice, whereas elsewhere it is made from molasses.

Mutineers in Australia seized control of the government in 1808 when the governor attempted to regulate the use of rum in what was known as the Rum Rebellion. Whereas in North America, George Washington had a barrel of Barbados Rum at his 1789 inauguration. The British Royal Navy continued to serve a daily rum ration or tot to sailors until 1970.

Rum is at the origin story of modern mixology, dating back to the rum punches and grogs concocted by British colonials. Punch in fact comes from the Sanskrit word *pañch*, meaning five and so named because of the 5 ingredients that made

the rum last longer: liquor, sugar, spice, water and bitters. The original Himalayan rum, Khukri, perfectly combined these ingredients.

Famous people who were famous for their predilection to rum were Ernest Hemingway (known for his mojito and daiquiri), John F Kennedy was another daiquiri man and American actor Will Smith, famous for his Oscars slap last year, goes for Piña Colada.

Nepal is a pioneer in dark rum with Himalayan herbs, pure spring water and abundant sugarcane in the Tarai. Khukri is a heritage rum that has all the characteristics of a contemporary rum, and is a perfect accompaniment to *chhoila* or *sekuwa*. 🇳🇵



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

Strictly come salsa

With sparse interior decoration, the place has a minimalistic look.

There is a neatly stocked bar and the large windows with a wide panorama of the forested mountains surrounding the Valley and the urbanscape below. Swyambhunath peeks from the distance.

Now, the Terrace Garden at Radisson Hotel in Lazimpat has been redone to offer authentic Mexican dishes for Kathmandu foodies. "We are multi-cuisine," says Ajay Sharma, the senior sous-chef, "but we are focusing on Mexican, especially as there are limited options for Mexican cuisine in Nepal."

Mexican culinary culture include staples familiar to Nepalis, like maize, beans, avocado, tomato, meat, squash and chilli peppers. The spices give both Nepali and Mexican dishes their characteristic taste.

The Terrace's signature mocktails have a World Cup ring to them: Neymar Jito, Corner Kick. The first is a citrus-based drink with orange and lemon juice, soda and sugar, topped with mint leaves that hits a quiet mixture of sweet and tangy flavours.

The Corner Kick is a mango drink that has a *diabolique* twist: green chilli, Tabasco and chat masala. Together with the piquant lemon juice and a sliver of coriander, Corner Kick lives up its name, at once sweet and hot with green chillies sitting ominously on the rim. In addition, keeping with the ongoing 2022 FIFA World Cup, the restaurant also organises a lively



watch party. Starters include Prawn Taco Salad and Tortilla Soup. The salad, has avocados and corn tortilla chips positioned like ridges. Red diced tomatoes and kidney beans add more colour to the mix as the centrepiece prawns are sprinkled with yellow cheddar cheese. The unique Tex-Mex masala gives it a singular taste.

The soup is a thick broth of ripe tomatoes, sour cream and avocado is topped with thin flakes of crispy corn tortilla, and the speck of hotness is complemented by the sliced sausages at the bottom.

The Veggie Enchilada and the San Antonio Pork Chop make up the main course. The basic filling of sautéed vegetables and cheese rolled in tortilla, and baked until melted, give the Enchilada its full-bodied magic.

The Pork Chop is marinated in Worcestershire sauce and comes with a zing of umami. Both leave one well-sated and in awe of the subtle wonders of Mexican cuisine.

There are three choices of dessert: Wildberry Cheesecake, Chocolate Soufflé and Caramel Flan. Says Sharma, "We want the Nepali palate to get the best taste of Mexican cuisine." 🇳🇵



NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक

Electrifying the Tarai

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) wants a high-capacity transmission line corridor in Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Mahottari, Dhanusha and other districts of Madhes Province to increase their power consumption by 4,000MW. Four circuit transmission lines and substations of 400KV will be



constructed parallel to the Postal Highway along the southern border with India in the coming decades. Under the Bara-Parsa Industrial Corridor, transmission network infrastructure will be built to consume about 3,200MW of electricity in Birganj and 800MW in Janakpur.

Adidas new collection

Adidas' Forum Collection for the season will be available in its Jawalakhel outlet from this week. To celebrate the release of the new line of shoes, Adidas is organising a launch event in its outlet at 4PM on 3 December. Attendees will receive free stickers, tote bags and sweet treats.

Toyota Checkups

Toyota has launched a checkup camp this week where customers received 15% discounts on genuine parts, 5% on motor oil and free general checkup of their automobiles. Toyota has also opened a new showroom in Surkhet with the goal of providing facilities to the people of Karnali region.

Sipradi Everest for EV

Sipradi trading and Everest bank have agreed to provide up to 80% vehicle loans to customers buying electric vehicles from Tata Motors at a 12.8% interest rate for up to 7 years.



Zonta Walkathon

Zonta Club organised walkathon to mark the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence saw more than 500 participants this week. The event was supported by Kumari Bank, JGI Foundation, Laxmi Bank, KTM City, Welt Hunger Hilfe, German cooperation and Aqua Hundred.

Peace Corps 2023

Peace Corps Associate Director Scott Beale was in Nepal for two days meeting government and civil society representatives to discuss the program. Following the global evacuation of volunteers in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Peace Corps is planning to return volunteers in early 2023. Nearly 4,000 Americans have served in Nepal across various sectors since the Peace Corps first established operations in the country in 1962.

3,000,000 e-BYD

BYD has released its three millionth new energy vehicle in a roll-off production line ceremony promoting green mobility. The company released one million new energy vehicles in 13 years and the rest within 18 months.

Ncell eSIM

Ncell customers can now upgrade their existing physical SIM to eSIMs through SMS by sending their citizenship identity number and email address to 17125.

Samsung TV offer

Customers can enjoy 0% EMI, a free soundbar, 30% cashback and more on the purchase of Samsung TVs. The offer is valid till December 31 and is available through the dealers HIM electronics and Triveni Byapar.

Hyundai FIFA winner

Hyundai has announced the winner of its 'Road to FIFA World Cup 2022 Finals' campaign. Naypal Bahadur Pande was awarded



an all-expense trip to Qatar to watch the finals. Other winners of the test drive campaign Hasta Maya Gurung and Sher Bahadur GC also received tickets to Qatar.

