



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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## Nirmal Purja, who redrew the limits of human endurance and reshaped Nepali mountaineering, dies in Broad Peak avalanche

The former British special forces soldier climbed all 14 of the world's 8,000-metre peaks in six months, becoming one of the most celebrated—and polarising—figures in modern mountaineering.

○ **SANGAM PRASAIN**

KATHMANDU, AUG 1

Nirmal Purja, the Nepal-born former special forces soldier who stunned the mountaineering world by summiting all 14 of the planet's 8,000-metre peaks in six months, has died in an avalanche on Pakistan's Broad Peak. He was 43.

Purja's death was confirmed in a statement by Elite Expedition on its social account on Saturday.

"It is with profound sadness and immense heartbreak that we confirm that Nirmal "Nimsdai" Purja tragically lost his life following the avalanche on Broad Peak," the statement said. "We have also received confirmation that other members of the expedition sadly did not survive."

Purja was on Broad Peak as part of an expedition when an avalanche struck the team on July 30, 2026. Pakistani mountaineering authorities said there had been no communication with the group since the incident. Mingma Gyabu Sherpa, a member of Nepal's House of Representatives and Purja's business partner, had said that tracking data showed Purja's position had shifted after the avalanche—first appearing to have been swept downhill, then moving again from where the signal had stopped.

Known across Nepal and the global climbing world as "Nims Dai," Purja became one of the most recognisable figures in modern mountaineering after completing what he called Project Possible—an attempt, in 2019, to climb all 14 of the world's eight-thousanders in seven months. He finished in six months and six days, shattering a previous record by more than seven years. Purja spent much of his career testing the outer limits of human endurance, driven by an unshakeable belief that anything was achievable if a person set their mind to it.

"I am quite lucky with my physiology but I have also been trained by the best unit on earth," he told the Post in an interview in 2019, referring to his military training. "So when you combine that with a positive mindset, you can do anything."

Purja was born on July 25, 1983, in Dana village in Myagdi district, and grew up largely in Chitwan. He came from a family with a long history of military service: his father and three older brothers all served in Nepal's Gurkha regiments. Purja followed that path himself, serving six years as a British Gurkha before becoming the



ILLUSTRATION: RABINDRA MANANDHAR FOR TKP

first Nepali to be accepted into the British Special Boat Service, an elite unit of the Royal Navy. "Being a Gurkha was my only dream," he wrote in his book. "It was the only thing I wanted to do."

Across a military career spanning roughly 16 years, he later became a subject-matter expert in extreme cold-weather warfare within the SBS's mountain unit. He was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2018 for his military service and mountaineering achievements.

On the morning of October 30, 2019, Tribhuvan International Airport in

Kathmandu was packed with journalists waiting for him. Purja emerged from the arrival hall buried under flower garlands so heavy he could barely move his neck.

To finance that expedition, Purja resigned from the Special Boat Service, gave up his military pension and sold his house in the UK. "I gave up my job in the United Kingdom. I gave up my pension and sold my house for this high-altitude, high-speed quest," he told reporters at the time. "Nobody believed it could be done. Everyone was laughing at me when I launched Project Possible."

Purja did not come to mountaineer-

ing through a conventional path. His climbing career traces back to a 2012 trek to Everest Base Camp, originally planned as a simple hike, that he extended into a summit push, an experience he later said had ignited his ambition for the mountains.

He went on to compress what typically takes climbers years or decades into months. His 2019 record-breaking expedition, chronicled in the Netflix documentary "14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible," carried him across Nepal, Pakistan and Tibet, closing with Shishapangma on October 29, 2019. His team included Mingma David Sherpa, Gesman Tamang,

Galjen Sherpa, Lakpa Dendi Sherpa and Halung Dorchi Sherpa.

For Purja, the record was never simply about speed. On April 23, 2019, while descending Annapurna, Purja interrupted his own expedition to help rescue Malaysian climber Chin Wui Kin, who had been stranded without food, water or supplemental oxygen for around 40 hours. Purja brought him down, though Chin later died from his injuries after being evacuated to Singapore. Weeks later, during the ascent of Kanchenjunga, Purja again gave up his own summit push to help others. "At 8,450 metres, we had to give our oxygen and start rescuing

three other climbers," he recalled. "That was a suicidal attempt and probably the hardest moment."

His final obstacle on the expedition came not from weather or altitude but politics: with only Shishapangma left to climb, Chinese authorities repeatedly delayed his climbing permit, which was finally granted on October 15 after Nepal's government intervened diplomatically with Beijing. "From rescuing people at high altitudes to fixing ropes, from supplying oxygen to opening routes and going nights without sleeping, we were doing multiple jobs and were testing our limits," Purja said afterward. "But we delivered."

Purja called the feat "extremely, horrendously good," despite setbacks along the way, including having his oxygen supply stolen while climbing Lhotse. Speaking to reporters in Kathmandu after his return, Purja said he hoped his record would show the next generation of Nepali climbers that "anything is possible with determination."

In doing so, he broke South Korean climber Kim Chang-ho's previous record of seven years, ten months and six days, and eclipsed Polish climbing legend Jerzy Kukuczka, who had become the first person to complete all 14 eight-thousanders, in 1987, after nearly eight years. Purja's own record proved short-lived: on July 27, 2023, Norwegian climber Kristin Harila and her Nepali climbing partner, Tenjen (Lama) Sherpa, completed all 14 peaks in just 92 days.

