

# The Infrastructure of Deception: A Comprehensive Forensic and Political Analysis of the Cooperative Embezzlement Crisis and the Case of Rabi Lamichhane

The financial landscape of Nepal has been fundamentally altered by a systemic crisis within the cooperative sector, a crisis that has transitioned from a localized liquidity issue into a national scandal of unprecedented proportions. At the center of this maelstrom is the Gorkha Media Network Pvt. Ltd. embezzlement case, involving the suspected diversion of *NPR* 2.58 billion from multiple savings and credit cooperatives across the country.<sup>1</sup> This crisis represents more than a series of financial crimes; it is a profound breach of the social contract between the state, the alternative political movements, and the burgeoning Generation Z electorate that sought a departure from traditional patronage politics. The case against Rabi Lamichhane, the Chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and former Home Minister, serves as the primary focal point for this disillusionment, as the very figure who championed anti-corruption and transparency now stands at the nexus of allegations involving organized crime, money laundering, and the misappropriation of billions in public savings.<sup>2</sup>

## The Structural Fragility of the Cooperative Sector

The cooperative movement in Nepal was historically envisioned as a grassroots financial mechanism designed to empower the rural poor, small-scale entrepreneurs, and low-income families. However, over the last 24 years, the sector has been systematically compromised by a lack of robust regulatory oversight and the infiltration of "white-collar" criminals who utilized these institutions as private piggy banks.<sup>5</sup> By 2025, the scale of this crisis reached a staggering *NPR* 275 billion in savings at risk across 357 cooperatives nationwide.<sup>7</sup>

The fundamental mechanism of the fraud involved a blatant violation of the Cooperative Act of 2074, which explicitly forbids the transfer of members' savings to private companies or speculative investments.<sup>1</sup> Instead of providing credit to members for productive purposes, directors of institutions such as Suryadarshan, Supreme, and Sahara siphoned funds into real estate, hydropower, and high-profile media ventures like Gorkha Media Network, which operated the Galaxy 4K Television channel.<sup>1</sup>

## Quantitative Overview of Cooperative Sector Liability (2025)

## Estimates)

Category	Value / Metric
Total Savings at Risk	<i>NPR</i> 275 Billion <sup>7</sup>
Total Number of Troubled Cooperatives	357 Institutions <sup>7</sup>
Liability of Top 40 Crisis-Ridden Cooperatives	<i>NPR</i> 87.89 Billion <sup>7</sup>
Total Number of Depositors Impacted	7.4 Million <sup>7</sup>
Official Fraud Cases Registered	266 Cases <sup>7</sup>
Amount Defrauded in Official Records (last 3.5 yrs)	<i>NPR</i> 33.321 Billion <sup>7</sup>

The systemic failure is underscored by the reality that out of 2,517 individuals implicated in cooperative fraud, only 595 have been arrested, while approximately 89% (1,922 individuals) remain at large.<sup>7</sup> This impunity has fueled a perception among the youth that the legal system is designed to protect the powerful while leaving ordinary citizens in financial ruin.

## The Gorkha Media Network Conduit

The Gorkha Media Network Pvt. Ltd. served as the primary repository for funds siphoned from five major cooperatives. Investigations by a High-Level Parliamentary Probe Committee, led by UML lawmaker Surya Thapa, concluded that *NPR* 655.4 million was illegally channeled into Gorkha Media from these sources.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of this network was Gitendra Babu (GB) Rai, the chairman of Gorkha Media, and Rabi Lamichhane, who served as the Managing Director during the period when the majority of these transfers occurred.<sup>1</sup>

## Fund Inflow to Gorkha Media by Source Cooperative

Cooperative Name	Location	Diverted Amount	Specific
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		(NPR)	Mechanism / Finding
Suryadarshan	Pokhara	300 Million	Illegal investment in Galaxy 4K; part of a larger 1.35B scam <sup>1</sup>
Supreme	Butwal	150.31 Million	Includes a 20M loan in Lamichhane's name without collateral <sup>1</sup>
Swarnalaxmi	Kathmandu	64 Million	Part of 2.65B misappropriated deposits <sup>1</sup>
Sahara	Chitwan	117 Million	35M transferred via Siddhartha and Global IME Bank <sup>1</sup>
Sano Paila	Birgunj	115.69 Million	15M personal loan to Lamichhane at 12% interest <sup>15</sup>

