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Nepal's labour market caught between jobless workers and worker shortages

Weak skills recognition, poor job information and low wages are widening the gap between Nepal's workers and employers.

HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUG 15

After spending 18 years working in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, Nil Bahadur Khadka of Banke returned to Nepal seven months ago hoping to settle back home.

Armed with certificates proving his skills, he went from one construction company to another looking for work as an overseer. No one hired him.

After nearly seven months without a job, Khadka received a call from his former employer in Saudi Arabia.

"We have secured a new contract in Kuwait. We can offer you the same position with a higher salary. We have already sent a demand letter to a recruitment agency. Go there and submit your passport," the company told him.

Khadka immediately agreed.

He is now preparing to leave for Kuwait after being assured that he will be able to save around Rs100,000 a month.

"Over there, companies actively seek us out and call us. Here, even after going from door to door looking for work, nobody trusts us," Khadka told Kantipur. "My children have not finished their education. At a time like this, I cannot just sit idle at home."

His flight is expected to be booked within a few days.

Thirty-year-old Rupal BK of Dang, who returned from Malaysia just three months ago, has had a similar experience.

"There are no large industries in our area hiring 300 to 400 workers. There are only small companies that employ five to seven. When we approach them, they say they have no vacancies," BK said. "Labour work is not available all the time. I need at

least Rs20,000 to Rs30,000 a month to support my family, but I cannot find a job that pays that much."

Unable to find reliable work, he too is preparing to leave, this time for Qatar.

"I have found a labour job at a hotel in Qatar," he said. "They say it will cost me Rs250,000 to go there. I am waiting for my visa."

While Khadka and BK are preparing to leave the country again because they cannot find work at home, employers complain that they cannot find enough workers.

Shivahari Ghimire, secretary-general of the Federation of Contractors' Associations of Nepal, estimates that the construction sector alone needs an additional 300,000 to 500,000 workers.

"The construction sector needs 1.1 million workers directly. Only around 800,000 to 900,000 are currently available in the market," Ghimire said.

"A large number of skilled workers have already left the country. We have had to hire workers from Bangladesh and India."

Nepal's labour market appears caught in a paradox: citizens cannot find jobs while employers struggle to find the workers they need.

According to the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, 15.7 million people, or 65.5 percent of Nepal's population, were classified as economically active, or part of the labour force. They included 8.2 million men and 7.5 million women.

The largest age group within the economically active population is 25 to 29, with about 1.9 million people. Another 1.8 million are aged 20 to 24, while around 1.78 million are aged 35 to 39.

Much of this 20-39 age group is searching for productive employment

and decent work.

According to the Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment, more than 745,000 unemployed people registered with employment service centres established in 746 local units last fiscal year.

Prabal Jung Pandey, chair of the Employers' Council at the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce

and Industry, said the shortage was particularly acute among skilled workers.

"We can regularly find unskilled workers. But there is a huge shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers," Pandey said. "The skilled workers we find are mostly those who have been unable to go abroad for work."

>> Continued on page 2



The shramsansar.gov.np portal was launched two years ago to better connect workers with employers but people say it's not been effective.

Why Nepal's economy will need more than a two-thirds majority

Four months in, the new government is discovering that good intentions don't fix decades-old structural problems.

GOKARNA AWASTHI
KATHMANDU, AUG 15

When Andy Burnham became UK Prime Minister on July 20, he used his first week to cut electricity taxes, lower bus fares, offer relief to pubs,

and push decentralisation. The instinct is universal: politicians everywhere win support by making services cheap and accessible. The difference is that rich countries can afford the bill. Poor ones, like Nepal, cannot.

The gap between what citizens expect and what the state can deliver is becoming the real story of Nepal's economy today, and it is one the government elected on the back of the Gen Z protests has yet to reckon with.

Nepal has crossed 5 percent GDP growth only 18 times since 1961. Only one government since the mid-1990s has lasted three years, and each bout of political turmoil has set the economy back further. The decade-long Maoist insurgency was the sharpest blow: growth bottomed out at 0.12 percent in 2001-02, the lowest in 36 years, as development spending was swallowed by security costs.

Growth recovered after the 2015 constitution—topping 7 percent on the back of post-earthquake reconstruction and renewed private investment—before Covid-19 knocked two years off momentum.

The rebound that followed, roughly 6 percent growth, was real. But it also sucked in imports fast enough to push foreign reserves down to six and a half months of cover, prompting the central bank to clamp down on credit and imports.

That clampdown, according to former banking association president Bhuwan Dahal, is where today's slowdown actually began. The side effect? It pushed activity into illegal imports instead of curbing demand.

>> Continued on page 2



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SIPRADI

How Nepal manages unidentified and unclaimed bodies

○ KRIPAL GAUTAM
KATHMANDU, AUG 15

When an unidentified body is found in Nepal, police begin an investigation to establish the person's identity and trace relatives before the remains are transferred to a hospital mortuary.

But with 788 unidentified and unclaimed bodies currently being kept in hospital facilities nationwide, limited storage capacity is forcing hospitals to begin disposal procedures within months.

The process starts at the local level. Police notify the relevant local government and ward representatives after an unidentified body is found. Under the Unidentified and Unclaimed Body Management Guidelines, 2021, police prepare an official inquest report in the presence of local representatives and residents.

If relatives are identified during the initial investigation, the body is handed over to them. If no relatives are found, the remains are transferred to a hospital mortuary for preservation while police continue efforts to establish the person's identity.

According to Nepal Police data, 1,634 unidentified bodies have been recovered nationwide since fiscal year 2013-14. Of these, 133 were identified and handed over to their families, 84 were transferred to teaching hospitals for medical research, and 629 were cremated or buried after the required legal procedures. Another 788 remain in hospital mortuaries, awaiting identification or final disposal.

Deputy Inspector General of police Abi Narayan Kafle, central spokesperson of the police, said detailed records are maintained for every unidentified body. "The police are always the first to arrive at the scene and complete all preliminary legal procedures," Kafle said. "We maintain complete records of the deceased. If families looking for missing relatives examine these records carefully, identification becomes significantly easier."

Police also publish photographs and details of unidentified bodies on their public online portal to help families looking for missing relatives.

But the system faces a major constraint: hospitals do not have enough space to preserve unidentified remains for extended periods.



Limited mortuary space means hospitals can't preserve dead bodies for long.

Justice served after a decade as Supreme Court delivers landmark gang rape verdict

Court says a victim's changed testimony cannot by itself justify acquittal when other evidences establish the crime.

○ DURGA DULAL
KATHMANDU, AUG 15

The Supreme Court has convicted four men of gang-raping a woman in Morang nearly a decade ago, overturning their acquittals by the district and High courts and sentencing each to nine years in prison.

Ajay Paswan, Sujit Chaudhary, Rajesh Kamat and Rabin Kamat were convicted after the top court found that the prosecution evidence, including physical, scientific and circumstantial evidence, established their involvement in the crime.