New chef at Terraces

The Terraces Resort and Spa has appointed Deepak Mishra from Orissa as the new Executive Chef whose expertise includes making homemade pasta to different varieties of cheeses while focusing on wellness food concepts. Mishra has been in the hospitality industry for the past 15 years having previously worked for chains like The Park in India, Mandarin Oriental in Singapore.

At the edge of tomorrow

Limbu sci-fi *Ningwasum* is a powerful assertion of Indigenous possibilities

● Mark Turin

In this bold and beautiful film by Indigenous Yakthung (Limbu) artist Subash Thebe Limbu, two time travellers invite the audience to navigate complex notions of space, memory and the very question of time itself. Through their reflections and mental dialogue with one another, the meditative Miksam and Mingsoma — played by Subin Limbu and Shanta Nepali respectively — explore how our present reality and our sense of what lies ahead might be reimagined by engaging with the unrealised aspirations of historically marginalised communities.

The creator of this extraordinary cinematic offering is a multi-modal artist based in London and Kathmandu whose experiments with sound, film, music, performance, painting and podcasts have resulted in creative works that address deep socio-political issues, practices of resistance and science fiction as well as speculative fiction. Indigeneity and climate change are guiding themes that infuse much of Subash Thebe Limbu's work.

As a film, *Ningwasum* is a singular piece of art. Within the Nepali context, it is entirely unique. As much in dialogue with Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism as it is with Yakthung cultural and linguistic traditions, *Ningwasum* summons the viewer to imagine a very different future, a world in which Indigenous peoples have agency, sovereignty and technology. Perhaps most importantly, it envisions a world where the traditional knowledge systems, ecological understandings, ethical frameworks and storytelling practices of Indigenous communities are not only intact but actually thriving. In so doing, *Ningwasum* asserts an entirely new way of thinking about what lies beyond the present to offer a transformative and liberatory idea: Indigenous flourishing and genuine self-determination.

Director Limbu has coined a compelling new term for this— 'Adivasi Futurism'. In a related paper of the same title, he argues that this might be imagined as a space for "futures without — or [that] de-link and dismantle — Brahminical patriarchal



PHOTOS: MANISH TAMANG/SUBASH THEBE LIMBU

casteism and racism that has been detrimental to Adivasis, Dalits, Madhesis, women and queer people in the region." In conceiving of this to be a domain where it becomes possible to "review and redefine progress", de-linked from nation-states and overturning hackneyed colonial narratives of Indigenous people, Adivasi Futurism becomes a technique for reimagining Indigenous peoples "as not only the storytellers of the past but also as creators of interplanetary and interstellar civilizations of the future." *Ningwasum* is an influential intervention in this space, both advancing the cause and stimulating an important conversation around how *adivasi janajati* cultures and communities are understood by mainstream Nepali society.

As for the film itself, not a great deal happens in *Ningwasum*, but then it doesn't need to, as this is no standard issue Kollywood production. This 44-minute arthouse picture, gorgeously shot and suffused throughout with an ethereal blue filter, invites deep contemplation on what it means to have an expansive imagination. The mothership featured in the film is based on a Silam Sakma, a ritual object commonly used and unanimously accepted to be the symbol of identity among the Yakthung community. Shot on location in the traditional homeland of the Sharwa (Sherpa) community in eastern Nepal, including in



the Wasanglung region which is believed to be the shamanic home of the Yakthung, *Ningwasum* makes powerful, if restrained, use of visual effects, and incorporates some dreamy drone footage. With an arresting soundtrack, *Ningwasum* is entirely in Yakthungpan, known more commonly as the Limbu language. Rendered accessible to a non-Yakthungpan speaking audience through excellent subtitles, the impact of using an Indigenous language for a film of such sophistication operates at many levels. First, it is simply beautiful to hear an *adivasi janajati* language spoken so confidently and gracefully, voiced in this case by celebrated Yakthung artist and singer, Manu Nembang. Not understanding the semantic content of words allows the viewer's mind to drift, picking up only an auditory

input as sounds interact with the visual frame. The overall effect is distinctly otherworldly, and thereby very much in keeping with the director's goal.

Second, releasing a film of this length in an Indigenous language also works at a representational and political level, affirming the contemporary utility, vitality and relevance of a language that might otherwise be viewed by many as inevitably antiquated, situational (as in, couldn't be used outside a village home), and lacking application in the modern world. Finally, choosing Yakthungpan as the medium for this message has a powerful pedagogical purpose, demonstrating to the viewer — and to members of the Yakthung community — that even the most refined forms of contemporary art can be expressed in a traditional

language. In this regard, *Ningwasum* reminded me of the award-winning 2018 drama, *Edge of the Knife*, which was filmed and released exclusively in Xaad kil, or Haida, a highly endangered language spoken in the Haida Gwaii archipelago off the coast of Canada and on Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. The process of creating *Edge of the Knife* generated a dynamic context for emerging speakers to gain cultural and linguistic confidence, as actors had to commit to relearning their language through their roles and through crafting the dialogue. I anticipate that *Ningwasum* could have a similar impact within the Yakthung community, particularly among the youth. At the end of *Ningwasum*, the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung — a social organisation representing Limbu community interests that now has global chapters — receives a well-deserved credit, both for its support of this project and its ongoing commitment to furthering the cause of Yakthung culture and language.

I was fortunate to attend a screening of *Ningwasum* in Vancouver organised by the Himalaya Program at the University of British Columbia where I teach. During the question-and-answer session that followed the screening, Limbu confirmed that while the film was shown during the Kathmandu Triennale in March 2022, it is not on general release. As of writing, two international galleries and museums have acquired *Ningwasum*, where the film will be curated and exhibited over time, and others are slated to follow. While I fully understand and appreciate the financial need for such exclusivity, I only wish that more people — particularly in Nepal — could have the experience of watching this extraordinary rumination on culture, language, heritage and our collective future. If you can find a way to experience *Ningwasum*, even just the trailer which is freely available online, you will not be disappointed. Political and passionate, this film is a cry for recognition and respect — not for help — an assertion that Cherokee scholar and intellectual, Daniel Heath Justice, so poignantly refers to as "imagining otherwise." 🇨🇪

Mark Turin is an anthropologist and linguist currently based in Vancouver, Canada. He is a regular contributor to the *Nepali Times* and the Director of the Digital Himalaya Project.