His 2019 schedule bordered on the unbelievable. He climbed Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, moved to Kanchenjunga, then summited Everest, immediately traversed to adjoining Lhotse, flew to Makalu Base Camp and climbed Makalu—all within 48 hours. His campaign then continued through Pakistan, where he climbed Nanga Parbat, Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II, Broad Peak and K2, before returning to Nepal to finish Manaslu, Cho Oyu and, finally, Shishapangma.

During that same expedition, Purja took a photograph that would become one of the defining mountaineering images of the decade: a long queue of climbers near Everest's summit, widely described as a "traffic jam," which ran on front pages worldwide, including in The Kathmandu Post, and helped push Nepal's government to tighten climbing regulations.

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## Bitter rivals in peace, partners in crisis

From the 12-point understanding to recent communal strife, Nepal's political parties have repeatedly put aside deep political differences to confront national crises together.

○ **RAJESH MISHRA & KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE**

KATHMANDU, AUG 1

When communal tensions erupted in Sunsari's Dewanganj and threatened to spread to neighbouring districts, it was not only the government and security agencies that moved to contain the situation.

Political parties in government and the opposition and those outside Parliament also stepped in.

Parties that routinely attack the government closed ranks, reinforcing a familiar pattern in Nepali politics: when the country faces a major crisis, political rivals often put aside their differences and act together.

The ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Parliament's strongest and youngest political force, followed a path long taken by Nepal's legacy parties. Recognising that communal unrest required a coordinated response, RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane convened an all-party meeting with urgency. The initiative drew support across party lines. Leaders attending the emergency meeting included Gagan Thapa, president of the main opposition Nepali Congress; Pushpa Kamal Dahal, coordinator of the Nepali Communist Party; Shankar Pokhrel, general secretary of the CPN-UML; Mahantha Thakur, chairman of the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party; Aren Rai, general secretary of the Shram Sanskriti Party; Rajendra Lingden, chairman of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party; CK Raut, chairman of the Janamat Party; and Prakash Adhikari, leader of the Janata

Samajbadi Party Nepal. The participation of the opposition leaders at a meeting called by the ruling party was widely viewed as a positive sign.

The meeting put out a joint statement in which leaders appealed for social harmony, peace and dialogue. They also urged party organisations at the provincial, district and local levels to organise all-party and multi-stakeholder meetings to help ease tensions on the ground.

Following the Wednesday meeting, political parties instructed their organisational units to engage in community outreach and mediation efforts. Opposition leader Thapa took a particularly active role in mobilising the Congress network.

The combined efforts of political leaders, security agencies, religious figures and civil society groups helped restore calm across the affected districts. Prime Minister Balendra Shah initially faced criticism over what many viewed as a slow response to the unrest in Madhesh. Critics accused him of remaining confined to Singha Durbar, failing to respond publicly to the deteriorating situation and not engaging directly with stakeholders in the affected region.

As criticism mounted, Shah became more active. He addressed the nation, calling for religious and social harmony, visited Sheetal Niwas to meet President Ramchandra Paudel in his first formal meeting with the head of state since taking office, and held consultations with Madhesh-based political leaders as well as lawmakers from his own party representing the region.

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## Home Minister Gurung takes charge on the ground as dialogue calms Tarai unrest

Direct intervention marks shift from curfews and security deployments to negotiations with victims' families, local groups.

○ **GAURAV POKHAREL**

KATHMANDU, AUG 1

Home Minister Sudan Gurung has shifted his operational approach to manage spreading communal unrest in the Tarai-Madhesh, stepping out from Singha Durbar to personally lead ground-level negotiations across affected districts.

Vowing not to return to Kathmandu until full stability is restored, Gurung's direct intervention marks a strategic turn away from an initial reliance on curfews, police reassignments, and security deployments that failed to contain the crisis.

The turmoil erupted on July 26 in Dewanganj Rural Municipality-4, Sunsari, where a local dispute escalated into violent confrontation. Security forces opened fire, killing 30-year-old Om Prakash Mehta and injuring nine others. A second victim, Jay Prakash Mehta, 30, later succumbed to his injuries during treatment.

Witnesses said that law enforcement used excessive force during a manageable confrontation.

Jugesh Das, a local resident who witnessed the incident, recalled that security personnel fired indiscriminately while a minor dispute was still underway.

In the immediate aftermath, Minister Gurung remained in the national capital, convening high-level meetings with chiefs of the security agencies. Present at these strategy sessions were Home Secretary Raj Kumar Shrestha, Inspector General of Nepal Police Dan Bahadur Karki, Armed Police Force Chief Narayan Datta Paudel, Chief of the National Investigation Department Tekendra Karki, and Nepali Army Lieutenant



POST PHOTO

Home Minister Sudan Gurung holds an agreement that the government signed with victims' families in Dewanganj, Sunsari on Thursday night.

General Pradeep KC.

Expecting the situation to be contained through administrative measures, the ministry imposed curfews, deployed army patrols, and reshuffled local security chiefs.

However, hardline measures failed to de-escalate the situation. By the fourth day, as drone surveillance feeds monitored closed streets, unrest began spilling into neighbouring districts. Experts noted that heavy-handed security tactics without political engagement often backfire in sensitive communal settings.

Former Additional Inspector General of Police Uttam Subedi said that law enforcement alone cannot substitute for trust-building measures.

"This was not merely a routine law-and-order issue; it required immediate political and civil society dialogue," said Subedi.

"Security presence alone cannot halt communal tension. Furthermore, replacing local security teams at the initial stage can disrupt operational coordination and field-level command."

The limitations of a purely administrative response became starkly evident on July 30. Despite active curfews, demonstrations broke out in Golbazar of Siraha, where security forces opened fire, killing 17-year-old Ganesh Yadav of Aurahi Municipality-2.

