THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXIV No. 170 | 8 pages | Rs10

Friday, August 07, 2026 | 22-04-2083

34.0° C Dharan 14.9° C Jomsom

Silver tops gold in import value as investors seek a cheaper haven

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

Gold or silver?

Silver has historically played a supporting role to gold in Nepal, where the yellow metal is deeply intertwined with Hindu and Buddhist traditions, centuries-old trans-Himalayan trade and the culture of holding tangible wealth.

From the gilded roofs of sacred temples to the heavy gold ornaments worn by brides, gold has long symbolised purity, status and financial security.

> **Many investors bought silver expecting gains, but prices fell as quickly as they rose.**

But the notion of precious metals as an investment appears to be changing.

Nepal's silver import bill surpassed the value of gold imports in the last fiscal year ended mid-July for the first time on record, reflecting an unprecedented surge in demand for the precious white metal.

Traders say the boom was fuelled by soaring silver prices, with Nepalis increasingly viewing the metal as a safe investment amid falling stock market prices and gold prices that have moved beyond the reach of many.

"It's basically about profit. A profit in a short span of time attracted investors," said Diyesh Ratna Shakya, senior vice-president of the Federation of Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers' Association.

>> Continued on page 5

Nepal, India seek breakthrough in stalled Pancheshwar project

After a four-year gap, the two neighbours will revisit disputes over water sharing, benefits and investment as they seek to finalise the Pancheshwar DPR.



POST FILE PHOTO

Sarada Barrage on the Mahakali, Nepal's western frontier river with India.

ANIL GIRI & **SEEMA TAMANG**
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

Nepal and India will discuss the long-delayed Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project and other issues related to the Mahakali Treaty at a bilateral water resources meet scheduled for the first week of September, the first such meeting in four years.

The meetings of the India-Nepal Joint Committee on Water Resources (JCWR) and the Joint Standing Technical Committee on Water Resources (JSTCWR) will also take up the proposed link canal from the Tanakpur Barrage to the Nepal border, among other issues.

The Tanakpur-Mahendranagar link road, irrigation water supply to the Dodhara Chandani area, the Saptakoshi High Dam Multipurpose Project, and the Sunkoshi-Kamala Storage-cum-Diversion Scheme too are on the agenda. The two sides will also review the progress of the Joint Committee on the Koshi and Gandak Projects and the Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management.

Sushil Chandra Acharya, joint secretary at the Ministry of Energy, confirmed that the Pancheshwar project will be on the agenda of the September meetings.

According to senior officials, the meetings are being held after India expressed its readiness to resolve outstanding differences and move forward with the implementation of the Mahakali Treaty during Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal's visit to India in June.

"Both sides are exchanging their proposed agendas for the overall water resources discussions as well as Pancheshwar-related issues," a senior government official told the Post. "The agendas are being finalised."

Multiple sources involved in preparations for the upcoming meeting say the Indian side appears more positive than in previous rounds about finalising the Detailed Project Report of the multipurpose project.

Nepal has been informally urging the Indian side not to delay the project any further. Some concrete progress on the project is expected, another government official told the Post.

>> Continued on page 2

Teen's fatal shooting in Siraha still a mystery as forensic probe begins

Home ministry panel, led by Joint Secretary Pushparaj Shahi, has yet to determine who fired the deadly shot.

GAURAV POKHAREL IN KATHMANDU **&** **BINAY AAZAD** IN SIRAHA
AUG 6

The mystery surrounding the fatal shooting of a 15-year-old boy during unrest in Siraha has deepened after Nepal's three security agencies denied firing the bullet that killed him, prompting authorities to expand the investigation with ballistic and forensic experts.

Ganesh Yadav, a resident of ward 2 in Aurahi Rural Municipality, was shot in the neck during violence in Golbazar on July 30, four days after communal tensions triggered by a clash between two communities in Dewanganj of Sunsari spread across Madhesh Province.

His body remained in Golbazar Chowk for nearly three hours as grieving relatives demanded answers.

A video showing his elder brother, Kamlesh Yadav, aged 18, breaking down while informing relatives about the shooting quickly went viral, adding to public anger and fuelling tensions. Home Minister Sudan Gurung travelled to Madhesh Province shortly after the incident and met Ganesh's father Ram Briksh Yadav in Siraha.

The family agreed to collect the body only after signing a seven-point agreement with the government. Yet the central question remains: whose bullet killed the teenager?

Chief District Officer Surendra Paudel of Siraha said that local authorities had been briefed that Nepal Police personnel fired only blank rounds and rubber bullets in their efforts to control the situation. "We have also been informed that the Armed Police Force did not fire live ammunition," Paudel told Kantipur.

Deputy Inspector General Abi Narayan Kafle, Nepal Police spokesman, said the Madhesh Province Police Office had formed an investigation committee led by Superintendent Bhesh Raj Rijal on the day of the incident. He added that the home ministry had also constituted a separate committee to examine the broader circumstances surrounding the unrest.

> **Probe team inducted 2 new officials to conduct detailed ballistic and forensic examinations.**

A curfew had been imposed in Golbazar as violence escalated, and Nepali Army personnel were also deployed to assist civil authorities.

However, the army has likewise denied firing live ammunition. Nepali Army spokesperson Brigadier General Rajaram Basnet said he could not comment on the issue because it was under investigation.

The home ministry-formed committee, led by Joint Secretary Pushparaj Shahi, has also yet to determine who fired the fatal shot. A member of the panel said identifying the source of the bullet had become one of the most challenging aspects of the inquiry.

>> Continued on page 2



Supreme Court order revives Congress leadership row, cools split push

Thapa faction says the review will provide further clarity on the legal and political basis of the special convention, while Deuba's camp says plans for a separate party will likely be dropped for now.



POST PHOTO: DIBESH DARSHANDHARI

Nepali Congress dissident leaders organised a separate event last week to commemorate party founder and ideologue BP Koirala's 44th death anniversary. This faction, which considers Sher Bahadur Deuba its leader, is holding its 'national gathering' from August 14-16.

❍ **KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE** & **DURGA DULAL**
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

The Supreme Court has reopened the legal dispute over the leadership of the Nepali Congress after deciding to review its earlier ruling that recognised the party's special general convention and the central working committee led by Gagan Thapa.

A three-justice bench comprising Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma and justices Nityananda Pandey and Shreekanta Paudel on Thursday issued the order while responding to separate review petitions filed by former party president Sher Bahadur Deuba and former acting president Purna Bahadur Khadka.

Both argued that the Supreme Court's April verdict, which upheld the Election Commission's recognition of Thapa's leadership, was flawed.

The court's order revives the dispute but does not immediately change the party's leadership. The Election Commission's decision recognising the Thapa-led central committee remains valid until the court issues a fresh ruling. As a result, Thapa continues to serve as party president and his central working committee retains legal authority.

Seeking to correct what they described as an "erroneous" Court ruling, Deuba and Khadka filed separate petitions for judicial review on July 22 and July 28, respectively.

The fresh order effectively resets the case to the stage before the April judgment.

A new three-justice bench, excluding the justices involved in the earlier verdict and Thursday's review order, will hear the case from the beginning. The Supreme Court will notify all respondents, including the Election Commission and the Thapa-led leadership, seek written responses, obtain the commission's original records and examine evidence submitted by both sides before delivering a final judgment.

The review comes as the Nepali Congress was edging closer to a formal split. Thapa, elected party president through the special general convention in January, now faces renewed pressure, while Deuba's faction has been emboldened after the court's decision. The faction had been preparing to form a separate party after concluding that efforts to bridge the divide within the party were unlikely to succeed.

Deuba's faction had called a national gathering in Kathmandu for August 14 to 16 and had been preparing to launch a separate political party if unity efforts failed.

Former acting president Khadka had declined to lead the proposed new party, after which senior leaders persuaded Shashank Koirala, son of the party founder and ideologue BP Koirala, to head the organising committee and potentially assume its leadership. Accordingly, preparations were underway to present proposals on the party statute, finances, politics and contemporary political issues at the gathering scheduled to start on August 14.

> **Deuba is expected to return home next week after nearly five months abroad.**

Following Thursday's order, however, leaders from the Deuba camp signalled a change in strategy. Leader Bimalendra Nidhi said the national gathering would proceed but that immediate plans to form a separate party would likely be dropped.

"There is no plan to postpone the gathering as of now. We will sit for discussions tomorrow [Friday]. Sher Bahadur ji is scheduled to return on August 11, and we will decide our next steps after consultations," Nidhi told Kantipur.

"The court's order restores constitutionalism, and the rule of law is a historic step."

Asked whether the gathering would move towards forming a separate party, Nidhi said, "We will no longer move towards forming a separate party. If the Supreme Court has granted a review, why would there be a need to create a separate party?"

Leaders aligned with Thapa also urged restraint. Vice-president Bishwa Prakash Sharma said that although the case had already been fully argued before the Supreme Court, the review would provide an opportunity to present the legal and political legitimacy of the special general convention in greater detail. He said his faction was prepared to present all relevant facts before the court.

"There was no need to reopen a matter for review after the Supreme Court's joint bench had already settled it by quashing the writ petition following lengthy arguments," he said. "However, I believe the review process will help shed further light on the legal facts and political realities surrounding the special general convention."

General Secretary Pradip Paudel said the court's decision to review the case should not be interpreted as a victory or defeat for either side. Instead, he argued that it had created an opportunity for broader party unity and urged leaders to seek a political settlement rather than waiting for the court's final decision.

The ruling has also raised questions about the process for the party's upcoming 15th general convention. The Congress is scheduled to begin ward-level conventions on August 18, followed by the national convention from September 30 to October 5. Party leaders said they would discuss whether the existing timetable should be maintained in light of the court proceedings.

In its order, the Supreme Court indicated that one of the principal legal issues requiring further examination is whether the Election Commission violated procedural fairness by recognising the new leadership without allowing the petitioners to present their case. The court referred to provisions of the Political Parties Act and Political Parties Regulations governing the updating of party records, suggesting that compliance with these procedural requirements needs scrutiny.

The dispute emerged after the Election Commission recognised the working committee elected under Thapa's leadership at the special general convention. The Deuba faction challenged the commission's decision at the Supreme Court.

On April 17, a division bench of Justices Sharanga Subedi and Nripdhwoj Niraula upheld the Election Commission's decision to recognise the special general convention of the Congress as lawful. The ruling effectively validated the working committee elected from the convention and allowed the Thapa-led committee to continue carrying out party activities.

Legal experts said the review does not invalidate the earlier judgment or suspend the current leadership. Senior advocate and constitutional lawyer Purnaman Shakya said the Thapa-led leadership would remain in office until the court reached a final decision. He explained that the review simply reopens the legal examination and that the Supreme Court could ultimately either uphold or overturn its earlier ruling after considering fresh arguments and evidence.

Advocate Apurba Khatiwada said the legality of both the special general convention and the Election Commission's decision would now be fully examined again, with the court reassessing the legal basis of the leadership change from the beginning.

In their review petitions, Deuba and Khadka set out 18 grounds challenging the earlier judgment. They argue that the Election Commission failed to conduct the inquiries required under the Political Parties Act before recognising the Thapa-led committee. They also contend that a special general convention cannot legally function as a regular general convention for electing a new central leadership.

The petition further argues that delegates had only demanded the convening of a special convention, not the election of new office-bearers, and that the then general secretary lacked both legal and moral authority to convene such a gathering. According to the petition, only the elected central working committee retained the authority to call a special convention under the party statute.

The Deuba faction also alleges that forged documents were submitted to the Election Commission, that signatures later withdrawn by delegates were ignored, and that the commission departed from procedures it had followed in previous disputes involving political parties. It further argues that an elected party president can only be removed through procedures laid down in the party statute and not through a special convention, while also questioning whether the convention had the number of delegates claimed by its organisers.

The dispute stems from the special general convention held from January 10 to 12, which elected Gagan Thapa and a new central working committee. The Election Commission recognised the new leadership on January 17, prompting Deuba and Khadka to challenge the decision in the Supreme Court.

Separately, Deuba is expected to return to Nepal on August 11 after nearly five months abroad. He spent some time in Singapore, where he has been "undergoing medical treatment" and later moved to Hong Kong. During his stay abroad, arrest warrants were issued against him and his wife, Arzu Rana Deuba, as part of a money laundering investigation.

Authorities sought an Interpol Red Notice, but the request was rejected. The Supreme Court has since issued an interim order preventing their arrest while it considers their legal challenge. Deuba had informed investigators that he was not absconding and would return to Nepal before mid-September to cooperate with the investigation.

Security agencies claim it wasn't their bullet. So who killed Ganesh Yadav?



POST PHOTO

People gather on a street in Golbazar, Siraha, on July 30, after unrest spread to Madhesh towns following communal tensions that began in Sunsari on July 27.

>> Continued from page 1

"The question of who fired the bullet has been more complicated than it initially appeared, and we are treating it as our top priority," the committee member told Kantipur.

As uncertainty persisted, the ministry expanded the investigation team by adding two officials from the Nepal Police Forensic Science Laboratory to conduct detailed ballistic and forensic examinations, raising hopes that scientific analysis will establish responsibility for the teenager's death.

The newly added investigators are Inspector Dipesh Awasthi and Superintendent of Police Manohar Singh Dhami, who specialise in ballistic and forensic analysis. They joined an existing panel comprising Nepal Police Superintendent Mohan Kumar Thapa, Armed Police Force Superintendent Naresh Bhandari, Central Police Forensic Science Laboratory Deputy Superintendent Pawan Kumar Dhungana, and Home Ministry Under Secretary Kul Shekhar Aryal.

A home ministry official said the team was strengthened because scientific evidence was considered essential to determine which weapon fired the fatal shot. Ballistic testing can identify the firearm used and estimate the firing distance, findings investigators believe will help reconstruct the sequence of events.

Buddha Narayan Sahani, head of the National Human Rights Commission's Madhesh office, said that there was still no confirmed answer despite widespread speculation. "Many claims have been made, but nothing has been conclusively established," he told Kantipur, adding that the commission was conducting its own assessment.

According to security officials, similar incidents in the past have also been marked by uncertainty over which party fired the fatal shot.

Former Additional Inspector General of Nepal Police Uttam Raj Subedi said uncertainty over responsibility was not unprecedented in crowd-control operations involving multiple security agencies.

"Ballistic examination can determine which weapon fired the bullet," he said. "Once investigators establish which personnel were deployed and which weapons they carried, identifying responsibility should not be difficult."

