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Bajhang traders resume Taklakot trade after 7 years

43 traders made a gruelling six-day journey to Tibet to sell baskets, handicrafts, spices and other products.

BASANT PRATAP SINGH
BAJHANG, AUG 10

After a gruelling six-day journey across one of the highest mountain passes along the Nepal-China border, 43 residents of Bajhang have reached Taklakot, a border market in Tibet, carrying traditional baskets, handicrafts, spices and other locally produced goods for sale.

The traders from Saipal and Talkot rural municipalities crossed the 5,200-metre Urai Pass on foot, while horses, mules and yaks carried their goods from Bajhang to the Tibetan market.

Their arrival marks the revival of a centuries-old cross-border trading tradition that had been suspended for nearly seven years after China restricted entry into Tibet during the Covid pandemic. The reopening has allowed residents of northern Bajhang to once again take part in the seasonal trade that has long linked communities on both sides of the Himalayas.

The traders received group permits to enter Tibet for the traditional trade and have set up stalls at a site designated by the Pulan County administration in Tibet. They have brought

> Traders say some products are fetching eight times their prices in local Bajhang markets.

dokos and dalas (traditional bamboo baskets), bamboo grain containers known as lyakchya, wooden handles for axes and sickles, timur (Sichuan pepper), lentils, wooden products and other locally made goods.

"Altogether, we have brought around 3,500 dokos and dalas," said Haribhan Bohara of Saipal Rural Municipality. "Some have brought wooden products, while others have brought timur and lentils. They have designated a separate place for us to sell our goods. Buyers come there and purchase them."

Some customers, he said, were buying as many as seven or eight bamboo baskets at a time.

The goods are fetching significantly higher prices in Taklakot than in local markets in Bajhang, making the journey commercially worthwhile for some traders.

The highest price is being paid for lyakchya. It is selling for as much as 215 yuan, or about Rs4,900. An ordinary doko is selling for around 70 Chinese yuan, equivalent to about Rs1,600, while handles for axes are fetching up to 30 yuan, which equals around Rs700.

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Government yet to decide how to reopen royal massacre probe

Home Minister Gurung's pledge for a new investigation has made little progress amid questions over evidence, legal authority and the way forward.



POST FILE PHOTO

This photo, taken on June 2, 2001, shows the body of a member of the royal family being carried to Pashupati Aryaghat for cremation, a day after the massacre that killed King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and their three children, along with several other members of the royal family.

GAURAV POKHAREL
KATHMANDU, AUG 10

The government's announcement to reopen the investigation into Nepal's 25-year-old royal massacre has failed to move forward as authorities remain undecided on how the inquiry should be conducted.

Home Minister Sudan Gurung announced a fresh investigation immediately after taking office for the second time. But the government has yet to decide whether Nepal Police should handle the probe or a separate commission should be formed.

The uncertainty over the investigation model has stalled the process.

A day after assuming office on June 9, Gurung held discussions with Nepal Police Inspector General Dan Bahadur Karki, security chiefs and senior officials at the Ministry of Home Affairs. During the meeting, Gurung instructed officials to explore ways to investigate the massacre through Nepal Police.

However, police officials advised that a Cabinet-level decision would be more appropriate because the massacre had already been investigated by a commission led by then chief justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya, with then speaker Taranath Ranabhat and opposition leader Madhav Kumar Nepal as members.

"Since a judicial inquiry commission had already investigated the incident and submitted a report, the police view was that simply forming another committee would not necessarily lead to a conclusion," a senior home ministry official said. "A decision has still not been made on whether to assign the investigation to police or set up a separate commission."

Home Minister Gurung, however, refused to disclose details about the progress of the probe. In a recent interview with Kantipur he said, "Home Ministry cannot disclose sensitive information," he said.

> Lack of crime scene records, postmortem reports, and ballistic tests key obstacles, say officials.

"The Home Ministry is not really a place for providing sensitive information; some things can only be discussed at the surface level," he said.

Officials from specialised crime investigation units, including the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) and Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office, also said no investigation had begun so far.

According to senior officials at the ministry, police leadership had already briefed the home minister about three major obstacles in reopening the case.

"During the meeting with security chiefs after the minister's decision, police officials explained that the absence of crime scene records and postmortem reports would create difficulties," a ministry official said. "Another challenge is that there was no ballistic examination to determine what weapons were used."

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Probe commissions lose steam as public pressure subsides

A review reveals a pattern of shelved reports, broken promises and lingering questions over accountability.

DURGA DULAL
KATHMANDU, AUG 10

Forming high-level probe commissions and task forces in response to public outrage is a long-standing political practice in Nepal. For decades, governments have responded to crises by setting up investigative panels, often to address public anger.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's government came to power promising to break with such practices and usher in greater transparency and accountability.

Yet months into its tenure, the administration appears to be repeating the pattern it had pledged to change.

A review by Kantipur shows that the Shah-led government has formed at least 10 high-profile commissions and investigative committees since taking office. But the urgency shown in forming them appears to disappear once they complete their work and submit their reports.

Reports on constitutional reform, national security, human rights violations and loss of life have either not been made public, not been formally received or remain unimplemented. The practice has raised questions over the purpose and effectiveness of commissions that are established at considerable public expense.

One of the clearest examples is the debate paper on constitutional amendment.

Amid widespread political dissatisfaction, the Cabinet decided on March 30 to form a specialised task force to prepare a comprehensive paper on possible constitutional amendments.

Coordinated by Prime Minister Shah's political adviser, Asim Shah, the task force began work on April 8. After consultations with political parties, legal experts and civic stakeholders, it completed its assignment and submitted its final report to the government on July 16.

> Non-implementation of Gen Z protest probe report has left Gauri Bahadur Karki concerned.

According to people familiar with the document, the task force proposed sweeping constitutional changes. The debate paper reportedly recommends amendments to 242 articles of the constitution and calls for the formation of a high-level constitution amendment commission to oversee the process.

Despite the scale of the proposed changes, the report remains with the prime minister's office. The government has neither made it public nor initiated broader parliamentary or public discussion on its recommendations.

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Borrowed gear, self-funded training and a shot at glory for Nepal

Nepal's para table tennis players are being forced to finance much of their own preparation, but they remain determined to challenge Asia's best in Japan.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Nepal's para table tennis players train for the 5th Asian Para Games at the hall of Nepal Disabled Association's Khagendra New Life Home in Jorpati, Kathmandu, on Thursday.

NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 10

Every evening, a hall just inside the main gate of the Nepal Disabled Association's Khagendra New Life Home in Jorpati, Kathmandu, hums with activity. Except on Saturdays, when the routine shifts to the morning, the space is filled with the rhythmic percussion of training—the sharp click of balls meeting rackets, their quick pop against the tables, and the clatter across the concrete floor whenever a shot is missed.

In the rare moments of silence, the rhythm of play gives way to quiet replenishment: athletes catching their breath or meticulously applying fresh rubber to their rackets with practiced hands. They are expensive, echoed five para table tennis players training for the 5th Asian Para Games as they glued the rubber on Thursday. These are second-hand rubbers they brought from Japan by requesting the players there. They cannot afford new ones themselves.

In Nepal, a basic set of two rackets and three balls can be purchased for less than Rs500. But neither these budget options nor professional gear costing thousands more are standardised for the specific requirements of international competition.

"I recall being denied a racket that cost me thousands of rupees during a Paralympic qualification event," said Keshav Thapa, who is currently preparing for his third Asian Para Games. A wheelchair user, Thapa has previously represented Nepal at the 2018 and 2022 Asian Para Games in Indonesia and China. "I ended up competing using a borrowed racket from another participant," Thapa said.

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Nepal is growing more rice but losing indigenous varieties

Farmers are abandoning indigenous rice for higher-yielding hybrids, putting at risk types that carry distinctive genetic traits, cultural traditions and centuries of agricultural history.

SHIVA PURI IN RAUTAHAT,
MANOJ PAUDEL IN KAPILVASTU
& **MADHAV ARYAL** IN PALPA
AUG 10



POST PHOTO: MANOJ KUMAR PAUDEL

Kalanamak rice panicles sway in the fields of Lamatiya, in Kapilvastu district, in this recent photo. The ancient variety is famed for its soft texture, distinctive fragrance, and delicate flavour. A Buddhist monk claims that Kalanamak has a history dating back to the Buddha era.

Until a decade ago, the paddies of Nepal's Tarai were dominated by rice varieties whose names were deeply woven into the region's farming culture: Sona Mansuli, Soni, Katarni, Savitri, Ram Dhan, Radha-4, Sawadhan and Swarna, also known as Ardinath.

By this time of year, the fields would already be green with these familiar varieties, their cultivation tied to generations of farming knowledge and the agricultural rhythms of the plains.

These were more than traditional crops. They were adapted to the Tarai's soil and climate and had long formed the backbone of farming communities in what is considered Nepal's food basket.

Today, many of these varieties are disappearing.

Across the Tarai, and particularly in Madhesh province, farmers are steadily replacing indigenous rice with imported hybrid varieties. Some traditional varieties have become so rare that they are now at risk of disappearing altogether. Others survive only because a handful of farmers continue to grow them, sometimes despite government restrictions.

The shift is largely driven by economics.

Traditional rice varieties generally take longer to mature, produce lower yields and are increasingly vulnerable to disease. Hybrid varieties, by contrast, promise farmers higher yields in a shorter period, allowing them to harvest rice earlier and prepare their fields for another crop.

"The disappearance of traditional rice varieties is unfortunate," said Surendra Prasad Kurmi, chief of the Agriculture Knowledge Centre in Rautahat district in south-central Nepal. "Disease outbreaks around harvest time have also been a major reason. Farmers have been abandoning these varieties for about a decade."

Sabitri, Ram Dhan and Radha-4 can take 140 to 160 days to mature and typically produce three to four tonnes per hectare. Hybrid varieties mature in 120 to 130 days and can produce six to eight tonnes.

For farmers working on increasingly tight margins, the difference is difficult to ignore.

In Rautahat, farmers now grow hybrid varieties such as Gorkhanath and Loknath, whose seeds are imported from India or China. Their popularity reflects a broader transformation in the Tarai's rice fields, where the pressure to produce more food in less time is steadily reshaping what farmers plant.

Even Sona Mansuli, once among the country's most popular varieties, has become a complicated part of this transition.

The government banned its cultivation five years ago after repeated outbreaks of blast disease. Yet the variety remains popular with farmers, who continue to plant it despite the restriction.

"Farmers are still secretly growing Sona Mansuli," Kurmi said.

Seeds of Soni, Katarni and Ram Dhan are also being brought in from India.

Nepal has 69 documented indigenous rice varieties, Kurmi said. But most are now struggling to survive.

"Most of them are on the verge of disappearing," he said. "Only about 5 percent are still being cultivated."

Among the varieties whose cultivation has declined are Baspate, Kankajira, Ratuwa, Sugandha, Pahadi Anadi, Madheshi Masino, Eklo Pahele, Sawa, Ram Dhan, Sabitri, Radha-4, Sawadhan, Ardinath-1 and Sukha-2 and Sukha-4.

The decline of these varieties is not simply a story of farmers choosing one seed over another. It reflects a much broader change in the way agriculture is being practised in the Tarai, as farmers respond to rising costs, changing weather and the need to make the most of increasingly limited land and time.

Changing weather patterns are making traditional farming harder. Erratic rainfall, prolonged dry spells and the spread of new diseases are adding to the risks.

Agricultural experts say traditional varieties are also losing their natural resistance to diseases such as blast, sheath blight and bacterial leaf blight. At the same time, the cost of fertiliser, ploughing, labour and irrigation continues to rise, leaving farmers with little room to experiment with varieties that may offer lower returns.

For farmers such as Rudhal Chaudhary of Simra Bhawanipur, the calculation is straightforward.

"Until 10 years ago, farmers would go out of their way to plant Sona Mansuli," he said. "Even though the government has banned it, farmers still prefer it."

The timing of the harvest matters almost as much as the yield.

A rice variety that matures early gives farmers time to plant mustard, lentils or wheat during the winter season. Traditional varieties can take weeks longer to mature, making it harder to fit a second crop into the agricultural calendar.

For farmers trying to maximise the use of their land throughout the year, that delay can translate directly into lost income.

It has further reduced the appeal of traditional varieties.

But the disappearance of indigenous rice carries costs that may not be immediately visible in a farmer's field.

As farmers switch to higher-yielding varieties, Nepal is also losing genetic diversity built up over generations. Indigenous varieties developed through years of cultivation were often naturally suited to particular soils, weather conditions and local farming practices.

Radha-4, for example, can tolerate dry conditions, while other local varieties are better adapted to flooding. Such characteristics may become increasingly important as Nepal's climate becomes more unpredictable.

> **What helps farmers survive today could put Nepal's agricultural diversity at risk, say experts.**

Once a variety disappears from farmers' fields, the genetic traits it carries can also be lost permanently.

That is what worries farmers and agricultural experts who see the transition not simply as a change in farming preferences but as a potential threat to agricultural biodiversity and, ultimately, food security.

Jagendra Sahani, an old farmer in the district, worries that commercialisation could come at a high cost.

"It is natural for agriculture in Madhesh to become more commercial, but the complete disappearance of traditional varieties is a serious concern for food security and agricultural biodiversity," he said. "Unless farmers are encouraged and supported to preserve indigenous seeds, varieties such as Sabitri, Ram Dhan and Radha-4 could soon exist only in agricultural textbooks and history."

The dilemma facing farmers is therefore not simply whether to grow traditional rice or hybrids. Farmers need varieties that can provide sufficient yields, withstand disease and changing weather, mature within a workable agricultural calendar and generate enough income to sustain their households.

For many, hybrid varieties currently offer the most practical answer.

About 98 percent of the district's rice planting has been completed this year. Rice covers around 34,000 hectares in Rautahat, according to the Agriculture Knowledge Centre.

