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Centre for Social Innovation  
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ECONOMY  
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SOCIAL INCLUSION  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
DOMESTIC POLITICS

**MONTHLY  
NEWSLETTER**  
DECEMBER 2024

**Centre for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy**  
**Kumaripati, Lalitpur**



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## A. International Relations and Foreign Affairs

### News Brief

On December 4, 2024, Nepal and China [signed the framework](#) for BRI cooperation during PM Oli's visit to China. In the intense last-minute negotiation, the two sides eventually agreed to include "aid financing modalities" despite Nepali Congress (NC)'s preference for only grants under BRI. PM Oli's economic advisor Yuvaraj Khatiwada, who was a member of the taskforce to draft the framework, maintained that [Nepal cannot say](#) it will not take loan from one particular country.

While Bishnu Rijal, PM Oli's chief political advisor, [claimed that](#) "China signed the agreements on our terms," the BRI framework [attracted criticism](#) from within the coalition, particularly NC leaders, for failing to uphold the party's position of no grant under BRI. Some even highlighted the challenges in the initiative's implementation due to geopolitical factors.

During PM Oli's visit, Nepal and China signed [multiple other agreements](#), including the "Development plan for year 2025-2029" between Nepal's Ministry of Finance and CIDCA, the details of which have been kept secret.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu [visited Nepal as a part of his south Asia tour](#) and [met several top Nepali leaders](#), including Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal; Lu was unable to meet PM Oli, however, as the latter was in Jhapa for an event.

During her long Europe visit, Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba met her counterparts and leaders from several countries; she also [delivered a statement](#) at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s public hearings on the "Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change."

After returning from China, PM Oli publicly reiterated his [eagerness to visit India](#), but the failure of foreign minister Deuba and CPN-UML leader Pradeep Gyawali [to secure a date for Oli's India visit](#) has made Oli [visibly irritated](#)—stating "it is unnecessary to discuss India visit."

On December 8, 2024, the Indian Embassy in Nepal organized the second [India-Nepal Cultural Festival](#) in Lumbini—under a collaboration with the Lumbini Development Trust and the Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU). The LBU later signed a collaboration agreement with the Beijing Language and Culture University in the presence of PM Oli; the [agreement aims to](#) "collaborate on cultural exchange, language teaching, and research initiatives," which includes establishing a Nepal Institute of China in Beijing and a China Institute of Nepal in Lumbini.

### News Analysis

The most prominent development in Nepal's international relations as the year 2024 wrapped up was the breakthrough in China's BRI in Nepal, which had stalled for over seven years since its initial MoU was signed in 2017. Although a political consensus between the coalition partners, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, paved the way for the agreement, China's reservation on Nepal's preference for "grant" only led the two parties to settle for "aid financing modalities" for BRI projects. This means that the implementation of the 10 infrastructure projects included in the framework agreement will proceed with a project-wise negotiation and may involve either grant or concessional loan. While uncertainties surrounding the large infrastructure projects'

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implementation persist—largely due to impending negotiations about their funding modalities and other geopolitical factors—China’s strategic gains in Nepal have continued to pile up; PM Oli’s visit and the subsequent joint statement is a clear example of this.

Ever since the establishment of the diplomatic ties with China, Nepal has firmly supported “One China Policy,” which was even elevated to “One China Principle” during PM Dahal’s China visit in 2023. However, during PM Oli’s visit, Nepal’s commitment to these core issues of China’s national interest was further elevated, through [a firmer language](#) on two particular instances. First, it mentions that “Nepal firmly supports China’s efforts to achieve its national reunification.” While opposing “Taiwan’s independence” had long been Nepal’s official stance, it had never explicitly extended a “firm” support to China on its reunification efforts, which may include more coercive and violent approaches in the future. For a geopolitically sensitive Nepal that has historically adopted a non-alignment principle, this shift is likely to complicate Nepal’s geopolitical standing and strategic maneuvers in the future. Another, and a comparatively less explicit, strategic concession in the statement is through the choice of “Xizang” over “Tibet.” This seemingly insignificant shift may be interpreted as Nepal’s admission of China’s unilateralism on Tibet issues, which reduces Tibet’s and Tibetans’ agency. Given Nepal’s long land border with the Chinese province and the presence of a sizable number of Tibetan refugees on its land, the shift offers another good example of how China’s growing influence in Nepal has succeeded in expanding its strategic space in Nepal. More recently, rumors of Panchen Lama’s planned visit to Lumbini to attend the “2024 Nanhai Buddhism Round Table” circulated in Nepali media, and after much speculation, the MoFA had to step in to clarify that [Nepal would not entertain such a scenario](#).