Subedi added that investigators must also consider the possibility that someone outside the security forces fired the shot if no agency accepts responsibility.

Ganesh's father, Ram Briksh Yadav, has consistently maintained that the government is responsible for his son's death. "The government killed my child. Whoever fired the bullet must be punished. I want justice," he said. He repeated the same demand when Home Minister Gurung visited his home on July 31.

Under the second point of agreement signed by Gurung, the government committed to an impartial and effective investigation into the Golbazar incident and immediate legal action against those found responsible.

Accordingly, the Shahi-led team began its inquiry. After arriving in Siraha, the committee started inspecting the incident site, collecting evidence and other relevant facts, and holding consultations with local residents and other stakeholders.

Investigators also held an all-party meeting at Golbazar Municipality, met business owners to document losses caused during the unrest, and separately consulted representatives of the Muslim community on the causes of the violence and ways to restore social harmony.

The committee is also examining whether security personnel followed established procedures governing the use of force. International human rights standards require lethal force to be used only as a last resort, while Nepal's Local Administration Act allows live ammunition only under exceptional circumstances after clear warnings are issued. Residents have alleged that no such warning was given.

The Siraha shooting came only days after police firing during communal violence in Sunsari's Dewanganj left several people dead and injured, renewing concerns over the use of lethal force during crowd control.

According to the Local Government Act 1972, security personnel may resort to live fire only as a last resort when law and order cannot be maintained by any other means. Before opening fire, authorities are required to give a clear warning to the crowd. International crowd-control principles likewise require security forces to exercise restraint and use the minimum force necessary to bring a situation under control.

Local residents, however, say no warning was issued before shots were fired. Clause 6(B) of the Local Government Act states that if a crowd refuses to disperse and firing becomes unavoidable, a written and signed order must be issued, and shots should be aimed below the knees.

However, most of those injured in the Sunsari incident received gunshots above the knees. Ganesh was shot in the neck. His post-mortem examination was conducted at the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan, and the hospital says the report has already been prepared.

Nepal, India set to resume Pancheshwar DPR talks next month

>> Continued from page 1

The project has remained stalled for decades due to a lack of political will, inconsistent approaches, disagreements over cost-sharing and water benefits, energy pricing concerns, environmental issues, and the inability to develop a long-term implementation plan.

Both sides have now concluded that key modalities related to investment, water and energy benefits, irrigation coverage, and flood control, among other issues, need to be reassessed, with Nepal and India presenting their respective positions.

During informal discussions between officials from both sides, Nepal has proposed a 30:70 cost-sharing ratio with India, while India maintains that it will bear only 65 percent of the project cost, not 70 percent.

Nepal and India signed the Mahakali Treaty in 1996 and have since held several rounds of discussions at various levels to finalise the DPR, determine the project cost, settle benefit-sharing arrangements, and resolve technical issues.

"It is all about the benefits of the project after its execution. India would gain greater irrigation and flood control benefits compared to Nepal. So our position is that investment should be made in proportion to the benefits each country receives," knowledgeable sources told the Post. "From the 50:50 investment model that was discussed initially, it has now come to 65:35. We believe 70:30 is justifiable."

Officials involved in finalising the meeting agendas said the two sides are almost on the same page regarding investment in electricity generation. However, water sharing remains a major point of contention.

"As India is the major beneficiary, it should naturally put more money into the overall project," the source said.

During the last meeting held on September 21–22, 2022, the two countries comprehensively reviewed the bilateral water-sector cooperation between India and Nepal, including the implementation of Mahakali Treaty, Saptakoshi-Sunkoshi Project and cooperation in areas of flooding and inundation.

The meeting agreed to take forward the Saptakoshi high dam project through further studies which take into consideration the planned upstream projects, submergence area as well as other social, environmental and technical aspects. The Joint Team of Experts is expected to meet soon.

On the Pancheshwar project, India's state-owned Water and Power Consultancy Services (WAPCOS) Ltd submitted the draft DPR in 2016 after merging separate project reports prepared by the two countries. Later a team of joint expert groups was constituted to review and revisit the report prepared by WAPCOS. Now the upcoming meeting will discuss the same amended report jointly prepared by the team of experts.

However, the two countries still have several issues to resolve, particularly regarding water sharing and the assessment of benefits for both sides. The DPR was later reviewed by a joint team of experts, which submitted a revised draft of the report.

In the upcoming meeting, both sides will discuss the revised DPR submitted by the Joint Expert Group (JEG).

According to officials, Nepal's comments to the JEG have focused on clearly defining water-sharing arrangements, including how much water each side will be entitled to use. The proposal also includes details on the irrigation systems through which Nepal and India would utilise the project's water.

According to hydrological studies, the Mahakali river has an average annual water availability of 18 billion cubic metres (bcm). Of this, 13 bcm is currently being used—12 bcm by India and one bcm by Nepal. India draws seven bcm of the 12 bcm from the upper Sarada barrage, built on the India-Nepal border, mainly for irrigation in Uttar Pradesh. The remaining 5 bcm comes from the lower Sarada barrage, located about 150 km downstream on the Indian side.

Nepal's position is that the 5 bcm drawn from the lower Sarada barrage should be considered part of India's existing water use. However, India wants it to be treated as part of its future water entitlement after the Pancheshwar dam is constructed.

"If the 5 bcm becomes part of future usage, India will effectively not get anything when the dam comes up," an official familiar with the negotiations said, explaining the Indian position and the point where negotiations have remained stuck.

The Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project—first conceived as part of the Mahakali Treaty signed by Nepal and India in 1996—envisages the construction of two hydropower plants with a combined installed capacity of 5,040 megawatts and a 315-metre-high dam to meet the power and irrigation needs of both countries.

Officials familiar with the developments said both sides could reach an understanding once the disagreement over water sharing is resolved, additional water discharge to India is agreed upon, and the cost-benefit analysis is completed.

Issues including the costs and benefits of flood control, water availability in the Mahakali river, calculation of downstream benefits, water availability in the Chandani-Dodhara area, and other legal matters will be discussed during the meeting.

Former Energy Secretary and former Chief Executive Officer of the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, Madhu Prasad Bhetuwal, said key issues related to the sharing of irrigation and flood control benefits, as well as the quantum of water rights, remain unresolved.

"When I was in office, there was no agreement on how the monetary benefits would be divided between India and Nepal, nor on the quantum of water rights—how much would belong to Nepal and how much to India," he said. "Hopefully, these issues will now be settled so that the DPR can move forward."

The treaty concerning the Sarada Barrage, Tanakpur Barrage, and the Pancheshwar Project on the Mahakali river was signed on February 11, 1996, by Nepal's then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and India's then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Following the agreement, commonly known as the Mahakali Treaty, the two countries began the process of jointly developing the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project through bilateral investment.

The treaty stated that the project's DPR would be finalised within six months. Nepal's Parliament ratified the Mahakali Treaty in October 1996, approving the agreement to develop the project. The two countries agreed to share investment based on their respective utilisation of the project's water resources, with India expected to contribute around 65 percent and Nepal around 35 percent of the investment. At the time, the estimated cost of the project was around US$3 billion.

More than two decades after the agreement, the project's actual cost has still not been recalculated at current prices. The two countries also remain divided over investment-sharing. Nepal maintains that India should contribute a larger share because it stands to gain greater irrigation benefits, while India argues that investment should follow the previously agreed cost-sharing formula regardless of how benefits are distributed. As a result, the DPR remains unsettled.

US aid freeze disrupts HIV outreach and treatment services in Nepal

A new study warns that the halt could lead to delayed diagnoses, treatment interruptions and preventable deaths.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

Thousands of female sex workers, gay men and people who inject drugs have been without access to pre-exposure prophylaxis for the past 19 months after the medication was discontinued since the US government halted USAID-funded programmes worldwide. Pre-exposure prophylaxis is a highly effective HIV prevention medicine taken by people at higher risk of infection to reduce chances of contracting HIV through unprotected sex or injectable drug use. The suspension of the USAID-funded programme has left hundreds of at-risk populations, including pregnant women whose husbands are HIV-positive, without access to the medicine.

"We don't have our own programme to provide pre-exposure prophylaxis medication to the at-risk populations," said Dr Sarbesh Sharma, director at the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control.

Along with pre-exposure prophylaxis medication, several other USAID-funded programmes, including awareness campaigns, counselling services, behavioural-change initiatives and other targeted interventions targeting female sex workers, homosexual men, and those taking injectable drugs and others have also been stopped due to the abrupt suspension of US funding.

As a result, the risk of a rise in HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases has increased, threatening achievements made over the years through huge investments, warns a new report, published in BMJ Public Health, the UK-based medical journal.

According to the study titled 'Global Health Consequences of the 2025 US Foreign Aid Freeze: Rapid Assessments in Colombia, Kenya and Nepal', carried out in Colombia, Kenya and Nepal, by the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health at Columbia University, loss of funding led to abrupt suspension of HIV services across the three countries, particularly in Nepal and Kenya.

Disruptions to antiretroviral treatment (ART) distribution, community-based outreach and follow-up care have left people living with HIV without consistent access to lifesaving treatment. "Since our clinics are shut, we have lost contact with several of our clients," the report quoted a service provider as saying. "Our community volunteers have also stopped home-delivery of ART to those who are unable to visit the clinics."

The ART centres run by the government cannot reach them since they do not have outreach workers for such activities, and the situation will be worse now on, the report warns.

Community health workers programmes, which had bridged the gap between government health services and communities by connecting people living with HIV to care, were described by some respondents as the first services to be defunded. Without the services, respondents feared delayed diagnoses, loss to follow-up and increases in preventable deaths.

"If we cannot give service, the number of HIV cases will soar," the report quoted another respondent as saying. "In our district, only 50 percent of the HIV survivors seek care regularly by themselves. Those who fail to seek treatment fall vulnerable to tuberculosis and other life-threatening diseases, which contribute to a high mortality rate." The abrupt cessation of US foreign aid in 2025 has had potentially far-reaching consequences for Nepal's health care sector, according to the report. For health workers, the economic and psychological strain was acute. Layoffs, as well as prolonged uncertainty about long-term employment and heavier workloads for remaining staff, contributed to widespread distress.

"Everyone is suffering from mental health issues. They are saying things like 'where will we get a job now?' and 'what should we do now?'," the report quoted. The researchers interviewed 18 key informants in Nepal, including NGO directors, programme managers, clinicians implementing US-funded health programmes and senior officials at the Ministry of Health and Food Safety, to assess the immediate consequences of the funding freeze on health services. "We used to run community-based organisations in 33 districts before the suspension of USAID funding," said Manju Adhikari, an activist working with Jagriti Mahila Sangh, a national network of female sex workers. "At present, none of our organisations are active due to the funding crunch. Our staff used to make close contact with the people infected with HIV, visit their homes, counsel them, encourage them to get tested and take medications. The halt in funding has not only affected our organisations but also increased the risk of spread of infections."

Meanwhile, officials at the Health Ministry said that even if community-based programmes have halted due to the suspension of USAID funding, HIV testing and treatment are available at state-run health facilities.

"Infected people can undergo free testing from state-run health facilities and take free antiretroviral medications," said Sharma, director at the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control. "Only some services provided by USAID-funded NGOs have been suspended."

New master plan charts Kathmandu Valley's transport future

Tunnel proposed at the Gaushala-Chabahil stretch, which sees heavy traffic and passes through a cultural heritage area.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

A section of the Ring Road pictured recently. The master plan proposes upgrading 23 major intersections and traffic signals.

SAJANA BARAL
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

The government has prepared a new master plan to reshape Kathmandu Valley's road infrastructure and urban transport system over the next 25 years, proposing major investments in mass transit, road upgrades and traffic management to cope with rapid urban growth.

Prepared by Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport with technical assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the blueprint is the fourth comprehensive transport master plan for the Valley after similar studies in 1993, 2012 and 2017. Unlike earlier versions, officials expect the latest report to receive Cabinet approval, allowing it to guide transport development until 2050.

The plan projects Kathmandu Valley's population to reach 4.3 million by 2050 and outlines new urban expansion areas, traffic demand forecasts, transport mode shifts, mass transit corridors, tunnels, junction improvements and reforms to public bus services.

However, discussions on Thursday revealed concerns over the Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway, with officials acknowledging inadequate coordination between the government regarding the alignment of the starting point and other technical aspects, JICA experts and the Nepali Army, which is constructing the strategic expressway.

During a presentation of the 'Kathmandu Valley Urban Transport System Master Plan', representatives of the Department of Roads asked how traffic generated by the expressway had been incorporated into the proposal.

> The plan includes the construction of an underpass at Maharajgunj Junction.

Responding to the query, Hideo Tsuji, head of JICA's expert team, said the consultants had formally requested discussions with the Nepali Army on projected traffic demand and future planning but had received no response.

"Construction of the expressway is being carried out by the Nepali Army," said Tsuji. "We formally sent a letter seeking discussions on future traffic demand and planning during the study, but we did not receive any response."

He added that a consultant's latest assessment estimated traffic volume on the expressway would reach around 27,000 passenger car units by 2045. "Since the expressway is designed as a four-lane highway, it should be able to accommodate that level of traffic," said Tsuji.

National Planning Commission member Arjun Jung Thapa said the expressway would begin at the Chobhar dry port and acknowledged that coordination challenges had emerged while the master plan was being prepared.

Thapa said the Army, which had earlier targeted completing the expressway by mid-April 2027, had now sought another extension until mid-April 2030. Despite differences over planning and implementation, he expressed confidence that both sides would reach a mutually acceptable solution within the next few months.

"Although the Army has been moving ahead in its own way, we are trying to coordinate and provide the necessary support," said Thapa.

"We are optimistic that this issue will be resolved through a fair, win-win agreement."

Sushil Babu Dhakal, joint secretary at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport and project director, said the master plan proposed 22 major infrastructure projects and 13 transport improvement programmes aimed at increasing road capacity and making travel safer.

"Acquiring land for new roads inside the Ring Road is no longer practical," said Dhakal. "Instead, we have focused on improving the capacity of existing roads and developing a 160-kilometre emergency road network to ensure hospitals and security facilities remain accessible during emergencies." He said that the new master plan would be implemented effectively soon after the Cabinet approved it. JICA representative from its headquarters said Kathmandu's worsening congestion required immediate action, adding that the focus should now shift from planning to implementation. He expressed hope that the government would soon endorse the report and begin executing priority projects.