The complexity of these transfers was designed to mask the origin of the capital. In the case of the Supreme Cooperative, funds were often credited to "dummy mortgage loan accounts" rather than legitimate borrowers, allowing the money to be moved to Gorkha Media's bank accounts at Global IME and Siddhartha Bank.<sup>1</sup> The parliamentary probe highlighted that even if Lamichhane was not directly involved in the *rerouting* of the funds from the cooperatives, he was the primary authorization point for their expenditure within the media company.<sup>10</sup>

## Forensic Analysis of Rabi Lamichhane's Administrative Culpability

The legal and political defense mounted by Rabi Lamichhane rests on the claim of ignorance regarding the source of the funds invested in Gorkha Media. However, forensic analysis and bank records present a contradictory narrative of active administrative responsibility. As the Managing Director, Lamichhane was a signatory on the company's bank accounts and authorized significant expenditures that directly utilized the embezzled cooperative savings.<sup>11</sup>

Investigations revealed that Lamichhane personally authorized the spending of over *NPR* 480 million from Gorkha Media's accounts through 814 individual checks.<sup>14</sup> This level of financial

involvement suggests a high degree of executive control over the day-to-day operations and liquidity of the firm. Furthermore, the parliamentary committee concluded that those in roles of shareholders, board members, and managing directors cannot evade liability for money received by their institutions, regardless of their claims of ignorance regarding the capital's origin.<sup>1</sup>

## Analysis of Rabi Lamichhane's Financial Liabilities

Claim Type	Amount (NPR)	Specific Detail
Personal Liability (Sano Paila)	57.43 Million	Direct loan and tenure-based misappropriation <sup>15</sup>
Personal Loan (Sano Paila)	15 Million	Taken on Aug 2, 2021; never repaid <sup>15</sup>
Personal Loan (Supreme)	20 Million	Credited to Global IME account; 400k service charge deducted <sup>13</sup>
Total Claim (Sahara Chitwan)	27 Million	Divided equally among Rai, Lamichhane, Joshi, and Ramtel <sup>15</sup>
Excess Payments Received	1.4 Million	Retained after returning 1.3M of a 2.7M withdrawal <sup>14</sup>
Payments to Family/Associates	14 Million	<i>NPR</i> 5.9M to wife Nikita Poudel; 8.1M to Gopikrishna Movies <sup>14</sup>

The "Sweat Share" mechanism also came under intense scrutiny. Lamichhane claimed his 15% stake in Gorkha Media was earned through labor and later sold following all legal procedures. However, the probe committee found that forgery was involved in the purchase and sale of these shares, and the documents used to finalize these transactions were found to be fraudulent.<sup>11</sup> This finding directly undermines Lamichhane's image as an uncorrupted reformer and suggests his involvement in the systematic manipulation of corporate records.<sup>3</sup>

## Socio-Economic Destabilization and the Human Cost

The cooperative scam is not merely a political scandal but a humanitarian crisis that has devastated the lives of approximately 50,000 depositors linked to the Gorkha Media network and millions more across the national sector.<sup>1</sup> For many Nepali citizens, especially the elderly and low-income earners, these cooperatives were the only accessible institutions for saving and credit. The betrayal of this trust has led to widespread financial ruin, with retirees losing their pensions and small business owners losing their livelihoods.<sup>8</sup>

The physical and psychological toll of the crisis is profound. Reports indicate that over 400 individuals have died without ever recovering their deposits, often because they could not afford essential medical care after their life savings were siphoned off.<sup>5</sup> In Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Butwal, victims have repeatedly hit the streets in protest, clashing with police and demanding that the government seize the assets of cooperative operators and their families to facilitate refunds.<sup>1</sup>

The response of the state has been characterized as tepid and politicized. While the government established the National Cooperatives Regulatory Authority (NCRA) in early 2025 and pledged to refund deposits up to *NPR* 500,000, there remains no legal guarantee or concrete timeline for these payments.<sup>7</sup> Victims have expressed concern that the government intends to use cooperative assets to fund the regulatory body itself, further depleting the pool of money available for restitution.<sup>17</sup> This lack of urgency has exacerbated the "distance" between the governing elite and the populace, particularly the Generation Z youth who view the crisis as a symbol of the "might is right" culture prevalent in Nepali politics.<sup>18</sup>

