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South Asia

Social revolts and environmental issues in South Asia

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Since the 2022 popular uprising in Sri Lanka that ousted President Rajapaksa, South Asia has been swept by a wave of revolts that have toppled three governments and threaten most regimes.

Driven by young people (Generation Z), it mobilizes all those who are victims of degraded economic and environmental situations, growing social inequalities, water and electricity shortages, and the endemic corruption of the elites who monopolize power.

A brutal crackdown tries to keep the lid on popular anger but fails to contain the spread of the movement. After Indonesia, this year it is Nepal that is ablaze, literally and figuratively, since the main places of power have been set on fire.

The protests of governments are contagious: the Philippines, Pakistani Kashmir and Timor-Leste have been affected in recent weeks.

Beyond the particular contexts in which the uprisings appeared and unfolded, these countries (nearly 900 million people) share the same vulnerability to extreme weather events and are victims of the extractivist predation of Western and Chinese groups. The recent protests raise major ecological issues related to the exploitation of resources, corruption and the dispossession of common goods.

Major ecological issues

The environmental causes are numerous: massive floods in the Philippines, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers that disrupts hydrological systems. Temperatures sometimes exceed 50°C, reduce agricultural yields and promote desertification, as in Timor-Leste.

In the face of climate disasters, governments are pursuing growth policies based on the intensive exploitation of natural resources (mines, forests, hydrocarbons) and the development of infrastructure financed by foreign capital. Indonesia's rich biodiversity is threatened by the proliferation of mines, oil palm monoculture, and logging. In all these territories, mining projects lead to pollution, deforestation and land conflicts. They are often accompanied by population displacements.

These large-scale extractivist practices create wealth that only a minority enjoys. The rents from exploited resources are captured by military-bureaucratic elites who benefit from disproportionate privileges, rather than being used in public services or measures to adapt to new climatic conditions. Corruption often manifests itself in the massive embezzlement of public funds intended for flood protection and ecological reconstruction (which motivated the 100,000 demonstrators on 21 September in Manila).

A neocolonial system of predation and exploitation

The continuous deterioration of living and working conditions is the result of this system of neocolonial predation and exploitation, in which the local elites are complicit. The struggles of youth, workers or indigenous peoples for power-sharing and social justice are closely linked to demands for climate and environmental justice. They express its fundamental social dimension: the rejection of the exploitation of humans and nature. They reveal the crisis of an extractivist model based on the privatization of common goods and institutionalized corruption.`

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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