The death of Yadav, alongside Jay Prakash Mehta's passing on the same day, fuelled widespread public indignation. Protests intensified, social media platforms saw a surge in provocative commentary, and demonstrator groups expanded their demands.

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# Why Nepal’s communal tensions keep returning

Nepal’s latest communal violence did not emerge overnight. A familiar mix of provocation, online misinformation, political neglect, and heavy-handed policing has turned isolated disputes into recurring flashpoints across the Madhesh.

PRANAYA RANA

This essay was originally published in Kalam Weekly.

8PM on Thursday, July 30, five days after sectarian violence in Nepal’s Terai-Madhesh plains killed three, injured dozens, and saw mass arson and vandalism, Prime Minister Balen Shah finally addressed the nation. Reading gravely off a teleprompter, Shah was somber, expressing sorrow for the dead and injured and calling for calm. It was one of the few instances where Shah discarded any bluster and bravado, choosing instead a restrained address that called on the public to not blame or target any single community for what is happening. It took a national crisis for Shah to finally discard his dark sunglasses and address the nation.

The Madhesh is in flames. Mobs armed with sticks and spears roam the streets, threatening and assaulting anyone they think belongs to a different religion. Homes and businesses have been burned down despite the Nepal Police, the Armed Police Force, and Nepal Army all being out in force. Three civilians have died from police bullets. Social media is stoking the fire. Anonymous or fake accounts on Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter are amplifying hateful rhetoric, spreading misinformation that Rohingya refugees are behind the carnage, that hordes of Muslims are coming in from India to take revenge, and that Nepal’s Hindus are under attack from its minority Muslims.

## How did we get here?

Things began, as they often do, with a minor dispute.

On Sunday, July 26, a Hindu procession was marching towards Kaptangunj Chowk in Sunsari District’s Dewangunj Rural Municipality with water from the Koshi Barrage for the Bol Bam festival. In the Nepali month of Shrawan, Hindus don saffron robes and carry holy water in pots to offer at Shiva temples, all while chanting ‘Bol Bam’ and playing music. The procession was allegedly stopped by members of the Muslim community, who protested the playing of loud devotional music. Earlier in the day, Hindus, again allegedly, had removed a Muslim flag in the area and replaced it with a Hindu one, leading to heightened tensions.

The fracas over the Bol Bam procession and the loud music escalated, leading to a large gathering of members from both communities. As videos and images of the confrontation spread on social media, more individuals from both communities arrived, sometimes armed with improvised weapons. As the two groups faced off, the Nepal Police attempted to intervene, but things quickly spiraled out of control. Each side began pelting the other with stones, with the security forces caught in the middle. The confrontation grew more violent and continued well into the night. The Armed Police Force was mobilized to contain the mob with baton charges and tear gas. It does not seem that the police employed rubber bullets before resorting to live ammunition. Locals claim that shots rang out when the protest area was suddenly plunged into darkness. Thirty-year-old Om Prakash Mehta was struck under the left armpit and died while being taken to hospital. At least nine others were also hit by bullets fired by the security forces, mostly above the waist.

Mehta’s death and the shootings only inflamed tensions, with Hindus believing that the police had taken the side of the Muslims to fire towards them. Despite a curfew order in place, large crowds of Hindus and Muslims gathered in Kaptangunj and other nearby areas, with demonstrations spreading to nearby districts like Sarlahi, Dhanusha, Saptari, and Siraha, including the Madhesh Province capital of Janakpur. On Thursday, two more deaths were announced. Twenty-year-old Jaya

Prakash Mehta died while undergoing treatment for injuries sustained during Sunday’s clash, and 17-year-old Ganesh Yadav died after being shot in the neck by security forces in Siraha’s Golbazaar. As of writing on Friday afternoon, large swathes of Madhesh Province remain tense with heavily armed police and army men patrolling the streets.

## A history of violence

The ‘Sunsari incident,’ as it is being called, is just one more instance in a worrying escalation of communal violence in the Madhesh-Terai. It always seems to start the same way, where one community accuses the other of disrupting their religious celebrations and violence breaks out. Almost always, there is provocation. Religious processions are often deliberately routed through neighborhoods dominated by other religious communities. These processions play devotional music, colloquially known as ‘DJ,’ through large, portable speakers, often well into the night. Any complaint or request to turn down the music is interpreted as an attack on their religion and has the potential to turn into a religious melee.

The year 2026 itself began with a communal clash in Birgunj over an allegedly provocative TikTok video shared by two Muslim youth. On January 4, the duo was corralled by local Hindus and handed over to the police, but that did not alleviate their anger. Hindus vandalized a mosque and Muslim households in Dhanusha and Parsa districts, allegedly even burning copies of the Quran. The violence and arson spread across the two districts, leading local administrations to institute a curfew and appeal to local community leaders to press for peace and dialogue.

That same month, on January 26, a clash broke out in Paroha Municipality of Rautahat district over a Hindu procession that was attempting a ritual immersion of a Saraswati idol in a nearby river. The procession was allegedly pelted with stones by members of the Muslim community, although it remains unclear what exactly incited them to do so. Again, the security forces had to intervene to prevent violence from breaking out.

Rautahat district, according to the 2021 census, has the highest concentration of Muslims in the country at 22.5 percent of the total population, and it is where clashes often break out between the minority Muslims and the majority Hindus. In February, a curfew had to be imposed on the city of Gaur in Rautahat district when clashes broke out after Muslims accused a Hindu wedding procession of playing loud DJ music near a local mosque. Hindus accused Muslims of pelting the wedding procession with stones, leading the Hindu community to retaliate by setting a mosque on fire. The Nepal Police and Armed Police Force enforced a curfew for several days before the riots came under control.