Much of that land is now being planted with varieties that promise farmers more rice in less time.

The slow disappearance of Kalanamak

The story is particularly striking in Kapilvastu, where another traditional variety is fading from the landscape.

Kalanamak rice is soft and flavourful, with a distinctive fragrance. Until two decades ago, it was a familiar presence in local kitchens and was often served to guests as a mark of hospitality.

Today, fields of Kalanamak are increasingly difficult to find.

The variety was once a source of pride and a defining part of Kapilvastu's agricultural identity. It was grown across parts of Kapilvastu, Rupandehi and southern parts of West Nawalparasi.

But Kalanamak is demanding.

It takes longer to mature than most other varieties, needs more water and requires greater care. It is also vulnerable to disease, pests and other crop stresses. The cost of growing it has risen while the returns have remained comparatively low.

"It is delicious, but expensive to produce and takes longer to mature," said Rakesh Ojha, chief of the programme implementation unit of the National Agriculture Modernisation Programme. "That is why farmers choose improved varieties."

The decline has been dramatic.

About 15 years ago, Kalanamak was grown on 4,000 to 5,000 hectares in Kapilvastu. Today, cultivation has fallen to barely 75 hectares, according to Ghanashyam Chaudhary, chief of the district's Agriculture Knowledge Centre.

The change can be seen in the fields themselves. The dark Kalanamak panicles that once appeared across the landscape have become rare, replaced by the yellow-gold heads of newer varieties.

For Khursed Ahmed Khan, an agricultural expert, the disappearance of Kalanamak is not simply a loss for farmers. It is also the erosion of a part of Kapilvastu's heritage, he says, yet local and provincial authorities have done little to preserve it.

"It is a grain with a history going back centuries," he said. "But no one seems interested in protecting it."

The rice is also distinctive in appearance. Farmers say its dark colour is what gave it the name Kalanamak, literally referring to its dark appearance.

Its history, however, reaches much further back.

Bhikkhu Siri Vajira, an assistant professor at Lumbini Buddhist University, claims Kalanamak has links to the Buddha era.

According to the tradition he recounts, about 2,600 years ago, when Gautam Buddha was preparing to leave Baishali, local people asked him for a keepsake. Buddha had little with him except his alms bowl.

"He took a handful of rice from his alms bowl and gave it to them," Vajira said. "He told them to plant it in a marshy area. He said it would become fragrant and asked them to remember him when they smelled its aroma."

During the Buddha era, a rice festival was held on the full moon of the Nepali month of Ashadh (June-July) outside the royal palace at Tilaurakot. Kalanamak was planted there, and rice made from the harvest was served in the royal palace, according to Vajira.

"This rice is very old," he said. "But it has gradually disappeared."

For those who see the rice as part of the cultural heritage of the Lumbini region, its decline also represents a missed economic opportunity.

Lilamani Sharma, president of the Lumbini Hotel Association, says Kalanamak's historical association with the Buddhist era could be turned into an economic opportunity by developing it as a distinctive brand.

He believes the rice could be grown around Lumbini and marketed under the "Saras" brand, named after the sarus crane, another species associated with the region's Buddhist heritage. Hotels in Lumbini and Kapilvastu could then serve Kalanamak rice to tourists as part of a campaign to preserve the traditional crop while creating a market for it.

Kalanamak is widely regarded as an organically grown rice variety, and Sharma says it could be promoted as rice dating back to the time of Buddha.

The rice also has an unusual connection with the sarus crane, one of the world's rarest cranes. Farmers say the birds favour Kalanamak fields and often build their nests among the rice plants. Linking the rice with the crane could therefore give the variety a distinctive identity, Sharma said. The sarus crane itself is also associated with stories and traditions from the Buddhist era.

Barmeli and Jarneli also disappearing

The decline of traditional rice is not confined to the Tarai. Indigenous varieties have also been disappearing from Nepal's hill districts, including Palpa.

Until about two decades ago, farmers in the hills commonly grew indigenous varieties. Today, seeds of some of those varieties survive only in a handful of places.

Farmers say they abandoned them because they produce less, are more labour-intensive, require plenty of water and take longer to mature.

Gopal Kafle of Lamdikhola in ward 9 of Rampur Municipality still remembers growing traditional rice. He says finding seeds of many of the varieties once grown in the area has now become increasingly difficult.

"Varieties such as Chhote, Barmeli, Anadi, Jarneli, Batisaro, Thapachini, Basmati, Kalo Jhinuwa, Jhinuwa and Aamjhotte, which were traditionally planted here, are now very difficult to find," he said, recalling the old varieties.

"The importance of traditional rice is disappearing in the villages. There are hardly any farmers left who grow them. More people are planting seeds bought from the market."

Some members of the younger generation have never even heard of the varieties, Kafle said. The problem is no longer simply that farmers have stopped growing them. Their seeds are disappearing as well.

Once farmers stop maintaining a traditional variety, its seed can become increasingly difficult to obtain. Over time, the variety may disappear not only from the fields but also from the local knowledge and seed networks that sustained it.

Some varieties are already considered endangered, said Krishna Prasad Aryal, a farmer from ward 6 of Rampur Municipality.

Farmers have increasingly turned to commercially available seeds because they produce higher yields and require less water, he said.

"People want rice that can produce more from a smaller area, which is one reason the old varieties are becoming so difficult to find," Aryal said. "In many cases, the seeds themselves are beginning to disappear. You might still find them in remote villages, but elsewhere they are very hard to come by."

The transition is also being accelerated by changes in rural labour and farming technology.

Farmers have moved away from traditional rice because newer varieties produce more grain, have shorter stalks and are easier to manage, said Narayan Prasad Gaire, head of the agriculture section at Rampur Municipality.

Hybrid and improved varieties produce significantly higher yields than traditional rice. Modern machinery has also made harvesting and threshing easier, while the migration of young people from villages to work abroad has reduced the availability of farm labour.

"People may also be moving away from traditional varieties because they want more production with less effort," Gaire said. "Traditional rice tends to be tastier and more filling, but the younger generation is no longer paying much attention to it."

Some farmers now grow traditional varieties only for festivals and special occasions, he said.

Although rice from the old varieties is considered tastier, their lower yields, higher water requirements, long stalks and tendency to fall over before ripening have pushed farmers towards hybrid varieties.

According to the Directorate of Agriculture Development under the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, Federal Affairs and General Administration, 7,287 hectares of land in the district is suitable for rice cultivation.

Plan to reopen royal massacre probe stalls over how to proceed

>> Continued from page 1

Investigators who spoke to Kantipur also said a fresh probe would face major scientific challenges because crucial evidence, including the type of weapons and bullets used, the nature of injuries and whether wounds were consistent with the official account, was not available.

"Police investigations are conducted with the purpose of prosecution. What matters is whether facts and evidence can support a case in court," an official familiar with the police briefing said. "Based on the evidence currently available, it appears difficult to reach any conclusion. That makes a police-led investigation complicated."

Nepal Police former superintendent Sher Bahadur Karki, who was assigned to photograph the crime scene after the June 2001 massacre, said even documenting the scene had been delayed.

He recalled reaching the site only five days after the incident and said conducting an investigation now would be extremely difficult.

"I don't think photographs alone will provide much assistance today. Many things would have to be based on assumptions," Karki told Kantipur. "However, some eyewitnesses are still alive, and their statements could reveal new information."

मोटरसाईकल हरायो

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नाम: निकी यादव

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Karki said that if the original structure of the palace had remained unchanged, investigators might have been able to understand the scene more easily through photographs, but major changes over the years would make the process harder.

A senior police official familiar with discussions between police and the home minister said the original report was the only substantial basis currently available for a new investigation.

"The key question is whether the people who prepared that report reached their conclusions objectively or under pressure or influence," the official said. "If they provide new facts, that could change things. Otherwise, there does not appear to be much basis for taking the investigation much further."

On June 4, 2001, then king, Gyanendra, formed a three-member panel to investigate the massacre. However, then opposition leader Madhav Kumar Nepal resigned from the panel.

"We were at the Birendra Military Hospital in Chhauni when the decision to form the committee was announced," recalled Deviram Sharma, who was then chief of the National Investigation Department.

"Initially, opposition leader Nepal himself had asked to be included in the committee. Later, for reasons unknown, he decided to withdraw."

After Nepal's withdrawal, the two-member panel submitted a report suggesting that Crown Prince Dipendra had carried out the massacre by opening fire on members of the royal family.

Statements from most members of the royal family who were present at the palace that night also claimed that Dipendra was responsible for the shooting.

According to the report, a total of at least 24 members of the royal family and relatives had gathered for a dinner at the Tribhuvan Sadan building inside Narayanhiti Royal Palace on June 1, 2001.

The report said Dipendra spent some time alone playing billiards in the billiards room at around 7:30pm. It also cited statements that he had consumed whisky neat before joining the gathering



POST FILE PHOTO

An official investigation in June 2001 concluded that Crown Prince Dipendra was responsible for the killings of members of the royal family. This photo from June 2, 2001 shows a body of a member of the royal family being carried on a bier by pallbearers, accompanied by military personnel.

"Before King Birendra arrived at the hall, it appeared that Dipendra was unable to control his body, and Prince Nirajan, Prince Paras, Kumar Gorakh Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana [the king's son-in-law], and Dr Rajiv Shah had taken Dipendra to his private quarters," the report stated.

The report said that while Dipendra was in his room, he called his aide Gajendra Bohara at 8:19pm and ordered him to bring cigarettes. According to the inquiry, royal attendant Ram Krishna KC prepared a special cigarette containing cannabis and another unidentified black substance and handed it to Paras through the eastern door of the billiards room.

The investigation also examined telephone records obtained from then Nepal Telecommunications Corporation. The records showed that Dipendra had three conversations with Devyani Rana before the shooting.

Rana, who was receiving treatment in India at the time, told investigators that she noticed Dipendra's speech was slurred and asked his aides Gajendra Bohara and Raju Karki to check on him.

According to attendant Ram Krishna KC's statement cited in the report, Dipendra changed into camouflage fatigues after speaking with Rana and came out of his private quarters carrying weapons.

When an attendant offered to bring his emergency bag, Dipendra reportedly replied that it was not needed at the time. The report said Dipendra then entered the billiards room carrying a rifle and a 12-bore shotgun.

According to the commission's account, Dipendra first fired at the ceiling and western wall of the room with a black-coloured gun. He then opened fire on his father, King Birendra, who was talking with other guests, before moving outside and throwing the weapon near bushes beside the inner garden.

The report stated that Dipendra then returned to the billiards room carrying a rifle equipped with a light and telescope and opened fire again.

The inquiry report described a series of shootings that killed or injured members of the royal family, including King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya, Prince Nirajan, Princess Shruti, Princess Shanti, Princess Sharada, Princess Jayanti Shah, Dhirendra Shah (the king's brother who no longer held the title of prince), Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah (king's brother-in-law), and others.

The commission said its account was based on statements from people present at the scene, including Princess Shobha, then prince Paras, Kumar Gorakh Shamsher, Ketaki Chester, Rabi Shumsher, Dr Rajiv Shah and Maheshwar Kumar Singh.

Despite the official inquiry's conclusion, public speculation and conspiracy theories surrounding the incident have continued for more than two decades, prompting periodic calls for a fresh investigation.

After seven years, Bajhang traders return to Taklakot



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BASANTA BOHARA

Traders from Bajhang take a break on their way to the Tibetan town of Taklakot recently.

>> Continued from page 1

"We negotiate the price before selling. If someone really likes an item, they may even pay more," said Bhim Jethara, who travelled from Talkot Rural Municipality. "The price also varies depending on the quality."

He said some products were selling for roughly seven or eight times the prices they would fetch in local markets in Bajhang.

But the apparently attractive prices do not necessarily translate into large profits.

The traders have to absorb the costs of transporting the goods, feeding themselves and paying for labour, in addition to the physical demands of the six-day journey across the mountains.

"For us, the earnings are only moderate after the costs of the journey, transportation, labour and other expenses are taken into account," said Basant Bohara, another young trader from Saipal.

He said profit was not the only reason they had made the difficult journey.

"We have come here not just for profit but also to keep alive the trading tradition that has continued since the time of our ancestors," he said.

The traders, however, have found that the Taklakot market is no longer as busy as it was before the border was closed.

"There is not the same crowd of customers as before because the border has been closed for such a long time," Bohara said.

In previous years, Nepali traders would regularly arrive in Taklakot around this time, during mid-July and mid-August, and customers would gather in large numbers to buy their goods. But the prolonged interruption has broken that trading cycle, and traders say it is taking time for news of the reopening to spread among villages on the Tibetan side.

The changing consumption habits of Tibetan consumers may also be working against the traditional trade.

Industrial products have increasingly replaced handmade household goods in Tibetan markets. Plastic, tin and other modern materials are now widely available, and demand for traditional baskets and other products from Bajhang has declined.

"In the past, everything we brought would be sold within a day or two. There is no such crowd now," said Bhakta Bohara. "Plastic goods are cheaper, so perhaps people are less interested in buying our products."

Even with fewer customers, he said, the business was not disappointing.

The traders reached Taklakot in the first week of August and plan to remain there for several more days to sell their goods. Most are expected to return to Nepal in the third week of August, said Kebjan Bohara, who is in Taklakot with the group.

On their return, they traditionally bring back Tibetan salt, liquor, electrical goods, clothing and shoes.

The reopening of the trade route, however, has not restored all of the activities that once connected communities in Bajhang with Tibet.

Residents are still not allowed to bathe in Lake Manasarovar or bring water from the lake back to Nepal. China's restrictions on access to the lake have left clan deity worship in Bajhang suspended for seven years.

The disruption also affects the seasonal movement of livestock.