The master plan's flagship proposal is a 14.6-kilometre east–west metro rail linking Ratna Park and Bhaktapur. It proposes constructing the section through the city centre and around Koteshwar Junction underground, while the remaining stretches would be built as elevated structures within the existing road right of way.

The plan envisages 1.9 kilometres of underground track and 12.7 kilometres of elevated alignment. It also suggests that the Gaushala-Chabahil section, which carries heavy traffic and passes through an area of historical and cultural significance, could be developed as an underground tunnel. A Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system along the Ring Road has also been proposed.

The master plan further includes the construction of an underpass at Maharajgunj Junction, along with upgraded roads and bridges along the Dhobikhola and Bishnumati corridors. It proposes widening the Gaushala-Tinkune section of the Ring Road and building a new river corridor road between Thapathali and Tripureshwar. The plan also calls for widening the UN Park Bridge and constructing new bridges over the Bishnumati, Dhobikhola, Karmanasa and Bagmati rivers, including at Gwarko and Thapathali. In addition, it proposes upgrading 23 major intersections and traffic signals to improve traffic flow and developing dedicated cycle lanes along selected roads.

The plan also recommends consolidating more than 65 public transport committees into five or six large operating companies to improve efficiency and encourage commuters to shift from motorcycles to public transport. It further proposes car-free zones in Thamel, Kathmandu Durbar Square and Patan Durbar Square.

Officials said suggestions collected during Thursday's consultation and previous meetings would be incorporated before the report is finalised and submitted to the Cabinet. They stressed that the proposals remain open to refinement and that detailed feasibility studies and engineering designs must be completed before individual projects move into implementation.

Manpower agencies threaten strike over recruitment policy

Recruitment agencies claim that price gouging by airlines and select travel firms has significantly inflated costs, placing an unfair financial burden on departing workers.



POST FILE PHOTO

Migrant workers pictured at the Tribhuvan International Airport in this undated photo.

HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUG 6

Foreign employment recruitment agencies have warned that they will stop placing migrant workers abroad if the government fails to introduce urgent policy reforms to address key operational challenges, as a 15-day deadline given to the government ends on Friday.

The ultimatum, issued by the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, demands transparent recruitment fee structures, lower airfares, the reopening of institutional migration to European countries, and broader market diversification.

Recruiters argue that current government policies have created an unsustainable environment, leaving them unable to conduct business ethically or legally while migrant workers continue to suffer the consequences.

"If this sector cannot be reformed, it is simply not viable to continue operating," said Dik Bahadur Khatri, president of the association. "The business is facing a severe crisis. The government must step in and create a healthy, transparent environment that allows us to work legally."

At the core of the dispute is the government's existing fee structure. Under current rules, recruitment agencies are barred from charging any fees to workers migrating to major destination countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia. According to bilateral labour agreements, employers are required to cover all expenses, including airfare, visa fees, and agency service charges—a policy widely known as 'free ticket, free visa.' For other destinations like Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, agencies are permitted to charge a maximum service fee of just Rs10,000.

In practice, however, these bilateral provisions remain largely unenforced.

Migrant workers routinely pay between Rs300,000 and Rs500,000 out of pocket to secure job placements abroad, creating a thriving illicit fee market.

Meanwhile, the Department of Foreign Employment has intensified monitoring efforts, penalising recruitment agencies caught charging excess fees and forcing them to refund the money. Agencies claim that this enforcement creates a double standard, leaving them legally vulnerable while failing to fix a broken system.

They are demanding a scientifically determined, transparent service fee structure that reflects actual operational costs.

Another of their major demands is to control the high airfares. Recruitment agencies claim that price gouging by airlines and select travel firms has significantly inflated costs, placing an unfair financial burden on departing workers.

"Airfares are excessively high due to collusion between airlines and a limited number of travel agencies," said Khatri. "Furthermore, because there are no direct international flights operating from Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa or Pokhara Regional/International Airport, workers are forced to seek cheaper tickets by flying out of Indian airports."

The department strictly prohibits workers from departing via foreign airports without prior approval. In recent months, officials have launched audits into air travel records of workers who received labour permits between March 14 and June 14. During that process, manpower agencies found guilty are being penalised.

On August 4, the department fined 39 recruitment agencies Rs50,000 each for placing workers via Indian airports without authorisation—marking the second penalty for several firms. Another 124 agencies were issued seven-day show-cause notices asking why they should not be fined Rs50,000 for failing to submit flight details. Under the Foreign Employment Act, three consecutive violations can result in the revocation of an agency's license.

Khatri urged the government to address the root cause rather than penalising agencies. "The government must take responsibility to reduce airfares," he said. "When workers are forced to use Indian airports because tickets are cheaper there, penalising recruitment agencies is unfair."

Agencies are also pushing for the formal reopening of institutional labour migration to European nations. Under the current demand letter attestation guidelines, labour demand documents from European employers must be verified by local Nepali embassies. However, Nepali diplomatic missions in Europe have expressed an inability to handle the verification workload, effectively halting institutional placements through recruitment agencies for the past two years.

> Biggest abuses and malpractices said to be occurring in individual migration to Europe.

Despite the halt, individual migration to Europe has surged, often mediated by informal networks and educational consultancies. In the last fiscal year of 2025-26, a total of 60,338 workers—representing 14.8 percent of all newly issued labour permits—migrated to Europe individually.

"The biggest abuses and malpractices are occurring in individual migration to Europe," said Khatri. "By forcing workers to migrate individually, the current system fuels human trafficking. The government must permit agencies to process European demand institutionally."

Recruiters also stressed the urgent need to diversify labour markets beyond traditional destinations in the Gulf and Malaysia. "When it is concentrated in just one place, it continually suffers contractions," Khatri said. "The labour market is impacted sometimes by natural disasters, sometimes by wars, and at other times by policies brought in to balance domestic manpower structures. The tension in the Middle East that has been ongoing since February confirms this."

According to department data, 406,404 Nepalis obtained new labour permits in the fiscal year of 2025–26, down 19.7 percent from 505,957 in the previous year. Overall labour permit issuances—including renewals—dropped 5.6 percent to 792,187.

The association has urged the government to end monopolies that inflate expenses for migrant workers. "We have been raising these issues repeatedly, but the government only listens without acting," said Khatri. "If our demands are wrong, tell us. Otherwise, we need a clear government plan to sustain this industry."

Responding to the concerns, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security maintained that it is actively working on comprehensive reforms. Pitambar Ghimire, ministry spokesperson, said that a government task force is finalising recommendations for a revised recruitment fee policy. "The task force under my leadership is in the final stages of determining a scientific service fee to eliminate illegal charges paid by workers," Ghimire said. "We will submit our report to ministry leadership soon."

Ghimire added that amendments to the Foreign Employment Act have been drafted and sent to the Foreign, Law, and Finance ministries for feedback before submission to the Cabinet.

"We recognise the need for reforms and are committed to addressing these issues," he said.

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Give inclusion teeth

Nepal requires a framework where inclusion commissions' recommendations carry legal weight.

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal was touted as a transformative socio-economic document designed to rectify centuries of historical injustice against marginalised communities. A decade later, the seven inclusion commissions established through Part 27 of the Constitution to safeguard the rights of the marginalised stand as gaunt reminders of a promise unfulfilled. These institutions, born from the sweat and blood of the People's Movement and the Tharuhat, Madhesh and Dalit struggles, have been reduced to ornamental fixtures within the state apparatus. As their ten-year review—mandated by Article 265 of the Constitution—looms, the state faces a difficult choice: Empower these commissions or admit that the inclusive project was merely an exercise in political window-dressing.

These commissions' current state of ruin is a result of deliberate institutional starvation. The financial records of these bodies reveal a grotesque imbalance between administrative survival and community impact. In FY 2023-24, the Tharu Commission expended a total of Rs38.78 million, yet a pathetic Rs900,000 was allocated to programmes directly benefiting the community. Similarly, the Indigenous Nationalities Commission received Rs35.66 million for the FY 2024-25, with a mere Rs1.1 million designated for capital expenditure. When salaries and office rent consume 99 percent of each commission's budget, they cease to be vehicles for social justice. Instead, they morph into taxpayer-funded waiting rooms for political appointees.

The powerlessness of these commissions is further calcified by a vacuum of legal authority and a wall of government indifference. Recommendations from these bodies are routinely treated as mere suggestions that the executive feels entitled to ignore. Of the 95 recommendations submitted by the Indigenous Nationalities Commission since its inception, only six have been implemented. The National Dalit Commission reports a similar trend, with less than 5 percent of its advice acted upon during a five-year tenure. While the Constitution explicitly defines the powers of the Women and Dalit commissions, it leaves the mandates of the Madhesi, Tharu and Muslim commissions to be determined by federal law, creating a hierarchy of rights that mocks the very principle of equality.

Over the years, the very integrity of these commissions has been eroded by political cronyism. Rather than appointing experts with proven records in research or advocacy, successive governments have used these constitutional seats as consolation prizes for loyalists who failed to secure election tickets. This degradation of meritocracy ensures that the commissions lack the teeth to challenge the status quo. Furthermore, the lack of permanent leadership—with the Tharu, Muslim and National Inclusion commissions currently languishing under acting officials—indicates a lack of state commitment to their success.

To argue that these bodies are redundant or burdensome would be to ignore the reality that electoral democracy alone cannot undo generations of systemic exclusion. A ministry focused on policy implementation will not independently audit its own failures. Constitutional commissions are essential. They serve as independent guarantors that protect rights on paper until they become rights in practice. Dissolving or merging these bodies into a single, diluted entity would be a retreat from the state's obligation to provide specific institutional responses to distinct forms of historical discrimination.

The upcoming ten-year review must not be viewed as a constitutional death sentence but as an opportunity for institutional strengthening. Nepal requires a framework where commission recommendations carry legal weight, and the government is mandated to respond within a fixed timeframe. Financial autonomy of the commissions must be guaranteed to prevent the executive from using the budget as a leash to pull these bodies into submission. Ultimately, the credibility of Nepal's democratic project rests on whether it views the marginalised as pillars of stability or as political inconveniences. True inclusion requires institutions with the resources, authority and independence to turn those words into practice.

THEIR VIEW

Support small farmers

Insurance must not make it difficult for marginalised farmers to reap its benefits.

It is shocking to learn that more than half our farmers—people whose labour and sweat provide the food on our plates—earn less than Tk 34,000 a year, an amount 10 times lower than our current per capita gross national income. According to a new survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 53.65 percent of all food producers in the country operate on a small scale, earning Tk 33,639 on average annually, whereas the rest of the farmers, who are large-scale agri-producers, earn Tk 1,29,956 on average—almost four times higher.

This income disparity reflects decades of agricultural policies and subsidies that have often failed to benefit small-scale producers who constitute, as per BBS definition, the bottom 40 percent of food growers across the country in terms of land area, livestock holdings and annual agricultural revenue. In fact, a World Bank study published in June found that the top 20 percent of farming landholders receive about half of all fertiliser subsidies, while the bottom 40 percent get only 15 percent. Ironically, the majority of our agriculture budget is spent on fertilisers. Despite such subsidy support, farmers are leaving this profession, which is increasingly becoming unprofitable because of unpredictable weather patterns, frequent natural disasters, price volatility of agricultural inputs in the international market, loss of agricultural land, limited market access, and weak post-harvest management.

The current government has taken several initiatives to support farmers, such as introducing the Farmers' Card, waiving agricultural loans up to Tk 10,000 with interest, and slightly increasing the agricultural budget. However, the allocation as a percent of the total budget has declined by more than five percent points over the last 15 years. ADP implementation in this sector has also been slow. This is where the government should divert its attention and heed expert recommendations. Measures can include mechanisation of agriculture, ensuring fair prices, strengthening post-harvest management by establishing strong cold storage chains, removing or shrinking the layers of middlemen, syndicates and extortion, and making credit more accessible for small-scale farmers.

The government's plan to introduce crop insurance to protect farmers from loss caused by natural disasters is a welcome step. But the insurance must not be designed in a way that makes it difficult for marginalised farmers to reap its benefits. Policymakers cannot continue to overlook the woes of the small-scale food producers or allow the corporatisation of the sector to reach a point where food becomes an oligarchic tool.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

The economic illusion of power

Arrogance about a political majority amid structurally paralysed markets is a dangerous illusion for those in power.

DURGA GAUTAM





AI GENERATED

Over the past 35 years, Nepal's electoral landscape has produced four spectacular parliamentary mandates—won either by a single party or a unified alliance—including the most recent, a near two-thirds majority government led by Prime Minister Balendra Shah. Yet each of the three preceding majorities ultimately failed to complete its full five-year term, while coalition powers proved even more short-lived. Although intra-party disputes are the visible triggers for these government collapses, the root cause is subtle and systemic. In a country marked by both geographic and geopolitical vulnerabilities, a largely extractive political bureaucracy, and an economy that has persistently struggled to channel capital into productive capacity, the governing equilibrium remains fragile. Under such rigidity, even a dominant political power can quickly break down amid minor shocks, whether internal or external.

In April 2021, a government ban on synthetic fertilisers and agrochemicals severely harmed Sri Lanka's agricultural market and food production, while exacerbating its foreign-exchange crisis, caused by pro-elite tax cuts, high debt-servicing costs and falling tourism revenue. With its 'import-dependent for export'-type manufacturing model, which depends heavily on imported energy and intermediate goods, the country's foreign reserves quickly dropped, and imports plummeted. The ripple effects brought Sri Lanka's entire economic market, both domestic and international, to a standstill. The lack of a grip on markets and the consequent public frustration took no time to overthrow the Rajapaksa regime, despite its powerful two-thirds governing majority. The failure was not a shortage of capital or economic resources, but a persistent institutional inability to convert borrowing and financial inflows into productive capacity.

Markets and powerholders

Markets are at the heart of economic prosperity. They allow people to take advantage of specialisation and division of labour, while enabling nations to expand trade based on comparative advantage. Since political markets seldom become efficient owing to the vagaries of representation, a nation's long-run development and transformation require greater efficiency of economic markets.

Fundamentally, the size, flow and efficiency of investment capital are jointly determined by the interplay between government and markets. The better the state machinery facilitating the workings of the market, the greater the efficiency of resource allocation, including physical capital, human capital and natural resources. These two dynamic forces are inherently inseparable; consequently, a misstep in one inevitably damages the other. That's why arrogance about a political majority amid structurally paralysed markets is a dangerous illusion for those in power.