Gear up for FIFA World Cup





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The city now wants to build a parking lot in Kathmandu’s last remaining open space

● Sahina Shrestha

Over the centuries, as Kathmandu expanded, the vast open space of Tundikhel, that was once on the fringes of the old town, has become the heart of the new city.

The name comes from the Newa Tinkhya: a ‘*khya*’ means large open space on the outskirts of town set aside for social and cultural events.

As dynasties came and went, Nepal’s rulers used the public space for their own convenience, and Tundikhel went from a place for festivals, to supposedly being the largest military parade ground in Asia, and started being a occupied piecemeal by the Army.

Today, not even 15% of Tundikhel’s original expanse is open to the public. It is fragmented into sections under either institutional and/or military control. After the 2015 earthquake, even the area with public access has mounds of debris and is fenced off to park tipper trucks.

In the latest instance of blatant encroachment, Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) under its new mayor Balen Shah has revived the idea of turning Khula Manch in Tundikhel into a parking facility.

The area behind the Army pavilion with its Panchayat-era open air theatre has been the site for historical events like the People’s Movements of 1990 and 2006, and political rallies. After the earthquake it housed a tent city for survivors.

Earlier this month, the 10th executive meeting of KMC set aside a budget to prepare a detailed project report for a three-storey underground parking in Khula Manch.

Activists and experts are up in arms, saying the decision was taken without proper homework and consultation, and would threaten one of the last remaining open public spaces in Kathmandu.

“The authorities have never understood the essence of Tundikhel,” says activist Ganapati Lal Shrestha of Occupy Tundikhel, a citizen-led movement to reclaim encroached open spaces. “We had hoped that at least the newly elected local representatives would understand its importance, but even they have not.”

The KMC has not divulged details, but activists are concerned that an underground parking will be detrimental to Kathmadu’s ecology and culture.

“Underground parking will disturb the aquifer and water flow in the *hiti* around the area,” says Shrestha. “If it is about managing traffic, the basement of the commercial buildings which the Mayor previously cleared, and new parking facilities would be enough. Why target Tundikhel? And they should have consulted local stakeholders.”

Kathmandu’s historic heart does not have much space left for new development. The plan should have been to use and improve what already exists.

“Traffic management in the city core has been a challenge for KMC, and adding parking space makes sense. But from an ecological point of view, underground parking would impact the environment. How much are you willing to compromise on that front is a political decision.”

Like other open spaces in Kathmandu Valley, Tundikhel plays an important role in the groundwater recharge system. While surface water is replenished every monsoon, deep aquifers need to be recharged.

“Underground parking can help in traffic management but there has to be a proper design and it should be carried out only after conducting a geological study,” says Joshi. “If the new mayor does not follow due process and consult the public, how is he any different from the previous mayors?”

KMC spokesperson Nabin Manandhar admits that an economic feasibility study and geological investigation have not been conducted.

Apart from the ecological impact, Khula Manch is also culturally important. To its northwest is Dui Maju, the goddess of grain which is considered the unseen energy linked to Goddess Taleju.

According to Uddhab Karmacharya, the priest of Taleju temple, Dui Maju is always established where the goddess Taleju Bhawani exists. A special worship for Dui Maju takes place in April to coincide with the special puja at Hanuman Dhoka.

“The state cannot do whatever it likes, but they need to understand the importance of the space for Dui Maju and work to preserve it,” says Karmacharya. “They are turning Kathmandu into concrete with no regard for heritage conservation. They should leave Khula Manch alone.”

This is not the first time the KMC has tried to turn the place into a parking lot. A feasibility study was conducted in 2016 for underground parking coverin 23,133 sq m for 2,000 light vehicles.

That year, the KMC started work on the 17-storey Kathmandu View Tower across the road, and



Giving Tundikhel b



moved the bus park from there to Khula Manch. After the bus park moved out, the area became a dumping site for construction material and temporary rooms for contractors. The KMC only acted to clear the area in 2019 after a public outcry by activists and heritage conservationists.

The plot belonging to Dui Maju was leased for five years by the Guthi Sansthan to a certain Amrita Bhattarai who was supposed to upkeep the holy site. Instead, she leased the prime real estate to

Marin Thakur International which sublet it to vendors.

After widespread public protests in 2019, then Deputy Mayor Hari Prabha Khadgi padlocked the gates and announced that the city would take charge of the upkeep and cleanliness of the religious site.

Urban Planner and Former VC of National Planning Commission Jagadish C Pokharel says adding underground parking will not ease congestion in Kathmandu’s core.

“Underground parking is not a

good idea in Kathmandu. We must keep in mind the soil condition and seismic aspects, and also how it will impact the water table,” says Pokharel.

Concentrated parking there will affect the traffic in the surrounding roads, and it will need other infrastructure to ease traffic flow in and out.

“The wiser route to go”, says Pokharel “is to decentralise traffic and study pocket parking areas above-ground with earthquake resistant technology.” 🇳🇵



Illegal construction in Khula Manch as seen in this photo from May 2020.

ALL PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

back to the people



Fragments of Tundikhel

The first mention of Tundikhel was in a 1709 scripture engraved at Taleju Bhawani temple by Queen Bhuwan Laxmi. This was during the Malla period, when Tinkhyo (Tundikhel) was a vast open space set aside by Kathmandu's rulers for social and cultural events.

The Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desderi who visited Kathmandu in 1721 in his chronicles mentions a two- mile long plain. In the 1850s, Henry Ambrose Oldfield, the British resident surgeon in

Kathmandu, wrote in his book *Sketches of Nepal* that Tundikhel originally stretched from where the Dasarath Rangashala is today to Rani Pokhari in the north. He estimated that it measured 2-3 miles in length and 300 yards in width.

Over the centuries, rulers as far back as Pratap Malla divided it up for their own convenience. Today only 15% of the space is open to the public.

