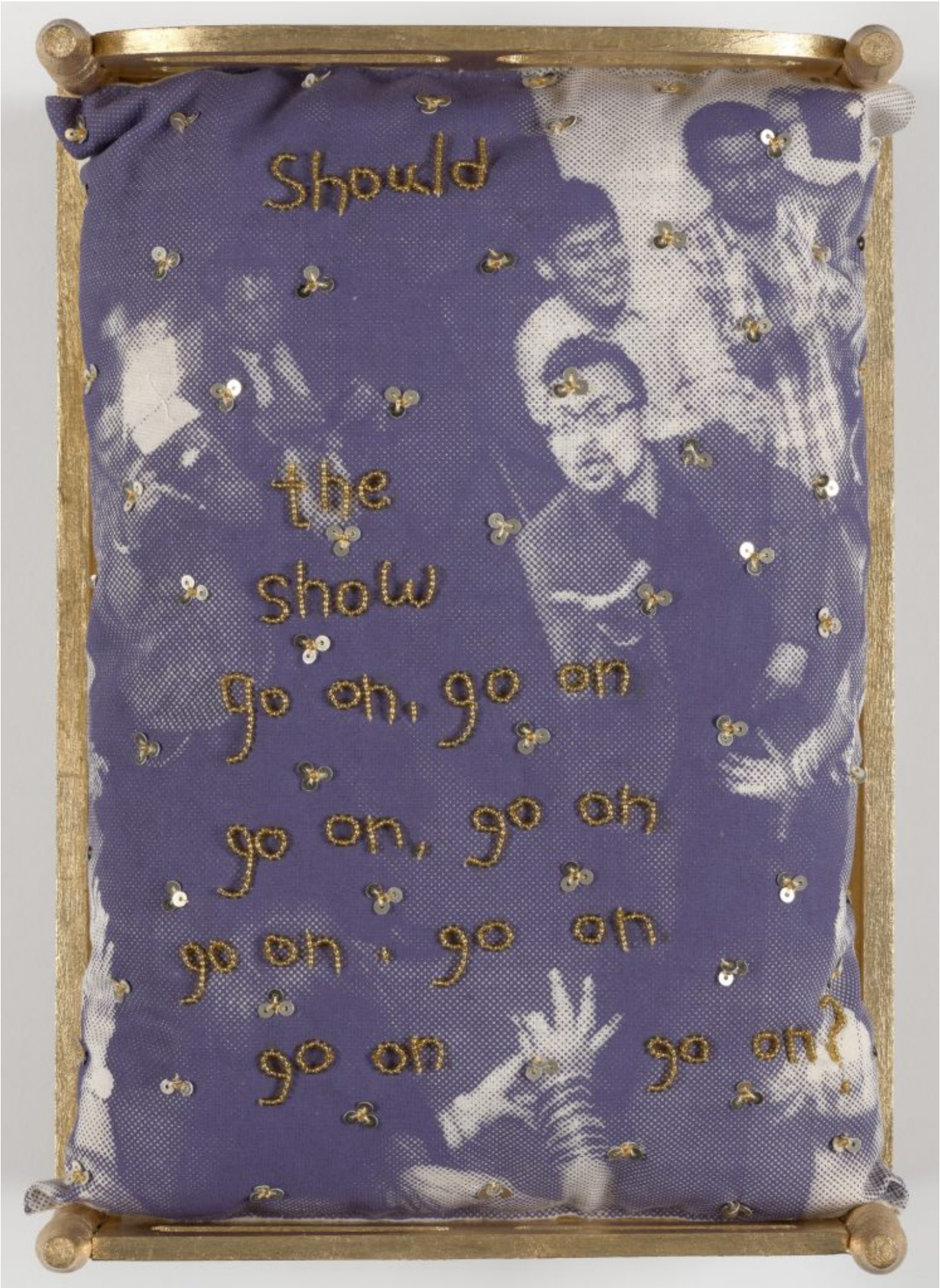


Tasks for the Nepali Left in the New Political Landscape

The Seventh Asia Newsletter (2026)



Sheelasha Rajbhandari (Nepal), *Agony of the New Bed*, 2023.

Dear friends,

In the first general elections held since the Gen Z **protests** rocked Nepali society, the four-year-old Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, won a two-thirds majority. The left parties, on the other hand, suffered a major defeat, with the former ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) or – CPN-UML – winning only 9 out of 165 seats in the House of Representatives. The Nepal Communist Party – a newly formed merger of over a dozen leftist parties – secured 7 seats. These major parties, which had held power before the Gen Z protests, could not even secure 10% of the total seats.