The contents and tone of the joint statement issued after PM Oli’s China visit demonstrates China’s effort to gradually bring Nepal under its broader strategic umbrella, by integrating it in its global initiatives, either explicitly like in the case of BRI and the Global Development Initiative (GDI) or implicitly in Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI). Notably, China “welcomes Nepal’s participation in the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative” in the joint statement, a new development since PM Dahal’s 2023 visit, when Nepal had [committed to “consider”](#) joining the group. Similarly, the [eighth point in the 2024 joint statement](#) essentially promotes a number of initiatives and exchanges under its GCI framework, without explicitly mentioning it. Furthermore, a consistent priority to strengthen cooperation in the area of law enforcement indicates China’s active interest to bring Nepal under the GSI.

The joint statement issued after PM Oli’s visit to China must serve as the latest reminder of China’s growing strategic footprint in Nepal, especially after Xi Jinping’s “historic” visit to Nepal in 2019 that elevated the Nepal-China relation to a “[strategic partnership](#).” Nepali leaders seem to either fail to identify this shift or truly understand its long-term consequences. Nevertheless, a failure to acknowledge this evolution in the Nepal-China bilateral ties erodes Nepal’s strategic neutrality, especially with little to gain from the strategic opportunity. Some may argue that the joint statement is not binding or that analysing it from China’s point of view takes away Nepal’s agency, but it is safe to say that Nepali leaders’ priorities from such high-level visits are often limited to personal and political gains for themselves. How else would they agree to blanket statements such as “[the China-Nepal border has long been demarcated](#)”?

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## B. Domestic Politics and Governance

### News Brief

#### **BRI framework made public**

The framework for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) between Nepal and China [was made public](#) on December 10. The framework was signed during Oli's China visit on December 4. The purpose of the BRI framework was to create a formal structure for further negotiations on the projects.

#### **Bhim Rawal ousted from CPN-UML**

The CPN(UML) has expelled Bhim Rawal, [ending his four-decade](#) long association with the party. The party's deputy general secretary Pradeep Gyawali reiterated the party's decision, and stated that Rawal's actions and statements were against the party's interests.

#### **President Paudel issues ordinance on cooperatives**

To amend some laws related to cooperatives, President Ram Chandra Paudel [issued an ordinance](#) on December 29. The ordinance was made according to clause(1) of Article 114 of the constitution, with the recommendation of the Council of Ministers.

#### **Janamat Party lawmaker Sapkota accused of paying large amount to secure position**

Goma Labh Sapkota, proportional representation speaker for the House of Representatives from [Janamat Party](#) has been accused of paying Rs 1.1 million to the party to secure her position. She has denied the allegations, claiming she became a lawmaker by her work and contributions.

### News Analysis

#### *Disagreements over the BRI framework between Nepali Congress and CPN(UML)*

The two leading parties in the coalition—the Nepali Congress and the CPN(UML) have separate viewpoints on the recently agreed [BRI framework](#). The Nepali Congress has fixed its stance that Nepal should not be accepting any loans to fund BRI projects. The CPN(UML) chair and PM KP Sharma Oli has, however, stated that the BRI funding could be either loans, grants or a joint investment.

Different leaders of both the parties have been giving contrasting statements on the issue. Some say that the disagreement won't affect their cooperation, while some from the Nepali Congress strongly oppose the idea. The term “technical support and aid financing modality” has created a stir among the leaders of Nepali Congress, creating friction on why the UML leader agreed on such a term when the official decision was against taking loans. One of the leaders of Nepali Congress, Shekhar Koirala has even stated [that the party](#) is unintentionally aligning with Oli's foreign policy, which risks the ideological direction of the Nepali Congress.

The disagreement between the Nepali Congress (NC) and the CPN(UML) over the BRI framework reflects deeper ideological and strategic differences within the coalition government. While Nepali Congress has firmly opposed accepting loans for BRI projects, citing economic prudence, the CPN(UML), led by PM KP Sharma Oli, has taken a more flexible stance, allowing for loans, grants, or joint investments. This divergence has led to contrasting public statements, raising concerns about coherence in Nepal's foreign policy. This friction could test the coalition's stability, as conflicting narratives risk undermining trust and

the broader direction of Nepal's engagement with the BRI.