Communal clashes like these are becoming increasingly more frequent. The Armed Police Force reportedly documented 25 incidents of religious or ethnic conflict between the fiscal years 2020-21 and 2023-24. The rise in such incidents is not coincidental; there appears to be a concerted push by unsavory actors both in India and across the border in India to inflame tensions and reap political dividends. In 2023, there were reports of Muslims being told to “go back to Pakistan” during a Hindu-Muslim clash, and even today, there are videos circulating of Hindu mobs stopping Muslims to force them to chant ‘Jai Shree Ram.’ These are tactics imported from across the border.

## Why the Madhesh?

For one, the Terai houses the largest concentration of Muslims in Nepal. Around 96 percent of Muslims live in the Terai plains while just around 4-5 percent live in the hills and urban centers like Kathmandu. Muslims in



ILLUSTRATION BY SUBIN RAJAKARNIKAR FOR KALAM WEEKLY

the Madhesh are thus a solid demographic bloc with socio-political power, not just token minorities. But despite this, Muslims sit at the intersection of two marginalised histories that often don’t overlap. Politically, they are Madhesis, but religiously, they are Muslims. They share the broad Madhesi concern with political marginalization, but their interests are distinct. Their representation in political parties is often token and instrumentalized. When there are issues, Muslims often find that they have no channels to express their grievances beyond their community.

There have always been tensions in the Madhesh-Terai between members of different communities, Hindu-Muslim or Madheshi-Pahadi. But these tensions have remained localized, with community leaders quick to step in and diffuse tensions. But we now live in the time of social media, and misinformation has already spread far and wide before local leaders can even call a deescalatory meeting. The Madhesh also sits along an open border and has deep kinship ties with Indians. Thus, the politics of religion as it plays out in the bordering states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh easily seeps into the Madhesh. This isn’t about Hindus in the hills importing narratives from the West but about close families and relatives consuming the same media and sharing the same political consciousness. It doesn’t help that Uttar Pradesh is currently run by Yogi Adityanath, a deeply conservative radical Hindu priest who has expressed support for Nepal reverting to a Hindu kingdom.

Social media is also rife with narratives of cultural incompatibility and demographic replacement that are borrowed from the right wing in India and the West. Bad actors are pushing the argument that the Muslim population is growing exponentially and could soon threaten Nepal’s Hindu majority while ignoring the fact that Nepal’s Hindu population sits at around 82 percent, the largest in the world, while Muslims are just 5 percent, a 1 percent growth in the past three decades. But this argument doesn’t have to hold water; all it needs to do is lodge itself in idle, susceptible minds until the next time a minor dispute with a Muslim person arises.

Finally, there is federalism, or a lack of it. Despite officially being declared a federal republic in 2015, Nepal’s provinces remain legislatively hamstrung by the federal center in Kathmandu. Provinces do not have their own civil service or their own provincial police, although mandated by the constitution. So whenever something like Sunsari happens, the decisions on when and how to deploy the police are made by officials in

Kathmandu. Provincial authorities have little say and often overridden by federal ministries. Instead of seeking dialogue in the community with the minimal use of force, the police come in like an invading army. This only serves to heighten tensions, especially as Madhesis have learned the hard way how the police see them.

## Patterns of hate

In each of these recent incidents between Hindus and Muslims, a pattern repeats. The trigger is often loud religious music that is played well into the night. DJs accompany religious processions, especially idol-immersion rituals involving the gods Durga, Ganesh, Saraswati, and Laxmi, and turn up the volume while passing mosques and Muslim-majority neighborhoods. Alternatively, Hindus also accuse Muslims of loudly playing the azaan, or call to prayer, over loud-speakers at early hours of the morning and night.

The state must also understand this is not just a law-and-order problem.

Every incident has also taken place along the Terai border in districts with the highest concentration of Muslims — Kapilvastu, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Banke, Dhanusha, Parsa, Mahottari, Bara, and Sunsari. Residents of these districts have close cross-border ties to the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and there is ample evidence that radical elements have increased their presence in these border districts. In 2024, the Center for the Study of Organized Hate reported how militant Hindu groups like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal have expanded across Nepal’s Terai districts. A 2023 US State Department report explicitly claimed that right-wing religious groups associated with the BJP had been funding politicians and political parties in Nepal to support a return to a Hindu kingdom.

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the Nepali offshoot of India’s Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has been active in the country since the 90s, and a small political party affiliated to India’s Bharatiya Janata Party has received extensive coverage in complicit Indian media despite being a non-entity here in Nepal. The Nepal Janata Party (NJP) employs the color saffron and the lotus as its election symbol, both distinct markers of the BJP, and is active primarily in the

Madhesh districts. Khem Nath Acharya, vice-president of the party, is a ‘Sanghi,’ a member of the ‘Sangh Parivar,’ the family of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which includes the BJP, the VHP, and the Bajrang Dal. The NJP contested 20 seats, primarily in Madhesh Province, in the March election and won none. Its highest vote count was 240 in Saptari-2.

[Sidenote: Hindus in the Madhesh and online often make tall claims about extremist funding for Muslims in Nepal. However, there is no credible report from Nepal or elsewhere of any such funding. That does not necessarily mean that such support does not exist. If the claims are credible, then it is incumbent on the Nepal government to take them seriously and investigate them. So far, I have seen nothing that corroborates any claims about extremist Muslim funding.]