The ruling also established that a rape victim's decision to retract an earlier statement or become a hostile witness does not, by itself, weaken the prosecution's case. Courts must assess such testimony alongside the other evidence on record, the Supreme Court said.

The woman, identified in court records by the pseudonym "Biratnagar Tha" to protect her identity, had initially told police that she was taken to a makeshift shelter beside a fishpond in Katakari, Morang, where she was restrained and raped by several men.

She later changed her account when the case reached the district court, saying that she had called her boyfriend, had consensual sex and did not know the other men. She told the court that none of the accused had raped her.

The Supreme Court, however, found that her changed testimony could not be considered in isolation.

A division bench of justices Hari Prasad Phuyal and Tek Prasad Dhungana delivered the verdict on June 24, 2025. The full text of the judgment was made public recently. The government had appealed against the decisions of the Morang District Court and the High Court in Biratnagar, which had acquitted the accused.

The Supreme Court ruled that victims or witnesses can contradict statements given during investigations because of social or family pressure or a desire to shield defendants from punishment.

In serious crimes such as rape and gang rape, judges must therefore examine the circumstances surrounding the case and assess all available evidence rather than relying solely on a victim's testimony in court.

The Supreme Court specifically rejected the High Court's reasoning that the four men should be acquitted because the woman had testified that none of them raped her.

It said that where medical reports and other independent evidence support the commission of a crime, an accused cannot be acquitted merely because the victim or complainant later gives contradictory testimony.

"In gang rape and rape, which are committed in secluded and private settings, the absence of direct evidence means that a chain of circumstantial evidence may itself be sufficient to establish the crime,"



The Supreme Court ruled that victims or witnesses can contradict statements given during investigations because of social or family pressure.

the judgment said.

The court found that the prosecution had presented physical, scientific and circumstantial evidence that, when considered together, established the involvement of the four men.

A government lawyer who argued the case said the lower courts had failed to assess the evidence in its entirety.

"In gang rape cases where victims and perpetrators are in proximity, victims do not always give a truthful account," the lawyer said. "The court has to consider the circumstances of the entire incident."

The Supreme Court, the lawyer said, considered the woman's condition, the crime scene and the evidence as a whole before reaching its conclusion.

Alongside the prison sentences, the Supreme Court ordered compensation for the survivor.

It directed that Rs600,000 be paid to "Biratnagar Tha" immediately from the government's Crime Victim Relief Fund. It also ordered the Morang District Court to ensure that another Rs100,000 is paid to her within 30 days.

The apex court also criticised the handling of the woman's medical examination following the assault, finding shortcomings in the way the then Koshi Zonal Hospital and the doctors involved conducted and interpreted the examination.

During the proceedings, doctors Yogendra Yadav and Meluna Bhushal testified that the woman's hymen could have been torn for various rea-

sons and that the examination did not show signs indicating that she had been raped.

The Supreme Court questioned the conclusions drawn from the examination and found that the hospital and doctors had failed to discharge their duties with the honesty and professionalism expected of them.

"Describing as normal the condition of a victim who had been rescued unconscious after suffering gang rape appears to have been negligent," the judgment said.

The court directed the government, the Ministry of Health and Food Safety and the chief registrar of the Supreme Court, through the Office of the Attorney General, to formally caution the hospital and doctors involved.

It said medical examination reports are key evidence in rape cases and other crimes involving women's dignity, bodily integrity and physical autonomy and must be impartial, objective and scientifically based.

The court also stressed the state's duty to prevent crime, help victims obtain justice and ensure that officials and service providers cooperate honestly with investigations and judicial proceedings.

The assault took place on January 23, 2017.

The woman, who worked as a waitress at a hotel in Biratnagar Metropolitan City-14, had travelled to Naya Bazar in Katakari to visit relatives. That evening, she was waiting at Katakari Chowk for a vehicle to return to Biratnagar.

Government to allow NRN joint ventures to issue foreign-currency IPOs

Regulatory changes will allow a joint venture between the government and non-resident Nepalis to raise up to 85 percent of its capital from overseas investors.

○ HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUGUST 15

Nepalis living abroad will soon be able to invest directly in Nepal-based companies through foreign-currency initial public offerings, as the government moves to create a new channel for mobilising diaspora capital.

The Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON) has amended the Securities Registration and Issue Regulations, 2016, to allow companies jointly established by the government and non-resident Nepalis to raise up to 85 percent of their paid-up capital through public share issues.

The amended regulations have been forwarded to the finance ministry and are awaiting formal approval from the Cabinet, according to ministry officials. Once endorsed, the provision will allow Nepalis living and working abroad to invest in primary share offerings using foreign currency.

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle said on Saturday that the regulatory change was nearing final approval.

Addressing the 11th Non-Resident Nepali Association Asia Pacific Conference in Guangzhou, China, through a video message, Wagle urged the diaspora to invest in sectors with potential to generate jobs and reduce the country's dependence on imports.

"Just a few days ago, we amended the securities allocation and issuance regulations to raise the permissible equity share from the government and the NRN Investment Fund to 85 percent," Wagle said. "Invest with confidence and bring your knowledge, capital, and skills back home."

He encouraged non-resident Nepalis to invest in tourism, information technology, green energy, high-value agri-

culture and industries that can substitute imports.

The regulatory change is aimed in particular at facilitating the proposed NRN Nepal Development Fund, a collective investment vehicle promoted by the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA).

The NRNA has for years sought a mechanism to pool the savings of Nepalis living abroad and channel them into projects in Nepal.

The association has established the NRN Nepal Development Fund with a proposed capital of Rs10 billion. Under the proposed structure, the government will hold a five percent stake, founding promoters will hold 10 percent, and the remaining 85 percent will be raised from non-resident Nepalis through a foreign-currency IPO.

Under existing securities regulations, companies generally cannot raise more than 49 percent of their capital from the public through an IPO.

The revised provision would therefore allow the proposed NRN fund to have an unusually high proportion of its capital held by public shareholders.

Hem Raj Sharma, president of the NRNA, said the fund was intended to bring smaller diaspora investors into projects that have traditionally attracted larger individual investors.

"The fund was established to mobilise a minimum capital of Rs10 billion by bringing small-scale NRN investors under a collective umbrella," Sharma said. "This decision paves the way for trading shares directly in foreign currency, with NRN shareholders also permitted to trade their equities among fellow diaspora members."

Sharma said the NRN Nepal Development Fund would operate as an independent commercial company and

that the NRNA would not bear its corporate liabilities.

The NRNA has argued that while significant amounts of money have been invested in Nepal by individual Nepalis living abroad, there has been no effective mechanism to pool relatively small investments and channel them into large domestic projects.