For generations, residents have taken sheep, goats and yaks into Tibetan territory during the monsoon to graze in the region's forests and pastures. But residents say Chinese security personnel have increasingly obstructed the practice and mistreated herders, leaving them increasingly reluctant to take their livestock across the border.

As restrictions have tightened around activities that were once routine, communities in northern Bajhang say the reopening of trade is only a partial restoration of their traditional links with Tibet.

Bajhang authorities have, for several years, attempted to coordinate with officials in China's border areas over the restrictions on religious practices, the mistreatment of herders, and other issues. Those efforts have so far failed to produce a resolution.

The traditional ritual in Bajhang requires water from Lake Manasarovar to be brought back and offered at a temple to complete the worship. That practice has remained suspended since access to the lake was restricted.

The resumption of trade has nevertheless raised hopes among residents of the border municipalities that the centuries-old relationship between Bajhang and Tibet can gradually be rebuilt.

"Taklakot market and the surrounding villages have ties with us that go beyond trade, religion and grazing. We also have traditional friendly relationships," said Manbir Bohara, chairman of Saipal Rural Municipality.

"When the border was closed, everything was cut off. Now trade has reopened. We hope other things will gradually become easier as well."

He said the government of Nepal should pursue meaningful diplomatic initiatives to strengthen the ties between communities on the two sides of the border that have been connected for generations.



Traders spread out their goods in Taklakot.

Shah government formed commissions but cares little for the outcome

>> Continued from page 1

Sources say the government has hesitated to release the report because opposition parties and some smaller political groups have declined to take ownership of it.

Constitutional experts, however, say political disagreement does not absolve the government of its responsibility to make the report public. After spending state resources and months collecting suggestions, they argue that the government should release the debate paper and allow a national discussion on the proposed changes.

By keeping it out of the public domain, the prime minister's office has stalled debate on potentially far-reaching changes to the country's constitutional framework.

Legal experts and former government officials see the handling of commissions as more than an administrative lapse. They say it reflects a long-standing political practice in which governments establish panels to ease immediate pressure without addressing the underlying causes of a crisis.

Former high court judge Lokendra Mallik said successive governments had fallen into this pattern.

"To address immediate problems and release political stress, governments form commissions. But they are plagued by a common disease of never implementing them," Mallik said. "In the past as well, numerous such commissions and committees were formed. Nobody knows where their reports are today. Unfortunately, the same tendency is visibly repeating itself in the current government."

Former law minister Govinda Bandi was more critical of the Rastriya Swatantra Party government's reliance on probe panels. He said commissions in Nepal have increasingly become tools for diverting public attention and providing political patronage.

"In Nepal, commissions have become little more than vehicles for providing positions to politically connected individuals," Bandi said. "Because this practice has persisted for years, their reports are rarely made public or acted upon. That is why the public must ask why these commissions and probe committees are formed in the first place."

Bandi said judicial and non-judicial probe committees are generally formed when regular state investigations fail to establish the truth or when victims have legitimate concerns about police investigations.

"A probe commission is formed to uncover the absolute truth and to ensure that such tragic incidents do not repeat in the future," Bandi said. "The fundamental purpose is to amend laws, reform policies, and improve state institutions based strictly on the commission's recommendations."

Instead, he said, commissions are increasingly being used to divert public attention.

"Nothing productive has come out of this mechanism. The current government urgently needs to reflect upon and learn from this failure," Bandi said.

The Shah administration's selective approach to accountability is evident in its handling of reports on the Gen Z protests of September 8 and 9 last year.

To investigate the protests and the state's response, the previous government led by Sushila Karki formed a high-level probe commission on September 21, 2025, under former judge Gauri Bahadur Karki. The commission submitted its report on March 8 earlier this year.

The responsibility for implementing the report fell to the Balendra Shah government. At its first Cabinet meeting on March 27, the government decided to implement the commission's report. The following day, authorities arrested former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak over their roles in the events of September 8.

But implementation of the Karki commission's report has stalled. The government has been accused of selectively using the report for political retribution while failing to address the loss of life and destruction of property during the September 9 violence.

Gauri Bahadur Karki, chair of the commission formed to investigate the September 8-9 incidents, said the government must explain why their report remains unimplemented.

"We worked diligently to uncover the facts and provided recommendations to prevent future crises, but I have no idea why they are not being implemented," Karki said. "In the past, the failure to implement reports on cooperatives and medical education meant that those exact problems have resurfaced today. Because this report contains vital institutional recommendations, it would be in the nation's interest to implement it fully."

Karki, who previously served on the commission looking into predatory lending practices, said the failure to implement past recommendations had contributed to the recurrence of similar problems. Victims of loan-sharking marched in Kathmandu again just days ago, he noted.

"Governments do not study the commission's suggestions, nor do they implement them," Karki said. "Recommendations and suggestions are given specifically for implementation. In the Gen Z incident, there were many systemic issues that needed addressing, but the government does not seem to be in the mindset to execute them."

On September 9, the commission recommended further police investigation because photographs alone were insufficient to establish individual responsibility. The government has not formed the recommended follow-up committee.

Government spokesperson Sasmit Pokhrel said the September 9 events required "consultations with political parties" before administrative action could be finalised.

A separate report by the National Human Rights Commission on the Gen Z protests also remains at the Prime Minister's Office. An NHRC committee led by member Lily Thapa made detailed recommendations on human rights violations on September 8 and 9 last year. The government has neither taken the recommendations to the Cabinet for endorsement nor indicated that it plans to revisit the investigations.

The government's handling of the Gen Z reports has also left questions over the conduct of security personnel unresolved.

When the Cabinet decided on March 27 to implement parts of the Gauri Bahadur Karki report, it acknowledged that the original commission had not adequately examined the internal dynamics and failures of the security apparatus during the protests.

The Cabinet therefore decided to form a separate three-member committee to investigate the conduct of security personnel. Former judge Prem Raj Karki was appointed its coordinator on April 15, with the committee given a month to complete its work.

The committee sought and received a short extension, saying the initial time provision was insufficient. It subsequently completed its investigation.

But the home ministry refused to formally receive the report.

On July 9, committee members led by Karki went to the home ministry to submit their findings. They met senior ministry officials, including the home secretary. During the meeting, Home Minister Sudan Gurung said he would not accept the report at that time and directed the committee to submit it to Prime Minister Shah instead.

The committee has since been unable to secure an appointment with the prime minister.

On August 6, its members went to the prime minister's office and met chief secretary Govinda Bahadur Karki. According to a committee member, the chief secretary said he would "create an environment" for the report to be received in the coming days.

Until then, the committee's assessment of the security agencies' conduct during the protests remains in limbo.

Beyond political and constitutional issues, the government's failure to act on probe reports has left families of victims of tragedies waiting for answers and justice.

On July 9, Ganesh Nepali (Bishwakarma) attempted self-immolation after dousing himself in petrol outside the Department of Passports in Tripureshwar. The incident followed a dispute over a parking fine imposed by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City police. Nepali succumbed to injuries later while undergoing treatment.

His family blamed harassment by the KMC police for his death and initially refused to claim his body. To defuse the tension, the government agreed to address the family's demands and formed a probe committee on July 22 led by former judge Keshav Prasad Bastola.

The Bastola committee completed its investigation and submitted a report to the government on August 3. A week later, however, the Cabinet had neither discussed the report nor begun the process of making its findings public, leaving the bereaved family waiting for answers.

A similar situation has emerged in eastern Nepal. Following a serious incident in Kaptanganj, Sunsari, on the night of July 26, the home ministry formed a seven-member study committee led by joint secretary Bhupendra Thapa.

Given one week to complete its work, the committee travelled to Kaptanganj, questioned witnesses, consulted local residents and security agencies, and prepared its report.

Despite the urgency, the government has yet to formally receive the document. According to a committee member, the home minister has repeatedly failed to make time to accept the findings.

The report, which requires immediate implementation to maintain local law and order, now sits in a committee member's personal drawer.

The government's inaction contrasts with its own commitments. Point 8 of its 100-day action plan acknowledged the long-standing practice of leaving commission reports in archives. It promised that within 30 days of receiving any commission report, the government would initiate the necessary legal, administrative and prosecutorial procedures for implementation.

Point 7 of the agenda promised to form a high-level committee within a week to investigate the September 9 incident. Both commitments were ratified at the first Cabinet meeting on March 27.

The government has sought to project transparency by declassifying several old investigative reports from previous administrations, including those concerning the Tribhuvan University's land, Bal Mandir properties and the Rawal Commission on public land. But reports generated during its own tenure have remained largely inaccessible.

Asked by Kantipur about the failure to implement the findings, Home Minister Gurung said reports and committee findings received by the government were "under study" and would be made public in due course.

The government is also sitting on the investigative report concerning anomalies and serious errors in the Grade 12 examination results, as well as the probe into the recent Siraha and Saptari incidents.

Even active commissions have been paralysed.

The property investigation commission, established by the Shah administration to investigate the assets of public officials, has been effectively halted by an interim Supreme Court order. Unable to proceed with its investigation, the commission has merely opened bundles of property declarations submitted to its office.

The government's list of investigative bodies includes the Gen Z probe, the NHRC recommendations, the Home Minister Gurung probe, the probe on security personnel's role on Gen Z protests, the Ganesh Nepali self-immolation probe, the property investigation commission, the constitution amendment task force, the Grade 12 error committee, the Siraha/Saptari incident commission and the cooperatives probe.It is nothing new for successive governments to shelve investigation reports. Whether it was the Property Investigation Commission formed under the chairmanship of then Supreme Court Justice Bhairab Lamsal, or the Mallik and Raymajhi commissions formed to investigate repression during the 1990 and 2006 people's movements, successive governments have largely ignored their findings. None of these reports was either made public or fully implemented.

During the 1990 movement against the Panchayat system, 45 people were killed and around 500 injured. The government subsequently formed a commission under the chairmanship of Justice Janardan Mallik to investigate the violence. The commission recommended action against those responsible for the repression. Its recommendations, however, were never fully implemented.

During the second People's Movement in 2006, 26 people were killed and more than 4,000 injured. In April that year, the government formed an inquiry commission under former Supreme Court Justice Krishna Jung Raymajhi. The commission recommended action against those who led the government at the time and those involved in the repression of protesters. The report, too, remains largely unaddressed.

This pattern has extended beyond political movements and state repression. Successive governments have formed commissions and committees to investigate irregularities, corruption, smuggling and administrative failures, only to leave their reports gathering dust.

In 2015, as preparations were underway to promulgate the new constitution, violence in Tikapur, Kailali, left several people dead. In September 2016, the government formed an investigation commission under former Supreme Court Justice Girish Chandra Lal. Although the commission submitted its report, it has yet to be made public.

In March 2017, five people were killed when security forces opened fire during a protest in Malleth, Saptari. The investigation report into the incident also remains confidential.

In March 2018, after a 33-kg gold smuggling case came to light, the government formed an investigation committee under the leadership of Ishwar Raj Poudel. The committee submitted its report, but its findings were not acted upon. Years later, when a 61-kg gold smuggling case emerged, the government formed another investigation committee under former Justice Dilli Raj Acharya. That committee was reportedly not even given access to the earlier Poudel-led committee's report.

The government's reluctance to act on such findings is not limited to irregularities and smuggling cases. Reports on administrative and ministerial reforms have met a similar fate. Reports prepared under the leadership of economist Achyut Wagle, former Chief Secretary Leelamani Poudel, legal expert Kashiraj Dahal and Laxman Aryal remain unaddressed.

The same is true of investigations into the encroachment of public and trust land. The government has yet to implement the report prepared under the leadership of former Justice Mohan Raman Bhattarai. Likewise, the report of the commission formed in September 2023 under former judge Baburam Regmi to investigate irregularities at the Social Welfare Council has not been implemented.

Similarly, the report on institutional reform prepared under the leadership of former Finance Secretary Shankar Prasad Adhikari has yet to be made public. Other investigation reports, including the one concerning the Biratnagar Jute Mill, have also remained either unpublished or unimplemented.

The recurring pattern is clear: governments form commissions in response to public pressure, allow them to investigate and submit reports, and then often keep their findings out of the public domain or fail to act on their recommendations.



POST FILE PHOTO

This photo from March 8 shows former chair of Special Court Gauri Bahadur Karki (left) handing over the Gen Z protest inquiry report to then Prime Minister Sushila Karki.

OUR VIEW

Invest in LPG alternatives

Logistical improvements must be paired with clear legal limits on cylinder ownership.

The Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) market in Nepal currently faces a paradox where consumers experience shortages despite government officials claiming that imports from India remain steady. This recurring crisis has resurfaced less than two weeks after the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) restored the sale of full-sized, 14.2 kg cylinders. The statistics maintained by the NOC tell an interesting story. During the initial stages of the West Asian conflict in February-March, the corporation supplied 51,192 tonnes of gas. LPG supply has remained steady, hovering around 40,000 tonnes per month till June-July. This trend indicates that the volume of fuel entering the country is not the primary driver of the current scarcity.

The roots of the present instability lie in reactive management of gas distribution. Following the escalation of conflict in West Asia in February, the government implemented a rationing system, limiting sales to half-filled, 7.1 kg cylinders to preserve national stocks. This measure successfully managed demand for several months, but the transition back to full-cylinder sales created a sudden, overwhelming surge in domestic gas trade. As the NOC director has acknowledged in a report published in this news outlet, the announcement that full cylinders were once again available caused all previously sidelined empty cylinders to return to the market simultaneously, placing an unbearable strain on the existing distribution infrastructure. This surge was exacerbated by a lack of consumer confidence, leading to panic-driven stockpiling by households and commercial entities.