Political Hindutva might not have succeeded yet in Nepal, but other tactics are being employed. There are reports of how right-wing groups are operating deliberate misinformation campaigns modeled after Hindutva tactics in India. Social media is being used as a force multiplier whenever there is a local dispute. Instead of appealing for the calming of tensions, instigators on social media amplify hate and misinformation, prompting communities to react emotionally in anger. This allows radical elements on both sides to portray the disputes as a civilizational clash that requires an active and often violent response. Even after tensions cool, resentment remains, fueling recruitment into extremist ideologies and organizations.

Then, there is also the incipient pattern of state response. Every large-scale communal clash results in the same cycle of a heavy-handed police response, a curfew being imposed, an appeal for reconciliation, and the formation of an investigative committee whose report is rarely published publicly. Local administrators appeal to community leaders from both sides, which often works in the short term, but does little to alleviate deep-seated anger and resentment, which only feeds the next cycle of violence.

## The Balendra Shah response

The government has also indulged in the same pattern, deploying security forces, instituting a curfew, and constituting an investigative committee. In doing so, it has repeated the same mistakes of the past. The committee is led by Bhupendra Thapa, Joint Secretary at the Home Ministry, and includes Nepal Police Superintendent Bipin Regmi, APF Superintendent Bikram Humagain, Energy Ministry Undersecretary Shaligram Bhandari, and Sunsari Assistant Chief District Officer Poshan Lamichhane. The committee includes no Madhesi representation and no Muslim representation, limiting its ability to understand and adequately analyze the sentiments that lead to such recurring instances of communal violence. Such committees do little to prevent the next cycle of violence.

The response of the current administration has also been largely motivated by security. The deaths of Om Prakash Mehta, Jay Prakash Mehta, and Ganesh Yadav have already raised concerns about the security forces’ use of force. It is unclear why the Nepal Police and APF resorted to live ammunition without exhausting all other non-lethal means of crowd control, but if we go by past reports, Nepal’s security forces have displayed a tendency to use excessive or lethal means when facing protests in the Madhes-Terai. In 2015, over 40 Madhesis were killed by security forces in protests over the constitution. Impunity has only contributed to this propensity. Even after the much-publicized shootings last year in Kathmandu that killed 19 unarmed protesters in a single day, not a single member of the Nepal Police or the Armed Police Force has been prosecuted or even disciplined.

The government has acted too little, too late. Prime Minister Balen Shah

and Home Minister Sudan Gurung spent the first crucial days ducking the public. Shah issued a public statement on Facebook on Tuesday, and even then, many demanded that he release a video message rather than a Facebook status that no one would read. Belatedly, on Friday, Shah finally held a meeting with influential politicians from the Madhesh. Gurung, despite being the man in charge of internal security, did not visit Sunsari until Thursday evening. When he finally got there, he was hounded by irate locals.

Instead of the executive government, it is the ruling party that has taken a political approach to resolving tensions. Rastriya Swatantra Party chair Rabi Lamichhane called an all-party meeting on Wednesday, July 29, though neither Shah nor Gurung attended. Unlike Shah, Lamichhane seems to have seen the problem for what it is — a political issue that cannot be handled through brute force. The parties, which included Madhesh-based parties not represented in Parliament, pledged to mobilize local units and representatives to conduct dialogue to prevent any further escalation.

## What is to be done?

The larger question, ultimately, regards how to prevent such instances from recurring in the future. Nepal has been largely spared the kinds of communal violence that have engulfed the rest of South Asia, but the specter of religious hate is now materializing. If the state doesn’t mount a pervasive, long-term response to nip this in the bud, incidents like that in Sunsari will only recur.

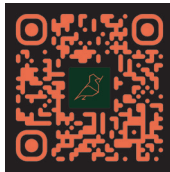
The first element is intelligence. Nepal’s security forces — the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Nepal Army and National Investigation Department — all need real-time intelligence around potential flashpoints, especially in the Madhesh. It was a broad intelligence failure that led to the killings, arson, and violence during the Gen Z protests, and not much seems to have changed since then. But even where there is intelligence available, governments have failed to act. The Kathmandu Post reports that the APF had flagged the potential for organized communal violence in Sunsari in a report three years ago, but nothing came of it. The Shah government must work closely with the security agencies to identify where extremist rhetoric is coming from and block it at its source, whether it is Muslim or Hindu.

The security forces themselves need a major overhaul, too. The Nepal Police, the most public-facing security organization, must be able to work with communities, building relationships and acquiring sources instead of coming in at the last moment armed with batons, tear gas, and bullets. Policing needs to be preventive and community-based, not punitive and reactionary. Perhaps this means deputizing Madhesi officers to Madhesh districts, as they are able to speak the language and understand local dynamics. Use of force should also be carefully regulated, especially in communal cases. The cops are all too trigger-happy in the Madhesh. Already, there are accusations that the security forces sided with one community over another.

The state must also understand that this is not just a law-and-order problem; it is a socio-political one that needs prevention, not punishment. An attempt at prevention was made by the interim government of Sushila Karki. In January 2026, then Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal mandated the creation of a District Peace and Social Harmony Committee that would include members of all religious communities. So far, it appears only a handful of districts, like Rupandehi, Dang, Sarlahi, and Parbat, have created these committees. Such committees, not just at the district level but also at the local level, would help ensure that there is dialogue before incidents spiral into violence. The Shah government should reinforce these committees and empower them further.