Anal Raj Bhattarai, chief executive officer of the NRN Nepal Development Fund, said individual Nepalis overseas would be able to invest between Rs100,000 and Rs100 million in the fund. "This is a specialised corporate entity. Investors will not need to travel to Nepal to purchase or sell shares, as all transactions will take place seamlessly in foreign currency," Bhattarai said. "Our target is to bring between 500,000 and 600,000 overseas Nepalis into this investment fold."

The fund plans to invest in infrastructure, hydropower, tourism, agriculture and information technology. According to Bhattarai, it will prioritise commercially viable projects requiring an initial investment of at least Rs500 million to Rs600 million.

Returns generated from the investments will be eligible for repatriation abroad in foreign currency, according to the proposed model.

The fund plans to organise roadshows in countries with large Nepali communities to explain the investment process and subscription procedures to potential investors.

Nepal's 2021 national population census recorded more than 2.2 million Nepali citizens living abroad, although the actual number of Nepalis overseas is believed to be higher when those who have acquired foreign citizenship or are not captured in official migration data are taken into account.

Subsidised rice reaches Humla through Chinese route after 7-year gap

Twenty-eight trucks carried the rice from Kathmandu to Kerung, where it was transferred into eight Chinese containers, each carrying 400 quintals, to Hilsa.

○ KRISHNA PRASAD GAUTAM
SURKHET, AUG 15

After a seven-year halt, the Food Management and Trading Company has started transporting subsidised rice to Humla through the Chinese route again, as poor road conditions along the Karnali Corridor continue to make supplies difficult during the monsoon.

The consignment travelled from Kathmandu through Rasuwa, Kerung, Jongba, Purang (Talakot) and Hilsa before reaching Simkot, the district headquarters of Humla. According to the company, the con-

signment reached the destination covering nearly 600 kilometres in China in 17 days.

Twenty-eight trucks carried the rice from Kathmandu to Kerung, where it was transferred into eight Chinese containers, each carrying 400 quintals, to Hilsa. The company said the transport charge from Kerung was Rs39 per kilogram.

"Even at the current freight rate, transporting rice through China was around Rs8 to Rs11 cheaper per kilogram," said Krishna Thapa Magar, chief of the company's Humla branch. "The Chinese route is considered safer because the Karnali Corridor



One of the 28 trucks that carried rice from Kathmandu, pictured in Humla recently.

requires loading and unloading at several points."

The company brought 1,500 quintals for its Simkot branch, 700 quintals for the Limi sales centre and 1,000 quintals for the Yalbag sales centre through China.

Transport from Surkhet to Humla costs Rs20 to Rs30 per kilogram, while the branch chief said the rate from Kathmandu through the Karnali Corridor can reach Rs50.

China stopped allowing food transport through its roads in 2019 amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Humla was connected to Nepal's national road network in July last year, the district depended on air transport for basic food supplies.

"The road has only recently been connected, and its narrow, unpaved sections make it difficult for large cargo vehicles to operate," said Thapa Magar. "The Karnali Corridor is risky during monsoon, which is why we chose the Chinese route for rice transportation."

The construction of a Bailey bridge over the Chuwakhola finally connected Simkot to the national road network after nearly three decades of efforts. The corridor remains challenging, however, with unfinished bridges and several poor road sections continuing to disrupt travel during the monsoon.

Humla, a remote mountain district in Karnali Province, has been allocated 23,000 quintals of rice this year. The company says 6,300 quintals are in stock at the Simkot branch, enough to maintain supplies during the rainy season. Rice is distributed through Simkot, Sarkegad and Srinagar depots and 10 other sales centres.

OPINION

Nepal's case for crypto regulations

RSP's formulation of national cryptocurrency policy must invite a debate on intelligent regulations.

MICHAEL SIDDHI



Crypto-assets, which include crypto-currencies, stablecoins, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and tokenised deposits, have evolved from a niche experiment into a platform for digital transformation. With the market maturing, the underlying technology better understood, and clarity in regulations, they are redesigning the future payment system, moving value as seamlessly as data. Due to its unique characteristics of decentralised infrastructure, borderless transactions, and privacy concerns, conventional regulatory frameworks cannot effectively govern this technology.

Nepal's approach toward digital assets is restrictive. Digital assets are not permitted in Nepal. This cautious approach by the Nepal Rastra Bank is understandable for a country with capital controls, shallow financial market infrastructure and heavy dependence on remittance inflows.

With Nepal receiving around \$10 billion in annual remittances, and an increasing number of Nepalis participating in the global gig economy, the need for a comprehensive digital assets policy has become pressing. If blockchain and the



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crypto industry can be regulated and managed, it can unlock new economic opportunities critical for a growing economy.

Globally, the suitability of the approach depends upon market maturity, regulatory readiness, consumer awareness, perceived threat to financial stability, potential opportunities and other local nuances. This has resulted in a complex regulatory landscape that ranges from total prohibition to full adoption of crypto-assets. In recent years, several jurisdictions have shifted away from total prohibition to a risk-based regulatory framework.

In Nepal, too, the restrictions have not eliminated interest, merely making it covert. The Central Bank's 'Strategic Analysis Report, 2025: Virtual Assets', acknowledges this dilemma, suggesting that a shift towards a regulated framework may be effective. Nepal can learn from early adopters' mistakes, avoid legacy pitfalls, and leapfrog to adopt a better policy framework.

The prohibition model, adopted by countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Algeria and Morocco, treats crypto-assets as a threat to monetary sovereignty and capital controls, leading to near-total restriction. China has taken a clear stance of restricting cryptocurrency while promoting blockchain and deploying Central Bank Digital Currency. Countries like India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam have adopted restrictive regulated models, where crypto-assets are treated as an asset class under strict compliance. This policy is not anti-crypto but includes controls, tax collection and consumer protection.

The US, Canada, Australia and Japan have adopted lighter regulation that is market-driven, while EU countries have advanced crypto

ecosystems regulated by the Markets in Crypto-assets (MiCA) framework. The US has recently enacted the GENIUS Act, the CLARITY Act and the Anti-CBDC, promoting digital assets like stablecoins to integrate with the mainstream financial system.

Policy models are evolving concurrently. The UAE and Pakistan have introduced independent digital assets regulators. Bhutan has adopted a dual strategy of controlled adoption, restricting the general public's access to crypto-assets, while enabling the state to build sovereign crypto infrastructure. Following the GENIUS Act, which has sparked interest in stablecoins, Japan launched its first Yen-pegged stablecoin under the revised Payment Services Act. Both Korea and China are considering allowing Won- and Yuan-based stablecoins. At the extreme of this spectrum are countries like El Salvador and the Central African Republic, where Bitcoin is a legal tender.

Nepal could adopt a progressive, prudential regulation that is not dualistic but risk-based, with appropriate guardrails to ensure financial stability and consumer protection while minimising possible risks. For this, the country would need a national cryptocurrency and digital assets policy, with clearly defined regulatory architecture as a key pillar.