Sovereign trade inequality

In a landlocked country like Nepal, where an ambulance essentially fuels up at the neighbour's gas station, there is no such thing as 'sovereign equality' in market exchange. All countries are equal under the political framework of the Montevideo Convention of 1933, but not under the modern economic framework of the global village: cross-border trade relationships, transformative IT, financial innovation and digitalisation. A developing country's trade and monetary policy independence is profoundly compromised when it pursues sustained gains on these fronts.

The economic giants, India and China, are not only neighbours, but also Nepal's largest trading partners. Unfortunately, Nepal's trade deficit with them is enormous; a recent report puts it at roughly $10 billion, or 77 percent of its overall trade deficit. If these figures raise serious concerns for policymakers, they must realise that borders are not simply geographical twists and turns; they hold extraordinary economic significance. Of course, borders matter, and neighbours matter. However, seeking diplomatic breakthroughs between neighbours matters even more.

Inward-looking impulse

Through persistent encroachment on domestic markets, Nepal's ruling elites have stifled the cross-border integration necessary for harmonious bilateral trade with the country's immediate neighbours. This intervention represents a systemic manifestation of political egoism, rather than a coherent economic strategy. The Panchayat regime's import-substitution (IS) model kept the economy from harnessing the benefits of cross-border linkages at a time when globalisation was shaping the markets of developing nations.

The IS model was inherently inward-looking. It restricted cross-border transfers of cutting-edge technology, destroyed the spirit of innovation, discouraged entrepreneurs, and underestimated the rise of venture capital. Nepal's isolation from broader regional and global value chains eroded the competitive edge needed for industrial productivity, leaving its manufacturing base in a state of persistent, structural decline. The aggressive liberalisation policies enacted during the democratic era merely exacerbated these structural vulnerabilities. By hiding behind the banner of sovereign equality, the Balendra Shah administration ignores the cross-border bilateral partnerships urgently needed to mobilise both internal and peripheral resources to revive manufacturing. Neighbourhood isolation and cross-border friction neither bring political stability nor generate economic gains.

Besides, the government's credibility, or lack thereof, undeniably influences the incentives faced by private sector participants—either domestic or foreign. Consider an economic agenda set by the current administration: double the per capita income within five years. Based on the successful experiences of China and South Korea, doubling a country's per capita income within five years requires an average annual real GDP growth rate of 14 percent or more, not 7 percent as targeted by the administration. While the target rate is already ambitious, this is an exceptionally large inconsistency. Furthermore, all other things being equal, the government also needs to proportionately double the allocation of capital expenditure from the customary 17 percent to 34 percent of the national budget, let alone the economy's persistently meagre capacity to absorb it.

While taking to the streets for parliamentary democracy in 1990, many Nepalis sacrificed their lives with a simple hope of seeing a good future for their children. By joining the fight with radical Maoists during the long insurgency, people embraced new aspirations for change and dignity. When both sides of the political spectrum blatantly turned their backs on the people, the broader public rose in retaliation.

That was what triggered the September 2025 Gen Z protests. It was a powerful reminder to the rulers that people are the ultimate source of power and that they deserve a large share of the bounty. Ultimately, the electoral shift from one party to another between elections in the nation's political market merely reflects the deeper cycle of hope and frustration in the economic sphere—a lesson today's sitting politicians cannot afford to ignore.

Gautam is currently a faculty member in the Economics Department at the University of Richmond, Virginia, US.

Count the loss, claim the fund

Every year Nepal experiences a climate disaster, but it fails to unlock the finance it deserves.

ABIRAL KHATRI





POST FILE PHOTO

The monsoon is back, bringing another series of disasters. According to the Department of Roads, five major highways are completely blocked across Nepal this week, with dozens of other road sections partially disrupted. The BP Highway connecting Kavrepalanchok and Sindhuli, a critical chokepoint linking eastern Nepal to the capital, is barely passable. Farmers in the Terai are anxious as the rain arrives late, leaving the soil harder for the next yield. One thing that remains common across these disasters is that there is no track record of data.

A few weeks ago, I was standing on the flooded bank of the Nakhu Khola in South Lalitpur with climate scientists from across the Hindu Kush Himalaya, including glaciologists, hydrologists and economists. We examined the visible evidence of climate change and observed a clear shift in the pattern, place and timing of rainfall that led to the 2024 floods. The historic Tika Bhairav temple, which stood since the Lichhavi era, was relocated.

There is no doubt that Nepal's loss and damage is visible. The question is: How do we track and compile the evidence into a credible case? This matters because the available climate fund is not enough for mitigation and adaptation, and other countries that are bearing the brunt of climate change are queuing up with equally strong claims. The Global Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) was created to address economic and non-economic irreversible losses from climate change, for those affected the most. However, only $800 million has been pledged by the world's largest emitters despite the dire need. More strikingly, 176 proposals have already arrived from 119 countries, with claims 11 times more than what is on the table. Every country is competing on the strength of the evidence it has gathered.

Nepal's share of global emissions is a mere fraction of what its two neighbours, India and China, release in a single afternoon. Emissions do not respect boundaries, and glaciers are melting fast. Our rivers are flooding communities and farmers are losing harvests to a crisis largely manufactured elsewhere. The Loss and Damage fund exists precisely to bridge this asymmetry. Nepal has every right to compensation, but asserting it requires evidence.

Natural disasters have cost Nepal nearly $7 billion in cumulative damage in the past four decades. Every time, it is the community and families that bear the biggest burden of loss. The 2021 Melamchi flood caused an average loss of $52,000 per affected household, yet the government's average relief payment was only $380. This is not an issue of funding alone but a clear sign of policy failure. Without systematic records, communities are provided with no evidence of climate losses that they rightfully owe.

The 2024 glacial flood in Thame burst devastated a Sherpa village in Khumbu that had stood for generations. In less than a year, a transboundary flash flood wiped away the Rasuwagadhi Friendship Bridge, which served as one of the important trade links with China. Despite millions in damage, the losses have not been compiled in any data system that could be referred to as a reference in future reconstruction efforts.

The non-economic losses, such as the loss of lives and livelihoods, displacement, destruction of cultural heritage, and long-term environmental impacts, are not even talked about. Nepal's NDC 3.0 has quantified only physical infrastructure losses, at roughly $345 million. A country with Nepal's disaster record should be at the front of the compensation queue. Instead, it keeps arriving at global climate summits without the paperwork to match its losses. What goes uncounted inevitably goes unclaimed.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) runs a national hazard and damage-reporting portal called BIPAD. Its Forecast-Based Financing under the Anticipatory Action Framework releases cash to vulnerable households before floodwater arrives. But other than alerting you when to run, it tells you nothing about what was lost, what it was worth, nor whether the place you ran from should be rebuilt in the same spot.

So where does Nepal actually start? This June, Kathmandu Metropolitan City did something long overdue. It mapped 128 flood-prone locations and found over 8,000 households living at risk. This kind of granular local evidence is a good start for building the case for Loss and Damage financing. For the next step, these maps must be documented meticulously and converted into river embankments, relocated schools and ward-level evacuation plans before the next flood arrives. Only then can we build the evidence base for a future funding claim. Above all, the data must be shared across the sector so that climate risks are integrated in future development projects.

The Loss and Damage Fund is different from other climate funds that require multiple agencies, and aspires to reach communities directly. The data work, and the political will to do it, must start at the local level. The constitution has provided Nepal's 753 local governments a strong legal mandate for disaster risk reduction. The challenge they face is the technical capacity to translate a hazard map into a tangible policy decision. The newly formed Green Climate Fund (GCF)-accredited national entities, such as the Town Development Fund, are already positioned to anchor local data tracking. What is still missing is a designated national authority with a clear mandate to manage and channel Loss and Damage funds when they arrive. A federal agency such as NDRRMA, which is already engaged in early warning and disaster response, could be ideal for the national coordination role.

It is not that Nepal has not engaged in climate policy. It was the first country to introduce climate budget tagging, but the issue lies in spending. Climate change recorded the lowest budget utilisation of any sector in FY2024-25. Systematic loss documentation needs its own dedicated budget line, not a token tag on someone else's allocation. The case from Bhutan shows what happens when done patiently. A decade of quiet hydromet monitoring unlocked a $40 million disaster-resilience facility the country can draw on the moment a disaster strikes. The money always follows the data. Nepal is already a priority country in the global push to deliver Early Warnings for All by 2027, and warning is its clear strength. But warning and evidence are not the same achievement. What is required is the discipline to count what Nepal has already lost, and the institutional will to turn that count into a claim before the next funding window closes.

Khatri works at the intersection of green economy, climate finance and energy transition.

FOREX

US Dollar	152.66
Euro	176.14
Pound Sterling	205.43
Swiss Franc	188.57
Australian Dollar	107.5
Canadian Dollar	108.96
Singapore Dollar	119.07
Japanese Yen (10)	9.67
Chinese Yuan	22.62
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.65
Qatari Riyal	41.87
Thai Bhat	4.62
UAE Dhiram	41.57
Malaysian Ringit	37.33
Korean Won (100)	10.72

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 296,000
Silver	Rs 4,570

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Commerzbank profit surges as UniCredit circles

FRANKFURT: Germany's Commerzbank said Thursday that its net profit nearly doubled in the second quarter, as its Italian rival UniCredit nears the possible completion of its hostile takeover. Net profit came in at 898 million euros ($1.03 billion) in the three months through the end of June, up from 462 million euros a year earlier. For the first half of the year, profit reached a record 1.8 billion euros. Commission income—fees from providing services like accounts or brokerage—rose, Commerzbank said, while income from interest was stable. The results come as the battle for control of the Frankfurt-based Commerzbank heats up. UniCredit has pursued Commerzbank for the past two years, causing alarm in Germany where the bank is dear to many thanks to its reputation for financing small and midsize industrial companies. Commerzbank has cut thousands of jobs in a bid to boost its profit and hence share price, making any potential takeover more expensive. **(AFP)**

Swiss Re profits jump as hurricane peak looms

ZURICH: The reinsurance giant Swiss Re said Thursday that its profits jumped in the first half of the year, beating expectations, while adding that it would "remain vigilant" as hurricane season nears its peak. The Swiss group, which provides insurance to insurance firms, registered $2.8 billion in net profit in the January-June period, it said in a statement. The figure was a nine percent jump on the same period last year. "Strong earnings delivery in the first half of the year puts us well on track towards our 2026 financial targets, while we remain vigilant as we approach the peak of the hurricane season," said Chief Executive Officer Andreas Berger. **(AFP)**

German industrial orders rise but war, dry rivers cloud outlook

FRANKFURT: Industrial orders in Germany came in above expectations in June, the country's statistics office said Thursday, but analysts warned that rivers running dry and the Mideast war could spell trouble. Industrial orders, a measure of future business activity, rose 3.1 percent in June on the previous month, Destatis said, well above the one percent increase expected in an analyst poll by financial platform FactSet. "The slight upturn in new orders is continuing," LBBW bank analyst Jens-Oliver Niklasch said. "All-in-all it seems as if the economy is doing somewhat better than was recently expected." A run of brighter-than-expected data has boosted hopes that Europe's biggest economy is defying the worst as the Mideast war has led to higher energy prices. Industrial production in May ticked up slightly more than expected, and business sentiment in July rose for the third month in a row according to a survey by the Ifo institute. **(AFP)**

Silver imports overtake gold in Nepal for the first time

>> Continued from page 1

He, however, said that the silver being imported is not in the form of bars or biscuits.

"It's coming as granules, a small, hard or compact particle resembling a grain," he said.

The price of silver granules peaked at Rs7,500 per tola (11.66 grams) in January 2026, up from Rs3,300 per tola in October 2025. In 2024, the price of silver in Nepal ranged from Rs1,350 to Rs 1,950 per tola.

"Most of the silver granules imported last fiscal year were bought by customers for investment purposes," Shakya said.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal's silver imports surged 366 percent to Rs32.74 billion in the last fiscal year. In volume terms, imports more than doubled, rising 108.37 percent to 104.29 tonnes.

By comparison, Nepal imported 1.52 tonnes of gold worth Rs29.15 billion during the review period. Although the value of gold imports increased by 46.18 percent because of higher prices, the volume declined by 6.17 percent in the last fiscal year.

Imports classified as "powder of silver" also climbed sharply, increasing 176.64 percent to Rs10.90 billion in the last fiscal year from the previous year.

A significant portion of the surge in silver imports came under the customs category "powder of silver", which saw sharp increases in both value and quantity.

Silver powder is a fine form of the precious metal consisting of microscopic particles. It is commonly used in electronics, solar cells and metal refining and typically has a purity between 99.9 and 99.99 percent.

But customs officials, bullion traders, analysts and the central bank told the Post that the product being imported is actually silver granules rather than silver powder.

Silver granules, also known as silver shot or silver grain, are small, irregular pellets of high-purity silver, generally measuring around 1 to 6 mm. They are widely used as raw materials in jewellery, silverware and other industries because they can be melted easily.

Nepal imported around 32 tonnes of silver granules worth Rs9 billion from Dubai, the largest source, followed by 4.34 tonnes worth Rs1.43 billion from China during the last fiscal year.



SHUTTERSTOCK

The dramatic growth in silver grain imports in Nepal has raised eyebrows among some insiders, who see no actual reason for the trend.

The price of silver more than tripled over a few months and attracted consumers and investors as the precious metal repeatedly set new records.

Traders say investors increasingly turned towards silver amid economic uncertainty, particularly after the September 2025 Gen Z unrest, when the stock market faltered and transactions in the real estate market nearly collapsed.

On Thursday, silver was priced at Rs4,570 per tola.

In the international market, silver reached a record nominal high of $121.67 per ounce on January 29, 2026, driven by a multi-year supply deficit, strong retail and safe-haven buying, and growing industrial demand from sectors such as artificial intelligence and green energy, Reuters reported. A record nominal high means the highest price ever recorded in current dollar terms, without adjusting for inflation.

The international price, however, fell to $57.41 per ounce on Wednesday.

Globally, silver's industrial importance has also grown with the expansion of artificial intelligence and green technologies.

As AI data centres and high-performance microchips process billions of calculations, they generate extreme electrical loads and heat. According to reports, silver is used in physical hardware—including semiconductor packaging, circuit boards, high-speed connectors and power switchgear—to help ensure rapid data transmission while reducing the risk of overheating or signal degradation.