Additionally, the mixed messaging on the BRI framework could undermine Nepal's credibility in negotiations with China and other international partners. Increased disagreements and contrasting statements only undermine Nepal's image on the international stage. Overall, the parties and leaders are in need to establish a balanced stance on domestic politics and foreign policies, to improve their positions at international platforms.



## C. Federalism

### News Brief

#### Development Partnership Between Karnali and Lumbini Provinces

Karnali and Lumbini Provinces have signed a [19-point agreement](#) to enhance development and improve livelihoods. The collaboration includes road connectivity, tourism, market access, and equitable revenue distribution initiatives. Notably, the provinces will focus on infrastructure development, creating a joint tourism route, and expanding market access for regional products, demonstrating a commitment to shared progress.

#### Local Governments Press Prime Minister for Action

In a [December 27, 2024 meeting](#), representatives from Nepal's local governments presented a memorandum to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, urging him to address unresolved commitments from the National Coordination Council. Their demands included expedited action on grants, coordination in legislative matters, and land management rights. The memorandum also highlighted concerns about the revenue-sharing model and reductions in equalization grants under the previous administration. Additionally, the representatives stressed the importance of annual council meetings to strengthen the federal system.

#### National Assembly Discusses Federalism and Governance

National Assembly leaders and lawmakers convened in Kathmandu to deliberate on strategies to strengthen Nepal's federal system. The conference, titled "**Federalism, National Assembly and the Tasks Ahead**," focused on improving governance delivery and promoting social justice. National [Assembly Chairman Narayan Prasad Dahal](#) acknowledged existing gaps in federal governance and reiterated the upper house's pivotal role in enhancing provincial and local governance. Contributions from experts enriched the discussion, emphasizing actionable reforms for the system's improvement.

#### Sudurpaschim Mayor Forum Aims to Enhance Regional Cooperation

Parshuram Municipality in Dadeldhura hosted the inaugural [First Sudurpaschim Municipality Mayor Forum 2081](#) on December 30 and 31. The forum brought together mayors and chairpersons from Sudurpaschim Province municipalities to discuss "**Opportunities and Challenges in Sudurpaschim Province**." The two-day event focused on fostering collaboration among local leaders, addressing development issues, and amplifying local government voices at the national and provincial levels, setting the stage for long-term regional cooperation.

#### Mixed Results in Local By-Elections

Nepal's local-level by-elections, held on [December 1, 2024](#), featured 376 candidates competing for 41 vacant positions. Major political parties, including the Nepali Congress, Maoist Center, and CPN-UML, secured most of the seats. The results reflected a mixed political landscape, with key parties maintaining a balanced influence in local governance.

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## News Analysis

### **Centralized Mindset in Nepal's Bureaucracy and Its Impact on Provincial and Municipal Performance**

Nepal's transition to a federal system of governance, aimed at decentralizing power and enhancing administrative efficiency, has faced significant challenges due to the centralized mindset deeply embedded in its bureaucracy. This mentality has hindered the performance of provincial and municipal governments, especially in filling senior administrative positions crucial for effective governance.

Even as the country adopts a decentralized administrative framework, this mindset remains entrenched across all levels, from politics to bureaucracy. For instance, despite efforts to decentralize, including the government employment adjustment program launched in 2019 to address staffing shortages in newly established provinces and local levels, the initiative largely failed to achieve its objectives. Most government employees preferred to remain at the federal level, exacerbating the problem rather than resolving it. While workforce shortage is widespread across all subnational levels, the issue is most pronounced in posts where federal appointments are required. For example, the federal government appoints chief secretaries and secretaries to provincial governments, as well as joint secretaries to serve as chief administrative officers in metropolitan and sub-metropolitan cities. However, many of these senior officials resist working at subnational levels despite their appointments.

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## D. Economy and Development