In 1671, King Pratap Malla constructed Rani Pokhari on the northern part of Tundikhel. In the 1800s and early 1900s, the Rana Regime used Tundikhel mostly for military parades and the pronouncements of edicts.

When Bhimsen Thapa built a palace for himself in Lagan Tole south-west of Tundikhel, it brought the army even closer to Tundikhel.

Barracks were constructed, and a canon foundry went up on the south-western side.

Before Jang Bahadur, it used to be Chhauni where military drills were held. Once he returned from England, he turned Tundikhel into a parade ground for the Nepali army. There were two trees that stood at the centre of Tundikhel for many years, and one of them was a *Chakala sima* (खरी बोट in Nepali) around which a marble platform was later built. The other tree was called *Yaka sima*, the lone tree. Both are now gone.

Major proclamations were made by the Rana rulers from the *Chakala sima* platform. In 1885, Bir Shamsher proclaimed himself prime minister from there, and in 1924, Chandra Shamsher announced the emancipation of the slaves. In 1945, the end of World War II in which 20,000 Nepali soldiers fighting for the British Army were killed in action, was announced from the same place.

In 1956, the southern part of Tundikhel was turned into a stadium for sporting events to mark the coronation of King Mahendra. In 1960, Sahid Gate was constructed with a road dividing Tundikhel into two halves. The Nepal Army then built a permanent pavilion for parades, and this Panchayat era structure is still used and is fenced off from the public.

In 1962, Tundikhel was further fragmented to build Ratna Park dedicated to Queen Ratna, and in 1973, Khula Manch was added with an open-air theatre.

The demon of Tinkhya

Tundikhel is steeped in folklore in which demons and deities once inhabited its open spaces

One of the more popular stories about Tundikhel begin in the monastery in Itumbaha.

Keshchandra comes from an affluent family, but is addicted to gambling. Over time he fritteres away his possessions until he has no money even to buy food. He then goes to his sister's home in Bhagawan Bahal where she gives him food on a plate made of solid gold.

After eating the food, he gambles away the golden plate. A few days later he goes to his sister's house again. This time she serves him food on silverware. Keshchandra once again gambles it away.

The next time he goes to his sister, she serves him food on the floor. Humiliated and chastised, Keshchandra picks up the food in a piece of cloth and goes on a pilgrimage to Gosaikunda.



A few days into his journey, he becomes hungry and opens the cloth bundle. But the food is mouldy and he goes to sleep on an empty stomach. While Keshchandra is asleep, birds feast on the food. A voice comes from the heavens, ordering the birds to compensate Keshchandra for the food.

The birds offer him droppings which turn into gold flakes. The shrewd Keshchandra pleads with Gurumapa to help him take the gold home, calling the demon his *paju* (mother's brother).

After much persuasion Gurumapa agrees, but on one condition: Keshchandra must feed him. Keshchandra permits him to eat any child in Kathmandu who cries. The two make their way to Itumbaha, where Gurumapa lived on the top floor of the northern wing of the monastery complex.

Gurumapa proceeds to eat disobedient children, terrorising Kathmandu. Mothers would warn their children that if they were disobedient and cried, the Gurumapa would gobble them up.

Soon, the demon devours most of the children in the town. Keshchandra is not bothered, until one day his own son cries and Gurumapa eats him up as well.

Bereft with grief Keshchandra banishes Gurumapa to the open fields of Tinkhya, present day Tundikhel, in return for a feast of rice and buffalo meat.

It is said that Gurumapa lived under the *Yaka sima*, the lone tree in Tundikhel. And to this day, every year, in keeping with the deal made in Kathmandu's mythical past, a feast of rice and meat is laid out for him.

As told by Amrit Man Shakya, Keshchandrakrit Paarawat Mahavihar

EVENTS



Game night
Enjoy exciting games with great company at Hostel Nextdoor's game nights.
8 December, 5.30pm-9.30pm, Hostel Nextdoor, Kuponol

Jatra
Don't miss the Saat Gaule Jatra celebrated at Bishnu Devi temple this weekend. Learn more about the culture and traditions of the city.
3 December, Bishnu Devi Temple, Tinthana



The Tiger's Jaw
The documentary *Baghko Bangara* by Herne Katha will be screened at Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival.
8 December, National Assembly House, Exhibition Road

Deities of Nepal
The exhibition 'Deities of Nepal', is dedicated to NAC's former president, the late Satya Mohan Joshi, and shows installations of expressions of faith and spirituality from the Newa and Tharu communities.
28 November-11 December, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

DINING



Terrace Garden
Something Mexican this weekend? Head to Terrace Garden at Radisson Hotel. Try the hot and sweet mango tango, or the delicious enchilada. The warm service and good food will make hearts full.
Lazimpat (01) 4411818

MUSIC

Axix Band
Enjoy this Friday night with Axix Band and opening act by Jhilkey and the Company. Call for more details.
2 December, 6pm onwards, Club Fahrenheit, Thamel

Live music
Book tickets for a fun Friday with band When Chai Met Toast and an opening act by Pahlenlo Batti Muni. Buy tickets at Khalti.
10 December, 7pm onwards, Privé Nepal, Tahachal



A pinch of jazz
This one is for the jazz lovers: wonderful music with with delicious food at Hyatt Place.
2 December, 7pm onwards, Zing Sky Bar & Lounge, Hyatt Place, Soalteemod

Reggae vibes
Celebrate the end of the week with reggae beats and the delicious Jamaican barbeque chicken.
2 December, 7pm onwards, Pauline's Rooftop, Lazimpat (01) 4002711




Music Room
Looking to learn how to play the guitar or the tabla? Call Music Room by Jazzmandu for more details.
Bhatbhateni, Naxal, 9818856982

Lhakpa's Chulo
A variety of Continental and Nepali cuisine, all in one place at Lhakpa's Chulo. From the Swiss Rösti to the spinach and cheese momo, everything is delicious.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5542986



New Orleans Cafe
Sit by the Newa-style courtyard and enjoy Continental, Indian, Thai, and Nepali cuisine. Live music on Wednesdays and Fridays.
Thamel (01) 4700736

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View
Located at an altitude of 1600m, this hotel offers a picturesque vista of the snowy Annapurna mountain range and Phewa lake, topped with great accommodations and services.
Sarangkot, Pokhara (061) 506000