Guru Prasad Paudel, spokesperson for the Nepal Rastra Bank, confirmed that imports of silver grains had jumped sharply, as reflected in the letters of credit issued by banks.

The dramatic growth in silver grain imports, however, has raised eyebrows among some insiders, who say the actual reason for such massive imports remains unclear. Some have raised concerns that the metal could potentially be diverted for smuggling or other purposes.

Arjun Rasaili, president of the Federation of Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers' Association, said the government's use of the term "silver powder" was misleading.

"It is actually silver granules being imported," he said. "Silver granules are used to make jewellery, utensils and to polish statues."

"This is most likely a customs classification issue. We believe that the majority of these imports are silver granules that have been classified under the Harmonized System (HS) code for silver powder," Adarsh Diwe, a Mumbai-based consultant at Metals Focus who tracks South Asian bullion markets, told the Post over the phone.

With silver prices hitting record highs in the first quarter of 2026, investment demand for physical silver surged, Diwe said.

"A heavy rush was seen outside shops as consumers flocked to purchase the metal. Silver granules are typically converted locally into bars for investment purposes or used in the manufacture of silverware and jewellery," he said.

Silver bars are not entirely illegal to own in Nepal. However, the government strictly prohibits individuals from importing raw precious-metal bullion, including gold and silver bars, through ports of entry.

Local residents can legally buy and hold physical silver within Nepal, but bringing raw bars across the border or independently importing them is prohibited. Bullion traders said silver is mostly traded in granule form, typically packed in 25-kg bags.

As prices soared to record levels, many people withdrew their savings to invest in gold and silver when prices reached an all-time high in January.

The rally strengthened silver's appeal as an alternative store of value.

But the bet has turned sour for some investors following the sharp correction in prices.

"Many people invested in silver without understanding the price cycle. With prices falling sharply and showing no sign of recovering anytime soon, it has become difficult for those investors to continue holding the metal," Shakya said.

"Some customers sold their holdings when the price hovered around Rs5,700 per tola. Others have brought their granules to be converted into silver jewellery," he said.

As economic pressure mounts, Iranians make trade-offs to stay afloat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN, AUG 6

Mahzad Azari has to choose between food and transportation, between learning English and new eyeglasses, as five months of war with the United States take a financial toll on Iranians.

Azari, who works at a small shop in Tehran, says she has put off normal purchases and little pleasures such as visiting a cafe, with soaring prices, slowing business and months of conflict squeezing household budgets.

"I have to cut back on one thing in order to afford something else," the 21-year-old told AFP.

"If I use Snapp (a ride-hailing app) one day, I won't be able to afford lunch that day... If I replace the lenses of my glasses, I can't go to my class."

For many Iranians, such trade-offs have become a daily reality to navigate Iran's worsening economy, battered by decades of international sanctions and further pressured by the US-Israeli war that erupted on February 28.

Davood, 23, a vegetable and fruit vendor, says he has cut back on holidays and meeting friends at weekends as he can no longer afford them.

"Sometimes we used to go to northern Iran with friends... we can't really go anywhere anymore," he told AFP at his shop in northern Tehran. For Fahimeh, who works two jobs, going out to eat has become a luxury out of reach. "Before the war, I used to enjoy going to watch a movie or dining out, or getting some Italian takeaway, but since then it has become all about survival," the 29-year-old said.

Hopes for a return to normalcy and economic recovery have been briefly raised with each diplomatic development in the war, including an April 8 ceasefire and the signing of a June 17 framework for peace talks.

But each proved short-lived, with the fighting returning and spreading further across the Middle East.



AFP/RSS

Shia Muslim devotees gesture beneath an Iranian national flag as they take part in a mourning procession marking Arbaeen in Tehran on Tuesday.

"Whenever there's a ceasefire, the market starts to pick up a little, then they announce that there's going to be a war, or they hit somewhere, and it's the same old story all over again," Azari said.

Officials in Iran have invoked the "resistance economy" strategy, which was first promoted by late supreme leader Ali Khamenei in 2010 to reduce dependence on the outside world.

Iran's new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei in a written message in May called on lawmakers to enact legislation to support the resistance economy and alleviate economic pressure. "Iran's economy has adapted itself to numerous crises and has developed a capacity to become resilient," said Tehran-based economist Behnam Samadi.

"But this resilience has not been free." According to Samadi, households have borne the cost through declining purchasing power, businesses through rising operating costs, and the government through increased public spending aimed at keeping the economy afloat.

Inflation reached 66 percent in the year ending July 22, up from 46 percent in the year ending February 19, while the Iranian rial has plunged to 1.88 million against the US dollar, compared with 1.65 million before the conflict. The Iranian economy has for years been hampered by chronic inflation and currency depreciation, largely due to international sanctions imposed on the country.

"The main question is how long this resilience can last," Samadi said.

One way businesses across Tehran have responded to the hardships has been to expand instalment payment schemes to cover everything from groceries to medical bills.

Samadi says instalment plans help companies improve cash flow and households spread their costs, but they are not a solution and are merely a "time-buying" tactic.

Romanians face highest EU inflation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CALARASI (ROMANIA), AUG 6

At the weekly market in the southern Romanian town of Calarasi, Florica Vasile goes from vendor to vendor loading her shopping trolley with vegetables the locals say are cheaper than anywhere else in the city.

As the country struggles with the European Union's highest inflation, she and other shoppers complained that rising prices were forcing difficult decisions about what to cut.

"I was supposed to go for a thyroid check-up in January," Vasile, a 56-year-old housewife, told AFP, saying she used the money instead for food and the electricity bill.

"We stretch our money a little more," she added. "Of course I'm worried."

Dumitru Baldovin, a 63-year-old construction worker also at the market, expressed the same caution.

"Instead of two litres of oil, I buy one litre and make it last... We're tightening our belts," he said.

Prices have risen across Europe in the wake of the Middle East war that sent oil and gas costs soaring, but Romania has recorded inflation rates three times higher than the EU average. The government, which has run the biggest budget deficit in the bloc for years, has created new taxes to tackle the shortfall and removed price caps on electricity.

That led to a 55 percent surge in electricity bills in May from a year earlier, and contributed to real wages falling by almost seven percent that month as salaries did not keep up with inflation that hit 11 percent.

Inflation slipped to 10.4 percent in June and analysts expect it to fall further this year, but is still the highest in the EU. Romanians now spend a third of their income on food, compared with just 14 percent in Germany, said Laurian Lungu, president of Consilium Policy Advisors Group, an economic think tank.

Businesses say eroding purchasing power has severely crimped spending in the country of 19 million people, where the average salary is 1,100 euros ($1,300).

Disagreements over austerity measures also led to a collapse of Romania's pro-EU governing coalition in May.

Debate over a new wage law for public-sector workers has exacerbated tensions, leading to a three-day healthcare strike in July on fears that bonuses would be cut.

A new government has yet to be formed in the eastern European nation, where far-right groups have seized on the popular anger.

In Calarasi, many people blame politicians across the political spectrum for failing to rein in inflation.

"They keep taking from the pocket of the regular people to make themselves billionaires," said Marin Zainea, 75, noting that his pension was less than 400 euros a month.

"They are the worst of thieves," Zainea added while selling fruit and vegetables from his own garden for some extra cash.

"I go to a supermarket just to look around," he said. "If I don't have any money, that's what I do—I look and don't buy anything."

President Nicusor Dan, a pro-European centrist, tried to address people's concerns last weekend after Romania avoided a downgrade of its credit rating by Fitch to "junk", or below investment grade.

"Purchasing power has declined but Romania is stabilising financially, and things will get better," Dan said in a video posted on social media.

This week he signed into law a bill reducing taxes on diesel and capping commercial markups on both diesel and petrol, a bid to keep energy costs in check.

That would be welcome news to Puiu Ilisei, a farmer in the village of Dichiseni, around 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of Calarasi.

Meta chases OpenAI, Anthropic with new AI coding app

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO, AUG 6

Meta entered the race for automated coding tools on Wednesday when it announced a new app for developers of artificial intelligence products, as it competes with other major AI labs for customers and revenue.

Dubbed Muse Code, Meta said in a blog post that the new product is an agentic coding tool that can perform "complex software engineering tasks" with large amounts of data, including planning, writing and validating code.

Agentic tools are software applications which are programmed to handle tasks without human supervision, though often someone will still make the final call on decisions or supervise the execution of tasks.

Muse Code launched in beta, or in a preview mode.

Meta also released an updated version of its flagship model, known as Spark, which it unveiled in April.

The update, called Spark 1.2, is "coding-focused" and available through Muse Code and another developer application called Meta Model API, the social media giant said.

Meta has poured billions into its AI division, now known as Meta Superintelligence Labs, as it attempts to keep up with OpenAI and Anthropic.

Major AI developers are in a tight race to dominate the sector, not just in pure technical capabilities but also to prove that their heavy spending to meet growing demand will turn into profits.

Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet and Meta are collectively on track to pour around $700 billion into AI data centers, chips and computing infrastructure this year.

While chatbots have generated a frenzy around AI since OpenAI launched ChatGPT in late 2022, few people have been willing to pay for them. However, software engineers and companies are increasingly willing to pay for automated coding tools.

In February, OpenAI said ChatGPT reached 900 million weekly active users, including 9 million businesses and 50 million consumers that pay for it.

Anthropic has not disclosed its total users, but the company told TechCrunch in March that its paid subscriptions "have more than doubled this year."

SpaceXAI, a subdivision of Elon Musk's rocket company SpaceX, develops its own chatbot called Grok, and the company announced earlier this year it would acquire coding startup Cursor for $60 billion.

Microsoft, which has invested billions into both OpenAI and Anthropic, offers coding tools through its business-focused AI app, Copilot, in addition to a developer product, GitHub.

Recent cyberattacks carried out autonomously by advanced AI models during routine testing, like those developed by OpenAI and Anthropic, have also raised concerns about their capabilities. A model developed by Meta, Spark 1.1, was involved in a similar incident, The Information reported on Wednesday.

That incident was caused by a "misconfiguration" at a third-party testing partner, a Meta spokesperson told AFP in a statement.

"We are currently investigating and will issue a full retrospective once we have all the facts," the statement said.

Ukraine strikes more oil facilities deep inside Russia, Volodymyr Zelenskyy says

ILLIA NOVIKOV/AP
KYIV, UKRAINE, AUG 6

Ukraine hit more oil facilities deep inside Russia in overnight attacks, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday, as Kyiv kept up its campaign to undermine Moscow's wartime economy and embarrass the Kremlin.

The repeated strikes have caused fuel shortages and rattled Russians. Ukrainians, meanwhile, are enduring regular barrages that Kyiv's depleted air defenses are struggling to counter amid Moscow's 4-year-old full-scale invasion. The Kyiv region observed an official day of mourning on Thursday after a Russian missile and drone blitz killed 17 people the previous day, prompting an increasingly urgent scramble by Ukraine and its partner countries to find new air defence supplies.

In the first six months of this year, 1,396 civilians were killed and 7,978 injured in Ukraine, the United Nations office in Kyiv said on Wednesday. That was a 37 percent increase from the same period last year and a 114 percent jump over 2024, it said, attributing the rise to more long-range aerial attacks by Russia.

Zelenskyy said he met with senior officials on how to accelerate the development of Ukraine's own ballistic weaponry, similar to its swift wartime innovation in drone technology.

"Developing one's own ballistic capabilities and creating a new anti-ballistic system is a task that only a tiny minority of countries worldwide have managed to accomplish," he said in a social media post. "Ukraine has this capability."

Zelenskyy said he expects the program to produce results this year and next after it overcomes "key challenges," including procuring critical components, technological cooperation with partner countries, and choosing where to build the armaments.

Ukraine says it hit Russian refineries and vessels at sea

Ukrainian forces hit a refinery in Russia's Bashkortostan region, more than 1,300 kilometres from the front line, as well as a refinery in the Yaroslavl region, almost 700 kilometres from the border, Zelenskyy said on social media. Yaroslavl Governor Mikhail Yevrayev confirmed an attack on a refinery, saying in a Telegram post that drone debris hit the facility's oil reservoirs, sparking a fire. Three private houses also caught fire, and several residential buildings were damaged, he added.

Ukrainian forces hit two Russian military patrol boats in the Black Sea, Zelenskyy said, along with vessels belonging to Moscow's so-called shadow fleet, which Russia uses to evade Western restrictions on its oil exports. He did not give any details.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its air defences overnight shot down 605 Ukrainian drones over its territory.

Ukraine seeks more interceptor missiles to bolster air defences

Drone and glide bomb attacks across Ukraine overnight killed at least three civilians and wounded 22 others, authorities said on Thursday, as countries helping Kyiv resist the invasion scrambled to find more vital air defences for its fight.

Moscow's forces have in recent weeks pummelled Ukraine with ballistic missiles that Kyiv officials say only the US-made Patriot air defence system can stop. But the Iran war has drained stocks of Patriot interceptor missiles, leaving Ukraine at the mercy of Russian bombardments that seek to exploit the weakened air defences.

"We are working as hard as possible with all partners who can assist with the supply of interceptor missiles to protect against such insane Russian strikes targeting life, people, and civilian facilities," Zelenskyy said on social media late Wednesday.

He said he had spoken to NATO chief Mark Rutte and Finnish President Alexander Stubb about urgently procuring interceptors from stockpiles. Zelenskyy said he and Rutte "coordinated our efforts regarding countries that have the necessary missiles and the capacity to help."

Rutte said on X that he was discussing with allies "how we can continue to get Ukraine the air defences they urgently need."

Glide bombs wound 12 in Sumy

Russia appears determined to exhaust Ukraine through sheer weight of numbers in terms of soldiers, armor and weapons. Russian President Vladimir Putin believes time is on his side, that Western support will fade and that Ukraine's resistance will eventually collapse under pressure, Western analysts and officials say.

Ukraine's air force said Russia fired four missiles and 101 long-range strike drones overnight, with air defences shooting down or jamming 66 drones.

Three people were killed in Balakliia in the Kharkiv region of northeastern Ukraine, said Vitalii Karabanov, head of the city's military administration. In the neighbouring Sumy region, Russian glide bombs wounded 12 people, the National Police said. Apartment buildings and infrastructure were damaged, with hundreds of windows shattered, said regional military administration chief Oleh Hryhorov.

In the Kherson region of southern Ukraine, a Russian drone struck a bus carrying farmworkers, injuring six people, regional authorities said.

A Russian drone also struck a residential area in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, injuring four, said regional administration head Ivan Fedorov.