## **The 2025 Digital Uprising and the "Asian Spring"**

The intersection of the cooperative scandal and the government's attempts to control digital expression triggered a massive societal shift in 2025. Following a sudden ban on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube—viewed by many as a "bulwark against political venality"—a youth-led movement erupted across Nepal.<sup>19</sup> This movement, termed the "Asian Spring," was fueled by resentment over corruption, unemployment (rising to 10.71%), and the three major financial scandals of the early 2020s, including the cooperative crisis.<sup>19</sup>

For Generation Z, social media was not just a tool for entertainment but a primary source of income and a platform for exposing the "lavish parties" and "foreign trips" of the political elite.<sup>19</sup> The ban was perceived as a clumsy cover-up of state corruption, leading to nationwide protests that culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in September 2025.<sup>19</sup>

The arrest of Rabi Lamichhane in October 2024 had already polarized his supporter base. While established parties called him a "cooperative fraudster," his followers viewed his arrest as a "political vendetta" designed to destroy a new party that challenged the status quo.<sup>22</sup> This sentiment reached a fever pitch during the protests of September 2025.

## **The Nakkhu Jailbreak and the Collapse of Order**

On September 9, 2025, during the height of the anti-government demonstrations, a mass jailbreak occurred at Nakkhu Prison in Lalitpur, where Rabi Lamichhane was being held in judicial custody.<sup>21</sup> Approximately 1,500 inmates escaped after police reportedly abandoned their posts.<sup>19</sup>

The circumstances of Lamichhane's release were initially shrouded in mystery. Reports indicated that a large crowd of his supporters reached the prison gate, and the administration, citing an inability to guarantee his safety, allowed him to leave.<sup>25</sup> Later investigations by the Gauri Bahadur Karki commission revealed that the jailer was pressured by the then Home Secretary to sign release papers for Lamichhane.<sup>24</sup> Lamichhane himself denied fleeing, claiming he was "freed by jail officials" with the cooperation of the home administration.<sup>24</sup> The incident highlighted the total breakdown of the rule of law and the immense "street power" that Lamichhane continued to wield despite his legal troubles.<sup>21</sup>

## The Judicial Pivot: Analyzing the 2026 Charge Withdrawals

The legal trajectory of the cooperative case took a dramatic and controversial turn on January 14, 2026. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG), led by Sabita Bhandari, decided to withdraw the charges of "organized crime" and "money laundering" against Rabi Lamichhane in multiple district courts, including Kaski, Rupandehi, Kathmandu, and Parsa.<sup>27</sup> The OAG clarified that while the "cooperative fraud" and "cheating" cases would continue, the more severe charges would be dropped under Section 36 of the National Criminal Procedure Code, 2017.<sup>27</sup>

This decision was met with immediate and fierce opposition from legal bodies and political rivals. CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli criticized the move, stating it "stained the history" of the OAG and exposed a lack of rule of law.<sup>18</sup> The Nepal Bar Association (NBA) issued a strong objection, arguing that the withdrawal promotes "impunity through the politicization of offenses" and undermines the independent judiciary.<sup>30</sup>

### Comparative Status of Criminal Charges against Rabi Lamichhane (Post-Jan 2026)

Charge Category	Legal Status (as of Feb 2026)	Implication of Status
Cooperative Fraud	Active (Multiple Districts)	Prosecution for direct misappropriation continues <sup>27</sup>

Cheating / Fraud	Active (Multiple Districts)	Personal liability and financial claims remain <sup>28</sup>
Organized Crime	Withdrawn / Pending Appeal	Prevents the use of harsher organized crime laws <sup>27</sup>
Money Laundering	Withdrawn / Pending Appeal	Lifting of suspension as a Member of Parliament <sup>27</sup>

The OAG justified the withdrawal by claiming that "additional evidence" had emerged and that prioritizing the fraud charges would better serve the interests of the victim depositors.<sup>31</sup> However, petitioners at the Supreme Court argued that no such new evidence existed and that the decision was "arbitrary, mala fide, and intended to grant Lamichhane immunity".<sup>33</sup> By late January 2026, the Supreme Court ordered the Attorney General to submit the original documents and evidence cited for the withdrawal, temporarily halting the implementation of the decision in certain courts like Rupandehi.<sup>32</sup>

## Implications for Generation Z and the 2026 Elections

The cooperative scam and the subsequent legal maneuvers have created a profound crisis of credibility for the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and the broader "alternative" political movement. Generation Z voters, who were instrumental in the RSP's rise in 2022, now find themselves at a crossroads. The party that promised to "steadily the country" and fight "favor and fear politics" is now perceived by many as having used the same mechanisms of patronage to protect its leadership.<sup>22</sup>