Kasara Resort
Looking for a luxurious, comfortable stay, cycling in lush natural setting and observing the wildlife at the heart of Chitwan National Park? Kasara has it covered.
Pathani, Chitwan National Park, Chitwan (1) 5909980



Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
Newari-style boutique hotel at the centre of the rich art, architecture and cultural landscape of Bhaktapur, with delicious food and service: Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur is just the place.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

Pataleban Vineyard Resort
Pataleban Resort is the perfect place to relax among the hills, hike and sip at wine made from their very own vineyard.
Chisapani (01) 4316377


Grand Norling Hotel
Retreat to the quiet, serene environment of Gokarna. A stay at the Grand Norling surrounded by the breathtaking Gauri Shankar mountain range, golf course, and amazing bird watching leaves one completely rejuvenated.
Gokarna (01) 4910193






Sam's One Tree Cafe
Sam's One Tree Cafe has mouth-watering appetizers and meals, and a perfect atmosphere that takes one to nature at the heart of the Kathmandu. Don't forget to try the sizzler.
Darbar Marg (01) 4222636

La Dolce Vita
Since 1986, La Dolce Vita has been the go-to place in Thamel for authentic Italian cuisine. A must-visit for a taste of that sweet Italian life.
Thamel (01) 4700612

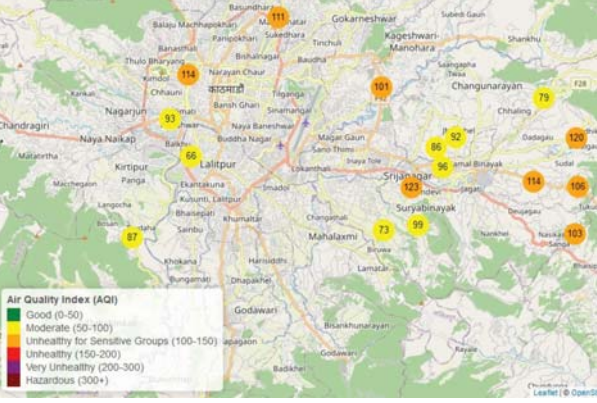
WEEKEND WEATHER



Colder and Colder
Winter has now truly set in with the minimum temperature in Kathmandu falling to 7°C on the higher outskirts. The maximum is also down to the low 20s. Because of the urban heat bubble, it will feel up to 2°C warmer in the city centre at night and afternoons. Part of the reason for this sudden drop is the thick smog over Kathmandu till mid-morning which blocks out the sun. There is also thick fog till noon along the Trisuli River, the Seti near Pokhara and western Chitwan and Nawalparasi.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 22° 7°	 22° 7°	 21° 6°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Satellite image on Thursday morning shows thick smog covering almost the entire Subcontinent. Suspended particles and toxic gases from open burning, vehicular and industrial emissions are trapped by the winter inversion layer on the surface. Some of this dirty air is sitting over the Nepal Tarai, and travelling up the Himalayan Valleys. Kathmandu's Air Quality Index could be worse, and there is some improvement towards afternoon due to wind action, as this Purple Air map on Thursday afternoon shows.

OUR PICK




Set in the international world of Western classical music, *Tár* centers on Lydia Tár, widely considered one of the greatest living composer-conductors and first-ever female music director of a major German orchestra Berlin Philharmonic. Both a superb character study and a highly persuasive piece of world building, the film follows Lydia as she works on her upcoming live recording of Mahler's 5th Symphony, relying on Francesca, her attentive personal assistant, and Sharon, her sickly wife and concertmaster. Things begin to gradually turn when she receives a copy of Vita Sackville-West's Challenge, sent by Krista Taylor, a former member of her fellowship program, who later dies by suicide leaving a note with serious allegations against Lydia. Critically lauded for its powerful performances, *Tár* is a brilliant study of the discordant side of fame-fuelled power, where everything one sees and hears matter. Stars Cate Blanchett, Noémie Merlant, Nina Hoss, Sophie Kauer, Julian Glover and Mark Strong.

दूषित पानीका कारण हुने रोगप्रति सजग रहौं

फोहोर पानीले झाडापखाला, हैजा, टाइफाइड, आउँ, जन्डिस जस्ता रोगहरू लाग्न सक्छन् ।

त्यसैले;

- खोला, धारा वा मूलको पानी सीधै नपिऔं ।
- पानी उमालेर वा शुद्धीकरण गरेर मात्र पिऔं ।
- पानीलाई पीयूष, अक्वाट्याब्स वा अन्य क्लोरिनजन्य कुराहरू हालेर शुद्धीकरण गरौं ।
- पिउने पानीलाई सफा भाँडामा छोपेर राखौं र सफा भाँडाले पानी झिक्ने गरौं ।




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Speaking the language of overseas work

A Nepali returnee from Korea finds a new future back home because of the Korean he learnt while working there

● **Raju Subedi**

I never intended to migrate overseas for work. But there was talk that families affected during the Maoist period would get a special labour quota in South Korea under its Employment Permit System (EPS). My father, who had been wounded during the conflict, encouraged me to prepare for the EPS Korean language test. And I did.

The special quota rumour turned out to be false, but my preparation did not go to waste. I passed my EPS language test for which I prepared at the travel company I worked for. Back then, there was just one language book to prepare from. I was familiar with using the internet because of our online bookings, but the concept of using the net to study was foreign to me. Soon in 2008, I was on a plane full of Nepalis in EPS hats and jackets heading out.

I was homesick and the job at a manufacturing company was physically taxing. It was a difficult first three months. Perhaps if I had grown up in Kaskikot, the village where I was born, I would have been more accustomed to physical labour. But my parents had moved to Pokhara when I was very young, and the only work I had done was a desk job at the travel company.

Sometimes, my hands hurt so much when I woke up after 12 hours of work the day before that I had difficulty even opening the door. My back also started to hurt, and it was clear that the job was not for me. So, I asked my employer to give me a release letter so I could move to another job. It took a while, but he agreed reluctantly.