French winemakers dread 'smoky taste' after wildfires

WAFAA ESSALHI & **ANNE LE COZ**/AFP
CORRENS, FRANCE, AUG 6



AP/RSS

Winemaker Edouard Le Grix de la Salle tends vines on his family's Grand Verdus wine estate in Sadirac, southwestern France's Bordeaux region, on July 29.

Brushing his hand over crackling vine leaves, French winemaker Gregory Guibergia was relieved a wildfire only scorched the edge of his vineyard but he feared its smoke would ruin this year's vintage.

In the last row of his fields in south-eastern France, the wind rustled through the brown leaves of vines that overheated during a blaze that swept the region this summer.

But plants further away were largely intact, with enough green leaves for their grapes to continue to mature in time for harvest next week.

Guibergia said he was lucky after several wildfires in the surrounding Var region in recent weeks, which sent thousands of people fleeing—including Hollywood star George Clooney and his family—and destroyed more than 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres) of land. But "the big question is whether or not we will have a burnt taste during the wine making", Guibergia told AFP.

"We won't know straight away."

He is one of many winemakers to be worried in France's main rosé-producing region, where flames have destroyed hundreds of some 30,000 hectares of vineyards, according to expert estimates.

Guibergia, who has been in the business for 25 years, said he planned to pick the grapes and turn them into wine in several separate batches to help limit damage from any contaminated fruit.

But he still dreads the possibility the product of his 25-hectare vineyard in the village of Correns could be declared undrinkable, and that he'd be unable to sell some 90,000 bottles.

Lab tests

In the surrounding region, experts have been testing grapes to see if they are still fit for wine.

"An hour or two of exposure is enough to trigger glycosylation, or the binding of smoke to the sugars in the grapes," said oenology consultant Clement Prelat, who is advising winemakers in the area.

"This smoky taste will only reveal itself after fermentation."

Lucie Demirdjian, another winemaker in the neighbouring village of Ponteves, was among those waiting for results from the laboratory before harvesting.

She said he had lost 11 of her 18 hectares in a wildfire, and didn't want to spend any money on harvesting surviving vines if the wine would be tainted.

"We know what to do for frost or hail, but not wildfires," she said.

At least, "we can detect the precursor of the smoky flavour beforehand".

'Smoked ham'

Agricultural engineer Gregori Lanza said so far only vineyards that fire-fighting planes covered in retardant—a chemical mixture used to stem the spread of a blaze—have been declared unfit for winemaking so far.

The smell of burnt wood combining with grapes for smoky wine would not necessarily make it unfit for consumption, but it would likely compromise sales, he said.

"It's not a sought-after taste in wines, so even if they're still drinkable, they won't be marketed," he predicted. Fabien Mistre, from the Correns winemaking cooperative, said winemakers in another part of southern France had tested some techniques to save their produce after a wildfire last year.

"Activated charcoal can remove the smoky taste from rosé and white wine," he said.

He said he was hoping his organic wine would emerge intact after the fires, but was waiting for the end of the winemaking process to be sure.

Even if insurance did not cover business losses linked to a change in taste, he would not sell his wine if its aroma was burnt. "It would be like smoked ham," he said.

Britain's Royal Mint strikes gold in electronic waste

LUCIE LEQUIER/AFP
LLANTRISANT, UK, AUG 6

At the heart of Britain's coin factory, old Bank of England telephones are stripped down and dipped into giant vats to recover a hidden treasure: the gold in their circuits.

Behind barbed wire and coded security gates at its site near Cardiff in Wales, the Royal Mint—the state-owned maker of British coins as well as medals—is turning electronic waste into luxury jewellery.

The initiative remains unusual in a sector where much electronic waste never reaches proper recycling facilities. Opened two years ago, the plant can process around 4,000 tonnes of electronic waste a year, containing "about 400 kilos of gold", said the Mint's development director, Sean Millard.

Behind him, a largely automated line of chemical vats is off limits to cameras because the process is patented by a Canadian company, Excir.

New process

Each Bank of England office phone recycled here contains around 30 milligrammes of gold, worth around three pounds ($4.00) at current prices. A modern smartphone contains roughly four pounds' worth of the metal. Gold is prized in electronic circuits because it conducts electricity well and does not corrode.



AFP/RSS

This photo taken on June 30 shows a worker removing silver bullion bars from a string tool at The Royal Mint in Llantrisant, south Wales.

But its chemical stability also makes it difficult to recover from electronic waste. Unlike many recyclers, which melt electronic waste in bulk, the Royal Mint dismantles devices first.

Copper, tantalum and even the plastic from circuit boards are sorted and sold to specialist recyclers. Gold is traditionally recovered either by smelting at very high temperatures or by using corrosive acid mixtures that generate hazardous waste. Instead, the Royal Mint uses a process that dissolves the gold at room temperature.

"There's no external energy input and it can be reused for batch after batch of feedstock," said Kate Griffiths, a chemical analyst at the Royal Mint.

She demonstrates the process by placing electronic components in a chemical bath and adding reagents one by one until a fine gold powder forms.

'Win-win'

Once refined to improve its purity, the extracted gold is used to make jewellery for the Royal Mint's "886" brand, which refers to the date the institution was founded. The mint also uses recycled silver, some of it extracted from old radios supplied by British hospitals.

In the jewellery workshop, quieter than the Royal Mint's coin-pressing halls where he used to work, 63-year-old John Powell carefully polishes a ring.

"I wouldn't be able to tell you whether I'm working with the recycled or the normal," he said.

Worldwide, only 22.3 percent of electronic waste was properly collected and recycled in 2022, according to a United Nations report.

Improper recycling can release lead, mercury or plastics into the environment and contribute to climate change, the report warned. At the same time, soaring gold prices have made recovering increasingly attractive. The metal climbed to a record high of nearly $5,600 an ounce at the end of January amid global economic uncertainty, though it has since fallen back to around $4,000.

"When the price of gold is really high, the cost of processing the waste to recover the gold is irrelevant," making alternative solutions commercially viable, said Jason Hallett, a professor of sustainable chemical technology at Imperial College London.

"It's a win-win," he said, as long as the extraction processes do not send energy consumption or emissions soaring.

India approves $2.5 billion scheme to boost biogas output

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI, AUG 6

India approved a $2.5 billion biogas programme to sharply expand domestic clean fuel production on Thursday, after Middle East war shortages underscored dependence on energy imports.

The South Asian nation, the world's third-largest importer of oil and the second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), has faced major disruptions due to restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz, driven by conflict between the United States and Iran. India consumes more than 30 million tonnes of LPG annually, importing more than half its needs.

A government statement released on Thursday said the latest National Circular Bioenergy Scheme "marks a defining moment in India's clean energy journey".

It will back waste collection, manure processing and the expansion of existing biogas plants.

"It will transform the country's abundant agricultural residue, cattle dung, press mud [sugar cane waste], municipal organic waste and other biomass resources into clean fuel, organic manure, rural income and national economic value," the statement said.

India—the world's most populous nation, and third-largest fossil fuel polluter—has pushed large-scale biogas production as part of a bid to achieve carbon neutrality by 2070.

Since the 1980s, it has also promoted biogas as a low-cost rural energy source, subsidising more than five million "digester" units that convert farm waste into methane for cooking, and nitrogen-rich slurry for fertiliser.

The government last year required that biogas account for at least one percent of liquid gas fuelling vehicles and for domestic use—rising to five percent by 2028.

India has also taken steps to reduce its heavy reliance on energy imports.

To cushion the impact of the Middle East conflict, New Delhi has expanded its pool of crude suppliers from 27 to 41 countries, including Venezuela, while increasing purchases from Russia and several African nations. The government said last month it will provide $8.8 billion in financial support for offshore oil and gas exploration.

मोटरसाइकल हराएको सूचना

मिति २०८३।०४।८ गते विराटनगरको विराट नर्सिङ होम नजिकबाट मेरो निम्न ब्यहोरा भएको मोटरसाइकल हराएको हुँदा भेटनुहुने महानुभावले मो.नं. ९८५२०७६१०२ वा नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालयमा खबर गरिदिनुहुन अनुरोध छ।

नाम : तुलसी प्रसाद सिग्देल
ठेगाना : विराटनगर-४,मोरङ
गाडीको रंग : कालो/रातो
सवारी नम्बर: प्र.१-०४-००१प ८८०९
इन्जिन नं. JA05ECG9D14762
चेसिस नं. MBLJA05EMG9D27917

पासपोर्ट हराएको सूचना

यही मिति २०८३।०२।०१ गतेका दिन **रत्ननगर टौंडीबाट भरतपुर** जाँदा अन्दाजी साँझको ६:०० बजेतिर मेरो **१२५३५४५० नं. को पासपोर्ट हराएको** हुँदा पाउनुहुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा निम्न ठेगानामा खबर गरिदिनु हार्दिक अपिल गर्दछु ।

नाम : उदय राज छत्कुली
ज्वालामुखी-७, डाँडाथोक, धादिङ
मो.नं. : ९८०८८४८८५६

shree airlines
Fly the new high

Shree Airlines is looking for following personnel for its current and planned fleet comprising of CRJ 200, Q400 and Helicopters AS 350B3e. Mi-8/17. Interested qualified Nepalese personnel may apply with a current CV and all related documents.

PILOTS:
TRI/PILOTS - 03 (For dash 8 Q400 aircraft)
PILOTS - 06 (for MI-8/17)
PILOTS - 04 (For AS350-B3e)

ENGINEERS:
B1 Licensed AME - 03 (For CRJ / Q400)
B2 Licensed AME - 03 (For CRJ / Q400)
(Senior/Junior based on qualification and experience)

CAMO - 03, Quality - 02

Flight Engineer - 04 (for Mi-8/17)

B1 Licensed AME - 04 (For MI-817 / AS350-B3e)
B2 Licensed AME - 04 (for MI-8/17 / AS350-B3e)

Basic Part 66 License Holders - 08 (Fixed / Rotor)

Please apply within 15 days of this notice to P.O. Box 806, Kathmandu or in-person at **Shree Airlines Sinamangal Office.**

Istanbul cymbals: From war tool to pulse of global music

HAZEL WARD
ISTANBUL, AUG 6

The rhythmic clanging of hammers on bronze echoes through the Istanbul workshop where three craftsmen are landing blows with astonishing precision to transform featureless metal discs into highly prized handcrafted cymbals.

First used by Ottoman military "mehter" bands to frighten and demoralise the enemy, cymbals were a useful tool for an empire on the warpath. But it would take the skill of a 17th-century Armenian alchemist called Avedis Zildjian to transform them into a percussion instrument whose exotic sound would first captivate Europe's classical composers and then shape the world of jazz.

Although cymbals existed long before Zildjian, he developed a unique alloy and special process for treating the metals that made them less fragile, winning plaudits in 1623 from the Ottoman sultan who let him set up a workshop.

"It's really hard to make good cymbals because they're consistently being crashed, so to make something that wasn't brittle which could withstand continuous use is quite an achievement," explains ethnomusicologist Audrey Wozniak, who specialises in Turkish musical traditions.

The secret was passed down through the generations and although the original Zildjian operation left Istanbul for America in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire, others who learned from the Zildjian masters have continued the tradition. Today, Istanbul remains the centre of excellence for cymbals, where a handful of brands still produce hand-hammered bronze using techniques developed more than 400 years ago.



AFP/RSS

Employees pictured at a cymbals workshop in Istanbul on July 30.

'A cymbal's soul'

"We are producing 100-percent handmade cymbals with traditional methods, without using electricity or gas, only coal and wood," explains Mehmet Ozturk, sales rep at Bosphorus Cymbals on Istanbul's northern outskirts, who says casting a cymbal takes up to a week. First is the casting stage. Most cymbals are made of a copper and tin alloy that is melted into molten bronze which is poured into moulds and cooled into disc-shaped blanks.

Moving swiftly, a worker using a long-handled peel places the blanks into the glowing furnace then removes others that are put through a rolling mill in a cycle repeated up to 15 times to compress and spread the metal which is then water tempered.

"Every stage is crucial," explains master cymbalsmith Hasan Seker, a burly 56-year-old who co-founded Bosphorus Cymbals in 1996 and is sweating after hauling glowing blanks into and out of the furnace.

"We use copper and tin and one more ingredient which is secret. Even though it's in very small quantities, it gives the cymbal a different character in terms of consistency and sound," he told AFP.

After punching out the raised bell and cutting it to size, what looks like the now recognisable cymbal must undergo the all-important hammering process.

"Not a single blow is random," he explains as a trio of craftsmen land expert strikes that create the darker more complex tones so prized by jazz drummers.

This is where a man's emotional state is poured into his work, says Seker, who began working in the trade aged 12 as a summer job.

"When someone is hammering, he might hit softly, then something comes to mind, he gets angry and hit harder. Those variations in the metal's surface, the reservations, the tension patterns diversify the sound. In a way, he gives the cymbal it's soul."

Trump's IndyCar race: Doing 200 in a 25 mph zone with manhole cover-displacing torque

WILL WEISSERT/AP
WASHINGTON, AUG 6

The speed limit along Pennsylvania Avenue is 25 mph.

But the open-wheel race cars roaring through the longest straightaway of the upcoming Washington IndyCar race organised by President Donald Trump could be going nearly eight times that fast.

"If we did that during the regular day, I think people would be put in jail, perhaps for the rest of their lives," Trump joked recently while hosting an IndyCar pit crew at the White House to hype the Freedom 250 Grand Prix.

The race, scheduled for Aug. 22 and 23, features vehicles that typically reach street-course speeds approaching 200 mph and have enough torque to tear off manhole covers. It is the latest—and the fastest—of the major events Trump has hosted against the backdrop of America's 250th birthday, a larger celebration he has made as much about himself as possible.

The president staged a UFC fight on the White House's South Lawn for his 80th birthday in June and held a rally to kick off the Great American State Fair on the National Mall after most of the event's scheduled musical acts pulled out. He headlined another rally for July Fourth on the National Mall, ahead of a massive fireworks display marking the semiquincentennial of the Declaration of Independence's signing.

Historian Michael D Hattem said Trump's events have put little focus on "addressing the specific history of the founding of the country or the 250th." White House spokesman Davis Ingle countered that Trump "is focused on saving our country—not garnering recognition."

Trump is "ensuring that America gets the spectacular 250th birthday it deserves," Ingle said in a statement, adding that the series of events Trump has helped organise shows that "2026 is sparking a renewal of patriotism and national pride" under the president's leadership.