This market volatility is exacerbated by institutional weaknesses surrounding the regulation of cylinder stocks. It is estimated that there are now approximately 17.5 million LPG cylinders in circulation across Nepal, a substantial increase from the 14.4 million units verified by a 2021 exercise. Despite this massive volume of hardware, there is no comprehensive policy governing how many cylinders a single household or a commercial establishment is permitted to possess. Furthermore, no system exists to determine how many new cylinders should be released into the market annually, rendering the system cluttered and unmanageable. This regulatory vacuum enables those with the means to hoard to do so whenever a perceived shortage occurs, while citizens who possess only a single cylinder are left without any recourse.

The government and the NOC must pursue a series of robust, long-term management strategies to address this crisis. Discussions are underway to consolidate the industry, reducing the number of bottling plants from 58 to fewer than 30. Additionally, the NOC is attempting to implement more dynamic distribution monitoring by identifying specific high-demand areas and redirecting supplies on a daily basis to prevent localised shortages. These logistical improvements must be paired with clear legal limits on cylinder ownership to prevent hoarding.

While improving the LPG supply chain is necessary for immediate stability, the most sustainable solution lies in a shift towards energy sovereignty. Given that Nepal is exceptionally rich in hydropower generation, it is strategically unwise to remain heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. In addition, the recent discovery of natural gas in Dailekh offers another cooking fuel alternative. The government must aggressively promote the adoption of induction stoves and other electric cooking technologies as a primary alternative to cooking gas. By incentivising and subsidising the use of hydroelectricity in households, the state can reduce its import bill, protect citizens from the recurring gas paradox, and leverage its natural resources to ensure a more stable and self-reliant future for every Nepali kitchen.

THEIR VIEW

HIV crisis

Staunch political will and a cohesive social response are vital to containing this preventable virus.

Pakistan's presence among countries with the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in Asia is a matter of shame. Globally, the virus is found in drug addicts, sex workers and other high-risk sections. What makes our crisis more distressing is the victims' profile: Children and low-risk groups who have been infected because of a broken healthcare system. Sindh's health department has said that the necessary measures were in place to curb HIV's spread, including 44 antiretroviral therapy centres in the province. Meanwhile, a Senate committee wants the complete findings of the Sindh Healthcare Commission's inspection of Karachi's Valika Hospital, where nearly 100 children tested positive for HIV due to reused syringes, infected vials and unsafe transfusions. The findings will help the authorities decide whether the facility, one of the many hospitals operating without a SHCC licence, deserves a permit.

Hospital fiascos here surface with troubling regularity on the same pattern as the 2019 Ratodero eruption. According to reports, the number of children who have contracted HIV through unsafe medical care is 7,500. Overall, 25,000 people are believed to have died after being infected by the virus. Poor diagnosis delays treatment. Immediate action should involve the screening of exposed people, counselling and lifelong antiretroviral therapy. The privacy of all carriers must be maintained, with compensation for transmissions caused by healthcare lapses. Aggressive steps should include regular hospital spot checks, blood-screening guidelines, steady stocks of auto-reusable syringes, and suspension of licences of erring medical outlets. The spread of HIV is a full-blown national emergency that demands comprehensive, sustained healthcare reform. Staunch political will and a cohesive social response are vital to containing this preventable virus. Hospitals cannot become incubators of disease. Public trust is the first casualty of systems that, instead of curing patients, expose them to danger.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

What it means to be a neighbour

If we stop seeing someone as our neighbour and instead diminish them to just their identity, democracy will drift away from both our constitution and our neighbourhood.

HYPHEN

CHANDRAKISHORE





AI GENERATED

Polarisation does not arrive suddenly. It does not even appear from afar like a procession. It comes quietly, like dampness seeping into the walls of an old house and going unnoticed for a long time. Gradually, it erodes the foundations of structures—yours and your neighbours' too.

One day, that same neighbour at whose house you would walk in without knocking to drink tea pauses before opening the door. This pause is brief, but it is from here that society begins to change. Earlier, people knew one another's names. They even addressed each other using terms like *chacha, bhaiya, chachi, daadi*. Earlier, children did not know which religion their friends belonged to. They only knew whose house had the sweetest guavas, whose grandmother told the best stories, and whose courtyard held the rainwater the longest.

Polarisation first steals away these small pieces of knowledge. Then a person no longer remains a person. They become a religion first, and their name comes later. The world remains the same, but the eyes that look at it change. The greatest victory of communalism is that it changes the way of seeing things before it burns any house.

When the gaze itself changes, the neighbour standing in front begins to feel like a distant person. Following this, a long distance is born within society—one that cannot be measured on any map. This fire, that breaks out in the eyes, sometimes takes an entire generation to extinguish.

A village or a market is not held together only by roads, bridges and government offices but by those small things for which no account is ever kept. Asking after someone's well-being at the morning tea shop, exchanging views on some matter while returning from the fields, *sewaiyan* of Eid and *thekuwa* of Chhath reaching one another's homes without invitation—these are the real capital of any society.

Before becoming a citizen, a human being becomes someone's neighbour. The first classroom of social harmony is on a footpath, where children from different homes run together, where no one asks about religion in someone's sorrow and no one counts caste in someone's joy. Therefore, when the fire of communal tension breaks out, it does not burn only wood, tin and brick. It scorches those unspoken relationships that take years to form. The ash of the market can be swept the next day. But who will sweep the ash settled in the heart?

In Kaptanganj of the Eastern Tarai too, what likely burned first must have been that easy trust people once had—a trust so strong that for years they drank tea at one another's shops without keeping accounts, remaining at ease knowing their children had gone to play at a neighbour's house. But after the inferno settles, the same familiar path begins to feel a little strange. The same *chowk*, the same *haat*, the same temple, the same mosque—everything remains in its place, yet in the eyes of the people walking between them, a fine hesitation seems to settle. The breaking of society does not always happen with noise. Sometimes it happens so slowly that only the wise recognise it. They say, "The settlement is the same, but the talk is no longer as it was." This is the greatest tragedy of any communal tension.

Nepal's real strength has always been its diversity. Its geography comprises the Himalayas, the Hills and the Tarai. Society is made up of neighbourhoods, where relationships were formed less by religion and more by everyday life. Answers to questions were found not in religious books but in the memories of the neighbourhood. But the politics of polarisation does not like such memories. It does not want a person's entire life. It wants only one identity. It does not see the farmers who ploughed the fields all their lives alongside people of many castes and religions. It overlooks the craftsmen whose hands built both the door of a temple and the threshold of a mosque. It only needs to know whether you are 'us' or 'them'.

Those who carried many relationships within them are forced to stand in a single compartment. The identity that was once that of a neighbour—teacher, farmer, carpenter, shopkeeper, singer or friend—is reduced to a mere religious name. Our society was never as simple as politics would have us believe. There were quarrels, meetings, mixings, differences of opinion as well as partnerships. But the cart of life kept moving because shared needs, sorrows and hopes outweighed differences.

When politics draws the line of 'us' and 'them', the first thing that shrinks is that shared life. Conversations at the *chaupal* decrease, visits to festivals reduce, children's games begin to divide. No announcement is made, yet the heart of society becomes a little smaller. Perhaps the greatest challenge of any plural society is that it continues to recognise its people not only by their identities but by their shared life. Because society is not made of religions, it is made of relationships. And relationships remain alive as long as someone can still call someone else a neighbour with ease.

A neighbour is not merely the one who lives next to your house. A neighbour is the one whose presence keeps alive the assurance that, even in your absence, your house is not completely alone. They are not part of the threshold of your door but are certainly part of your peace of mind.

There must have been some conditions of being a neighbour too—the sound of someone's sorrow crosses the wall and reaches your ears. That in children's play, the boundaries of houses are not visible. That when trouble is heard, the first knock on the door does not ask about religion. The history of civilisation is also the history of the neighbourhood. Walls separate houses, but neighbourliness keeps an invisible door open in those walls.

The fire of communalism first burns this invisible door. The paths remain, but trust in them does not. Even after the fire is extinguished, people continue to live in the same settlement, but it feels different. Nowadays, eyes look before doors open. Identity is checked before a greeting. Then one understands that the fire burned less wood and more of neighbourliness.

The hallmark of a civilised society is that, even in times of crisis, its neighbours can still reach one another's doors. Temples, mosques or a strong constitution come after that. Perhaps being a neighbour is itself the first public proof of being human. The day we stop seeing someone as our neighbour and instead diminish them to just their identity, democracy will depart from both our constitution and neighbourhood.

The author is a veteran journalist.

Leading with intelligent banking

Nepal shouldn't just digitise banking but build one of the world's first AI-native financial systems.

NIRVANA CHAUDHARY



For more than seven centuries, banking has been built around one fundamental purpose: Moving capital efficiently across an economy. Over the next decade, however, banking will increasingly be defined by something altogether different: intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents the most profound shift in financial services since the emergence of commercial banking itself. Just as electricity transformed manufacturing and the internet transformed commerce, AI will redefine how capital is allocated, how risk is assessed, how trust is established, and how financial decisions are made. This is as much about automation as it is about augmenting human intelligence at an unprecedented scale.

Moving ahead, true competitive advantage won't be measured by the amount of money that a bank has in its vault. It will be determined by its intellectual capital, data quality, technological capability and organisational agility.

When we look at the banking industry around the world, we notice that banks are constrained by legacy infrastructure, fragmented technology platforms and complex organisational structures. If a bank seeks to modernise those systems, it will require an investment of billions of dollars and years of execution.

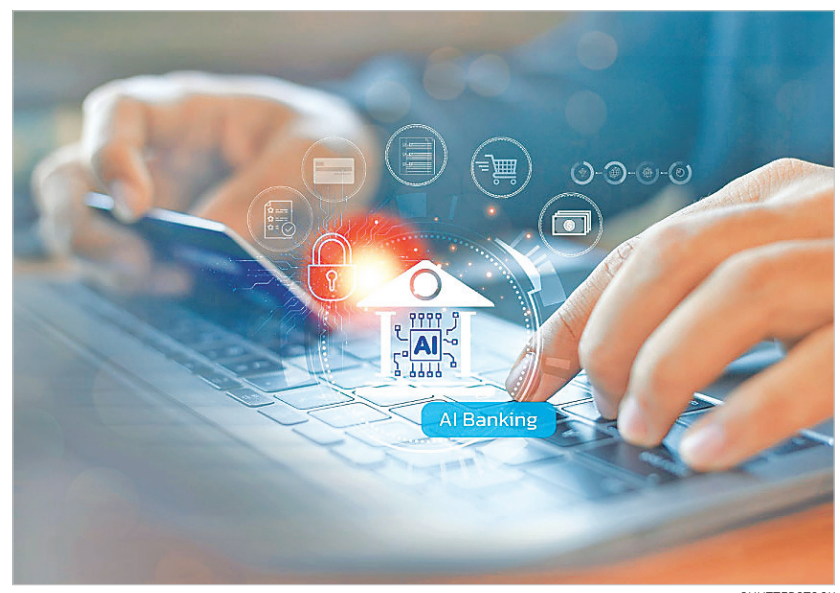
Countries like Nepal begin from a different position. The country's banking sector has the opportunity to build the financial architecture of the future rather than continually upgrading the infrastructure that exists at the moment. History rarely offers emerging economies an opportunity to leapfrog global leaders. And if adopted properly, we can actually become an example of how intelligent financial systems can accelerate inclusive economic development.

However, technology alone does not create transformation. It is the way leadership adopts and adapts to change. The organisations that will succeed will be those that are willing to break away from the traditional approaches to banking that have been carried out for decades.

For years, expansion involved the opening of more brick-and-mortar branches. But in the coming years, banks will scale by deploying better algorithms. Traditionally, banks competed with each other primarily through financial capital, but now it will be knowledge, intelligence and customer experience that will rule the roost.

This shift fundamentally changes the economics of banking. Historically, shareholder returns have been driven by balance sheet growth, prudent lending, capital allocation and cost discipline. These principles remain essential. But the next generation of value creation will increasingly come from something different.

AI will reduce operational costs, improve credit decisions, strengthen fraud prevention, enhance regulatory compliance, personalise customer engagement and dramatically increase



SHUTTERSTOCK

organisational productivity. What this literally means is that intelligence itself will become an economic asset. Banks that successfully integrate AI into every layer of their operations will generate superior returns not because they take greater risks, but because they make better decisions.

That distinction is critical. However, human judgement should never be replaced by technology. Instead, we should use technology to help improve our judgement. Since the evolution of banks, trust has always been the foundation of the banking industry. And in this age where algorithms are increasingly influencing financial decisions, trust becomes even more valuable. We all need to take heed that people will not simply choose a bank because they possess advanced technology.

Customers will opt for banks that can combine technological excellence with transparency, ethics and human understanding. AI may become the engine of modern banking. Trust will remain its currency. This philosophy has guided the evolution of Nabil Bank. For more than 25 years, my father, Binod K Chaudhary, believed that Nabil should never be content with being Nepal's largest or most profitable bank. His vision was to build an institution capable of continuously redefining banking itself.

Over the past 42 years, Nabil has consistently sought to remain ahead of structural change. From becoming Nepal's first computerised bank to pioneering digital innovation and modern banking services, our objective has always been the same: Anticipate the future before it becomes obvious. The numbers tell part of that story.

Today, Nabil serves more than 2.5 million customers. Over four decades, the Bank has consistently ranked among Nepal's strongest performers in profitability, return on equity and long-term shareholder value creation while maintaining one of the country's most respected dividend records. More importantly, generations of investors have trusted Nabil to create sustainable value across economic cycles through disciplined governance, prudent capital allocation and responsible risk management.

Yet past performance is not a strategy for the future, which led us to create nBank, Nepal's first digital banking platform developed by a commercial bank. However, digital banking is only the beginning. Our vision, our goal is not merely to use AI. We aim to redesign the bank around AI, making Nabil Nepal's first truly AI-ready bank by 2028.