One of the biggest challenges will

then be the classification of crypto-assets. If classified as a security, it would fall under the jurisdiction of the Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON). If treated as money or e-money, it would be regulated by NRB. Globally, overlapping mandates have created confusion leading to uncertainty. Instead, Nepal could create a single, specialised regulator to eliminate such ambiguity. NRB's report identifies this anomaly and has clearly outlined three possible approaches: regulate through existing institutions, create a second-tier structure, or establish a new authority.

The choice of regulatory architecture will depend on the country's strategic ambition, regulatory maturity, and institutional and human capacity. Beyond the regulatory design, the policy must also address risks, including monetary sovereignty, capital flow and foreign exchange controls, while also complying with global standards such as FATF and anti-money laundering (AML). In addition, the policy framework must also address consumer protection, tax rules, capacity development, and nimbleness to match the fast-evolving technology.

A young, reform-oriented government in Nepal with a strong mandate for digital transformation offers a new opportunity to rethink its stand on emerging technologies, particularly crypto-assets. Amongst its stated objectives, the ruling party has a priority to formulate a national cryptocurrency policy within a year. Now, a debate needs to be started on intelligent regulations. Nepal must avoid both unchecked liberalisation and total restriction.

Siddhi is a blockchain strategist from Said Business School, Oxford University.

Metamorphosis of diaspora literature

The question of readership in diasporic literature is important and deserves serious discussion and engagement.

WORDS & ECHOES

ABHI SUBEDI



The invitation I received early this month from the Centre for Nepal Studies UK to participate in a live webinar on the topic 'How does diaspora writing reshape the Nepali literary sphere?' impressed me in several ways. Nepali diaspora writing has strongly drawn the attention of researchers, Nepali writers and literary critics over the years. Literary writers and critics have been eloquent on this subject. The participants were Nepali fiction writer Neelam Karki Niharika, travel writer Krishna Bajgai and my former student and well-known scholar Mahesh Paudyal. Sangita Swechcha curated the webinar.

Diasporic writing has become a popular subject among writers within and outside Nepal, even though it may require further discussion and writing to conclude that it has transformed Nepali writing. Discussions of the Nepali diaspora encompass both broad and minuscule issues. Debates about the role of the Nepali diaspora, especially in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam and other places, have undergone various metamorphoses throughout history. Nepal's and their role in contributing to the formation of states and territorial administrations in India have gone down in history.

The first phase of diaspora is one of ambivalence. Literary writers of the early generations, all based and active in Darjeeling, expressed ambivalence in their writing and in their shifting bases between India and Nepal. The pioneers known by the acronym Su Dha Pa or Surya Bikram Gyawali, Dharanidhar Sharma and Paras Mani Pradhan represent that diasporic ambivalence in Nepali writing and activism. Surya Bikram Gyawali became the writer of 'brave Nepali history' (in the words of historian Pratyoush Onta) and the Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. Dharanidhar moved to Nepal.

Literature has played a quiet role. Obtrusive and unobtrusive modes can be identified in this regard. Lain Singh Bangdel's position was similar to Gyawali's. Bangdel also became Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, but his famous diasporic novel *Muluk Bahira*, or 'outside the native land', pulsates with ambivalence and a quest for diasporic identity. Lil Bahadur Chettri's *Basain* has become a classic of migration literature, as the title suggests. Many examples exist.

The fuzzy border of diaspora should be noted here. Literature production in Banaras became possible



AI GENERATED

through 'print capitalism', to use Francesca Orseni's expression, in the second half of the 19th century and continued well into the early decades of the 20th century. This deserves discussion in relation to diasporic literature. Production, readership and sales were the words of print capitalism. The printing of Bhanubhakta Acharya's *Ramayana* brings together these various strands of the early diasporic anxieties. The mantra of the early Indic Nepali diaspora was the quest, and its primary means was producing texts. Banaras' print capitalism saw the publication of many books and literary magazines. Then came the literary textbook production of Paras Mani Pradhan. The carefully prepared diasporic texts were our textbooks. I grew up with them without ever thinking about who had created and produced them.

So what I call the productive ambivalence of books from the first phase of the Indic Nepali diaspora was part of the educational campaign. We should look at this with a broader perspective. The fuzzy lines between native and diasporic literature remained a force of a certain order for a long time. They persisted well into the writings of Indra Rai and the *Tesro Ayam*. The diasporic line became broader. Later, the idioms changed. Literary writers became Indian Nepali writers. The motif of the 'muluk bahira' psyche was not strongly evoked even in earlier times. Govinda Bhattarai's novel *Muglan* is an important intervention in that area. Written by a Nepali writer with diasporic sympathy and empathy, this novel evokes *Muglan*'s conditionality. I would call it an important meta-fic-

tional work on the theme of diasporic *imaginaire*.

Ramji Timilsina, a fine scholar and my erstwhile student and a PhD on diasporic literature, in an article titled 'Use and Misuse of 'Diaspora' in Nepali Literary Discourse' says, "Those who have crossed the border of Nepal, have permanently settled in a new nation, and have grown a community that resembles and reflects Nepal are the members of the Nepali Diaspora." He further adds, "They maintain and grow contacts and relations with the homeland through its members and make physical visits to it; they make use of communication". Timilsina concludes, "These features show that a diaspora is different from transnational mobile communities and the transnational outsiders."

Literary critics and historians assert that the geographical and national spaces of the Nepali Diaspora are in India, Bhutan and Burma. The other category of the incipient Nepali Diaspora, as commonly discussed, is England, USA, Canada and Australia. Nepali diaspora is growing. But we must address the earlier category again. I have heard in interactions and read in writings that the ambivalence of the Nepali diaspora in the case of the Nepal's in India is evoked frequently. We ask: Are the established Indian Nepali writers diasporic? I think they are Indian Nepali writers. They do not maintain the nostalgia or angst related to the original land in the same way as writers of earlier times.

The question of readership in diasporic literature is important; it deserves serious discussion and engagement. This calls for expanding readership and working with a psy-

che of sharing. I think this is already happening and should be seen as an important shift in readership and in the creation of a readership sphere in different countries. The growing diasporic population, rising interest in writing, and the availability of sharing tools are notable. I think this phenomenon has become an important reality that will affect the very nature of diasporic literature and the praxis of sharing and spreading.

Another feature is the careful and subtle creation of the diasporic experience by native writers and publishing them either in the original language, such as Nepali and Nepal Bhasha, or getting them translated into English. I want to mention one such novel titled *17 September* written in Nepal Bhasha by Malla K Sundar and translated into English by the Lisbon-based scholar Jyoti Tuladhar.