AP/RSS

A sign on a building along the route for the upcoming Freedom 250 Grand Prix.

Race preparations include securing manhole covers

The IndyCar event will be 250 miles (400 kilometres) over 147 laps on a 1.66-mile (2.67-kilometre) track featuring seven turns. Series owner Roger Penske, whom Trump awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2019, led the effort to make the race happen in the District of Columbia. He gave the president a racing helmet, urging him to wear it "when you're riding around in The Beast, leading the field to the green flag"—a traditional pre-race kickoff that may feature the presidential limo.

DC Mayor Muriel Bowser suggested that the event was the "first, to be followed by second and third," and Trump says he'd like more Washington races in future years. But Bud Denker, president of Penske Corporation and the race's chair, isn't committing.

"It is the first ever," he said. "It might be the only."

Denker said Penske is paying for the "vast majority" of the race, including road construction and improvements, while the city handles some "very limited" repaving. The District of Columbia referred questions about repaving costs to Penske.

About a third of the track needs road improvement, a cost that should come in at under $3 million, Denker said. That's less than is often spent on road fixes ahead of other races, including in Markham, Ontario, where up to $9 million is being doled out on improvements for the IndyCar race being held the week before Washington's event, he said.

"The roads here are in pretty good shape," Denker said, noting that area residents are surprised when they hear him say that. But that reflects the nature of the nation's capital: The stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the US Capitol is repaved every four years for presidential inaugurations. Another key area along Constitution Avenue was resurfaced after tanks rolled down it for Trump's military parade marking July 4 last year.

One issue, Denker said, is the 220-plus manhole covers on the race circuit that had to be welded to ensure the race cars don't suck them off the road. About 50 of those need to be fitted with silicone because they are set too deep into the road, creating a bump, he said.

Organisers also are paying to build 1,800 walls weighing 10,000 pounds (4,536 kilograms) each to ring the track and metal detectors that will be manned by the Secret Service.

Penske is relying on the federal departments of Interior and Transportation, Denker said, not for funding but for help with issues such as permitting, allowing Chevrolet to set up a car display and vendors to sell merchandise and beer on the National Mall—activities that aren't normally allowed.

The route features monuments and landmarks

The race will go in the rain, except in the event of lightning or if major puddling makes the track slippery. Denker said that 288,000 free tickets were requested through a lottery system—exceeding the 130,000 spectators whom organisers plan to host on each of the event's two days.

"It's just going to be something we've never seen before," said Denker, who said there will be 90 minutes of pre-race show that Sunday and military flyovers like those that thundered over the National Mall for July 4.



Bob Varsha, a veteran sports announcer who long specialised in motorsports, said that a track running less than 1.7 miles (2.7 kilometres) is shorter than most street race courses and that Washington's design may feature 90-degree corners. That means cars likely won't be able to maintain top speeds. "It's going to be a lot of speed up, slow down," he said.

"It's a huge idea," Varsha said. "And I hope it goes as well as it possibly can." The track heads down Pennsylvania Avenue from 3rd Street to 9th Street NW, then doubles back to 7th Street, then goes south to Independence Avenue alongside the National Mall before looping back to 3rd Street.

Turn 1 has the US Capitol's west façade as its backdrop, while the pit lane is on the straightaway between Turn 1 and Turn 2, along Pennsylvania Avenue. Other sections feature views of the Washington Monument and the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum.

The race has been likened to 1801, but the historical record is spotty

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Washington hasn't seen a race like this since Thomas Jefferson helped mark America's 25th birthday on July 4, 1801.

That's when the north grounds of President's Park were thronged with booths, and attending crowds watched horse racing and cockfighting, according to the White House Historical Association. Jefferson eventually opened the White House and "invited everyone in to partake of his hospitality," with ordinary people joining military officers and visiting Cherokee chiefs inside, the association said.

But Hattem, who has written extensively on how the US has celebrated its independence, said that, the association's account aside, contemporary descriptions of that celebration didn't mention horse racing. He also said that Washington then was a sparsely populated swamp with the White House but very little actual city, meaning there wasn't much infrastructure for such races.

Instead, Hattem said, accounts from 1801 focused on how Jefferson—the first president from the Democratic-Republican Party—handled July 4 celebrations differently than his predecessors, George Washington and John Adams, who favoured the Federalist Party's backing of a strong central government and close ties to Great Britain. Jefferson's festivities were more utilitarian and, according to the National Intelligencer newspaper, offered "no ostentatious homage to power."

"That is a strong contrast between then and the present," Hattem said.

How Blundell's old school tactic ended England's 'Bazball' era

BEN STRANG/AFP
WELLINGTON, AUG 6

Wicketkeeper Tom Blundell believes his standing up to the stumps in England—a move that helped kill off the "Bazball" era—was a case of New Zealand shelving their egos for the good of the team.

Blundell's heroic efforts in fearlessly standing close behind the stumps to his fast bowlers enabled New Zealand to fight back from 1-0 down and win the series 2-1 in June.

England captain Ben Stokes retired during the third Test and, soon after, coach Brendon "Baz" McCullum was sacked, bringing down the curtain on the pair's attacking style of Test cricket, widely dubbed "Bazball".

Blundell managed to avoid serious injury from fielding so close to New Zealand's speed merchants, a tactic that is fraught with danger, but described how he woke every morning with swollen and aching hands.

"It was just a constant sort of barrage, but I was fortunate not to get hit on the end of a finger or anything," Blundell told AFP. Blundell began standing up in 2023 in Wellington to keep England's attacking batsmen quiet during a home series, after a request by seam bowler Matt Henry.

"We were the first ones to try it out," Blundell said. "We used it for Ollie Pope initially. He was getting a long way out of the crease, and it happened quite organically. Matt Henry was the one to ask me to come up. I was quite reluctant at the time.

"Usually a fast bowler doesn't want you to come up, it hurts the ego a little bit, but Matt Henry is such a team guy, he'll do anything for the team."

The players noticed the move kept England's batsmen stuck in the crease and slowed the scoring rate.

It led to the run-out of danger man Harry Brook for a duck in the second innings of the second Test—a match New Zealand won by a single run.

Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey employed a similar strategy for Australia in their 4-1 Ashes series win in 2025-26. Blundell said he was surprised, when he tried it again in June, that England's batsmen still struggled to adjust.

'It was so bizarre'

"Even Harry Brook, who dances down the wicket so well, he's a totally different player when the keeper's up," said Blundell. "I thought he would run at it, and I was just waiting. But it never happened. He never did. I was surprised. I remember he snicked off to first slip, and that's just not him. That's not how Harry Brook gets out."

For all of England's talk of a new ultra-positive style of Test cricket, it was an old-school tactic that finally killed off Bazball.

That and what Blundell said was the way that Stokes announced his retirement during play in the third Test.

"It was just bizarre," he said of the fourth day at Trent Bridge, when New Zealand effectively sealed the series as Stokes tried to finish his career in a blaze of glory, only to suffer a rapid defeat. "We saw on TV that Ben Stokes had retired, and we were like: 'What's going on here?'," he said of the retirement bombshell that dropped just before tea. "We had the whole field out, they could have worked it around, surely that's what you want, but they kept picking fielders out."



PHOTO: TOM BLUNDEL'S INSTAGRAM

New Zealand's wicketkeeper-batsman Tom Blundell.

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra was heard asking, "What are they doing?", as England collapsed to 212 all out to hand New Zealand a 160-run win and the series.

Blundell described it as a "laugh-off", rather than a traditional send-off for Stokes. "It was just so bizarre, honestly." McCullum has been replaced with another former New Zealand captain, Stephen Fleming, as England turn a new page with Joe Root reinstalled as captain.

As for Blundell, he said he may be back up to the stumps when New Zealand play Tests against India and Australia later this year.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
New connections and exciting ideas bring a peppy energy to your morning, dearest Aries. Don't be afraid to share your perspective when surrounded by inspiring people, even if you're not sure how it will land.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Pay special attention to where visions lead you this morning, darling bull. Don't hesitate to change course if you've hit a dead end within the current trajectory.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
You'll radiate mystique and charisma this morning, dearest Gemini, and luck will certainly be on your side. Use these vibes to make headway socially and to rally support for projects or goals.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
You may realise you've been playing by rules that don't serve you, and will be eager to break free from these structures. Be mindful of what success, security, and rebellion mean to you to ensure one does not overpower the other.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
You have access to love, support, and wisdom, dearest Leo. Approach each interaction with a curious yet open mind to make the most of these vibes.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
You'll make significant headway toward long-term goals, darling Virgo. Knowing which dreams and tasks to prioritise will put you at an advantage.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Maintain valuable relationships by putting forth the effort to interact with companions near and far. If you've been struggling to open up emotionally, these vibes can help you lower your guard with safe people.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
If you don't fight for yourself, it's unlikely anyone else will. Challenge yourself emotionally, mentally, and physically without pushing yourself to the brink.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Loved ones go out of their way to expand your mind and share what they love, dearest archer. Though you may feel skeptical of unfamiliar ideas or interests at first, try not to let it cloud your judgment.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Consistency and security don't always have to be boring, dearest Capricorn. You may discover that simple pleasures haven't been enough of a priority recently, causing your world to feel bland.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
You can have a positive and meaningful influence on the world, dearest Aquarius, even if your efforts seem insignificant at the moment. Dare to dream up a better future.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Nurture your small corner of the world, dearest Pisces. These vibes emphasise just how vital sacred spaces are, nudging you to invest in your own.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Stardom
5 Moisten a roast
10 Recipe amt.
13 Wild mountain goat
14 Above (Pref.)
15 Singer — Collins
16 Strike
17 Anteroom
18 Franc replacement
19 Rebuke (2 wds.)
21 Made furious
23 Aids and —
25 Actor — Somerhalder
26 Time
29 Tongue
34 Coeur d'—
35 Crew
36 Jazz type, for short
37 High throw
38 Clues
39 Floor mat
40 Sword
42 Punta del —
43 Feed on growing grass
45 Fragile
47 Killed with comedy
48 "In — We Trust"
49 Jeans fabric
51 Swiss herdsman's instrument
55 Yaks
59 Plunder
60 Cargo ship
62 Secular
63 "— does it!"
64 Shelved for later (2 wds.)
65 Cogito — sum
66 Newt
67 Encounters
68 Barrel piece

DOWN
1 Clenched hand
2 Competent
3 Ground grain
4 Make clear
5 Polished
6 High in the sky
7 Pigpen
8 Sapling
9 Money made
10 Hoodlum
11 Beget
12 Trudge
15 Goober
20 Orchestra member
22 Torn cloth
24 Tilted
26 Grew wan
27 Flee to marry
28 "— Without a Cause"
30 Poker stake
31 Dress in finery
32 Thin fabric for dressing wounds
33 Inched
35 Essence
38 Vertical clearance
41 Fourscore
43 Smooth-talking
44 Goes aimlessly
46 Bill and —
47 Captures
50 Oust
51 Toward the sheltered side
52 Do nothing
53 Pillar
54 Muses' number
56 Nobleman
57 Capital city in Latvia
58 Highlander
61 Rest

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

B	L	O	B	■	R	E	E	F	■	■	S	H	A	D
I	O	T	A	■	I	N	C	U	R	■	T	O	N	Y
L	O	T	S	■	B	O	R	N	E	■	A	R	T	E
E	M	O	T	E	■	S	U	N	T	A	N	N	E	D
■	■	■	E	V	A	■	■	Y	A	R	D	■	■	■
S	P	I	R	I	T	S	■	■	I	M	P	A	C	T
T	U	B	■	L	O	O	S	E	N	■	A	L	A	R
A	R	E	S	■	■	F	E	D	■	■	T	A	R	O
R	E	A	P	■	S	T	A	G	E	D	■	M	O	P
R	E	M	O	T	E	■	■	E	A	R	L	O	B	E
■	■	■	O	A	R	S	■	■	T	A	O	■	■	■
I	D	E	N	T	I	C	A	L	■	G	U	M	B	O
S	E	R	F	■	E	R	R	O	R	■	N	O	R	A
A	C	L	U	■	S	E	N	S	E	■	G	O	A	T
N	O	E	L	■	W	E	E	P	■	E	N	D	S	■

7-1-26 © 2026 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS



SUDOKU

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

No.SC6094 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

No.SC6095 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

INTERVIEW

The making of Miss Nepal International

Arya Nishaant opens up about deleting social media, embracing criticism and preparing to represent Nepal in Japan.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI
Urusha Bhandari, Miss Nepal International, 2025 crowning Nishaant at the finale.

Arya Nishaant, Miss Nepal International 2026, born and raised in Janakpur, is a Business Administration graduate and Academic Coordinator by profession.

In this conversation with the *Post*'s **Jony Nepal** and **Rivash Rijal**, Nishaant discusses the friendships forged over high-stakes weeks of training, the exact second her name was called on crowning night, and why, in an industry built on being seen, she still believes the strongest thing a woman can have is a mind of her own.

What has been your biggest inspiration to start your pageantry journey?

My biggest inspirations to join pageantry were the international and national beauty queens I've seen growing up. I have seen the way pageantry has changed their lives, the impact they've brought to their society, the work they've done for other people, and the way they've helped others. I think all of that combined inspired me to join pageantry.

What was the most memorable and transformative part of your training sessions? How did you navigate self-improvement, growth, and self-criticism during the process?

I think the most memorable and fun part of our 50-day journey was making friends and spending time with them. We were together 24/7, on calls talking about what to do the next day, what's happening, and how we could do better.

As for the transformative side, different aspects of us as humans were tested throughout the journey. Our intellect, the way we carry ourselves, how punctual we are, how we manage stress, because the days were long and stressful. We were also given constructive criticism to our faces, in front of everyone. That's a hard pill to swallow. It's different when suggestions come one-on-one versus in front of everyone. But I think that's what helped everyone improve. It gave me a point to prove: that I can do better, and that's what helped me personally transform.

How do you curate a space in social media that drives real-world change while protecting your mental space from digital noise?

Before joining Miss Nepal, I had deleted all my socials. I am not someone who's very active on social media. If it were up to me, I would be living on a farm in a village with no internet. But as a pageant girl, there are certain things expected of you, and I had to have a social presence, so I did join.

I came in with a strong mindset. I am able to differentiate what's real life and what's 'reel' life. I don't let what anyone else has to say impact my mental health or how I see myself. I only take opinions from people who know me or know my journey. You just need a strong mindset to not let it get to you.