Ultimately, it is up to Nepalis themselves. There is no question about whether Hindus and Muslims can live alongside each other in Nepal; they have done so for centuries. Disputes are natural; they are the price of living in a diverse community. But local disagreements cannot be allowed to turn into civilizational clashes fanned by bad actors here and across the border. Nepalis are tolerant; we value diversity, and we love to take part in each other’s traditions. Hindus invite Muslims over for Dashain feasts and Muslims invite Hindus over for Eid. It is the way we have always lived. What is being tested now is whether the camaraderie of the everyday can outlast the virulent hatred of social media.

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A fire lit by protesters on the deserted main road at Ramananda Chowk in Janakpur on Thursday afternoon.

POST PHOTO



# The lonely grind of Nepal’s top tennis star

Despite dominating domestic tennis for a decade, playing in the Davis Cup and many big tournaments, Abhishek Bastola continues to fund his own global journey as official support remains non-existent.

**NAYAK PAUDEL**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 1

On October 25, 2023, while competing at the Davis Cup in Isa Town, Abhishek Bastola was battling more than just Qatar’s top player, Mubarak Alharrasi—he was also fighting a fever and a runny nose. Frequently reaching for his towel between points at the Bahrain Tennis Federation court, Bastola displayed remarkable grit to win the match in straight sets.

After a brief half-hour break—spent refueling on fruit he’d brought from his hotel—Bastola returned to the court, teaming up with Aki Zuben Rawat for a doubles match against Alharrasi and Rashed Nawaf. The physical toll finally caught up with him; as soon as the match ended, Bastola collapsed.

“I vomited all over my t-shirt,” Bastola recalls. He returned to his hotel to wash the poor-quality garment himself, as it was one of only two he had for the entire tournament. “I had to wear that same shirt for my match the next day.”

Bastola and Rawat were then accompanied by Pradip Khadka and Ritik Rana. It was the first time that Nepal participated in the Davis Cup, dubbed the World Cup of tennis, organised annually by World Tennis.

The following day, Nepal faced Yemen, where Bastola swept aside then-Yemen No 1 Ghassan Al-Ansi in straight sets. He maintained his momentum throughout the tournament, overcoming a second-set stumble to defeat Abdulla Faaih Fazeel—the Maldives’ top-ranked player—on October 28, 2023.

There are currently 160 countries in the Davis Cup. The countries have been divided into five groups—Groups I and II consist of top countries, while those in Groups III, IV and V fall in the lower levels.

Nepal competed in Group V during their 2023 debut. With three singles victories that year and a matching performance in 2024—defeating top players from Guam, Brunei, and hosts Bahrain—Bastola was instrumental in securing Nepal’s promotion to Group IV.

Despite his pivotal role, Bastola was surprisingly excluded from the national squad last year. In his absence, Nepal failed to win a single match and was promptly relegated back to Group V.

“I don’t know the exact reason for my exclusion last year,” Bastola says with a wry grin from his current training base in China. “But one thing was certain: the Nepal Tennis Association didn’t want me on that team.”

For Bastola, this exclusion was not a new experience. Rather, it was a familiar disappointment for an athlete long accustomed to being denied both institutional support and



PHOTO: ABHISHEK BASTOLA'S FACEBOOK

Nepal's top tennis player Abhishek Bastola (left) with 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic when the legend was in California for the BNP Paribas Open-Men's Singles in March last year.

professional opportunities.

“I have been participating in global events without a single penny—either from the state or the NTA,” Bastola, who has represented Nepal in over 20 countries, told the Post during a phone interview following his Friday evening training session. “Neither my travel, accommodation nor gear have been supported... In fact, the only official recognition I received at home after my historic Davis Cup victories was a Thakali dinner.”

Bastola is currently in Tianjin, China, for an event under the Men’s World Tennis Tour. Bastola is the only Nepali to be playing in the tour of World Tennis, the global governing body of tennis formerly known as the International Tennis Federation (ITF). He has an ITF Ranking of 1,270.

Bastola reached China from Bengaluru, India, where he played in an event of the UTR Pro Tennis Tour. He played five matches there—against India’s Keerthivassan Suresh, Suraj R Prabodh, Gandharv Gourav Kothapalli and Neeraj Yashpaul, alongside Norway’s Baltazar Wiger Nordas. But he could only manage one win, coming from behind to defeat Prabodh 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

To qualify for the UTR Pro Tennis Tour, a player must rank among the top 3,000 globally. And Bastola is the only Nepali to fall under the standards to date.

### His first serve

Bastola, now 28, first picked up a racket as a young child in his hometown of Pokhara. He began by following his

father to the local courts, where the elder Bastola played the sport recreationally.

Yet, his passion for the sport wasn’t immediate.

“I was quite good at cricket and now feel I could have excelled in almost any sport I chose,” says Bastola, reflecting on his naturally athletic childhood. “But I found solace in tennis because of its steep learning curve. It’s far more demanding than it looks—you have to maintain absolute focus and grind through matches for hours.”

That dedication paid off quickly. By age 15, Bastola was already dominating Nepal’s domestic circuit, and by 17, he was representing his country on the international stage at the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

“It may be because my parents were athletes themselves that they have done everything they can, and even beyond, to help me fulfil my hunger in tennis,” Bastola said. “They are the only ones who made me what I am today. I remember my father allowing me to do wall practice at our garage when I was a child.”

His parents, Anuj Kumar Bastola and Padma Bastola, were former national badminton players who met and fell in love on the badminton court before getting married.