This means embedding intelligence across every major function of the institution. Every repetitive process should become automated. Every decision should become better informed. Every customer interaction should become more personalised. Every employee should become more productive. The objective is not fewer people, but better banking. AI should free talented professionals from repetitive work so they can focus on what humans do best: Exercising judgment, building relationships, solving complex problems and advising customers.

Every financial institution must ask itself difficult questions. How should AI make decisions? Where should humans always remain involved? How do we eliminate bias? How do we preserve privacy? How do we strengthen trust while embracing intelligent automation? These questions will define the next generation of banking leadership.

The future also demands a broader view of financial services. Customers expect one integrated financial ecosystem. Recognising this evolution, Nabil has expanded beyond traditional banking through digital banking, investment banking, wealth management, capital markets and fintech partnerships. Our continued investment in Nabil Invest, stock brokerage and intelligent financial platforms reflects our belief that the financial institution of the future will be an integrated ecosystem rather than a collection of individual products.

Yet technology, no matter how advanced, is ultimately only an enabler. The true purpose of banking remains unchanged. Banks finance entrepreneurs who create employment. They enable businesses to invest. They help families educate children and purchase homes. They support innovation, infrastructure and national competitiveness.

Banking will be reshaped more intensely by the coming decade than the previous 50 years combined. And it is natural that some institutions will view this disruption defensively, while others will recognise it as an opportunity to reinvent themselves. I strongly believe that Nepal should choose the latter. Our ambition should not simply be to digitise banking. It should be to build one of the world's first AI-native financial systems.

If we invest in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, talent, responsible regulation and innovation, Nepal can demonstrate that emerging economies need not follow the path taken by larger markets. They can create their own.

Chaudhary is the chairman of Nabil Bank.

NAIMA Mobility Expo opens today. 18 new two-wheeler, 29 four-wheeler brands on offer

Nepal's electric vehicle market is expanding rapidly, but industry leaders say weak border infrastructure, cumbersome customs procedures and uncertain policies are holding the market back.

BIMAL KHATIWADA
KATHMANDU, AUG 10



POST PHOTOS: DEEPAK KC

The main pavilion of the NAIMA Auto Show at Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu, on Sunday, on the eve of the show's opening. Picture below shows workers installing wiring and lighting behind the pavilion.

The NAIMA Nepal Mobility Expo 2026 opens at Bhrikutimandap in Kathmandu on Tuesday, as more vehicle brands join the country's shift towards electric mobility.

Organised by the Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA), the expo will run until August 16 and feature 53 automotive stalls. It will showcase 18 new two-wheeler brands and 29 four-wheeler brands entering or expanding their presence in the Nepali market.

Electric vehicles are the main attraction, with models on display ranging from around Rs2 million to Rs35 million. The expo will also feature workshops on road safety and the management and recycling of lithium-ion batteries, according to the organisers.

Promotional offers on vehicle bookings have also been announced for the event, which comes ahead of the festive season, traditionally a peak period for vehicle sales.

Two days before the expo opened, Kantipur Media Group hosted a roundtable on Sunday, bringing together industry leaders and government representatives to examine the state of Nepal's automobile sector, government policies and the infrastructure needed to support the country's transition to electric mobility.

Taking part in the discussion, Ritu Singh Vaidya, president of NAIMA, said the strong response to last year's expo had strengthened the association's position in the automobile industry and reflected growing consumer interest in vehicles and new mobility technologies.

The number of vehicle brands participating in the expo has increased from 42 last year to 55 this year, reflecting growing confidence in the event and Nepal's automobile market, she said.

The expansion has been particularly pronounced in electric mobility, with more than 80 EV brands now present in the Nepali market, Vaidya said.

"The private sector is driving the growth of electric mobility, but the government must create policies and infrastructure that support this transition," she said.

Vaidya also pointed to uncertainty over the implementation of maximum retail price (MRP) requirements at customs as a concern for importers. Discussions are under way on enforcing MRP provisions at customs, but the policy has yet to be formally implemented.

She urged the government to ensure that any MRP system is practical, predictable and workable for businesses.

Importers also face significant logistical problems at Nepal's northern border points, particularly Tatopani in Sindhupalchok and Rasuwagadhi in Rasuwa, she said.

Vehicles entering through these points have to be unloaded at warehouses, inspected and fitted with regulatory stickers before being loaded again for onward transportation. The additional handling increases transportation costs and adds to the overall cost of importing vehicles.

"The process is cumbersome and increases the cost of doing business, ultimately affecting consumers," Vaidya said.

Poor road infrastructure and recurring landslides have further disrupted vehicle imports through Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi, which are key routes for vehicles imported from China.

The disruption at Tatopani has also affected the expo, with several brands unable to bring vehicles for display and many China-imported vehicles stranded at the border, Vaidya said.

"Tatopani is currently paralysed, and that has directly affected the expo," she said.

The problems at the border have highlighted a wider challenge for Nepal's automobile sector, which depends heavily on cross-border trade for vehicles, components and spare parts. Industry representatives have repeatedly called for more reliable transport links and faster customs procedures to reduce costs and improve supply-chain efficiency.

Vaidya also called for greater government involvement in expanding electric public transport, arguing that private-sector growth in electric cars and two-wheelers alone would not be enough to complete Nepal's transition to cleaner mobility.

The government and private sector need a clear framework to jointly develop electric public transport, she said.

Taking part in the roundtable, Nirakar Shrestha, a board member of NAIMA, said this year's expo had been designed not only to showcase vehicles but also to encourage discussion on the future of Nepal's mobility sector.

The programme covers foreign direct investment, battery reuse and recycling, vehicle financing, insurance and youth entrepreneurship. Students and auto enthusiasts will also take part, he said.

Shrestha said organisers had improved parking and ticketing arrangements for the expo, including by leasing the Nepal Police Club premises and introducing online tickets with cashback offers.

But the absence of a permanent, international-standard exhibition centre remained a major problem despite repeated government announcements, he said.

"We need an international-standard exhibition centre that can serve not just the automobile sector but all commercial sectors," he said.

Shrestha also warned that the rapid expansion of electric vehicles was being accompanied by a growing informal spare-parts market. He estimated that the informal market was nearly twice the size of the formal market, with around 1,000 to 1,200 repair garages in the Kathmandu Valley sourcing parts through informal channels across the open border with India. Such imports result in revenue losses for the state, expose consumers to counterfeit or substandard parts and undermine authorised dealers, he said.

Shrestha said Nepal's automobile market remained disproportionately small compared with countries with similar or even smaller populations.

"Vehicle numbers are alarmingly disproportionate to the population," he said, pointing to Malaysia's much larger automobile industry despite its population of around 35 million and Bhutan's annual sales of about 15,000 vehicles despite having fewer than 1 million people.

Better roads would be essential to expanding the automobile market and supporting domestic vehicle assembly, Shrestha said.

Motorcycle assembly plants are already operating in Nepal, while four-wheeler assembly has also begun. Two Hyundai models, the Creta and Venue, are being assembled domestically, he said.

Local assembly has reduced the price of the Hyundai Creta by around Rs600,000 compared with the fully imported version, while another model has seen a price reduction of about Rs900,000.

Shrestha said tax incentives for assembly industries should not be assessed simply in terms of revenue forgone by the government. Their wider economic benefits, including lower prices for consumers and the development of domestic industry, should also be considered, he said.

He also stressed the distinction between assembly and manufacturing. Assembly involves importing components and putting them together locally, while full-scale manufacturing requires a much broader industrial ecosystem capable of producing those components.

But for such an ecosystem to develop, the government needs to look beyond automobiles as a source of tax revenue and address the wider infrastructure and regulatory constraints facing the sector, industry representatives said.

"The government should not view automobiles simply as a source of revenue," Shrestha said, arguing that vehicle ownership and mobility should instead be considered in the broader context of economic development.

The government says it has begun addressing some of these structural constraints through changes to transport policy and legislation.

Ramhari Pokharel, joint secretary and spokesperson at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, said the government had recently introduced a National Transport Policy aimed at addressing some of the structural problems facing Nepal's transport sector.

According to government data, 6,249,732 vehicles have been registered across Nepal, including 63,280 electric vehicles. But Pokharel said more detailed analysis of vehicle registrations, usage and transport patterns was needed to formulate effective policies.

Road infrastructure remains another major challenge. Nepal has around 104,000 kilometres of roads, of which about 21,000 kilometres fall under federal jurisdiction. Yet there is no single central mechanism maintaining an integrated database of roads across federal, provincial and local governments, he said.

The absence of such a system makes it difficult to determine the condition and usability of roads across the country and plan upgrades systematically.

The government is investing in four-lane highways and tunnels, but weaknesses in contracting and construction management continue to cause delays in maintenance and repairs, Pokharel said.

On EV infrastructure, he said Nepal needed different approaches for its mountainous terrain and densely populated urban areas. The government must also assess whether electric public buses can operate nationwide solely through charging infrastructure or whether a hybrid model would be more practical.

The National Transport Policy places particular emphasis on improving public transport in the Kathmandu Valley. With technical and financial assistance from Japan, the government has completed a study of the Valley's transport system and road infrastructure and prepared a master plan, Pokharel said.

"Road infrastructure will be developed through collaboration between the government and private sector," he said.

The government is also working to replace outdated transport legislation. Pokharel said a new Urban and Transport Management Act was now being drafted to replace the existing Transport Management Act 1992.

He invited the private sector to contribute to the drafting process, saying reforms should reflect the realities faced by both transport operators and users.



"Our objective is to create a modern and practical transport sector," Pokharel said.

Taking part in the roundtable, Sahil Shrestha, chief executive officer of Cimex Inc (BYD), said Nepal's electric vehicle market had reached a significant stage, with around 95 percent of the electricity used to charge EVs generated from domestic hydropower.

The Nepal Electricity Authority has established 52 fast-charging stations, while the private sector has built more than 1,000 charging stations across the country, he said.

Shrestha also highlighted the economic benefits of the shift to electric mobility. Nepal's automobile sector accounts for around 15,000 vehicle transactions annually and represents an industry worth about Rs50 billion. Compared with internal combustion engine vehicles, EVs offer lower energy and maintenance costs because they have fewer moving parts.

Battery performance, often cited as a concern among potential EV buyers, has not so far created major systemic problems, he said. Manufacturers' warranties also cover battery replacement when required.

Shrestha argued that rising vehicle ownership should be viewed as a sign of economic activity rather than simply increased consumption. He linked vehicle demand to the government's target of building a $100 billion economy, maintaining average annual economic growth of 7 percent and creating 1.2 million jobs.

"An increase in vehicular density should be viewed as an indicator of economic mobility and market expansion," he said.

But outdated laws and inconsistent policies continue to constrain the industry. Although the government has issued the National Transport Policy-2026 (2083 BS), Shrestha said its provisions covering customs duties, transport logistics and vehicle management remained unclear.

He called for a review of the entire vehicle lifecycle, from import and registration to ownership transfer, to identify administrative bottlenecks and establish clearer rules.

Battery management also requires an urgent policy response, he said. Nepal could develop domestic battery recycling industries, promote the reuse of degraded batteries for stationary energy storage, or simplify the process for exporting depleted batteries to specialised recycling facilities abroad.

The biggest challenge, however, remains policy instability. "Unstable government policies consistently disrupt business plans," Shrestha said.

Since EV imports began expanding significantly around fiscal year 2020-21, taxes on electric vehicles have been repeatedly changed, sometimes sharply, he said. In some cases, tax rates have jumped from 10 percent to 100 percent without adequate consultation.

Such uncertainty has made the annual budget a major source of speculation for the automobile industry. Manufacturers must place orders with overseas factories months in advance, often before the government announces its tax policies, leaving importers exposed to sudden changes.

Consumers also respond quickly to rumours of tax changes, Shrestha said, often bringing forward or delaying purchases depending on expectations about the budget.

He also called for a unified national database of vehicles. Different government agencies currently maintain separate datasets, making it difficult to establish the actual number and composition of vehicles operating on Nepali roads.

The National Transport Policy cites 6,249,732 registered vehicles, but the figure does not adequately distinguish between private, commercial and heavy vehicles, he said.

"Private cars and commercial vans cannot simply be placed in the same category if we want accurate data," Shrestha said.

He proposed creating a separate classification for passenger vans with up to nine seats and maintaining detailed records by vehicle type and brand. The Department of Customs should use the same classifications in its import data, he added.

Shrestha also stressed the need to prepare Nepal's workforce for the growth of electric mobility. The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), universities and technical institutes should incorporate EV diagnostics and repair into their curricula, he said.

With EVs accounting for around 35 percent of vehicle adoption in Europe, Nepal must begin preparing skilled technicians before the domestic market reaches a similar level of penetration.

Shrestha also called for greater flexibility in monetary policy and a higher loan-to-value ratio for EV financing to encourage adoption.

He linked the expansion of the automobile industry directly to road development and wider economic growth. More vehicles create demand for better roads, while improved roads encourage greater vehicle use and economic activity, he said.

The private sector, he added, could also help the government improve transport management through technology. GPS-based telematics and GSM-enabled tracking systems could provide real-time information on road conditions, vehicle speeds and traffic congestion.

Such data could help authorities identify bottlenecks and improve urban mobility, while clearer divisions between the government's regulatory responsibilities and its role in infrastructure development would improve accountability.

"If electric mobility, modern public transport, private-sector innovation and effective government regulation are brought together, Nepal can build a more organised and sustainable transport system," Shrestha said.

Chinese AI drives price competition among US labs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING, AUG 10

Artificial intelligence users are shopping around as US giants face fierce competition from Chinese rivals—and in Beijing's tech district, drinkers at an AI-themed bar can even plug in to DeepSeek for free.

A new generation of cost-efficient, high-performance Chinese AI is putting pressure on Silicon Valley's leading labs to lower prices to grab market share as they try and find ways to turn a profit.

