

## Nepali Leaders visit North Korea and South Korea - A Brighter Day May Come

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*Left to right: Rev. Ek Nath Dhakal, then director of UPF-Nepal; Dr. Robert Kittel, then with UPF India; Ambassador Krishna Venkatesh Rajan, India's ambassador to Nepal (1995–2000); Pushapa Kamal Dahal (then known as Comrade Prachandra, leader of the Maoist insurgents) and his second-in-command, Dr. Babura Bhattarai, at a 2007 South Asia Peace Initiative (SAPI) a UPF-Nepal endeavor*

Madhav Kumar Nepal, who served as the prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal from May 2009 to February 2011, led a delegation that visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in August. Likely of interest to Unificationists is that the ex-prime minister is a member of IAPP and helped facilitate the launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace in Myanmar on July 3. Also of interest, is that among his delegation was Ek Nath Dhakal, the head of Nepal's *Pariwar Dal* (the Nepal Family Party) who was active in Nepal's government beginning in 2008. This may well not be an official Nepalese government endeavor, but they are engaging in discussions. Even before entering government, as FFWPU national leader and head of UPF, Mr. Dhakal served his nation by initiating the South East Asian Peace Initiative (SAPI) that took on extremely complex issues at a time when the country had been flailing from one crisis to the next for years.

SAPI was instrumental in bringing in from the cold the Maoist revolutionary leader, Comrade Prachanda - the Fierce One, which was the *nom-de guerre* of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who at the age of twenty-seven had joined the underground Communist Party of Nepal, which later added "Maoist" to its name. Prachanda initiated an insurgency that over the course of a decade cost thirteen thousand Nepali lives. Pushpa Kamal Dahal was still an outlaw at the time that he began listening to SAPI presentations. He had been living underground, his true name unknown, for twenty-five years. In a remarkable turn of events, this guerrilla would go on to serve as prime minister of Nepal from August 2008 to May 2009 and again from August 2016 until last June.

### Goings on in Pyongyang

According to an article by a daily newspaper in Nepal ([www.myrepublica.com/news/25951](http://www.myrepublica.com/news/25951)), the delegation from Nepal "held talks with government officials, top leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) including prominent leaders of the Supreme People's Assembly, and Workers Party of Korea." The Supreme People's Assembly is North Korea's unicameral legislative body, which consists of 687 deputies who serve five-year terms in office. Though any person of at least seventeen years of age is eligible to vote and even to run for office in North Korea, only those that have garnered approval from the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland actually become candidates. Voting is mandatory and nearly 100 percent of the eligible voters turn out to cast ballots that contain only one approved name for each political post.

According to a paper by the National Committee on North Korea, which Mercy Corps, "a global humanitarian and development organization" founded, the degree to which North Korea engages with countries outside its borders has changed over time. After it came into being in 1948 as a separate nation from South Korea, the DPRK foreign relations were limited mainly to Eastern European Communist countries. During the 1960s and 1970s, North Korea established ties to poor Asian and African countries emerging from colonialism. Since the end of the cold war, it has developed relations with capitalist

countries around the globe. North Korea is no longer an isolated hermit kingdom; a hundred and sixty-four nations currently have relations with the DPRK; twenty-four of them have embassies in Pyongyang. North Korea had embassies in forty-seven countries, Nepal among them.

Being a presence in the country, North Korea has exerted some influence on Nepal. The Nepal's Workers Peasants Party is said to be smitten with North Korea's *Juche* Ideology. More than a half dozen other organizations exist that reflect admiration for the North Korean outlook -- Study Forum for Self-Reliance, Nepal Korea Literary Forum for Juche Idea and Nepal-DPRK Center for the Study of Socialism, to name a few. Under these circumstances, Nepalese may be intermediaries that North Koreans are comfortable with, but how might South Korea see these developments?



*This photograph, by Roman Harak, is of the North Korean Parliament Building. According to an article on the Nepalese news site, myrepublica.com, Nepalese ex-prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal encouraged DPRK leaders to join international forums including UPF and IAPP*

### **South Korea's equilibrium**

President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea has demonstrated empathy toward North Korea. For him, as for many other South Koreans, the rending of their nation is a family affair. In 2004, he accompanied his mother, Kang Hang-ok, to the Mt. Keumgang Resort for the tenth round of reunions for families that the Korean War had separated. There he met his aunt, his mother's youngest sister. His mother was seventy-seven at the time. She had grown up in Hungnam, near the east coast, but she had already joined her husband, Moon Yong-hyeong, when war began. She and her husband fled south on a three-day sea voyage with other refugees on the deck of a US ship. Her five siblings remained behind. At the time of the reunion, her son explained, "Since the Roh Tae-woo administration (1988–1993), my mother has repeatedly applied to take part in the reunions of separated families, but because priority was given to separated parents and children, she never got the chance to participate in them. The reunion materialized this time when my aunt in North Korea applied." Pres. Moon had been influential in the Roh Moo-hyun administration, when the two Koreas held approximately fifty high-level joint dialogues. Nevertheless, against recent DPRK existential threats to the nation, the South Korean government has taken a strong stance.

### **South Korea–Nepal**

Nepal and the Republic of Korea established diplomatic relations in 1974 and are on good terms. Park Young-sik, the South Korean ambassador to Nepal, in a presentation in July of this year stated that "both countries have built firm bilateral relations on all fronts, including people-to-people exchanges, development assistance and economic cooperation."

President Moon served as the senior presidential secretary during the raucous days of the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2008). President Roh, who had never gone to university but studied hard on his own and earned a law degree had focused his legal practice on human rights advocacy. His clients were often Leftist student protesters or labor union organizers. From the time that Roh entered politics, South Korean conservatives dogged his every move. Moon Jae-in was also an attorney and loved the work. He apparently derived so much satisfaction from legal work that it no longer seemed like a job. He was uncomfortable in his role in President Roh's administration. He did not seem to fit in but knew he'd feel bad if he simply went back to enjoying his life as an attorney. In that state of mind, torn by contrary

forces -- Should I stay or should I go? -- he quit his job and did what 35,000 South Koreans do every year: He went with his wife to trek through the Himalayas in Nepal and Tibet. He returned a month later to resume assisting the president at a particularly difficult time.

In June 2016, shortly before being elected president, he once again traveled to Nepal and spent four weeks hiking in the mountains and participating in earthquake relief efforts. This was only fourteen months after the Gorkha Earthquake struck killing more than nine thousand people and causing billions of dollars in damage.



*In 2007: Ek Nath Dhakal (civilian on the left), and the late Mrs. Julia Kim, then co-regional president of UPF Asia. On the right is Binod Dangi, national leader of our movement in Nepal. They're among police officers and soldiers who attended presentations on UPF's peace philosophy*

### **Time for prayer**

Perhaps in years past, Unificationists or friends of our movement had made efforts to engage North Korea toward some good end, but these were behind the scenes and we were unaware. This time, it seems, some sincere effort is underway. The myrepublica article does say they are engaged in discussion with people of merit. If we reflect upon the changes Heaven has wrought in Nepal and perhaps in our own nations, we might dare believe that the momentum is building and that a brighter day may come.