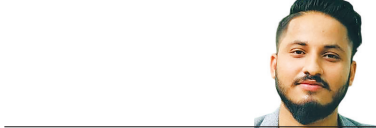
Nepali diasporic literary output is growing. The spheres of writing are expanding. With this, the identification of diasporic Nepali writings and writers is also growing. Connectivity and organisational networks have created a unique condition in diasporic literature. Literary organisations like the International Nepali Literary Society (*Anesasa*), along with visits by writers from Nepal to other countries, have fostered a culture of connectivity that encourages diasporic literature. Efforts are made to build cross-national readership by familiarising readers with works by diasporic writers. Launching their work in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu, organising interactions with them and creating literary awards are some productive activities.

Subedi is a poet and playwright.

The state kept only one copy

Nobody said anything about the government ledger in the back room, and until someone does it, the next fire will cost us the same as this one.

UTSAV LAMICHHANE



Every person who has waited in a *malpot* (*Land Administration*) office for a copy of *lalpurja* (Land Ownership Certificate) knows that moment. Someone walks into the back room and comes out with the *srestha*, a ledger too heavy to fit flat on the table. He dips his thumb in water, flips through pages and locates your record. Whatever is written, there is the truth about your land, as far as the state cares. Since those ledgers were burned in the Gen Z protests of September, all the land transactions in some districts just ceased, waiting for someone to recreate a ledger again, one owner at a time.

This week, the Auditor General Toyam Raya told the Public Accounts Committee how much we lost. Records of 179 public bodies were destroyed during the protests of September 8-9. Around Rs148 billion worth of government transactions never got audited because of this. It can be recollected from the banks' statements and government software, but the proof of whether it was done legally was burned down.

His deputy, Deepak Lamichhane, pointed out that the records could be reconstructed using the general vouchers that survived and internal audit reports. Reconstruction sounds like a lot, but lawmakers sitting in that room dismissed any notion that an office cannot be audited due to loss of papers.

My field is governed by a rule known as 3-2-1. Every piece of information you cannot afford to lose should have three copies, two kinds of storage, and one of them should be in another place altogether. It is not smart, and it is not novel, but this is exactly why every serious laboratory



POST FILE PHOTO

follows it without a thought. The rule assumes that the building will be destroyed, but does not bother speculating how.

Nepal followed this rule in one place, and it saved us. The Integrated Data Management Centre is located in Singha Durbar. While the fires ravaged other buildings around it, the centre came through unharmed, and its recovery site in Hetauda was never threatened. "The country would have gone blank," said Manish Bhattarai, who runs that centre. He was not overstating. This building stores the information of Nepal Rastra Bank, the Home Ministry and police databases, company registry, Nagarik App and websites of all 753 local governments.

The same logic saved the land records. An estimate suggests that a million land documents burned in those two days, but people can still reclaim what belongs to them thanks to the existence of this information in the central system. Investment Board Nepal lost its own servers and hard disks in that fire, but it managed to preserve its files because they were

stored at that centre and not in its own building.

The Supreme Court had no such arrangement. Basic details of the cases, such as party names and case numbers, were kept digitally, but the files themselves were paper-based. Roughly 20,000 pending case files and a far greater number of those with verdicts issued were burned. For several months, the court has been restoring this information by publishing notices urging litigants and their lawyers to come with photocopies of their files. Over 17,000 were restored by July. The real backup, it turns out, was hiding in photocopy shops outside the courthouse gates.

This is the thing that worries me. In the budget, a sovereign AI compute centre was announced, tentatively in Syuchatar, and the purchase of thousands of processors to operate it. I was arguing for it, and I still do. But no model is as good as the records it relies upon. Two days before this announcement, *The Kathmandu Post* reported that government servers were malfunctioning all over the

country and that a single software breakdown took land revenue offices offline in all 77 districts. Most government data centres' servers are seven or eight years old and have already reached the point where nobody can support them anymore. We plan to compute on the data we have no idea how to save.

During the same hearing, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle promised the government will digitise government records and follow any instruction issued by the committee. Nobody offered a deadline. Nobody asked who will audit it. There is still no rule requiring every ordinary district office, ward office or school to store a copy of its records in another place.

The usual objection to this idea is the cost. Half of it is legitimate. Digitising millions of pages is a very slow and expensive process, as the Supreme Court discovered for itself this year. Holding a second copy of information already digitised is not. Storing it costs a bit more now than it used to, because of the current worldwide rush into AI which pushed memory prices sharply up. It is nothing compared to the cost of importing processors.

Underneath all of this lurks the question of what people get away with. Once the records of 179 public bodies disappear, the proof of any questionable information they contained disappears with them. I am not suggesting that someone set the building on fire to hide a ledger. I am saying that we created a state in which such an excuse becomes permanently available.

There will be speeches about rebuilding next month. It is easy to buy some furniture. Nobody said anything about the *srestha* in the backroom, and until someone does it, the next fire will cost us the same as this one.

Lamichhane is a PhD student in Machine Learning and Bioinformatics at the University of Georgia.

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— Editors

WORLD

India premier Modi woos youth with free coaching, AI training

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI, AUG 15

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday his government would provide free online coaching lessons for competitive exams, weeks after massive youth-led protests forced the education minister to resign.

Modi said the initiative was aimed at easing the financial burden on millions of families caught up in the country's fiercely competitive education system.

The 75-year-old leader made the announcement while speaking from the ramparts of New Delhi's imposing 17th-century Red Fort to mark the country's independence from Britain on August 15, 1947.

"We have decided to provide free online coaching for various competitive examinations for our youth. We have the digital public infrastructure, and we have highly talented teachers and educators," he said.

The move comes after nationwide protests triggered by the leak of a key medical entrance examination paper and a series of other recruitment scandals.

The protests, which culminated in the resignation of education minister Dharmendra Pradhan last month, exposed deep frustration among young Indians over access to jobs and educational opportunities.

They also highlighted immense pressures on students in India, the world's most populous nation where admission to government-run colleges remains one of the most sought-after pathways to economic security.

The cut-throat competition has



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) hoists India's national flag from the ramparts of the Red Fort during celebrations to mark the country's Independence Day in New Delhi on Saturday.

fuelled a sprawling coaching industry where students spend years preparing, often at enormous financial cost for their families.

Modi said the free online classes would ease financial burden on "poor and middle-class families".

"The competition surrounding coaching classes has become a huge burden for middle-class families... [Students] can stay close to their families, receive their care, and avoid placing an additional financial burden on them," he said.

Modi also announced plans to train several million young people in artificial intelligence tools.

"We have decided in the next one year, one crore [10 million] youth will be given training in AI skills," he said.

Since the protests, authorities have attempted to appease the nation's youth, with the parliament hiking penalties for leaking exam papers.

Critics say the protests posed one of the biggest challenges to Modi's government since coming to power in 2014.

Growth framework

In a speech lasting more than an hour, Modi also reiterated his government's vow to help India achieve the status of a developed country in the next 20 years, announcing a seven-point growth and reform framework.