ChatGPT maker OpenAI has slashed fees by 80 percent for its latest lightweight model "Luna", and Anthropic has unveiled a model approaching its most powerful system's performance at half the price.

Meanwhile some of China's buzziest AI companies are raising fees as their open-source offerings gain traction among businesses and programmers worldwide.

DeepSeek—whose V4 Flash tops the usage leaderboard of technical platform OpenRouter—said last week it plans a "significant increase" in prices for programmers.

Thirsty Beijingers have another option: free AI for customers at AGI Bar, which opened last summer as a hub for developers, founders and investors.

The bar is decorated with references to China's AI boom, with logos of the country's major labs on the walls and the menu full of jokes riffing on tech jargon. Its signature drink AGI—"Artificial General Intelligence", meaning future AI tools as clever as humans—is a glass almost entirely full of beer foam, a nod to the frothy hype rife in the industry.

"It's quite common for bars to provide free Wi-Fi with routers, so I'll provide free tokens," or units of AI usage, bar owner Song De told AFP.

The bar in Zhongguancun, often called China's Silicon Valley, has two boxy Nvidia workstations to self-host DeepSeek V4 Flash—meaning Song doesn't need to pay the Chinese start-up to use its model.

Large language models are the technology that underpins chatbots and other AI tools by crunching vast amounts of digital data.

Song, an independent AI developer himself, is one of many swapping the most cutting-edge, bells-and-whistles—and expensive—models, like Anthropic's Fable 5, for leaner alternatives like V4 Flash.

These are much cheaper to run and good enough for many purposes, such as helping run AI agents that can carry out real-world tasks autonomously, experts say.

"There's a lot of stuff that can be done with older models, or lesser models, or small language models," said technology analyst Jack Gold, founder of J.Gold Associates.

"Especially as we move into the agentic world, a lot of the models will be running locally."

New Chinese AI models big and small—from Moonshot AI's Kimi K3 to Alibaba's popular Qwen series—are grabbing attention as challengers to Anthropic and OpenAI's lead.

Both US companies are preparing to go public, which means they "need to start showing a profit", Gold told AFP.

"I hesitate to say it's a price war because we're not quite there yet. But it's certainly a price competition to try and get more users on board," Gold said. "Also there's a lot of pressure from enterprises to say: agents are great, AI is great, but I can't be spending twice the annual salary for (a given employee) on AI."

Chinese AI models are often open-source, meaning they can be modified by programmers—unlike top US options, where the underlying code and data is locked away.

"Open-source is closing the performance gap with closed models faster than anyone expected," said Wang Tiezhen, an independent AI consultant and former head of APAC ecosystem at developer platform HuggingFace.

Ukrainian drone attack on an oil hub deep inside Russia kills 13, officials say

Russian officials didn't say what the drones targeted, but the city is home to two refineries and a petrochemical plant.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AUG 10

Ukraine attacked the petroleum hub of Nizhnekamsk in central Russia's Tatarstan region on Monday, killing 13 people and injuring 78 others, local authorities said, in one of the deadliest attacks in the country in the 4-year-old war. The Ukrainian military said it hit an oil refinery in Nizhnekamsk, which is about 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) east of the Ukrainian border and has a population of about 240,000.

Russian officials didn't say what the drones targeted, but the city is home to two refineries and a petrochemical plant. Ukraine has targeted Russian oil facilities with long-range drones almost daily in recent months. The campaign has caused fuel shortages in Russia, eaten into its refining capacity and unsettled the population.

Previous Ukrainian attacks on Russian soil with high death tolls have come in the border region of Belgorod. In December 2023, Ukrainian shelling of the region's capital, also called Belgorod, killed 25 people and wounded over 100, local officials said. Five months later, a Belgorod apartment building partially collapsed after shelling, killing at least 13, according to Russian authorities.

Also on Monday, several Ukrainian drones sparked a fire at an industrial facility in the Tyumen region of western Siberia, said Gov. Alexander Moor, without offering any details.

Ukraine's General Staff said its forces damaged part of a petrochemical complex in Tobolsk, in the Tyumen region. The plant produces rocket fuel components, aviation fuel, composite materials for drones and high-octane gasoline, it said in a Telegram post.

Last month, Ukrainian drones hit a refinery in Tyumen, more than 2,400 kilometers (about 1,500 miles) east of the border with Ukraine.

Ukraine says its strikes aim to push Russia into peace talks

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his country is trying to force Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table and stop his full-scale invasion, launched in 2022. Russia is one of the world's biggest energy producers. Ukraine's General Staff said its forces struck a Taneco oil refinery in Nizhnekamsk, starting a fire. The city came under a "massive" drone attack targeting industrial and civilian facilities, according to the press service of Tatarstan's head, Rustam Minnikhanov. One of the drones hit a hostel, killing nine of the 13 victims, including citizens of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, officials said. Uzbekistan's consular office in Tatarstan said seven of its nationals were killed.

A child was among the dead, along with the 75 injured, the press service said, adding that Monday was declared a day of mourning in Tatarstan. It was not possible to independently verify either side's claims. Russia's Foreign Ministry urged foreign governments and international organizations to condemn Ukraine for the attacks.

Russia has also regularly battered Ukraine from the air using missiles, powerful glide bombs and drones, hitting civilian areas and causing thousands of civilian casualties, according to the United Nations. In the first six months of this year, 1,396 civilians were killed and 7,978 injured in Ukraine, the UN office in Kyiv said last week. That was a 37% increase from the same period last year, it said.

A Russian glide bomb struck the city of Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine, injuring 24 people, authorities said Monday. The city is the capital of a region of the same name that is partly occupied by Russian forces.

The WHO's European office said that one of its warehouses in the central Dnipro region of Ukraine was hit twice in less than 24 hours. The attacks destroyed emergency supplies worth an estimated $500,000 that were intended for front-line health facilities, it said in a statement. No casualties were reported.



AP/RSS

Rescue workers try to put out a fire of a residential building and cars burning after a Russian air guided bomb strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, Monday.

20 dead after 7.4-magnitude earthquake shakes western Colombia

Colombia's Geological Service said Monday that it had been 'the highest magnitude earthquake registered in Colombia in the last decade'.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BOGOTA, COLOMBIA, AUG 10

At least 20 people were killed and dozens of buildings collapsed in cities across western Colombia on Monday after a powerful 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck the South American nation.

The quake trapped residents under debris, leaving more injured and forcing people to evacuate their homes as far as the capital of Bogotá.

The epicenter was in San Jose Del Palmar, a community of about 4,800 people in the Choco region about 250 miles (400 kilometers) west of Bogota, the US Geological Survey and Colombia's counterpart reported. The USGS said it struck at a depth of 66 miles (107 kilometers). The quake also was felt in neighboring Ecuador.

Local officials confirmed that at least 18 people had been killed in the city of Pereira and two in the city of Manizales.

The quake left cities across the west of the country—Pereira, Quibdo, Cali and Manizales—ravaged, and residents picking through the rubble of collapsed buildings amid concerns by authorities of aftershocks.

Jorge Moncayo, a 64-year-old taxi driver in Colombia's third-biggest city, Cali, said he saw plumes of dust shoot up across the city from his home in hills of the city as buildings collapsed. Residents in the city and rescue workers were searching the rubble for survivors.

"My entire house shook," he said. "I've never lived through such a powerful earthquake."

Colombia's Geological Service said Monday that it had been "the highest magnitude earthquake registered in Colombia in the last decade" and that it had been followed by two 2.8 and 4.8 magnitude aftershocks. Authorities also reported that flights were suspended in the airports of Manizales, Quibdo, Armenia, Cartago y Buenaventura and Pereira.



AP/RSS

Residents and rescue workers search through the rubble of a collapsed building after an earthquake struck Cali, Colombia, Monday.

In Pereira, photos and videos published by local media showed pieces of the airport ceiling falling down on travelers taking shelter and screaming, and people running through rubble in a panic.

Pereira's mayor, Mauricio Salazar, told a local radio station that at least 18 people had died and that many more were trapped under "a massive quantity of collapsed buildings."

In nearby Manizales, a city nestled in the coffee-producing mountains of Colombia, one of the towers of the neo-Gothic cathedral collapsed and fell on the nave. Jorge Eduardo Rojas, the mayor of Manizales said two people had died in the city "because of the quake" and asked residents to stay outside in case of aftershocks.

Authorities in the rural state of Choco, the epicenter of the quake, reported injured people and damaged buildings in the capital, but provided few details.

In Cali, a city 2 million people, Mayor Alejandro Eder said that residents were trapped in at least 19 buildings that had collapsed.

Small earthquakes, known as "temblores," are common in central and western Colombia, but those above 6.0 magnitude are rare. In 1999, a 6.2 magnitude quake near the city of Armenia, killed more than 1,100 people.

Colombia's newly inaugurated President Abelardo de la Espriella said Monday that he had personally taken charge of the government's response to the emergency in San José del Palmar following the earthquake that struck the country.

"You are not alone. The state is present and taking action," he said.

The quake follows two back-to-back 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes in Venezuela in late June.

Those earthquakes destroyed hundreds of buildings and killed more than 5,000 people.

Meta releases new AI model as Zuckerberg lays out vision

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES, AUG 10

Meta Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg called Monday for lower barriers for open source AI, as his company introduced a new model that can run on a personal computer.

The launch comes amid debate in the United States on whether access to the technology should be more restricted, and on local pushback against the buildout of data centers that power it.

This was accompanied by a long essay on the Meta website outlining Zuckerberg's vision for artificial intelligence in which he stressed the need to remain competitive against countries like China, among other issues.

Competitors OpenAI and Anthropic largely focus on closed AI models.

Zuckerberg said in an Instagram video Monday that his company would open the weights for its latest AI model, enabling it to be downloaded by the public. Weights refer to calculations or rules governing how an AI system behaves.

He said Meta would also release a new class of open source models, designed to run on a laptop.

"Rather than centralizing superintelligence, we should distribute it widely and give every person the ability to direct it," Zuckerberg said in his essay.

He took aim at other labs that are "focused on building AI for companies, governments or other institutions," arguing that this would tip the balance of power in favor of institutions instead of individuals.

Facing pressure over the novelty of their capabilities, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order in June setting up a voluntary federal review of national security risks in advanced AI models before their release.

Zuckerberg added that foreign labs hold advantages over US ones that have to comply with restrictions on training data.

"I do not believe restricting access to foreign open source models is an effective solution," he said.

"Our goal should be for American open source models to be the best globally. This requires removing the hurdles that make it harder for American open source models to compete," he said.

Amid growing public opposition to data center development in the United States, Zuckerberg added that Meta is launching a fund to directly support communities around its facilities.

A Meta spokesperson said the size of the fund, launched Monday, is $1 billion.

Meta has in recent months reaffirmed plans to keep spending heavily on the data centers and chips underpinning its AI effort. It expects capital expenditures of up to $145 billion this year, nearly doubling the amount it spent in 2025.

From Uniqlo to Zara, clothing brands try to win over Gen Z with a needle and thread

While luxury fashion houses and select specialty retailers like Patagonia have offered product repairs for decades, the concept has caught on.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, AUG 10

Encouraging customers to mend worn clothes instead of buying new ones might seem like a self-defeating sales strategy. But in-store repairs and sewing workshops are becoming essential retail services for clothing brands as they try to appeal to young consumers who want to save money and the planet.

While luxury fashion houses and select specialty retailers like Patagonia have offered product repairs for decades, the concept has caught on. Jeans giant Levi Strauss & Co., casual wear chain Uniqlo and budget retailer Primark are some of the apparel companies hoping to win over Generation Z shoppers with a needle and thread.

Levi's created a handstitching course for high school students after determining that many Gen Zers lacked the sewing skills to match their interest in thrift store shopping and sustainability. Employees spend 90 minutes instructing teenagers on four tasks: sewing on a button, hemming, patching a hole and fixing a tear.

The Wear Longer program, which the San Francisco-based company is expanding across the US, builds on the repair and customization services Levi's offers at hundreds of stores worldwide.

"We think it's important to empower the people who buy our clothes with the skill sets to maintain them, to get them to that second life," Paul Dillinger, Levi's head of global design innovation, said.

Detroit resident Chloe Halprin, 25, is the kind of consumer retailers hope to attract with a "fix it, don't ditch it" message.

In high school, Halprin shopped at inexpensive, trendy stores. Fixing a big rip felt beyond her limited sewing ability. If she damaged a top or skirt from Forever 21, "I might just throw it away."

These days, Halprin buys most of her clothes secondhand. She recently learned to hem with a sewing machine and hopes to tackle projects like turning a skirt into a shirt.

"I try to be conscientious of my carbon footprint," Halprin, a nonprofit grant writer, said. "I really don't like waste. I'm trying to save money as well."

Mending is a tiny part of cutting the world's mountains of textile waste

The evolution of mending from an economic necessity and traditional craft to a method for cultivating customers didn't happen overnight. The fashion industry as a whole has come under intensifying pressure to reduce its contributions to environmental pollution and climate change.

Textile waste—which includes manufacturing remnants, unwanted clothes and linens, and unsold products—is one of the industry's most pressing challenges. Each year, the world generates fabric waste at a rate equivalent to a garbage truck's worth getting dumped or incinerated every second, the United Nations Environment Program estimates.

Researchers broadly agree that repairing and reselling clothes can reduce a garment's environmental impact, especially if it delays or replaces a new purchase. But many caution the practices remain too limited to offset continued growth in clothing production and consumption.

Clothing production roughly doubled between 2000 and 2015, while the average number of wearings per garment declined by about 36%, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The sustainability nonprofit estimated that less than 1% of discarded clothing material got recycled into new apparel.

Enter Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012. It's the generation that grew up with fast fashion and e-commerce, then had school years and young adulthoods shaped by the coronavirus pandemic and post-pandemic inflation.