Take us back to the exact moment you were being crowned. What came to your mind, and who were you looking for in the crowd?

I didn't know my dad was going to attend the finale. I thought he would stay home with my mom, that it would just be my brother. I actually saw him in the crowd, and that really helped me stay grounded. I thought, 'Okay, my dad is here; he's watching me'. He was the one person I kept looking at throughout the time I was on stage.

At every step of the finale, I was so ready for my name not to be called. So when my name was called, it felt unreal. In the video, I don't think it looked like I had much emotion, but my heart was racing; I was breathing so heavily. I couldn't believe I was actually going to be one of those beauty queens with a crown on my head. It was magical.

A cause you're passionate about?

Academics. I've been an academically inclined child my whole life, and education has played a very important role in shaping who my family and I have become. I think the lack of access to quality education in Nepal is one of the most prominent challenges I see, and my Beauty with a Purpose project is tied to that. It is something I want to keep working on.

What does the Miss Nepal community and sisterhood mean to you, and how has it shaped your journey?

I think the sisters we make throughout the Miss Nepal journey are the most important relationships to build, because it's such a unique experience; if you don't have people who share the same experience to talk to, life can get very difficult. The friends we make during and after the journey keep us grounded and keep us sane.

How do you associate changemaking with pageantry? Could you have become a changemaker without it?

I don't think pageantry and changemaking need to go hand in hand. You can be a changemaker regardless of whether or not you're in pageantry. I think pageantry just accelerates the process. It helps you reach more people, connect with more people and organisations relevant to your cause. It's a catalyst, not the reason change takes place.

What impact do you believe fashion can bring to self-expression and identity?

I believe fashion is a huge part of our personality and how we express ourselves. The way a person dresses shows how they see themselves and how others perceive them. Though for people who aren't into fashion and prefer comfort, that too reflects a personality that values practicality over being flashy.

For me, I love fashion. I have been designing and styling my own clothes, not professionally, but personally, and I really enjoy it. It's the message you give people without speaking, and especially in the industry we're in, it's important to carry yourself in a certain way and stay authentic to your personality.

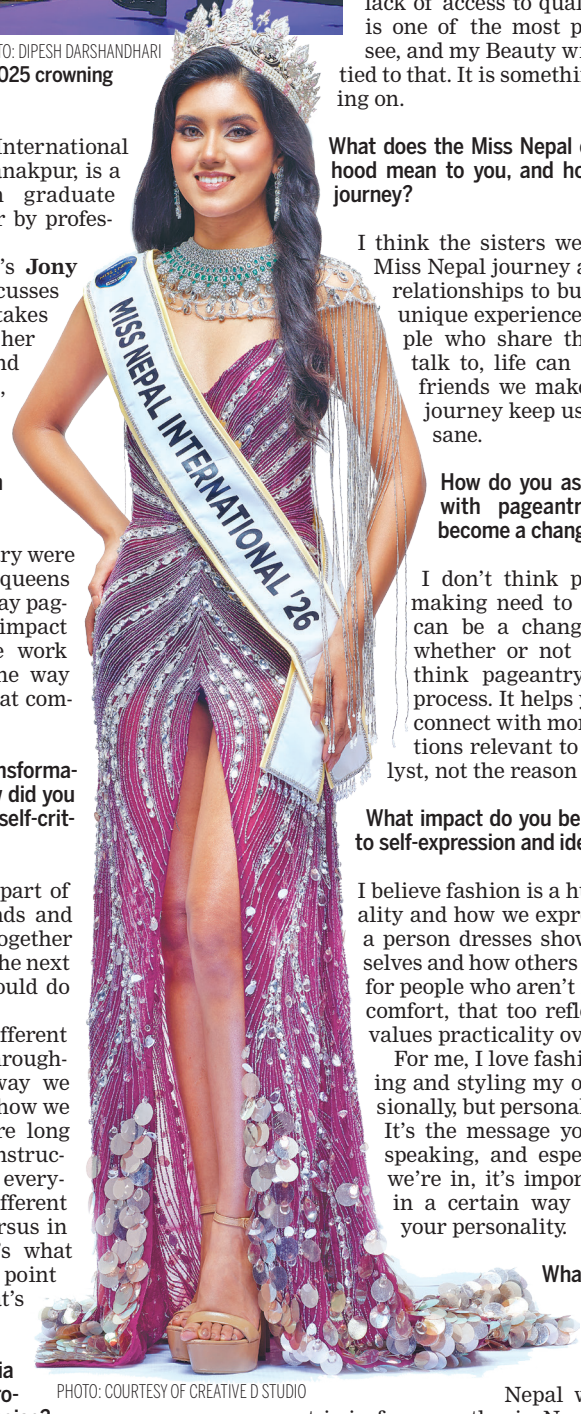


PHOTO: COURTESY OF CREATIVE D STUDIO

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

Short-term, it's definitely to represent Nepal well. My international pageant is in four months, in November in Japan, and I need to prepare for that, give my best, and make my country proud.

Long-term, ideally I'd like to have a fashion business that also gives back to society, without needing to be actively hands-on with it. And for myself, to live on a sustainable farm.

A message for young people, particularly those aspiring to join pageantry?

You could take the route my friend Kashish (Miss Nepal Cosmo, 2026) took. She's a professional model who's been in the industry a long time. Or you could do what I did. I modelled here and there, did about two shows in my whole life, and realised it was hampering my education, so I set it aside and focused on academics instead. I was a 4.0 student, and I took that route.

You could take the academic route or the professional route, whichever you're genuinely interested in. There isn't a particular do's-and-don'ts list for becoming a beauty queen. If it's what you really want, first understand and research what's actually required of the pageant, and work on yourself accordingly.

Learning to believe

At 21, Kashis Subba entered Miss Nepal unsure of herself. Winning the Cosmo crown, she says, proved that growth begins with taking the chance.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI
Kashis Subba being crowned as Miss Nepal Cosmo, 2026.

Kashis Subba, 21, is a fashion model and stylist with a Diploma in Fashion Design. She has spent the last four years building her name in Nepal's fashion industry, earning titles such as 'Face of Nepal 2023' and 'Model of the Year 2025'.

Crowned Miss Nepal Cosmo 2026, she now hopes to build an international career in fashion while inspiring young people to pursue their dreams fearlessly and grow into the best versions of themselves.

In this conversation with the Post's **Jony Nepal** and **Rivash Rijal**,

What was the biggest inspiration in starting your pageant journey?

Growing up, I used to watch pageants. After joining modelling, fashion runways, and photoshoots, I had seen a lot of opportunities, and I really loved performing on stage. But I never thought I would be a pageant girl, because I always felt like a pageant girl needs really strong speaking skills.

That changed when I saw Miss Cosmo. I realised pageants are evolving. It is not only about speaking anymore; your performance and stage presence also matter. It gave me a vision that I could also do this, that I could create impactful change for my country and community through this platform.

Even so, I doubted myself. I'm only 21, without the strong academic or professional portfolio a lot of pageant contestants have. But this year, my mentor pushed me to join Miss Nepal. Even with four years of modelling experience and representing Nepal in Korea at 18, I always felt I still had so much to learn. My mentor told me: you'll grow, you'll gain clarity on your vision, you won't just grow mentally but be able to make a real impact on people. That convinced me to give the audition, even unprepared.

What was the preparation process like?

I worked incredibly hard. For 50 days, I only slept three to four hours a night. My two mentors pushed me constantly. There were moments of doubt. Thinking I was too young, that there were so many strong contestants, and that I could always try again next year. But my mentors reframed it as my winning mindset.

I told myself that even if I did not win, working on my weaknesses and turning them into strengths would matter for my life regardless of the outcome. I tried not to carry stress through the days. During training, we had fun, we teased each other, we played. Only at home in the evenings did the real work start.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CREATIVE D STUDIO

What did it feel like when you won?

Before my name was even announced, I was mentally thanking everyone. My mentors, everyone who'd supported me. I thought of my grandmother, who passed away last year; my mentor always told me that when I feel nervous or afraid, to look up and remember she's blessing me.

That day, oddly, I felt calm and confident rather than nervous. I kept thinking, whatever happens, I was brought here to grow; this is a chapter of my destiny. When they said my name, I broke down crying. I don't remember much of the actual crowning—the crown, the sash—but I still feel that emotion vividly even now.

How do you navigate social media and public scrutiny now that you've won?

Winning this title comes with huge responsibility. The whole country and the world are watching. No one is perfect, and I've never claimed to be. What I've always said is: I'm not perfect, but I'll keep working on my weaknesses.

I honestly have not had time to look at social media since winning. The people who watched me work—my team, the makeup artists, everyone at Hidden Treasure—they saw my effort and supported me. If criticism came from someone who actually knows me closely, it would affect me. But strangers judging a single moment who do not know the full story do not matter. Even in an imperfect moment, I showed courage by standing for myself. That is what I'm proud of.

What difference has the platform actually made?

I'm about to represent my country in Vietnam. The people there already show me so much love and support. Whether I'm competing, performing, or just introducing myself as Nepali, I feel like I'm making a real impact representing my country internationally.

What impact do you believe fashion has on your self-expression and identity?

Fashion has been part of me since childhood. I used to drape my mom's shawls and put on my own fashion shows at home, walking an imaginary ramp. One day I'd want to be a tomboy in baggy clothes, the next day I would want to be a Barbie. I have always liked being creative with my looks. I think that's just my personality.

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

No one in my family was in the fashion or glamour field, but somehow destiny kept drawing me here. To become a model, and now Miss Nepal.

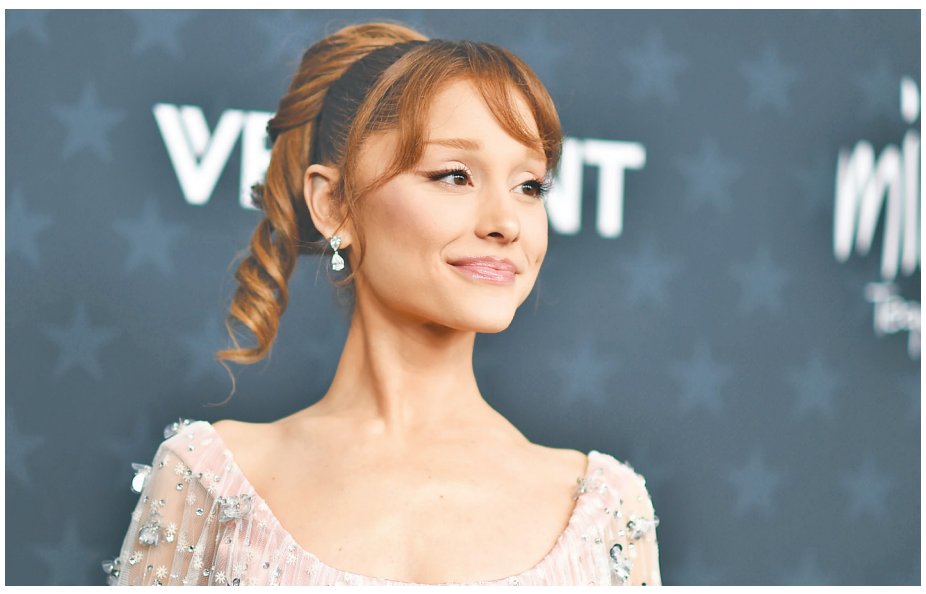
I always wanted to serve my community and do good for my people, but I had not imagined it would be through this platform. Now that I have it, it feels like this is my purpose. Not just for myself, but for the people around me.

I have never been an academic person. Studying was never easy for me. But Miss Nepal demanded a different kind of discipline: photoshoots, runway work, working under pressure, sometimes until three or four in the morning, and I found I had endless energy for it. Preparing for this actually made me work harder than I ever did for school, and I realised that if I build a habit around something, it becomes easier.

I genuinely enjoy this work, and I believe it can create real impact. So my long-term goal is to keep going in this direction, even though the future is never fully certain.

Ariana Grande's new video sparks conversation on body and beauty standards—again

It also raised the question: Just because we can say anything, does that mean we should?



AP/RSS

DEEPTI HAJELA

Talking about beauty can get really ugly—particularly when it comes to public figures.

In an increasingly connected world, there's no shortage of hot takes and judgment. That is evident yet again in recent days in the wake of a new music video from singer Ariana Grande and the release last week of her new album, 'Petal', which reignited commentary about her thin appearance.

It also raised the question: Just because we can say anything, does that mean we should? Some saw yet more body-shaming being aimed, no surprise, at a woman in a society that constantly judges them; others said it was simply a concern.

Some called for respecting her privacy, while others said the influence of celebrities on young fans made it a valid topic.

Grande, 33, has faced attention and commentary throughout her career around her appearance, with the current focus being on the increasing visibility of her body's bone structure, including her sternum and rib cage.

She has pushed back against discourse that she's anything other than healthy, and repeatedly insisted that she doesn't think commenting on people's bodies is acceptable. Her representative told People magazine that she would be stepping back from public life after her current tour finishes due to the endless, ongoing public scrutiny.

Even in the video, a nearly seven-minute indictment of the harsh process of assessment and judgment that leads to fame and celebrity, Grande hits on the subject of being constantly sized up. "I don't need someone to save me," she sings. "I'm not a victim."

The way we talk in situations about body image matters because the impact can transcend a one-off comment or snap judgment about celebrities we'll never meet, says Johanna Kandel, founder and CEO of the National Alliance for Eating Disorders.

"I would just check our intentions behind it," Kandel said. "What is the purpose of it? ... What is the intent versus the impact of it?"

Aggressive scrutiny of people in the spotlight is nothing new, nor is the reality that women's appearances are heavily judged — even though the past decade has brought concerted efforts to promote ideas of body acceptance at all sizes.

These days, effective weight loss-inducing medications—their use driven by celebrities—have joined the larger cultural conversation. They're shifting the ground once again around ideas of thinness, beauty and health, with some concerned that a slew of images of noticeably skinnier famous faces could have a troubling impact on those struggling with body image issues or eating disorders.

— Associated Press

Published and printed by Kantipur Publications Limited, Central Business Park, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal, P. B. No. 8559, Phone: 5135000, Fax: 977-1-5135057, E-mail: kpost@kmg.com.np, Regd. No. 32/049/050, Chairman: **Kailash Sirohiya**, Editor-in-Chief: **Gokarna Awasthi**