This defeat has ideological and political significance. From a leftist perspective, the defeat raises serious questions about the Nepali communist movement's ideological deviations, internal divisions, institutional weaknesses, and declined sense of responsibility towards the people. In this context, the post-election political landscape in Nepal and its external relations have created a new dimension. For Nepal, a landlocked nation spread across seven provinces from the Himalayas to the low-lying plains of the Terai, diplomatic acumen is a primary necessity right now.

This newsletter attempts to analyse the historical background of Nepal's leftist movement, the message of the March 2026 elections, and the tasks for the Nepali left in the new political landscape.



Jyoti Shrestha (Nepal), *Ji ta Newa Bhyaa Mawa*, 2025.

Nepal's Modern Political History

Through the lens of dialectical materialism, every change in Nepal's political history has been directed by the conflict over control of the means of production and social relations. The Anti-Rana movement of 1951, the People's Movements of 1979 and 1990, the People's War of 1996, and the Second People's Movement of 2006 freed Nepali society from the web of feudalism and brought about a federal democratic republic.

However, the journey towards socialism remained incomplete. A political complexity was manufactured regarding the practical implementation of the concept of a 'socialism-oriented' state outlined in the republican constitution. Leftist and democratic forces could not break free from this debate.

The communist movement in Nepal, which achieved significant and respectable results in elections across different eras, secured a historic success in the 2017 elections. The leftist alliance between CPN-UML and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) won 174 out of 275 seats in the House of Representatives, achieving nearly a two-thirds majority. At that time, the two major communist parties merged to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), and the country received a powerful communist-led government. Although the government had the people's mandate, the ruling party failed to implement Leninist organisational principles, and the government collapsed before the end of its five-year term due to the leadership's arrogance, ego, and unilateral style.

In the 2022 elections, those two parties suffered a major defeat. The centre-right Nepali Congress emerged as the largest party with 89 seats, while CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre were reduced to 78 and 32 seats, respectively. Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), a party split from CPN-UML, failed to become a national party, gaining just 10 seats.



Hitman Gurung (Nepal), *We are in war without enemies*, n.d.

Nepali society remained in a transitional phase characterised by comprador capitalism, a remittance-based economy, and an ambiguous relationship with the state. Leftist political leaders either failed to internalise or chose not to heed Lenin's maxim, 'Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement'. Consequently, Nepal's leftist parties could not escape the labyrinth of comprador capital.

Nepal's leftist forces were confused about whether to consider parliamentary practice as the ultimate goal or to use it as a means to build a society based on social justice and equality, moving towards the destination of socialism. For this, they were unwilling or unable to articulate clear positions on structural issues such as control over the means of production, the role of the state, and the development of a self-reliant economy. As a result, they suffered a shocking defeat in the March 2026 elections.

The results of the March 2026 elections signal the impulse, anger, and desire for change in the psychology of Nepali voters. The failure of traditional political forces to channel this impulse through the sieve of wisdom resulted in the newly emerged or engineered forces securing nearly a two-thirds majority in parliament. Leftist political forces must now understand that the people want results, not just slogans and promises.

The Gen Z Rupture

The role of young voters, especially the generation accustomed to digital technology, was decisive in this election. Social media was no longer just a medium for information; it became the primary arena for setting political agendas and shaping public opinion.

The ageing left leadership completely failed to realise that issues like employment, digital infrastructure, education reform, and climate change were priorities for young voters. Despite the populism sought in election manifestos, conscious citizens prioritised long-term economic planning and issues of national sovereignty.

As a result, young and urban voters embraced the RSP in the elections. The RSP converted anger against established parties into votes. The same wave that brought the communist parties victory in 2018 turned against them. This shows that the communist parties failed to win the hearts of the people, failed to keep the people's issues central, and lost dialogue with the masses.



Hitman Gurung (Nepal), *Untitled*, 2013.

Managing Geopolitical Complexities and Non-Alignment

Nepal is geographically situated between two giant neighbours – India and China. Moreover, it has also become strategically important for the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy. In such a situation, protecting

Nepal's neutrality and national interest is a major challenge.