Whether due to limited budgets or a rejection of materialism, Gen Z has helped the preowned clothing market grow much faster than retail apparel sales in the US, independent market intelligence firm GlobalData estimated in a report with resale platform ThredUp.

For companies that make new clothes, mending programs and classes address "some deeper consumer needs and consumer behaviors at the moment," GlobalData retail analyst Neil Saunders said.

"It puts a halo on the brand," he said.

Skeptics say the environmental impact of retailer repairs is limited

The hands-on response from mass-market retailers, especially fast-fashion chains like Primark, Zara and H&M, has generated interest as well as skepticism.

Zara, which has its headquarters in Spain, launched a digital platform in 2022 for customers to resell their used pieces and to request basic alterations and repairs. The program is available in 17 of the nearly 100 countries where the trend-driven retailer operates.

Ireland-based Primark has focused more on customer education. The value-focused retailer hosts free "Love It For Longer" events where customers are taught skills like replacing zippers and buttons.

"Learning how to repair and care for clothing is probably one of the most simplest but absolutely totally effective ways that we can reduce waste and also extend the lifetime of whatever we buy," Vicki Swain, Primark's product longevity & partnership lead, said.

The company has held the workshops—more than 730 altogether—in nine of the 17 countries where Primark has stores, including the US Primark also tested in-store repairs at three UK locations this year.

Swain argues that affordable clothes can be just as durable and repair-worthy as more expensive ones. Half the items Primark sells annually are basics like socks, underwear, T-shirts, and jeans, she said.

"There is nothing throw away about our products," Swain said.

Uniqlo, which focuses on wardrobe staples, offers a range of aftercare services, including repairs, decorative sashiko mending, embroidery and creative restyling.

Available in 75 of the Japanese mass-market retailer's roughly 2,500 stores, the services are promoted as a natural extension of product life cycles. The program also strengthens Uniqlo's connection with customers, said Jean-Emmanuel Shein, director of global corporate responsibility at Uniqlo USA.

Kate Fletcher, a professor of sustainability, design and fashion systems at England's Manchester Metropolitan University, said she thinks popular retailers are well-meaning, but she doubts their repair initiatives will have much environmental impact.

"The fashion sector's primary source of impact is due to the overproduction of pieces and growing volumes of garments created," Fletcher said. "Repairing a garment in store happens in addition to these growing production volumes, not instead of them."



AP/RSS

Ava Trujillo practices attends a clothing repair workshop at a Levi's retail store in downtown San Francisco, on July 22.

Companies want tax incentives to make repairs and secondhand sales more profitable

The question facing the fashion industry is whether repairs can evolve from niche service to commercially viable.

Sweden's H&M Group, which has more than 4,000 stores in over 80 countries, has been unusually candid about one of the biggest obstacles: the economics. The company has argued that repair and resale are desirable goals, but manufacturing new garments costs less than keeping existing ones in use.

H&M experimented with mending and redesign studios in several European cities, but in-store repairs now are offered only at its Paris flagship, a spokesperson said. The company, which is majority owner of an online consignment platform called Sellpy, also sells preowned pieces at selected stores in 13 cities.

In May, H&M joined Primark, ThredUp and dozens of other fashion and textile businesses in signing a statement that urged governments in North America and the European Union to adopt tax policies that would make eco-friendly services profitable.

Making mending work in retail is challenging because it's labor intensive and must be priced low enough to entice customers, Saunders, of GlobalData, said. Signals from consumers also are mixed, he said.

"I think younger shoppers still shop fast fashion because even though it goes against some of their principles, it is one of the most accessible parts of the market," Saunders said. "But what they're doing as well, though, is they're buying into alternative channels like resale. And they're having things repaired."

Second-hand gear, first-class resolve

>> Continued from page 1



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Five of the seven para table tennis players who will be representing Nepal at the 5th Asian Para Games pose with volunteer coach Basanta Bharati and aspiring players alongside officials of the National Physical Disabled Table Tennis Association during a self-funded training camp at the hall of Nepal Disabled Association's Khagendra New Life Home in Jorpati, Kathmandu, on Thursday.

Should athletes be paying out of pocket to represent their country at major international events like the Asian Para Games? While global sports standards demand robust state sponsorship, for Nepal's para table tennis players, self-funding is a grim, routine reality. This systemic government neglect forces athletes to rely on second-hand rubbers sourced from Japan and borrowed rackets just to remain competitive. Despite their proven potential—exemplified by continental medals and unwavering dedication—these players must navigate a precarious landscape where empty pockets and state indifference stand in stark contrast to their unwavering resolve to bring home glory.

Nepal has participated in the Asian Para Games since its inaugural edition in Gwangzhou, China, in 2010. But the country sent athletes for table tennis at the Games only from the second edition in South Korea in 2014. Hira Niraula and Ram Prasad Kharel represented Nepal in table tennis then.

At the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia, four table tennis players—Thapa, Sonika Dhakal, Lek Bahadur KC and Raikosha Shahi—represented Nepal.

KC has not played of late, while Shahi is currently the treasurer at the National Physical Disabled Table Tennis Association (NPDTTA). Shahi reaches the hall in Jorpati to manage the boards and other equipment before any players arrive for training. Thapa and Dhakal, meanwhile, are still competing.

On Thursday, Dhakal was the first to arrive at the training hall. She greeted Shahi as soon as she saw her, pushing the rims of her wheelchair. Dhakal had travelled a long way to get here, from Sanga in Bhaktapur, over 20 kilometres away, where she works as a peer counsellor at the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre. "The bus picks me up at 6:55am and drops me off at around 5pm, the time when my training commences," she said, as she entered the hall and started stretching her arms with the second-hand rubber bands brought from Japan.

Dhakal, who is 42, is training for her fourth participation at the Asian Para Games. She was one of the first Nepali athletes to participate at the Asian Para Games in China in 2010. But Dhakal was then a para swimmer.

"I found swimming expensive," Dhakal said with a laugh. She was in for a rude shock when she found out table tennis was not a cheap sport either, she said.

After shifting to table tennis, Dhakal has represented Nepal in the sport at the Asian Para Games in South Korea and Indonesia. "I did not participate in the previous edition in China in 2023 as I could not afford it," Dhakal lamented.

Alongside Thapa and Dhakal, five other para table tennis players are aiming to represent Nepal in Japan. All of them have played for the country at international tournaments in the past—out of their pockets.

"We have made up our minds to spend the required amount ourselves this time as well," said Digam Sing Chemjong, one among the seven para table tennis players aiming to represent Nepal in Japan.

Chemjong was one of the two para swimmers, alongside Dhakal, from Nepal at the 2010 Asian Para Games. He then also led the national wheelchair cricket team as its captain. It was during his captainship that Nepal won their first tri-series in 2017 by defeating India and Bangladesh at the TU Ground.

"In the end, I found solace in table tennis," Chemjong said. "My biggest reason to take up sports is to win medals and trophies for the country. Though the state has neglected us, we have not stopped loving our country."

The government has allocated Rs3.5 million for the country's participation at the Asian Para Games in Japan. There are expected to be at least three dozen athletes across around a dozen sports from Nepal. And the budget allocated does not even cover a one-way fare for these athletes, let alone coaches and officials required to support these athletes with disabilities.

Chemjong, who also visits the National Table Tennis Training Centre in Lainchaur during the mornings, said he had to wait for three days in his wheelchair—with a bat in his hands—to be called to play by able-bodied athletes.

"Can you even play table tennis in a wheelchair? Can you play these strokes? These are the questions I faced at the beginning in Lainchaur around three months ago," Chemjong said. "But once I got a chance to play, many were shocked. Now, they call me to play with them."

Chemjong said that there is not much difference between table tennis players on a wheelchair and those who are physically able. "All you need is the hunger to give your best," he added.

Alongside Thapa, Dhakal and Chemjong, Lali Tamang and Bibek Rai are also aiming for another shot at a table tennis medal at the Asian Para Games.

Rai, who works at Dharan Sub-metropolitan City and trains locally, had participated in Hangzhou, China, in 2023. Tamang, who currently works at the Vocational Opportunity for Inclusion to Community and Employment (VOICE) project run by Spinal Injury Sangh Nepal (SISN), represented Nepal in the previous Asian Para Games as well.



While the 2023 event was Rai's first participation at the Asian main event, Tamang was a wheelchair runner at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Indonesia.

"I left athletics after I got to see the difference between foreign para athletes and us in Indonesia," Tamang said. "They had quality wheelchairs. When I asked how much it cost, the answer was over Rs1 million. Then, I decided to shift to table tennis believing it would be cheaper and better."

But the lack of support from the state has made table tennis an expensive game, too.

"I want to win medals for the country and motivate many others like us to come outside and challenge the world," Tamang said. "I do not care if I have to invest in it myself."

And it is the same reason why emerging table tennis players have also decided to continue the sport.

For Nirmala Bhandari, 23, for instance, it has not been long since she started playing table tennis. After just a couple of months of training, she represented Nepal at the 2025 Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai.

After she arrived at the training hall in Jorpati on Thursday evening, riding her scooter for around an hour from Lalitpur, Bhandari said that she was highly motivated after seeing many athletes like her leaving their mark at the Asian Youth Para Games.

"When I asked those foreign athletes about the support they received back home, I felt jealous," Bhandari said. "From receiving training at the places that were near and accessible to being provided with other necessary equipment, they have all the support. Back in our country, even finding an accessible training area is a herculean task."



Para table tennis player Keshav Thapa trains for the 5th Asian Para Games on the same wheelchair he used during the 2018 Asian Para Games in Indonesia. He will be representing Nepal at the Asian main event for the third consecutive edition in September in Japan.

However, Bhandari, who spent handsomely while travelling to Dubai, does not want to quit anytime soon.

"I will continue playing table tennis until I can," said Bhandari, who is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Journalism. "I do not care if I have to spend all the hard-earned money on this sport and try winning medals for the country."

So are these athletes ready to take on the world? The response from their volunteer coach Basanta Bharati is an emphatic yes.

"I am fully confident that these players can challenge the best in the world," Bharati told the Post. "They might not win, but they are not easy to beat… The fire in them burns very bright. But they need more support from the state."

Bharati adds he is quite optimistic about his players winning medals in Japan.

"These players are training very hard," Bharati said as he showed hand-weight bands that weighed from half a kilo to a kilogram that were worn by the players to improve their strokes. "For instance, let's see Swikrit Neupane. He already won a silver medal at the Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai last year."

Neupane is currently training in his hometown of Biratnagar. "I have my examinations underway and could not be in Kathmandu for training," Neupane, who is pursuing a Bachelor in Computer Application, told the Post over a phone call.

Rai and Neupane are two players who do not play in a wheelchair. They both fall in Class 7.

Wheelchair table tennis players fall under Classes 1-5 while those with physical impairment and who play while standing fall under Classes 6-10. There is also Class 11 for athletes with an intellectual impairment.

Neupane, who ranks 357th in the world among standing men's singles, has been playing table tennis for over a decade. He dedicates his table tennis journey to coach Biken Thapa, who operates Stellar Table Tennis Training Centre in Biratnagar. "After my family's support, it was coach Biken who trusted in me," he said.

Even Chemjong has praised Thapa's training centre as one of the best in Eastern Nepal. "I have trained and played there many times," Chemjong said. "The most beautiful thing is that the centre is wheelchair-friendly. And coach Biken is very experienced."

Neupane, 22, sees a good future in table tennis. "My family was very happy when I won silver last year, though I had to spend a good amount of money for travel and accommodation, among others," he said. "I even got honoured by the provincial and local authorities. The whole community praised me. It was a great moment."

Neupane's medal-winning journey further exposes the state's systemic neglect of para athletes. While the Sports Development Guidelines, 2079, reserve cash incentives exclusively for Paralympic medalists, the government offers no such recognition for success in the Asian Youth Para Games or Asian Para Games. Yet, despite years of official indifference, the para table tennis squad remains driven by a singular, defiant purpose: to bring home medals for Nepal.

Thapa, the athlete, however, lamented that they do not even have a proper wheelchair. "We use the ones that are available and have come through someone's support," he said. "We need a sports wheelchair, which is extremely expensive."

Citing Palesha Goverdhan's historic medal in Paris 2024, Thapa said he believes para athletes will soon get the state's attention again. "It shall start from the Asian Para Games in Japan," he said. "We will give our best to win medals for the country."