### To the US

By the end of his adolescence, Bastola had outgrown the domestic circuit. He was practically unbeatable at home, yet he found himself at a crossroads, yearning for a challenge that could

match his ambition. This search for higher-level competition eventually led him to the United States in 2018.

His early success, including representing Nepal at the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon at just 17, paved the way for his next chapter. These accolades earned him a full scholarship to Saint Mary’s College of California, where he balanced the rigors of academia and elite sport, graduating with a degree in Business Administration in 2020.

“I competed in the NCAA Division 1 for college,” he says. “It is the highest level of competitive college athletics in the United States.”

For the past six years, Bastola has been striving to establish himself as a full-time touring professional, yet the climb to profitability in pro tennis remains brutal.

“It is virtually impossible to earn a proper livelihood from tennis unless you are ranked in the world’s top 100,” Bastola explains. “When millions are competing globally, reaching that bracket is extremely tough.”

**Opportunities and support denied**  
Bastola vividly recalls the stinging frustration surrounding the 2019 South Asian Games, an event Nepal was preparing to host on home soil.

“I was in Kathmandu then. And I wanted to compete at the South Asian level as a medal was in sight,” he remembers. “But I had to play the qualifier, which I would have easily won. The qualifier was not organised unless I was in Nepal. It was organised once I reached the US.”

Bastola alleges that the NTA intentionally manipulated the schedule to block his participation. “It was a deliberate move to make way for someone else—that is simply how sports administration functions in Nepal,” he adds.

He was equally devastated when he was not taken to the Davis Cup last year.

And a similar scenario was about to repeat this year as well. “I was almost denied a spot in the 20th Asian Games taking place in Japan in September,” he says.

Undeclared on domestic courts for nearly a decade, Bastola qualified as Nepal’s No 1 at the 18th and 19th Asian Games in 2018 and 2023, respectively. But he had to fight off the court to get a slot for the 20th edition.

“The NTA asked me to return to Nepal to play selection trials to be eligible for the 20th Asian Games. I declined because it would have been a waste of critical time and training,” Bastola said. “I am competing globally—in fact, I am the only Nepali tennis player doing so—and there is no one in Nepal who can beat me. When I asked if the NTA would cover my travel expenses for trials, they refused.”

Unwilling to miss the Asian Games, Bastola took his case directly to senior national sports authorities, explaining his situation and track record. Officials eventually exempted him from flying back for trials. And he is currently spending out of his pocket to participate in the events in India and China, all so that he can reach Japan at his current peak and put up a good fight against far better opponents.

“The association [NTA] has always worked for the benefit of the players. Abhishek is no exception,” says Manohar Das Mool, who was elected as the president last year. “We know how good of a player Abhishek is. But he also needs to follow the rules. If we had any problems with him—despite him keeping accusing the association—why would we be taking him to the upcoming Asian Games?”

Regarding further support, the association gets a Rs300,000 budget annually from the National Sports Council, Mool says. “What can we do with that amount?”

he questions. “We hope Abhishek keeps growing as we want him and all our players reach greater heights and we have been trying it by managing extra resources and funds.”

### The dream of playing at a Grand Slam

Currently, world’s No 1 Jannik Sinner has the highest Universal Tennis Rating (UTR Rating) of 16.40 among pro men, followed by Carlos Alcaraz (16.31) and Alexander Zverev (16.15).

In the UTR Rating, all players are rated on the same 1.00-16.50 point global scale based on daily match results. Bastola has a UTR Rating of 12.07.

“The UTR Rating is the best way to measure yourself against all other players regardless of their age or skill level,” says Novak Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam champion.

Bastola has also traded shots on court with Djokovic when the legend was in California for the BNP Paribas Open-Men’s Singles in March 2025. “I was then recruited as a hitting partner for the participating players like Djokovic to train,” he recalls with a sense of big achievement. “I felt extremely lucky then. I also met Alcaraz then. And I am glad I could click pictures with them.”

Meeting Djokovic and Alcaraz firsthand only reinforced Bastola’s ambitions.

“I have always aimed to compete at the highest levels, but meeting two of the best in the game gave me extra motivation,” he said. “Still, I constantly wonder how far I can realistically reach while doing this all on my own.”

For Bastola, the ultimate goal remains qualifying for Grand Slam main draws—the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the US Open.

Asked what it would take for him to reach those heights and put Nepal firmly on the global tennis map, Bastola pointed to administrative reform: the national association needs leadership driven by authentic passion for the game and real investment in player development.

“I always speak up when I feel there is something wrong. And it has only backfired in terms of the support and recognition I deserve,” Bastola told the Post. “But I won’t change. I will keep moving forward to becoming the best player I can. There is still a lot of fire in me.”



## HOROSCOPE



**ARIES** (March 21-April 19)

Unwelcome sleep disruptions could leave you feeling unrested, dear Aries. Resist the temptation to stay in bed all morning, or you may struggle to fall asleep later tonight.



**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20)

You might have a hard time relating to others this morning, dearest Taurus. Don't force yourself to engage with people or conversations that don't appeal to you.



**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21)

Why be a gatekeeper when you can help others move up in this world? Be mindful of how you can elevate your peers. Your own prospects could improve as a result.



**CANCER** (June 22-July 22)

Identify the best path forward by honoring your intuition and emotions without abandoning logic, even if it takes time to determine where these themes overlap. Be mindful of what you can realistically carry.



**LEO** (July 23-August 22)

Focus on cultivating a strong, healthy ego, dearest Leo, especially if you sense envious eyes on you. You'll have no issue rising above drama and finding your way to higher ground.