Nepal must maintain balanced relations with both China and India while keeping its national interest at the centre. It needs to seek cooperation from neighbours for agricultural development, water resources, and connectivity without compromising on its sovereignty. For this, a transparent and nationally focused institutional mechanism is necessary in the selection, management, and implementation of projects like the controversial US-backed **Millennium Challenge Corporation**.

The Strategic Partnership Program, a military engagement programme between the US and Nepal, must not be accepted under any circumstances. It is imperative to strengthen Nepal's negotiating capacity regarding the open border with India, the Lipulekh issue (a territorial dispute between Nepal and India over a strategic Himalayan pass near the border with China), water resource agreements, and energy trade.

Nepal, as a non-aligned nation, needs to have a clear stance on issues such as Venezuela's struggle against imperialist intervention and the right to self-determination for Palestine. This will not only enhance Nepal's moral standing on the world stage but also support its effective presence in multilateral forums like the United Nations.

However, diplomatic acumen to balance such stances with bilateral relations is equally important. In the past, Nepal's vote in favour of Ukraine at the United Nations and the Nepali government's decision not to issue visas on arrival to Iranian citizens were not in line with the non-aligned foreign policy.

Advancing Federalism and Local Government

The successful implementation of federalism envisioned by the constitution is key to Nepal's balanced development. However, the centralised mindset, confusion in resource allocation, and lack of capacity building have raised questions about federalism itself. Local governments need to be strengthened and made self-reliant.

Economic self-reliance, agricultural modernisation, maximum utilisation of local resources, and institutional development of cooperatives are economic foundations for local government. From a leftist perspective, the concept of cooperatives and collective farming should be promoted from the local level. This is possible only if land management, easy access to agricultural loans, support prices for agricultural produce, and proportional access to the market are guaranteed. This will simultaneously end unemployment and make the country self-sufficient in food. The framework of accountability must be clear. This structural aspect is most important for the success of federalism.

Democratic and Sovereign use of Technology

In the digital age, the use of technology is indispensable to counter algorithmic propaganda and bring grassroots voices into the mainstream. The influence of social media seen in election campaigns must now be used for soliciting feedback for policy formulation and promoting public awareness.

However, mere use of technology is not enough for this. Establishing digital infrastructure as a public service, public ownership of media and data, and effective implementation of the right to information must be a mandatory agenda for leftist politics.

In addition, an important issue that Nepali leftists must raise is national data security. As the current government prioritises digital operations, there is a need for a vigilant campaigning and oversight regarding what the national strategy and capacity for digital security are.



Asha Dangol (Nepal), *Where is my village?*, 2015.

The Way Forward

Nepal stands at a decisive juncture. For the left, there is no alternative to respecting the democratic mandate given by the 2026 elections. Political parties must now focus on economic prosperity and social justice. However, the arrest of former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and former Minister of Home Affairs Ramesh

Lekhak raises concerns about the new government's political vendetta against the left.

Yet it is important to note that arrogance and conceit have brought Nepal to this point. A policy of consensus and cooperation on national issues must be adopted. For this, the left must focus its agenda on the following priorities:

1. **The economic agenda.** Breaking the cycle of comprador capitalism, developing national capital, increasing investment in the productive sector, and transforming the remittance-based economy into a production-based economy.
2. **The diplomatic stance.** Firmly adhering to the policy of 'friendship with all, enmity with none' without joining any military bloc. However, to put this policy into practice, the development of institutional diplomatic capacity, negotiation skills, and a clear definition of national interest are necessary.
3. **Centring youth leadership.** A new political direction must be determined by combining the energy of the youth with the experience of the old. There must be a clear institutional process for generational transition within political parties, a framework for youth participation in policy-making, and appropriate leadership development programmes for this task.
4. **Ideological clarity.** Parliamentary practice must not be seen as the final goal but as a tool for building a society based on social justice and equality. For this, the capacity to conduct fact-based analysis through theoretical study and connect it with the basic needs of the people must be developed.

Instead of merely copying Marxism, it is necessary to develop and implement it in the Nepali context by conducting a 'concrete analysis of the concrete situation'. For this, there is a need to build a theoretical and ideological foundation based on the current class structure of Nepali society, the form of the state, the nature of global capitalism, and Nepali specificity.

Nepal's journey towards socialism is difficult, but not impossible. The destination can be reached through clarity of thought and strengthening organisation.

Warmly,

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Disclaimer: The views expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect the views of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.