I ended up switching jobs multiple times. One of them was piling up cartons at another company. I thought that was also too taxing, only to realise that the next job at a car parts company was even harder. The company was prohibited by immigration rules from renewing the visas of foreign workers even though they liked my work as they had just let go of two local employees. A migrant worker support group stepped in and decided to sue the company and the government on my behalf.

I had three options: to return to Nepal, to stay on illegally, or to fight a legal battle. The last one



PHOTOS: RAJU SUBEDI

made the most sense. The court case bought me time to legally stay in South Korea while the case was pending. But I did not have a work permit so I had to work illegally.

An irregular status makes you vulnerable and easier to discriminate against whether in pay or just how a worker is treated overall by employers and fellow-workers. The court's verdict finally made the company pay me a month's basic salary as compensation, but my visa was not renewed. I subsequently applied for refugee status which was also eventually declined. I did not bother to appeal the decision, and after seven years in Korea I came home for good.

The bright side of the legal battle was that it forced me to learn Korean. Earlier I had learnt Korean just to pass an exam, and by the time I had got the job it had been two years and I had forgotten most of what I had learnt. My colleagues were from Nepal and other Asian countries which meant I did not have to speak Korean much.

It was only when I quit my job and applied for a new one that I realised just how rusty my language skills were. I scrambled to find Nepali seniors who spoke the language fluently whenever I got a call about a potential employment



opportunity.

But in court, the desperation to express myself made me learn Korean more diligently, and watch Korean movies a couple of hours everyday. It was not formal training, but life experiences that drove

me to learn the language.

Fighting a legal battle in a foreign country is not easy. It was difficult to take time off from work because a worker's worth is measured solely by how much we produce. Then when my employers found out I was fighting a legal battle, they wanted to disassociate from me. They did not want to be found out hiring an irregular worker.

No matter how difficult it got for me in Korea, whether because I lost my jobs or struggled to find new employment, or the legal case which was an uphill battle, the thought of coming back to Nepal never crossed my mind even remotely. I had bought land in Nepal and was bent on staying on until I paid off my loans. Furthermore, if I did not make it in Korea, I was convinced that I would not be able to make it in life. I, too, wanted to be a Korean success story just like many other returnees I had met in Korea and Nepal.

I struggled a lot. We Nepalis referred to the glittery 'Korean



dream' as “दुई गुणा अन्तःडन्” — referring to the Rs200,000 monthly salary over a 58-month period, which was our target earnings. That kind of money would transform my life.

We did not realise that we may not always earn the promised Rs200,000 a month because overtime may not always be available to top up our basic salary. Or we may not be physically able to do physically demanding overtime work. Besides being difficult, routine and repetitive tasks day in and day out can also be mentally taxing. Since the time I was there, things have improved for foreign

workers in Korea and perhaps lessons from the experiences of EPS predecessors like us help make adjustments to the program.

The journey of my life was full of challenges. But I met the kindest Koreans. One taught me how to repair mobile phones, a skill that has come in very handy. Another hired me back even though I had quit after he found out I was struggling with the court case. I was offered shelter and legal support by strangers who just wanted to help migrants in distress like myself. Before I left Korea, my colleagues even raised money to spend on anything I wanted. There were moments and people who touched me deeply.

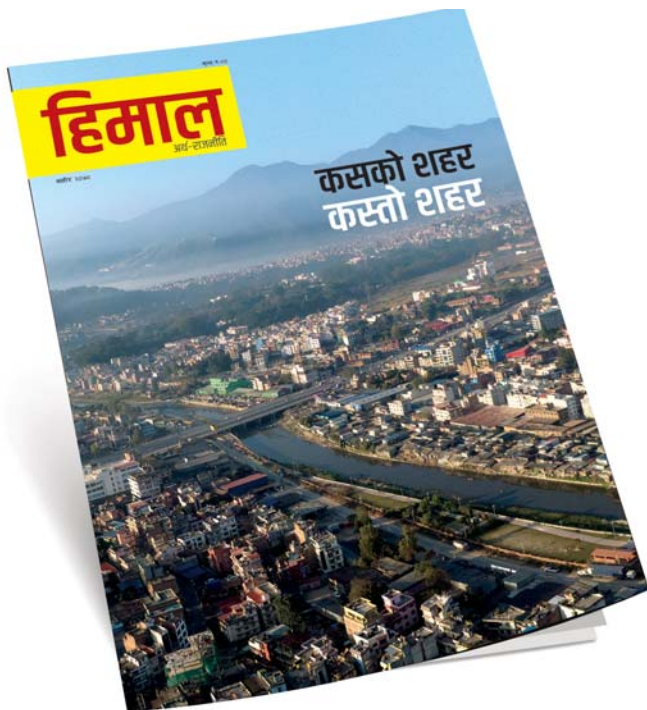
It turns out that my connection with Korea only grew stronger after I returned to Nepal in 2015. While I was still trying to decide what was next for me, a friend recommended me to his Korean client who wanted to go trekking in Nepal. At that time, I did not even know that many Koreans came to Nepal for trekking — and a majority of them hiked to Annapurna Base Camp. The client also ran a trekking outfit company in Korea and started recommending me to people.

I started organising treks for more and more Korean guests, and soon my Seoul Pokhara Travel and Tours became known in Korea as one of the best Nepali travel companies. I have employed four Nepali Korea returnees and two who have passed the Korean exam and are waiting to go to Korea for work.

My clients are entirely Korean, and the business was going quite well until the Covid-19 pandemic struck. But tourism has revived and on 12 September alone, for example, I was looking after 12 Korean trekking teams simultaneously. There are some other trekking agencies in Pokhara also catering to Korean clients. Soon, I plan to also start a Korean restaurant in Pokhara.

I may have learnt Korean out of desperation to tell my story in Korea, but it is serving me well today back home in Nepal. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with Diaspora Diaries in the subject line.