### News Brief

- The government will offer [subsidized loans](#) of up to Rs2.5 million at 3% interest to startups from March 2024. IEDI received 5,158 applications, with shortlists due in January. Rs1 billion has been allocated for this fiscal year. Selected startups must adhere to strict repayment and reporting requirements.
- Nepal's [new policy aims to boost micro, cottage, and small enterprises \(MCSEs\)](#), which contribute 22% to GDP and employ 2.74 million. It focuses on improving infrastructure, access to finance, skilled manpower, and exports while addressing challenges like high costs and weak coordination. Effective implementation remains critical.
- Yak trade, once vital for Nepal's highland economy, remains stalled due to Tibet's restrictions, exacerbated by lumpy skin disease fears. [Farmers face economic strain](#), with 8,000 yaks in Taplejung losing market value. Despite reopened borders, Beijing's reluctance to resume trade hinders livelihoods, turning yaks from assets to burdens in Nepal's trans-Himalayan regions.
- The liquidation of [Smart Telecom has exposed](#) deep regulatory and managerial flaws in Nepal's telecommunications sector. Homeowners with Smart towers face severe financial burdens, including unpaid electricity bills, while 2.4 million users remain stranded. A lack of coordination and delayed asset management by government bodies worsens the crisis, highlighting systemic inefficiencies.
- [Hetauda Cement Industry's prolonged shutdown since October 15](#) has deepened its financial crisis. Administrative costs, salaries, and fuel expenses persist despite halted production. Efforts to resume operations hinge on equipment repairs requiring Indian technicians, though raw materials remain sufficient, reflecting systemic inefficiencies in Nepal's state-owned enterprises.
- [Nepal diversifies tea exports as China eases import regulations](#), offering an alternative market amid India's trade restrictions and pricing issues. Orthodox tea's growing demand highlights opportunities for market expansion and challenges India's monopoly, signaling a shift in Nepal's tea trade dynamics.
- The key NEPSE trends over december's weeks. [December 13, 2024](#), the index fell to **2,682.29**, down **52.64 points (-1.92%)**, with losses in Manufacturing, Banking, and Life Insurance sectors. The need for structural reforms remains crucial to stabilize the market. [December 20, 2024](#), the NEPSE index dropped to **2,596.82**, down **85.47 points (-3.19%)**, reflecting bearish sentiment driven by macroeconomic pressures like inflation and remittance uncertainty. Major sectors—Microfinance, Banking, and Trading—saw significant losses, particularly Microfinance. By [December 27, 2024](#), the index rose to **2,630.71**, up **33.89 points (+1.31%)**, due to optimism in Hydropower and Banking, despite challenges in smaller banks.

### News Analysis

#### Persistent Disconnect between Rhetoric and Action

Bishnu Prasad Paudel's third term as Finance Minister reveals a troubling pattern of contradictions between rhetoric and action. His first term (2015) relied on short-term fixes during Nepal's crises, while his second term (2020) saw populist responses like soft loans, which worsened inflation and liquidity issues. This raises doubts about his ability to implement effective, sustainable reforms. In both terms, Paudel failed to deliver sustainable economic solutions, despite repeated claims of progress. In 2020, during his [second tenure](#), Paudel assured the public that "the economy is on the brink of crisis, and the government has to work to bring it back on track," promising to consult experts and explore solutions. However, his track record belied these

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assurances, as the economy continued to deteriorate due to mismanagement of fiscal policies and an inability to address structural weaknesses in the banking sector. The clearest example of this contradiction lies in his handling of Nepal's banking sector. During his previous terms, significant funds were channeled into speculative sectors like real estate and the stock market, rather than productive investments. As noted, the banking system is facing a massive shortage of liquidity, with CDR at 78.58% (Dec 2024), rising NPAs (NPR 37.7B mid-2024), and rising defaults (NPL ratio 4.42%). Excess liquidity goes unused due to declining lending and a stagnant real estate market, exacerbating financial instability. The interest rate has doubled in a year as a liquidity crisis is still haunting the financial sector. Despite clear indicators of a failing banking system, Paudel did little to implement meaningful reforms that would address the underlying structural problems.

Paudel's tenure has seen repeated failures in fiscal discipline. In 2016, he increased the budget by 28%, and in 2021 by 12%, citing the need for infrastructure spending and social security measures. Yet, both budgets had to be revised due to the government's inability to meet revenue targets. As highlighted in the opinion, "his decision to increase the budget during both his terms, often citing the need for populist measures such as infrastructure spending and social security increases, has repeatedly resulted in budgetary revisions." This approach underscores a pattern of fiscal imprudence, despite repeated calls from stakeholders for fiscal restraint.