The initiative would focus on manufacturing, agriculture, technology and defence, as well as India's "soft power" through yoga, tourism and handicrafts.

India, Asia's third-largest economy, must "establish itself as a trusted global supply chain partner for the world", Modi said of manufacturing.

Lebanon reports 11 dead in strikes that Israel says targeted Hezbollah

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ANSAR, LEBANON, AUG 15

Lebanon said Israeli strikes on the south killed 11 people including three children on Saturday, the deadliest raids since deals in June eased hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel's military said the strikes in the early morning were in retaliation for an attack by the Iran-backed militant group on its troops in south Lebanon.

They came as Israel and Lebanon were set to hold an eighth round of US-sponsored direct negotiations early next month in Rome.

The sides agreed a framework deal at talks in Washington in June, but Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said Saturday's "violations are a clear message on the negotiations process and American efforts aiming to implement this agreement".

Hezbollah said the Israeli attacks "will be met with an appropriate response", urging Lebanese authorities to abandon "the humiliating path of direct negotiations".

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) said that Israel "escalated its attacks on the south" early Saturday, reporting an airstrike on a home in the village of Ansar and a "series of airstrikes targeting the Ali al-Taher ridge", a strategic hill overlooking the Nabatieh area.

It later reported another strike on the southern town of Deir Zahrani.

Lebanon's health ministry said seven people were killed "including three children and two women," in Ansar, where Aoun said "an entire family" had been killed.

The ministry said four other people were killed and 17 others wounded including a child and 11 women in Deir Zahrani, raising an earlier toll of two dead.

In Ansar, an AFP correspondent saw a destroyed building as rescuers combed the rubble, and a swimming pool clouded and grey from dust and debris.

Abbas Khalil, 60, said he was praying when the strike hit.

"We were shocked... There's no justification for this," he told AFP.

The Israeli army said it struck "Hezbollah terror infrastructure in the areas of Nabatieh and Ansar" in response to "action" by Hezbollah against Israeli soldiers in the Ali al-Taher ridge area.

It later added that Hezbollah had "attacked our forces inside the agreed security zone", a strip of territory around 10 kilometres deep inside Lebanon where Israeli forces are operating, decrying "a serious violation of the agreement".

Search for survivors follows M7.7 Indonesia earthquake



A young patient is treated next to a temporary medical tent set up due to fears of aftershocks in Maumere on Flores Island on Saturday, following a 7.7-magnitude earthquake. Rescuers combed through debris for survivors after a powerful earthquake struck off Indonesia's Flores island on August 15, killing at least 38 people, according to a disaster official.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MAUMERE, INDONESIA, AUG 15

Rescuers combed through debris for survivors on Saturday after a powerful earthquake struck off Indonesia's eastern Flores island, killing at least 47 people, according to disaster officials.

The national disaster management agency (BNPB) raised the death toll from 40 late Saturday, and rescue official Fathur Rahman said 50 people were injured in the 7.7-magnitude quake.

Suharyanto, who leads the BNPB, said earlier that people were trapped in several buildings.

"These will be the initial targets of the disaster response teams," said Suharyanto, who like many Indonesians uses one name.

Nearly 160 houses, dozens of educational and health facilities and other public buildings were damaged when the earthquake struck the popular tourist island in Indonesia's east, the BNPB reported.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said preparations were underway to bring aid to some 2,000 people in temporary shelters.

The government sent 50,000 aid packages weighing a total of 275 tonnes to the area, and European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen

offered help from the bloc's Copernicus Earth observation satellites.

"Europe stands ready to deploy Copernicus, our eyes in the sky, to support search and rescue efforts. Indonesia, we stand with you," she wrote on X.

'Like we were on a trampoline'

"I have never felt an earthquake this big," Yulian Juita Ekalia, who lives in Ruteng city more than 100 kilometres west of the epicentre, told AFP by telephone hours after the tremor.

"It felt like we were on a trampoline; it was really scary," said the 37-year-old university lecturer, who was jolted awake at around 5:30 am (2130 GMT on Friday).

"As I rushed to get outside, everything in the house fell down: the television, my son's trophies, the dish racks, suitcases on top of the wardrobes. When I got outside, my son and neighbours were already there, screaming in fear."

Rescue official Fathur told AFP the focus was on locating victims who may be buried under rubble, but rescue efforts have been complicated by landslides cutting off roads.

Many Flores inhabitants were left without electricity and telecommunications.

Residents in Nagekeo, an area close to the epicentre, raced for higher ground as the sea retreated early

Saturday—a possible sign of an approaching tsunami, AFP journalists witnessed.

While a tsunami warning was lifted, authorities urged people not to return to damaged buildings for fear that aftershocks may bring them down. Hundreds remained outside hours later as dozens of aftershocks shook the island, the strongest measured at a magnitude of 6.1.

Waves of up to 1.6 metres were reported in some coastal regions of Flores, according to Indonesia's BMKG geological agency.

Fleeing in panic

Yulian said she had dragged her stove outside and was cooking there, fearing further tremors.

She said she saw patients being treated under emergency tents outside a nearby hospital. Nagekeo resident Yohanes Babo, 56, said he was at a market when the earth started shaking in the early morning hours.

"The shaking was strong. Thankfully, we were already outside the house," he told AFP.

"People were panicking, running here and there. We're evacuating for the time being... and trying to get to the hills," he said.

The epicentre of the shallow quake was located just off the north coast of the island, US and Indonesian authorities said.

Japanese prime minister skips controversial shrine visit on 81st anniversary of country's World War II surrender

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO, AUG 15

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi avoided Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine, apparently to prioritise diplomatic relations with China and South Korea, as Japan marked on Saturday the 81st anniversary of its surrender in World War II.

However, she did not mention her country's wartime past in Asia or show remorse over it in her address.

The Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates over 2.4 million people who died in wars, became controversial after including 14 convicted World War II Japanese war criminals.

China and South Korea say visits by Japanese officials to the shrine show a lack of remorse over Japan's wartime atrocities.

Takaichi mourned the victims of major devastation in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa, as well as those who perished in overseas battlefronts, and thanked them for their sacrifice as the "foundation of Japan's peace and prosperity today".

"Japan, since the end of the war, has consistently contributed to global peace and prosperity. We will never let the tragedy of the war be repeated," she said in her address at Budokan Hall, a walking distance from Yasukuni.

Takaichi said Japan can play a key role in addressing global challenges as "a dependable nation" in the region.

China and South Korea protest shrine visits

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, three other Cabinet ministers and three executives from Takaichi's governing party showed up at the shrine earlier Saturday. A non-partisan group of dozens of lawmakers also prayed there.

China's Foreign Ministry protested to Japan over the visits, saying that Japanese politicians' true intentions were to "change the verdict on the war criminals, cover up Japan's war crimes, distort the historical facts and pave the way for accelerating militarization." It urged Japan to do "serious soul searching" on history and make a

clean break with militarism.