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Invest time in your home, and give yourself enough rest and emotional support. Channel your energy into creative activities, avoid unnecessary social conflict or misinformation.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Pursue meaningful ideas with confidence, while staying open to lessons along the way. Seek encouragement when needed, but rely on your own judgment and strengthen skills.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Allow yourself a modest reward for recent effort, while staying curious and open to useful conversations. Share helpful information with others, and act promptly when a strong idea feels worth pursuing.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Prioritise your personal goals with confidence, but avoid pushing others aside unnecessarily. Reconsider agreements or partnerships that no longer suit you, and stay prepared to explore better options if negotiations stall.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Protect your privacy and work quietly on important goals until you feel ready to share them. Speak openly about relationship concerns, give complicated issues proper attention, and stay willing to reassess people as new information emerges.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Be selective with social commitments, and protect your energy by making time for proper rest. Review your priorities carefully, decide which goals and relationships deserve attention, and stay open to unexpected professional opportunities.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Stay focused on important goals while remaining open to new opportunities and valuable professional connections. Ignore unnecessary criticism, invest in personal growth, and strengthen your abilities by developing new skills and expanding your interests.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Step away from screens and social media, and spend time in nature to restore your focus. Seek honest feedback from someone you trust, confront unrealistic expectations, and move gradually beyond your comfort zone.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Act with focus, trust your instincts, and strengthen partnerships while letting go of what no longer serves you. Stay flexible when plans shift, and take practical steps toward the goals you have been considering.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Show up for the people you care about while protecting time for your own balance and rest. Approach negotiations thoughtfully, discuss shared goals with clarity, and keep practical judgment at the centre of important decisions.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Create more consistent routines and organise your daily life to support steadier energy and better well-being. Take time to recharge with someone you care about, then reassess your direction and make a practical plan for improvement.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Choose a passion project that genuinely motivates you, and adjust your routine to make space for it. Let go of goals that no longer interest you, simplify your schedule, and focus your energy on what feels meaningful.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Curved structure
5 Highway
9 Crash against
12 Soft drink flavor
13 Goes slowly
15 Cornbread
16 Word of agreement
17 Enthusiasm
18 Spoil
19 Waste time
21 Where planes touch down
23 Enticement
25 King of beasts
26 Arrayed
29 — and figures
32 Move to and —
33 Sultan's wives
35 Substantial
37 Burden
39 Permitted by law
41 Pallet
42 Thing of value
44 Consumed
46 Printer's measures
47 Commence
49 Easygoing
51 Gossip
53 Tear apart
54 Kind of bicycle (Hyph.)
58 Corpsmen
62 — fixe
63 Flavoring substance
65 "American —"
66 Examination
67 Signaling device
68 Lamb's pen name
69 Loan charge (Abbr.)
70 Dimple
71 Gainsay

DOWN
1 Private sch.
2 The Eternal City, in Italy
3 Ball of yarn
4 Treat
5 Turnaround
6 "— to a Nightingale"
7 Taj Mahal site
8 Satan
9 Libertine
10 Indigo
11 Repair
14 Letter stroke
15 Nobles
20 Richly green
22 Froth
24 Not of this world
26 Slag
27 Dinner item
28 Decorative transfer
30 Seized
31 Be frugal
32 State near Ga.
34 Angled joint
36 Distances (Abbr.)
38 Determined (2 wds.)
40 Run-down building
43 Trek
45 Baseball team
48 Blond lock
50 Flowed in a circle
52 Lukewarm
54 Small monkey
55 Paradise
56 Put one within another
57 Dreadful
59 Not working
60 Invent
61 Murder
64 Middle (Abbr.)

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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■	P	I	O	N	E	E	R	■	R	E	G	A	R	D
S	O	D	A	■	A	G	O	R	A	■	E	P	E	E
A	M	O	S	■	L	I	M	I	T	■	N	E	N	E
W	E	L	T	■	■	S	A	G	E	■	T	R	O	D

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SUDOKU

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8	7	6	3	1	2	5	4	9
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No.SC6098 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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No.SC6099 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Historic Nepali films return to the big screen

The Film Development Board's 'Old Is Gold' exhibition offers a window into how Nepali cinema—and Nepali society—has changed, while revealing what remains familiar.



SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI
KATHMANDU

Before the lights dimmed, the audience was already split between two worlds. Some had come to revisit a past they once lived through. Others had only heard stories about it.

The Film Development Board's 'Old Is Gold' offers more than a chance to revisit old Nepali films. The exhibition features ten digitised films, including 'Aama', 'Sindoor', 'Pariwartan', 'Manko Baandh', 'Kumari', 'Jeevan Rekha', 'Badlindo Aakash', 'Ke Ghar Ke Dera', 'Shantideep and Hijo Aaja Bholi'.

According to Film Development Board chairperson Dinesh DC, the programme was conceived as more than an anniversary event.

"An anniversary should not only mean cutting a cake and exchanging greetings," he says. "A good way for an institution to mark its anniversary is also by bringing the history it has preserved back before the public."

The technical development of Nepali cinema is immediately visible. Camera quality, sound, editing and production have improved significantly over the decades.

In 'Sindoor' conversations often unfold through long, largely static shots, while transitions between scenes can feel abrupt to viewers accustomed to the quicker cuts and multiple camera angles of contemporary cinema.

The films preserve not only stories but fragments of everyday life: of streets that no longer exist, fashions long abandoned, accents that have softened with time, and homes built around values that have since evolved.

Songs appear frequently, sometimes interrupting the narrative in ways that can feel excessive today, yet they generated some of the strongest audience reactions. Viewers clapped along when familiar songs began. Among them was Sumit, 37, who had brought his children, aged eight and thirteen, to introduce them to older Nepali cinema. The children said the songs were what they enjoyed most.

DC says that was one of the aims of the exhibition.

"I don't want to call young people into the hall to give them a history lesson," he says. "I want them to come, watch the films, enjoy them and start asking themselves questions about what Nepal was like at the time."

Fashion is one obvious marker of change. Women frequently appear in saris and more traditional attire, contrasting with the broader urban and global influences visible in contemporary Nepali films.

Some romantic conventions now appear exaggerated. During 'Sindoor', the audience laughed at prolonged exchanges of glances between the romantic leads that were played seriously in the film.

Yet what now feels clichéd was still being established at the time; films like these helped define conventions later Nepali cinema repeatedly returned to.

At the same time, not everything feels distant. One of the more striking continuities is the way women are represented.

In 'Aama', for instance, Harka repeatedly abuses his wife, yet she is still expected to remain within the marriage and endure his behaviour. The scene reflects the limited choices available to women within the social world the film depicts.

Filmmaker and film educator Abhimanyu Dixit says the social shift is more complicated. Older films often relied on archetypes like the dutiful wife, sacrificial mother or "bad woman", though he notes that some characters still had considerable agency. "Sometimes I watch and think, 'did we actually become more conservative later?'" he says.

Dixit does not entirely agree that contemporary cinema simply reproduces the same stereotypes in more polished forms. "I actually think contemporary Nepali filmmakers are trying," he says. "Even compared to 2018, when I used to review Nepali cinema for the Post, I can see a change."

"You can watch a filmmaker's work over several films, sometimes even within the same series, and see that their female characters have continued to evolve," he says. Dixit attributes that partly to the current cultural climate and greater scrutiny from audiences. "Maybe social media scares filmmakers now, so they are more conscious. Or maybe we are genuinely learning."

DC himself describes old cinema as a "visual document" of its period.

"When we watch an old film, we do not only watch a story," he says. "We see the cities and villages of that time, the houses, clothes, language, family structures and the way society looked at men and women."

For older viewers, the films also operate differently.

Sixty-seven-year-old Yogesh Parajuli said watching 'Aama' reminded him of a period when going to the cinema itself felt different.

"We used to bunk classes whenever there was a show," he said. "Our mother used to come and chase us out. This made me miss her."

That contrast between old and new audiences became one of the more interesting parts of the exhibition. Older viewers often recognised songs, actors and scenes immediately. Younger viewers responded to the films with more distance, sometimes laughing at the acting or dialogue, but still remaining engaged.

For the Board, this is also part of a larger archival project.

DC distinguishes between digitisation, restoration and preservation, noting that the three are not the same. The ten films in the exhibition have been digitised and made suitable for screening, while the Board is also preparing to digitise additional historically significant films.

He argues, however, that preserving only a limited number of films is not enough.

"Ten films are something to be proud of, but we cannot be satisfied with ten," he says. "This is a beginning, not a destination."

The challenge extends beyond digitisation. Old reels, negatives, scripts, photographs and other material remain scattered across private collections, while copyright and ownership can limit how digitised films are publicly distributed.

Screenings including 'Aama', 'Sindoor' and 'Pariwartan' drew strong attendance, with some shows filling the hall.

For viewers, the exhibition offers a direct comparison between different periods of Nepali cinema. The cameras are sharper, editing is faster, fashion and romance have changed, and filmmakers are reconsidering how women are represented. Yet songs still draw audiences in, familiar storytelling conventions persist, and some older social attitudes remain recognisable.

'Old Is Gold' is therefore most interesting not simply as an exercise in nostalgia, but as a record of what Nepali cinema has changed, what it has retained and what it is still learning to leave behind.





POST PHOTOS: SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI

Painting the rhythm of Kathmandu's festivals

Pradip Kumar Bajracharya's 'UTSAV' draws on the festivals, rituals and cultural memory of the Valley.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

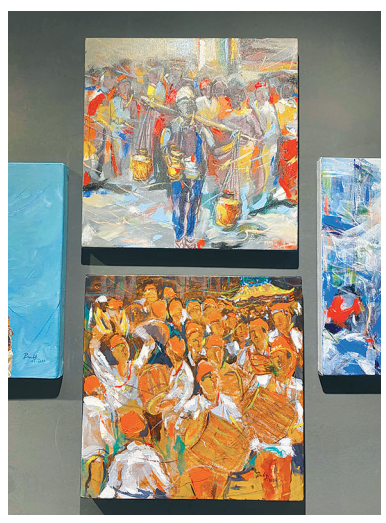
Gallery 108 is showcasing '**UTSAV: In the Rhythm of the Jatra**,' a solo exhibition by visual artist Pradip Kumar Bajracharya, through Sunday, August 23.

Based in the Kathmandu Valley, Bajracharya draws extensively from the region's festivals, rituals and living traditions. His works explore how these cultural practices shape collective memory, identity and a sense of community, translating the rhythms and visual richness of traditional celebrations onto the canvas.

'UTSAV' brings together a series of paintings inspired by the living festival culture of the Kathmandu Valley—including the Machhindranath Jatra, Bhoto Jatra, and Sindure Jatra—as celebrated in Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Hadigaun, and other historic settlements.

Rather than documenting these events literally, Bajracharya's work seeks to capture their essence, including the rhythm of the dhime baja, the movement of crowds, the colours of celebration, and the devotion of worshippers, translated through brushstrokes, line, colour, and composition.

A distinctive feature of 'UTSAV' is its formal unity—every painting in the series has been created in the same square format, a deliberate choice intended to build a sense of rhythm, harmony, and connection across the body of work.





PHOTOS: COURTESY OF GALLERY 108

"Art has always been a way of connecting with my culture, my memories, and the people around me," says Bajracharya, who grew up surrounded by the festivals, rituals, and music of the Kathmandu Valley. "As our society evolves, culture continues to change. While change is natural, it is equally important to preserve the traditions and values that define us."

Inspired by the belief that art and culture represent Nepal's true treasures and heritage, 'UTSAV' is Bajracharya's tribute to the living heritage that connects one generation with another.

UTSAV: In the Rhythm of the Jatra
When: Until August 23
Where: Gallery 108, Durbar Marg, Kathmandu
Time: 11 am to 7 pm
Entry: Free

'One Night Only' is a tease, but its stars score

The movie constantly feels like it's narrowing its many possibilities.

JAKE COYLE

The Purge' for sex is the best way to describe the premise of "One Night Only" unless you prefer Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" for one-night stands.

As the movie announces right away: The US government has passed a mandate that premarital sex is illegal except for one night a year. For the past three years, sex out of wedlock has been off limits except for an annual 12-hour reprieve. "It's been a lot," reads the opening title cards.

Such a concept, naturally, spawns a lot of questions. How could such a policy be policed? Where, exactly, are the lines drawn? And why hasn't everyone moved to Canada?

But "One Night Only," directed by Will Gluck ("Easy A," "Anyone But You"), is less interested in extrapolating the potentially very bizarre ramifications of its dystopian concept than it is selling a surprisingly tame romantic tale. "One Night Only" may be dressed up as a raunchy sex comedy, but it's a rom-com at heart, and a chaste one at that.

That makes "One Night Only" a disappointingly denuded comedy without the gumption to interrogate its satirical gimmick. And yet its charming leads, Monica Barbaro and Callum Turner, do enough to keep "One Night Only" pleasantly watchable.

The health of the rom-com is perpetually debated, but one of the genre's most abiding benefits is in giving young stars an uncluttered big-screen stage to shine on. Turner, the Bond-rumored British actor, has already appeared in one (also monogamy-friendly) rom-com in last year's "Eternity."

But "One Night Only" is an especially welcome showcase for Barbaro, who has thus far stood out largely in male-dominated ensembles ("Top Gun: Maverick," "A Complete Unknown," "Crime 101"). So, while "One Night Only" is unlikely to be a standout in her filmography, it's the one that most proves her lead-actor incandescence.

One of the biggest stretches in a movie full of them is that these two — neither of whom are exactly hard on the eyes — are among the only ones striking out on a night dedicated to scoring. Owen (Turner), who runs a Manhattan pizzeria, has his engagement plans thwarted when his longtime girlfriend (Maya Hawke) says she plans to sleep with someone else. Allie (Barbaro), meanwhile, is a single singer (she gets paid to belt out pharmaceutical jingles) who has to be coaxed by her friends into even going out.

Both are romantics on a night for flings. After bumping into each other and meeting on the street, they spend the night traversing New York, separately but often together, through nightclub escapades and condom shortages.

In Travis Braun's high-concept script, the cleverest parody isn't of conservative political intervention in private sex lives. It's of a swipe-right sex culture, where old-fashioned romance is hard to find. But "One Night Only" — populated in product placement ads from Durex to K-Y — has little about it that suggests something particularly sincere.

Instead, "One Night Only" constantly feels like it's narrowing its many possibilities. Early on, one character notes the night belongs to the straights because gay people long ago learned to circumvent repressive restrictions. Instead of widening its satire into contemporary sex life, Gluck's film turns throwback, even leading to a climax atop a New York landmark.

So "One Night Only" isn't bawdy or trenchant enough for its concept or quite sweet enough for its romance. It's more successful as a meta comedy about a pair of charismatic Hollywood stars reckoning with their onscreen sex appeal. Sydney Sweeney, Glen Powell and Pete Davidson all make a kind of cameo. And on that score, neither Barbaro nor Turner have much to worry about.

Hopefully, though, there are more "Purge" riffs to come. One night only for ... backgammon? Just imagine the chaos.

"One Night Only," a Universal Pictures release in theaters Thursday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for sexual material, language and brief nudity. Running time: 102 minutes. Two stars out of four.

– Associated Press



AP/RSS
Monica Barbaro

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