In his recent remarks at the [UNESCAP consultation in December 2024](#), Paudel acknowledged the pressing need for sustainable expenditure management and efficient resource allocation. He stated, "Budget planning, efficient resource allocation, and capacity building for effective project implementation remain significant obstacles," adding that "developing nations must focus on formulating specific revenue strategies and ensuring their effective implementation to improve mobilisation capacity." Yet, these statements directly contrast his previous actions. The same consultation also underscored that Paudel has failed to reform the very banking sector that underpins his economic strategies. Paudel's claims of an improving economy, supported by rising stock market indices, further highlight the inconsistencies in his policies. His tenure has seen the stock market perform relatively well, yet these gains reflect external factors rather than his direct policy interventions. In 2015, when he handled the ministry, "the share market index was just over 1,100 points, which crossed 1,800 points in 2016." Similarly, during his second stint, "the market crossed the 3000 points-mark," suggesting an unearned credit for stock market gains. The real indicators of Nepal's economic health—such as declining revenue collection, rising inflation, and a persistent liquidity crisis—paint a more troubling picture. As observed, "the recurrent expenditure of the government, in the first five months of the current fiscal year, has exceeded the total revenue collection." Paudel's claim of "economic recovery" rings hollow when we consider that revenue collection has plummeted by 20% in this fiscal year. Paudel's assurances at the UNESCAP forum, where he emphasized "internal revenue mobilisation" and "sustainable development strategies," suggest a commitment to addressing economic challenges. However, his track record demonstrates that these commitments have not translated into effective policies. His repeated failures in managing fiscal discipline, reforming the banking sector, and addressing revenue shortfalls suggest that his third term will be plagued by the same contradictions that have defined his previous stints as Finance Minister.

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## E. National Security and Climate Change

### News Brief

It has been confirmed that [Nepal has its third Mpox case](#). A 44-year-old migrant worker from Sindhuli who returned from Saudi Arabia was diagnosed with the disease. This is the second infection among Saudi returnees in the last 10 days, raising concerns over the disease spilling into communities. Health experts have warned that asymptomatic carriers can spread the virus unknowingly, and not all such cases may be identified by current screening measures at entry points. There is enhanced monitoring at airports and coordination with partners to prevent community outbreaks, but still calls for self-isolation and hygiene practices.

Despite the risks, many earthquake victims in Salyan have [returned to their damaged houses](#) to escape the severe winter cold. People are moving back from temporary shelters due to health issues caused by the cold and poor living conditions. Over 500 families have left these shelters in the past three weeks. The government hasn't had significant progress with its reconstruction efforts. Health officials report rising cases of cold-related illnesses among those victims. They have criticized insufficient shelter grants and lack of urgency in rebuilding efforts.

Nepali Army Chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel, during his official visit to India, was [conferred the Honourary Rank of General of the Indian Army](#) by Indian President Draupadi Murmu in a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan, symbolizing the deep bond between the two armies. He also held discussions with Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, reinforcing strategic defence ties and exploring avenues for collaboration. General Sigdel hosted a Reciprocal Lunch at the Nepal Embassy, fostering informal bilateral dialogue, and planted a sapling at Manekshaw Centre, symbolizing enduring relations. The visit reflects the commitment of both nations to peace, stability, and enhanced military cooperation.

Conflict victims and human rights defenders have urged the government and political parties to immediately [restart the process of appointing office bearers](#) for Nepal's transitional justice commissions. They emphasized that further delays in forming a recommendation committee would only complicate the process and deepen victim dissatisfaction. The Om Prakash Mishra-led panel's failure to nominate candidates has fueled disappointment among victims, with major parties accused of prioritizing political interests over justice. International human rights organizations have also warned that continued inaction risks signaling Nepal's inability to ensure accountability for serious human rights violations.

### News Analysis

Recently, Nepal pleaded for climate justice at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The developing, vulnerable nations are disproportionately burdened by the climate crisis and Nepal's efforts looked to argue for fair climate justice. Despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, Nepal is a frontline victim of the adverse impacts of climate change, such as accelerated glacial melting, erratic monsoons, and increasingly devastating landslides. These events endanger lives and erode livelihoods, weaken local economies, and exacerbate developmental challenges in one of the world's least developed countries.

Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba's [emphasis on Nepal's plight](#) draws attention to the need for global accountability, particularly from industrialized nations whose historical emissions have largely fueled the current climate emergency. Nepal aligns with broader calls from vulnerable states for developed countries to uphold their obligations under international law. This includes financial commitments for climate adaptation and mitigation as outlined in frameworks like the Paris Agreement.

The hearings at the ICJ are pivotal, as they aim to establish clarity on [state obligations regarding climate change](#) under international law. While the advisory opinions of the ICJ are non-binding, they carry

significant political and moral weight, potentially influencing future climate litigation and negotiations. Nepal's stance also reinforces the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," advocating for tailored commitments that consider historical contributions to emissions and varying capacities of nations.

By positioning itself within this legal and moral framework, Nepal not only seeks reparative justice but also aims to galvanize global consensus on holding high-emitting nations accountable. The outcome of these proceedings could redefine international climate governance, potentially catalyzing stronger compliance mechanisms for climate financing and emissions reductions, particularly for the most affected yet least culpable nations like Nepal.