Tensions between Japan and China escalated in November when Takaichi said a Chinese attack on Taiwan could constitute "a survival-threatening situation" for Japan requiring the use of force. The comments enraged Beijing.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, in his speech Saturday marking the 81st anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, said that his administration used "pragmatic diplomacy centered on national interests" and will broaden cooperation in shared interests to resolve common challenges.

"Korea-Japan cooperation is now more important than ever."

"The new bilateral relationship we are building must warmly illuminate those who are still suffering from pain in the shadows of history," he said.

Attention this week was on whether Takaichi, who has repeatedly said she would pray at the shrine on August 15 despite the controversy, would keep her pledge and show up at Yasukuni.

Defence minister prays at Yasukuni

Koizumi has regularly visited the controversial shrine on August 15 and other occasions. But as a defence minister pushing to increase Japan's military capability and weapons sales under Takaichi's hawkish government, his visit is seen as more contentious. The previous shrine visit by a defence minister was in 2024 by Minoru Kihara, the current chief secretary and top government spokesperson for Takaichi's government.

Japan's Defence Ministry prohibits group visits by service members of the Self-Defence Forces, on grounds of constitutional separation of religion and state. Koizumi said in October it is natural for anyone in any country to pay respect to those who sacrificed their lives for their nation.

Hours after his Yasukuni visit, Koizumi said on X he paid respects to the war dead for their sacrifice for the country. "I renewed my war-renouncing resolve and will continue to fulfill Japan's postwar responsibility as a peace-loving nation."

He is the son of popular former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi,

whose 2006 Yasukuni visit as a serving leader outraged China.

Party executives make up for Takaichi's absence from the shrine

The three executives from Takaichi's governing Liberal Democratic Party prayed together on Saturday at the shrine and brought offerings in a rare joint visit on the prime minister's behalf, seen as a move to make up for Takaichi's absence and appeal to her right-wing supporters.

Party secretary-general Shunichi Suzuki told reporters he prayed while keeping in mind the prime minister's thoughts for "the spirits of the war dead" and that he brought Takaichi's cash offerings in her

capacity as party leader.

For Takaichi, appealing to right-wing voters is key at a time when her support is seen as falling rapidly, presumably over delayed economic measures to address rising prices, as well as scandals including alleged negative election-campaign videos and unpopular revisions to Japan's imperial family succession rules.

Takaichi has not visited the shrine since taking office but has sent offerings twice for the shrine's biannual festivals. On Saturday she prayed remotely toward Yasukuni from the Budokan parking lot before the ceremony, NHK television reported.

Japanese emperors have shunned the shrine



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi (right) walks past Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako, after delivering a speech during the memorial service marking the 81st anniversary of Japan's surrender in the World War II, at the Nippon Budokan hall on Saturday in Tokyo.

Japanese emperors have shunned Yasukuni since its 1978 inclusion of the war criminals as "martyrs," and have expressed regrets over Japan's wartime past, though in a nuanced way.

Emperor Naruhito, in his address on Saturday at the ceremony, said he hopes the ravages of war will never be repeated while "reflecting on our past and bearing in mind the feelings of deep remorse."

"It is my sincere hope that we shall continue to pass down the memories of the sufferings endured during and after the war."

Pushback against remembering Japan's wartime history

Takaichi has resisted acknowledging Japan's wartime aggression and atrocities,

ities, and denied that coercion was used against Korean laborers and women held as sex slaves for Japanese troops. She was previously part of a campaign to remove references to wartime sexual slavery, known as "comfort women," from school textbooks.

She has said she is from a postwar generation that bears no responsibility for Japan's past actions and has no intention of apologizing.

The country has faced revisionist pushbacks since the 2010s under nationalistic former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who pushed to correct a "self-deprecating view" of Japan's wartime history and regain national pride. Takaichi considers Abe a mentor.

Since 2013, Japanese prime ministers have stopped apologising to Asian victims for wartime atrocities, under a precedent set by Abe.

Last year, however, former Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba expressed "remorse" over the war and called it a mistake, though he fell short of mentioning Japan's aggression across Asia or apologising.

People at Yasukuni remember relatives lost in the war

At Yasukuni, some of those queuing up early Saturday were descendants of the war-dead, and for them Yasukuni is a place to remember their relatives.

As a child, Mariko Shinoda, 56, whose grandfather died as a Kamikaze pilot, came to Yasukuni with her mother every year on August 15. Kamikaze pilots departed on their one-way missions saying, "Let's meet at Yasukuni," her mother told her.

"To me, Yasukuni is where every spirit gathers, and that's where you get to see them on August 15," Shinoda said.

Masashi Ichimura, 48, whose grandfather went to war, often heard from his father about harsh wartime living conditions, including starvation.

"There is nothing good about the war, win or lose," he said. "But those who died in the war only fought for our country, and I just want to thank them for the sacrifice."

How Youssef Wehbe is shaping Nepal’s MMA elite at Soma

The Bali-based Soma Fight Club's head MMA coach speaks on sharpening Rabindra Dhant and Yuki Angdembe, the fierce loyalty of Nepali fans and Gorkhali mentality, and why the country must invest in its combat promise.

○ NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 15

It is not easy to get to train at Soma Fight Club in Bali, Indonesia. Youssef Wehbe, head MMA coach at the facility, is very picky about the fighters he lets in and be part of the family. It is specifically the reason why Rabindra Dhant and Yuki Angdembe, two of Nepal’s elite MMA fighters, often mention Soma and its key role in shaping them before and after their fights.

When Angdembe and Dhant first entered Soma, they were treated with the respect that a fight gym abides by: show them hell on the first day.

“Yuki had sought a different gym in Bali,” Wehbe told the Post over a phone call recently. “He [Yuki] had come to Soma and said, ‘I wanna try this place’. Soma had just opened then. I said to myself, ‘If you wanna try me, MF, I am gonna smash you. I whipped his ass.”

Soma is about to complete its fifth year. And it has already become one of the go-to places for MMA training for fighters across the world. The facility has also earned a special place among Nepali combat sports fans.

“Now, I can’t get rid of him [Yuki],” said Wehbe, adding that the scenario was similar when Dhant first came to Soma with his coach Diwiz Piya a couple of years ago.

Wehbe hails from Lebanon. He went by the moniker ‘The Silverback’ during his fighting days. It was when he was training at Bali MMA, a premier martial arts and fitness academy in Indonesia, that he met Gianni Subba and Mike Ikilei—Wehbe’s teammate and striking coach, respectively. Subba and Mike then later opened Soma and called in Wehbe.

Subba was born to a Nepali father and a Malaysian mother. He was raised in Hawaii and Malaysia, and went on to become Malaysia’s foremost flyweight martial artist. It was Subba who first mentioned Dhant to Wehbe. “Rabi was then fighting at ONE when Gianni told me about him,” Wehbe recalls. “Yuki also proudly mentioned Rabi.”

