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Nepal

The Nepalese paroxysmal crisis and its regional context

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It only took a few days for the situation in Nepal to abruptly shift, leading to violent riots, before the resignation of the Oli government and the appointment of lawyer Sushila Karki as interim Prime Minister allowed a return to calm, with de facto power returning to the hands of the army. The explosion of the Nepalese powder keg was preceded and followed by popular movements of a scale rare in the region. Revolted by the arrogance of the oligarchies, they often have the fight against corruption as their banner.

The Nepalese crisis appears to be a distant replica of the social earthquake that had Indonesia at its epicentre. "Civil society" is very active in this country, using social media to stay informed about the actions undertaken in the immense archipelago (280 million inhabitants). At the end of August, parliamentarians danced after granting themselves a very substantial housing allowance. The video of this indecent spectacle went viral. It was the spark that ignited the anti-corruption movement in the capital, Jakarta.

The death of a motorcycle delivery driver, Affan Kurniawan, 21, who was hit by a police armoured vehicle, further boosted the protests, which spread to more than a hundred urban centres. Government buildings and the homes of some leading politicians bearing the responsibility for the policy of repression were set on fire. The revolt covered a wide range of issues, such as regional inequality, poverty, budget cuts in health and education, and the risk of militarization: President Prabowo Subianto is a general with a long history of repression who is currently granting new powers to the army. The repression has been severe: deaths, disappearances, numerous injuries, incarcerations... The regime has taken some temporizing measures in the face of popular anger, but it is currently hardening its stance and denouncing the protesters as "traitors to the nation."

In Nepal, it was the ban on social media, such as WhatsApp and Messenger, that sparked a widespread social explosion, fuelled by the spiral of repression and radicalization. Driven out by poverty and the lack of prospects for young people, a large number of Nepalese men and women (some 7.5 per cent of the population) have emigrated. These social media platforms are essential for keeping loved ones in touch and for ensuring that money sent by expatriates reaches families back home. Furthermore, many small and medium-sized businesses also depend on them. Their use is therefore vital for the population, a fact that the government could not fail to be aware of. To nip the nascent protest in the bud, the so-called security forces opened fire, killing at least 19 people (including schoolchildren walking to class in uniform). In two days, September 8 and 9, the country descended into paroxysmal violence. Many buildings were set ablaze, including hotels, and a minister's wife was burned to death. The presidential palace, residences of prominent figures, Parliament, and the Singha Palace were among the targets. Durbar (a complex where many government departments and most ministries operated), the Kathmandu High Court and the Supreme Court went up in flames (along with their archives, in a country where they have not been digitized). The army declared a curfew, imposing its control.

Nepal is no longer governed by royalty or a general, but by a coalition led by... communist parties. In 2006-2008, an uprising had put an end to the constitutional monarchy (the absolute monarchy had been overthrown in 1990), and then established a republic – and the royal palace was converted into a museum. After renouncing armed struggle, various communist parties, with Maoist references, succeeded one another in government, forming shifting coalitions, with or without the Congress Party. KP Oli, Prime Minister at the time of the riots, was thus labelled "communist" (he distinguished himself in 2020 by attempting to dissolve Parliament). Factionalism prevented the stabilization of a government. In the absence of a policy of radical reforms capable of keeping popular momentum alive, the ruling apparatus of the various Nepalese communist parties became integrated into the dominant oligarchy. A fairly classic co-optation process, justified in Nepal by a programme affirming the need for an alliance with the "national bourgeoisie." The political crisis became evident when the communist parties lost the municipal elections in

Kathmandu (the capital) in 2022, to an independent candidate, Balen Shah (a rapper and structural engineer turned politician).

Nepal has a population of some 30 million. It is known as a Himalayan state (it has eight of the ten highest mountains in the world), but part of the population resides in the Ganges Valley and has traditionally been neglected by the central government. It is a country of great complexity, multi-ethnic, polyglot (the official language is Nepali), multi-religious, multi-cultural, comprising many castes. It is backed by China and borders India. The Himalayan range is the scene of border tensions. Global warming and melting glaciers are creating temporary lakes that threaten to devastate the valleys, and water control is also becoming a major geopolitical issue here. The regime has attempted to negotiate a balance in its relations with its two large neighbours, China and India, without much success. The internal opposition, like the monarchists, may seek allies in South Asia. Hindu supremacists, linked to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, can claim to defend the Hindu populations of the lowlands, who are effectively discriminated against.

The appointment of lawyer Sushila Karki as interim Prime Minister has helped restore calm, even though the military maintains de facto power. She enjoys a reputation for honesty that dates back to her time as a member of the Supreme Court. However, regime crises are occurring in many countries in the region (and elsewhere in the world!): the overthrow of Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka in 2022, the overthrow of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh in 2024, a popular revolt this year in Indonesia, and a massive anti-corruption mobilization underway in the Philippines.

Solidarity and its difficulties

The events in Nepal were closely followed throughout the region. Progressive movements were quick to demonstrate their solidarity with the Nepalese youth and working classes. This was particularly the case with the NPA's sister organizations in Asia, which initiated calls to this effect [\[1\]](#). However, organizing this solidarity encountered several difficulties:

- The historical links woven in the past with the Nepalese progressive movements often concerned the communist parties and their trade union or peasant organizations, which, upon taking power, were unfortunately taken prisoners by it.
- The "figures" representing the youth mobilized against corruption, the so-called "Generation Z", were, by their own admission, completely overwhelmed during two days of riots, the scale and nature of the most extreme violence being unjustifiable. Here, unfortunately, we can still see the political and organizational weaknesses of "Gen Z" or Nepalese "civil society".
- Many unknowns remain regarding what happened on September 8 and 9. The "events" express above all the degree of socio-economic and democratic crisis that prevailed in the country. A revolt of this magnitude is not the product of a "foreign conspiracy." However, national (monarchists, etc.) and international (Hindu supremacists, state, etc.) actors could have fanned the flames.
- It seems that what is on the agenda is the general reconstitution of a political and social left, a process which, it seems to me, can only be long and in which the progressive forces of the region are best placed to help.

Nepal, however, is making its way onto our own international agenda: an issue to follow, hopefully for the better.

24 September 2025

Translated by **International Viewpoint**.

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[1] <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article76246>