हिमालको मंसीर अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर

The past is foretold in Nepal

Although arithmetic shows the big parties dominate, Nepalis have sent them a clear message of dissatisfaction

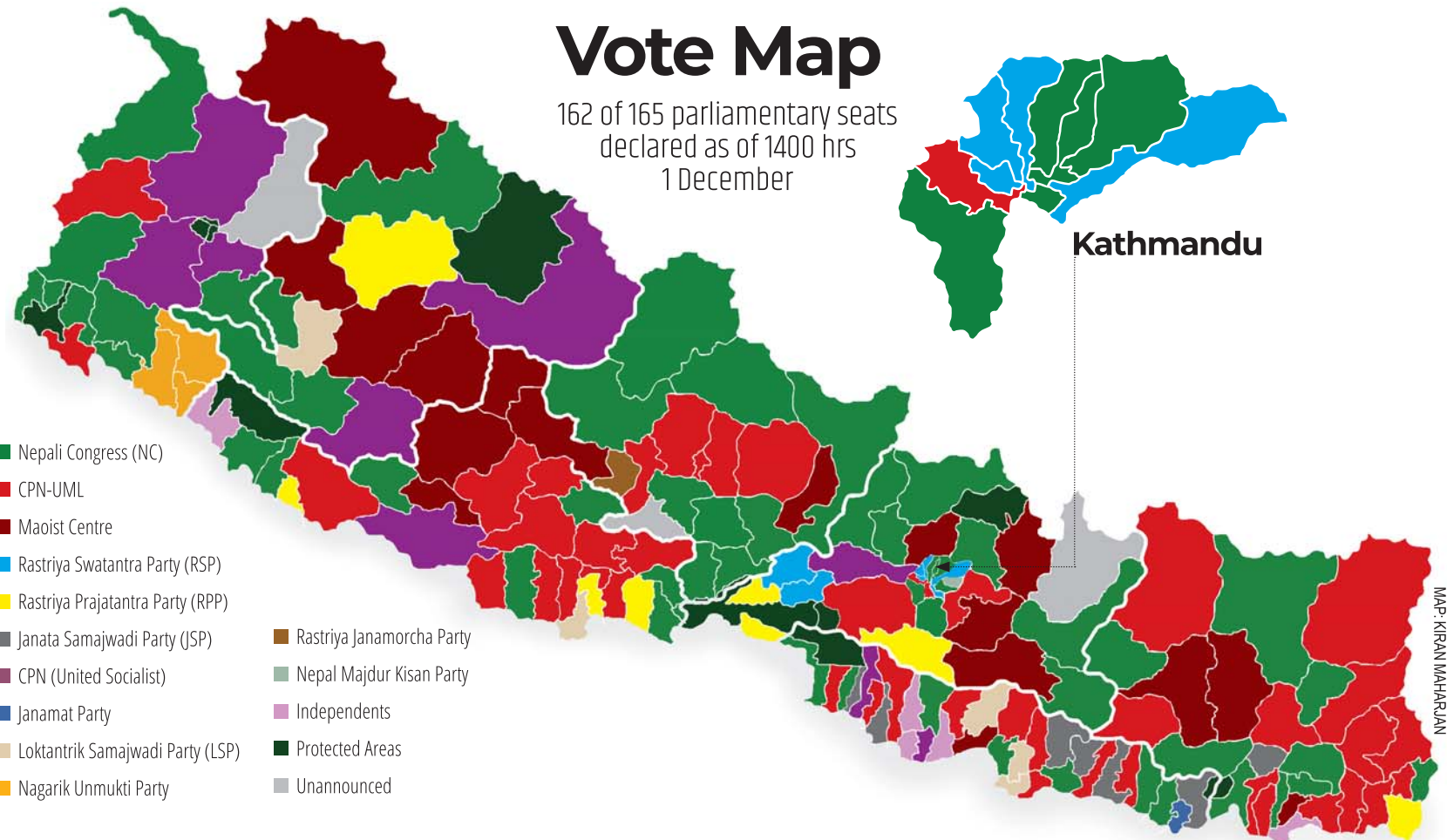
● Shristi Karki

Ten days after Nepal held parliamentary and provincial polls, the last of the election results are trickling in. With ballots in 162 out of 165 constituencies now counted, the NC leads in first past the post (FPTP) with 55 seats, the UML is second with 44, the Maoist Centre is a distant third with 17 seats, followed by Madhav Kumar Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialists) who have won 10 seats.

Meanwhile, the monarchist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), which won only one seat in 2017, has emerged with seven wins this time. The Madhes-based Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) — which formed an electoral alliance with the UML at the last minute — has won seven seats overall, while the LSP — which sided with the coalition — has four seats. (See graphics.)

Rabi Lamichhane's new Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has emerged with seven young MPs, while five independents have also bagged direct seats. Coalition partner Rastriya Janamorchha, former Madhes separatist CK Raut's Janamat Party, and Nepal Majdur Kisan Party have obtained one seat each. Nagarik Unmukti has won three seats in the western Tarai.

Nepal's two biggest political



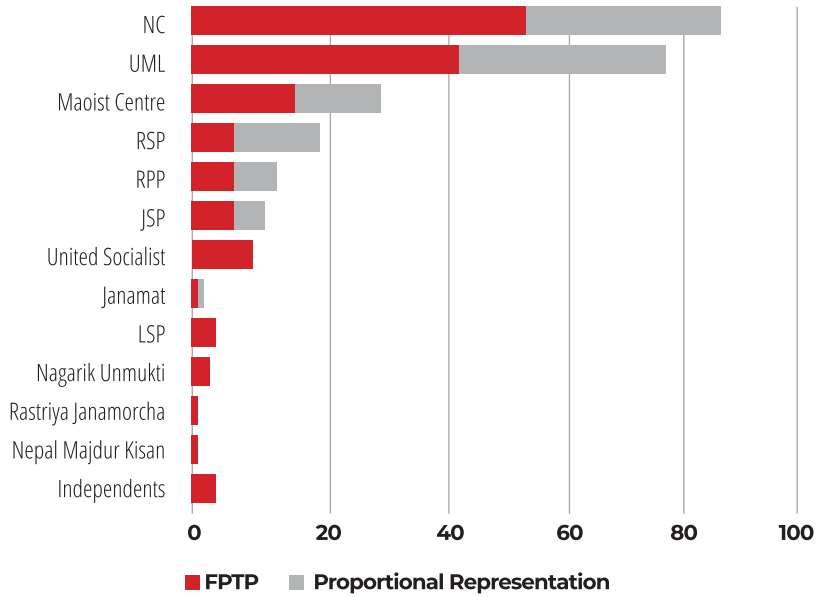
collectives, the five-party coalition led by the NC and opposition UML both fall short of the 138 out of 275 parliamentary seats they need for an outright majority.