**VIRGO** (August 23-September 22)

You won't be any good to others if you aren't good to yourself, darling Virgo. Though you have the resilience to push through fatigue, your work and relationships will suffer if you run on fumes.



**LIBRA** (September 23-October 22)

Slowly let trusted allies in on your latest schemes, dear Libra, and commission help from those willing to give it. Romantic interactions, self-care practices, and quests for balance mesh well.



**SCORPIO** (October 23-November 21)

In a world of pretenders and followers, be someone who honors their truth. The universe urges you to embrace goals and activities you are genuinely good at and passionate about.



**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22-December 21)

Dramatic outbursts from loved ones could cut into your sleep time this morning, Sagittarius. Compassion will get you closer to resolution than any form of reasoning will.



**CAPRICORN** (December 22-January 19)

Inspiration strikes at inconvenient moments. You may find yourself working on projects as dawn filters in, narrowing your window for sleep.



**AQUARIUS** (January 20-February 18)

Relationship challenges will be difficult to ignore this morning, Aquarius. Though you may feel undervalued or taken for granted, it's possible your partner feels the same.



**PISCES** (February 19-March 20)

Reclaim appreciation for the life you've built and the people who fill it, dearest Pisces. Small gestures of gratitude can go a long way in assuring loved ones that you value and appreciate them.

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## CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**

1 Peacenik  
5 Beauty and the —  
10 Pennant  
14 Highest point  
15 Serviceable  
16 Hold sway  
17 Classroom event  
18 Oregon's capital  
19 Actor — Alda  
20 “— and Cleopatra”  
22 Lover of fine food  
24 Ear part  
26 Held  
27 Swiveling wheel  
29 Reared  
33 Droop  
34 Moves slowly and carefully  
37 Singer — Parton  
38 Stuff  
40 Early time of life  
42 River in Africa  
43 Opposing ones  
45 Characteristic  
47 “How — it go?”  
48 Staggered  
50 Fiery signals  
52 Secular  
54 Duct for smoke  
55 Actress — McCarthy

**DOWN**

1 Grist for spreadsheets  
2 Candid  
3 Bulletproof garment  
4 Praises  
5 Meddler  
6 Abbr. in timetables  
7 Trouble  
8 Smooth and shiny  
9 State of mind  
10 Small part  
11 Humdinger  
12 Of a wing  
13 Actor — Kelly  
21 Memorandum  
23 Apple tablet  
25 Rye fungus  
27 Chili con —  
28 Playing marble

**PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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| H | O | R | A |   | E | L | E | M | I |   | E | L | M | O |   |
| A | M | A | N |   | V | E | N | U | S |   | C | L | O | D |   |
| S | P | L | I | C | E |   |   |   |   | P | H | R | A | S | E |
| P | A | R | O | L | E | E |   | R | A | L | E | I | G | H |   |
| A | B | E | L |   | A | L | A | C | K |   | L | O | A |   |   |
| V | E | N | D |   | C | R | A | V | E |   | D | I | R | T |   |
| E | L | D |   | S | I | N | G | E |   | R | A | G | E |   |   |
| R | E | S | T | I | V | E |   | R | E | C | E | D | E | D |   |
| C | A | N | C | E | L |   | A | R | I | D |   | Y | A | R | N |
| A | M | O | K |   | I | S | L | E | T |   | H | I | V | E |   |
| R | A | T | E |   | A | P | I | S | H |   | E | R | I | C |   |
| S | H | E | D |   | N | A | T | T | Y |   | D | E | L |   |   |

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30 Slip  
31 Immigrants' island  
32 Tinted  
33 Leave a mark from injury  
35 Part of EU  
36 Walking stick  
39 Lots and lots  
41 Sloping land  
44 Seven —  
46 Tight  
49 Gloomy  
51 Think logically  
53 City in Egypt

55 The greater number of  
56 Gen. Robert —  
57 Tilt  
59 Tiny opening  
60 Claim against property  
61 Otherwise  
64 French friend  
65 Mal de —

## SUDOKU

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| 7 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 8 |
| 9 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 2 |
| 2 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 6 |
| 5 | 9 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 7 |
| 3 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 1 |
| 1 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 |

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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|   |   |   | 2 | 4 |   | 1 |   |   |   |
|   |   |   | 7 |   | 9 |   |   |   |   |
|   |   | 5 |   | 3 | 1 |   |   |   |   |
|   |   | 1 |   |   |   |   |   | 5 |   |
| 7 |   |   | 1 |   | 6 | 4 | 9 |   |   |
| 6 | 4 |   |   |   |   | 7 |   |   |   |

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**JONY NEPAL**  
KATHMANDU

A group of five women in elaborate, sequined gowns standing on a stage during the Miss International 2026 pageant. The woman in the center is being crowned by another woman. The background features a large 'INTERNATIONAL 2026' sign.

Arya Nishaant won the Miss Nepal International 2026 title.

The 24 finalists taking the stage.

A group of women in elaborate gowns and crowns on a stage, with a large 'MISS NEPAL 2026' backdrop. One woman in a yellow gown is being crowned by another woman in a dark blue gown. A third woman in a red gown stands to the right. The backdrop is blue with white stars and the text 'MISS NEPAL 2026' in large white letters.

Kashis Subba as Miss Nepal Cosmo 2026.

The event showcased this year's theme, 'Top of the World'.

Shraddha Adhikari is handed the Xtreme Energy Miss Active Award.

POST PHOTOS: DIPESH DARSHANDHAR

Top 6 finalists faced the question-and-answer round.

Each crowning was met with confetti and cheers.

**Top 3 finalists of Miss Nepal 2026.**