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## F. Gender, Social Inclusion & Human Rights

### News Brief

**Foreign Minister Deuba Urges Feminist Foreign Policy for Equality and Inclusion-** Nepal's Foreign Minister, Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba, [advocated for adopting a feminist foreign policy during a conference in Berlin](#), emphasizing its potential to challenge patriarchal structures and ensure inclusivity, equity, and human security. She highlighted the policy's role in safeguarding minority rights, particularly gender and sexual minorities, and called for its revival to build a just and equal society. Dr. Rana stressed that profound changes rooted in social values are essential to combat discrimination and injustice effectively.

**Govt Drops Controversial Provision on Political Case Withdrawals-**The government has [withdrawn a controversial provision from the 'Bill to Amend Some Nepal Acts.'](#) which proposed dropping criminal cases linked to past political activities. Introduced in May 2023 by the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led administration, the bill sought to amend Section 116 of the Criminal Procedure Code-2017, allowing the withdrawal of insurgency-era cases deemed "political". The proposal faced strong opposition from lawmakers, human rights groups, and the public, who warned it could promote impunity and undermine justice for conflict-era crimes. While some political factions supported the move citing past agreements, Law Minister Ajay Kumar Chaurasiya announced its withdrawal, addressing concerns over accountability.

**Narapura Budha Elected Deputy Chair of Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality-** Narapura Budha of the [CPN \(Maoist Centre\) has been elected deputy chair of Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality](#), securing 3,627 votes and defeating Keshakumari Tulachan of the Nepali Congress, who received 2,128 votes. Tulachan was a coalition candidate of the Nepali Congress and UML. The position had been vacant since former deputy chair Bhupendra Budha died in a jeep accident on September 13. By-elections were held on Sunday to fill 41 of 44 vacant positions across local units. Further, Tek Raj Bhattarai, Tika Kumari Chaudhary, and Jagat Gharti were elected unopposed in Kailali, Okhaldhunga, and Ward 2 of Putha Uttarganga, respectively.

### News Analysis

#### Jajarkot Earthquake: A Year of Neglect for the Vulnerable

[The 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Jajarkot, Rukum West, and Salyan on November 3, 2023](#), caused extensive devastation, damaging approximately 8,000 public and private houses. The earthquake resulted in the tragic loss of at least 157 lives, mostly from Jajarkot and Rukum West. According to the Karnali Provincial Police in Surkhet, the disaster left 34,501 homes destroyed in Jajarkot, the epicenter, alongside 16,909 in Rukum West and 5,000 in Salyan.

More than a year later, [the condition of earthquake victims remains awful, particularly for marginalized and impoverished families](#) who were already struggling before the disaster. In Jajarkot and Rukum West, hundreds of victims have been forced to return to their partially damaged houses, risking their lives in structures that could collapse at any moment. This desperate decision stems from their inability to endure another winter in makeshift shelters that offer little protection against the cold. Last year alone, over three dozen cold-related deaths were reported in the earthquake-affected districts, underscoring the harsh reality of living without adequate shelter.

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The federal government, through the [Temporary Housing Construction Grant Procedures for Earthquake-Affected Households-2023](#), promised Rs50,000 to each displaced family whose house was completely or partially damaged. However, the support was to be disbursed in two tranches of Rs25,000 each. Many victims have yet to receive the second installment, leaving them to rely on high-interest loans to construct temporary shelters. These shelters, however, are inadequate for shielding families from the severe cold, further deepening their suffering.

In Darma Rural Municipality alone, of the 4,080 houses declared damaged last year, around 1,600 families remained in temporary shelters. However, over the past three weeks, more than 500 families have reluctantly returned to their damaged homes, unable to withstand the challenges of living in poorly constructed huts. “The situation is worsening, especially for those who cannot afford basic necessities,” said Nim Bahadur KC, chairman of Darma Rural Municipality.

Among the most affected are those from marginalized and poor communities who lack the resources to rebuild or seek alternatives. They are trapped in a cycle of poverty exacerbated by the disaster, with limited access to government relief and rehabilitation. Despite promises of aid, these families have been overlooked in the bureaucratic delays and lack of effective action from authorities. Their cries for support often go unheard, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and further hardship. The government’s inability to deliver timely aid and its failure to prioritize long-term rehabilitation have left these communities in a precarious state. While wealthier families have managed to rebuild or relocate, the marginalized remain disproportionately affected, highlighting the distinct inequalities in disaster response and recovery efforts.

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