While NC leads in the direct elections, the opposition UML is ahead in the proportional representation (PR) ballot count with more than 2.7 million of the over 10 million votes counted. The NC is in second place with more than 2.5 million popular votes, followed by the Maoists with over 1.1 million.

Although these numbers may look like the big parties are still in control, the electorate has sent a clear message by elevating the independent RSP as a national party in Parliament with over 1.1 million votes. With its seven change-minded MPs, the RSP will have clout in the federal Parliament — a remarkable feat considering the party was only

FINISH LINE

Party ranking with total FPTP and estimated PR seats as of 1400 hrs 1 December



formed six months ago.

Meanwhile, the JSP has more than 400,000 PR votes, and CK Raut's Janamat Party has obtained more than 370,000.

Madhav Nepal's Unified Socialists, which split from K P Oli's UML, has fared badly in the PR count, and is struggling to stay relevant with just under 3% of the threshold required to have PR members in the House.

It is clear from the results so far that neither the coalition, nor the UML-RPP-JSP alliance will have enough seats to form a majority on their own (page 1). This means they will have to explore partnerships with multiple fringe parties, making politics even more unstable. At the same time, individual parties also have to deal with internal power struggles between prime ministerial aspirants. 🇳🇵



SUMAN NEPALI

The Excluded

There were 225 women candidates standing for FPTP seats to the Federal Parliament. Only 25 of them got tickets by Nepal's mainstream parties: 11 from UML, seven from the Maoist Centre, five from NC, and only one each from the Rastriya Janamorchha and the Unified Socialists.

And with results in 162 out of 165 constituencies now in, only nine women have been directly elected to Parliament — four from the UML, two from the independent RSP, and one each from NC, Maoist Center and Nagarik Unmukti. Young lawyer Sobita Gautam and doctor Toshima Karki (pictured) were elected from Kathmandu-2 and Lalitpur-3 — both young RSP candidates who defeated established Maoist women Onsari Gharti Magar and Pampha Bhusal.

In 2017, 90 women were voted to Parliament: six women through direct ballots and 84 by popular votes. So far, Bidya Bhattarai, who was directly

elected after a 2019 by-election, is the only female leader to be re-elected even though four out of the other six women elected under the FPTP in 2017 were given tickets by their parties. Padma Kumari Aryal of the UML ran from Syangja-2, where the vote count is ongoing.

Nepal's top leadership has historically denied female leaders tickets to contest direct elections, preferring to fulfil the 33% Constitutional quota by nominating women through the PR list. Women who became MPs through PR proportional complain that they are seen by their directly elected male colleagues as underqualified and less deserving.

'Parties were reluctant to give tickets to women because they thought they would lose, yet youngsters like Sobita Gautam and Toshima Karki have proven that women win when they run for office,' noted former Election Commissioner Ila Sharma.

Meanwhile, Nepal's excluded communities have been pushed out further in this election. Both the mainstream parties and the independent RSP fielded few candidates from marginalised and Indigenous communities. Glaringly, no mainstream party fielded Dalit candidates for direct elections this time.

poll results



Rabi Lamichhane

Depending on Independents

Rabi Lamichhane and six other RSP candidates have won direct elections to become MPs. Five other individual independents have also won the election.

While having these fresh faces in the political arena is considered by many as positive, it remains to be seen how younger candidates will fare as kingmakers while they navigate coalition horse-trading in the coming days. Since neither the NC nor the UML will have enough seats to command a majority in the House, they will need support from the RPP, RSP, as well as independent candidates.

Looking for Partners

Even before final results are in, Nepal's top political leaders are in talks to switch partners and explore new alliances to find a majority in Parliament.

PM Deuba has met with Dahal and Madhav Nepal, Dahal and Oli have also sent feelers to each other. Before polls, Deuba and Dahal had agreed to rotate premierships, but that was before the poor showing by the Maoists.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal wants to continue his Maoists' alliance



Sher Bahadur Deuba



K P Oli



Pushpa Kamal Dahal



Rajendra Lingden

with NC to fulfil his ambition to be prime minister for a third time. But other leaders within his party see more advantage in a leftist alliance with the UML.

Deuba also faces challengers to a sixth tenure as premier from within his own party: Ram Chandra Poudel and Gagan Thapa think it is time for him to step aside. Thapa says he is now preparing for Parliamentary Party elections and is supported by other NC leaders like Bishwa Prakash Sharma and young turk Pradip Poudel, who defeated established UML leader Ishwar Pokhrel from Kathmandu.

A NC-Maoist-RPP partnership or an UML-RPP alliance with the RSP are possibilities. However, an NC-UML alliance happened in 2013 and is also possible.

Big Leaders, Small Parties

While the election has been advantageous for up and coming parties like the RSP and the newly revived RPP, Nepal's established leaders of smaller parties faced losses.

The Maoist Centre, which enjoyed an advantage during the May local election

through its alliance with the NC, has now shrunk from 36 parliament seats to 17.

Madhav Kumar Nepal's party cannot be sure if it will have enough PR votes to become a national party in Parliament. Chitra Bahadur KC of Rastriya Janamorchha has been elected but his party has negligible popular votes.

Kamal Thapa of the breakaway RPP-Nepal was defeated by RPP candidate Deepal Bahadur Singh in Makwanpur-1 even though he ran under the UML banner. His party has fared similarly poorly in the PR votes.

The LSP has already lost its national party status, although party leader Mahanta Thakur was elected. The JSP, meanwhile, will get PR seats, even though its leader Upendra Yadav was defeated by Janamat's CK Raut in his Tarai constituency.



Kamal Thapa



Madhav Kumar Nepal



Upendra Yadav



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While stationary, a right sidelight means I am illegally parked on a no-parking zone, but I'm pretending I'm not parked, just gone in for a takeout from Kalinchok Sekuwa Corner and Bar so I can snack while the driverless car drives itself.

**SIPRADI**