### The Erosion of Reformist Identity

The image of the RSP as a "beacon of integrity" has been severely tarnished by the forensic evidence of Lamichhane's signatures on 814 checks and the siphoning of *NPR* 480 million.<sup>14</sup> While some supporters still believe in the narrative of a political vendetta, others see the controversy as a failure of the party to uphold its core values in practice.<sup>36</sup> The youth electorate, characterized by its "anti-establishment" stance, is increasingly frustrated with the "dual legal system" where common citizens face jail while leaders negotiate their charges through the Attorney General's office.<sup>18</sup>

### The 2026 Electoral Context

As the House of Representatives (HoR) elections on March 5, 2026, approach, the cooperative scandal remains the primary battleground issue. The political landscape has shifted significantly:

1. **RSP-Balen Shah Unification:** In a strategic move to regain credibility, the RSP Central

Committee approved a unification deal with Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah in late 2025.<sup>37</sup> This alliance aims to leverage Shah's popular, action-oriented persona to shield the RSP from the fallout of the Lamichhane scandal.<sup>37</sup>

2. **The Rise of Youth Candidates in Traditional Parties:** Recognizing the youth's hunger for change, parties like the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) are fielding a high percentage of candidates under the age of 40.<sup>31</sup>
3. **The Persistence of the Victims' Struggle:** The National Campaign for Protection of Cooperative Depositors continues to organize protests, demanding that the 2026 elections be a referendum on the recovery of their *NPR* 275 billion.<sup>7</sup>

The 2026 election is not just a contest of personalities but a test of whether Nepal's democratic institutions can deliver justice in the face of massive financial fraud. For Generation Z, the decision to vote will depend on whether they believe any political force—new or old—is truly committed to dismantling the infrastructure of deception that has allowed billions in public savings to vanish.

## Second-Order Insights: The Political Economy of Cooperative Capture

The Gorkha Media Network scam is symptomatic of a broader political economy in Nepal where financial institutions are "captured" to fund political and media influence. The reliance of Gorkha Media on cooperative funds, rather than traditional revenue sources like advertising, suggests that the media company's very existence was predicated on the illegal exploitation of micro-savings.<sup>1</sup>

### The "Sweat Share" as a Tool for Legal Evasion

The use of "sweat shares" in this case represents a sophisticated attempt to legitimize high-profile involvement without direct capital investment. By accepting a 15% stake for "labor," Rabi Lamichhane became an owner and administrator of the company, and thus legally liable for its financial operations.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent forgery of share transfer documents indicates a secondary layer of fraud designed to conceal the exit of political figures from failing corporate ventures as legal scrutiny intensifies.<sup>11</sup>

### The Nexus of Media and Political Power

The scandal highlights the dangerous convergence of media ownership and political ambition. Galaxy 4K Television was utilized to build the persona of an anti-corruption crusader, which was then converted into political capital during the 2022 elections.<sup>21</sup> The fact that this media platform was funded by the very "white-collar crimes" it ostensibly campaigned against creates a recursive loop of deception that has deeply damaged the credibility of independent media in Nepal.<sup>6</sup>

## Future Trajectories and Systemic Reform

The resolution of the cooperative crisis requires more than just the prosecution of a few high-profile figures. It necessitates a fundamental restructuring of the regulatory framework:

- **Abolition of Self-Regulation:** The "self-regulatory" nature of cooperatives has failed. A strong, independent regulatory body with powers similar to a central bank is required to monitor the financial activities of the 31,373 cooperatives in Nepal.<sup>7</sup>
- **Separation of Management and Ownership:** Clear legal barriers must be established to prevent cooperative board members and their families from investing funds in private companies or real estate ventures.<sup>8</sup>
- **Accountability for Signatories:** The case establishes a legal precedent that signatories on corporate bank accounts must be held liable for the origin and expenditure of funds, effectively ending the defense of "administrative ignorance".<sup>1</sup>

As the Supreme Court continues its hearing on the withdrawal of charges in early 2026, the nation remains on edge. The outcome will determine whether Nepal moves toward a transparent, rules-based financial system or remains a landscape where political maneuverability can erase the consequences of massive institutional betrayal. For the Generation Z voters of Nepal, the stakes could not be higher: their financial future and their faith in democracy depend on the final verdict of this saga.

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