For Wehbe and Mike, when Dhant first reached Soma—with his coach Piya—he was an average fighter.

“Mike used to say he [Rabindra] is good. Okay. Average,” Wehbe said.

However, the more he learnt about Dhant and the more Dhant proved himself in the ring and training, the crazier Wehbe got.

“I measure individuals with others,” said Wehbe. “There is a guy—I won’t say the name—who beat Rabi to a pulp in the initial days. Now, Rabi goes toe to toe with him.”

Dhant’s story, as it is well known, is a motivating one—from a construction labourer to Nepal’s top MMA

fighter. “It is a crazy story,” an elated Wehbe told the Post.

“Rabi was supposed to be a construction worker in Qatar. Now, see where his life choices took him. I always say it to Rabi: You are not supposed to be here. Take advantage.”

Since his pro MMA debut in 2019, Dhant has fought 11 bouts. And he has lost only one—which came against Pakistan’s Ismail Khan at ONE Championship on December 15, 2023.

It was especially when Dhant debuted at ONE and won his first fight—against Russia’s Torepchi Dongak on September 15, 2023—that made him popular among Nepalis. His star rose further when he defeated Indian favourite and champion Chungreng Koren and took the bantamweight title at Matrix Fight Night-17 in August last year.

“It was a big win for Rabi,” said Wehbe, who was in the ring side when Dhant defeated Koren in Uttar Pradesh, India. “Around six weeks before that fight, Dhant had torn his hamstring. He did not just recover after following specialised training plans at Soma... It was his mentality and Gorkha blood.”

Now, Dhant is on a path where no Nepali had ever wandered before—at the Road to UFC (RTU). Launched by the UFC in 2022, RTU is an annual, single-elimination tournament series that offers top rising prospects from the Asia-Pacific region a direct path to an official UFC contract.

There are three stages in Dhant’s bantamweight division at RTU Season 5—quarterfinal, semifinal and final. He has already won his first fight—against Kimbert Alintozon of the Philippines—in Macau in May.

“I was 100 percent sure that Rabi would win his fight against Kimbert,” said Wehbe. “We, including Mike, put plans for a year and more. And the way we all had prepared and trained, the win was visible from the very start.”

However, Wehbe says he cannot give a similar guarantee in Dhant’s upcoming fight at the semifinal, where Dhant is facing New Zealand’s Kasib Murdoch in Shanghai, China, on August 28.

“This will be Rabi’s greatest challenge to date,” Wehbe said. “Irrespective of the result for now, I am certain that it will be a very good fight.”

Nonetheless, Wehbe stressed that the “Soma family” is backing Dhant to the very end and working together to make sure he wins his next fight and then the final as well and earn a UFC contract.

“There are many MMA promotions in the world. Too many,” Wehbe said. “But the UFC is the pinnacle. Getting to fight at the UFC is a very big thing. And I want to see Rabi there.”



Coach Youssef Wehbe carries Rabindra Dhant and Yuki Angdembe after their wins at Road to UFC in Macau and Matrix Fight Night-18 in India, respectively.

Soma is a family

Two days ago, Wehbe posted a group photo of the available fighters in Soma. Including Wehbe, there were individuals from 13 countries—Nepal, Lebanon, Ukraine, India, New Zealand, Australia, United States, Russia, Egypt, Armenia, Algeria and Turkey.

“That’s the beauty of Soma. We live and push each other like a family,” said Wehbe. “But it is not easy to be part of this family.”

Why does Soma place so much emphasis on the notion of “living like a family”?

“Family gives you extra power,” Wehbe said. “It is why we live like a family at Soma.”

Wehbe, Mike and Subba are the three main pillars that run Soma. They all hail from three different regions, thousands of miles apart.

“But what unites us is a deep love for our families. We—myself, Mike and Gianni—are deeply family-oriented people, and everything we do is to support them,” Wehbe said. “In a sport as dangerous as MMA, it’s your family who ultimately suffers through your sacrifices and celebrates your achievements.”

How much Wehbe loves his family, especially his daughter Ayouni, can be seen on his Instagram posts and stories.

And Wehbe says he sees a similar fire in Dhant. “Rabi isn’t just fighting for himself,” Wehbe continues, “but for everyone around him and every-one standing behind him.”

Angdembe has been in Soma for a long time. Dhant and Piya have been associated with that family for around two years now.

“No matter how long you’ve spent

with Soma, once a part of the family, always a part,” said Wehbe. “Even Sisan [Baniya] is a part of Soma. He is a great guy too.” Wehbe also expects that Bali has been a home-away-from-home for Dhant in another way as well: the gods.

“Rabi often visits temples of Hanuman and Shiva as Bali has a strong Hindu religion,” Wehbe said. “It is important because in combat sports, you do need a bit of luck that comes through blessing. I also feel Rabi gets stronger after he visits these temples in Bali.”

Fond of Nepalis

Wehbe spent his quality days—when he was a fighter—in the Gulf. When he lived in Dubai and Qatar, Wehbe often came across Nepalis.

“Many Nepalis do not have ideal jobs in Dubai and Qatar. But one needs to do it for money,” Wehbe said. “But Nepalis have a deep identity and great history from what I have learnt.”

Wehbe got to know Nepal closely through Subba. Then, there was Angdembe. And then Dhant and Piya. “Right now, I have Nepali hats [dhaka topi] and Nepali knives [khukuri] of different sizes,” said Wehbe, who wore a dhaka topi when he entered the ring and celebrated Dhant’s win over Koren at MFN-17.

Wehbe insists on being present for every bout his fighters take, convinced that trust in the corner is paramount. Yet cornering Dhant and Angdembe revealed an unexpected highlight—the vocal loyalty of the Nepali diaspora.

“At MFN, the support Dhant and Angdembe had from Nepali fans so far from home was astonishing. It was in India, near to Nepal, so it was believe-

ble,” Wehbe recalled. “But to see even a bigger crowd in Macau, I was damned.”

Wehbe says he was not the only one to be surprised at Dhant’s supporters in Macau.

“It was not just me. Even the UFC was shocked to see such a big crowd, and that too not for the main cards,” Wehbe remembers. “Once Rabi’s fight was over, the venue was almost empty. I also saw videos of Nepalis gathering in different places back home to watch Rabi’s fight. I have to admit it, Nepali fans are extremely supportive of their athletes. I hope to see a similar crowd in Shanghai too.”

There is one more thing Wehbe loved about Nepali supporters: the way they accept and love back people who love them.

“Zack had asked Yuki for Nepal’s flag before entering the ring at MFN-17. And when Nepali fans saw it, they accepted Zack as their own in no time,” Wehbe recalls. “At the end of the fight, after Zack won, he even screamed ‘Jay Nepal’. The next thing, Zack got a nickname from Nepali fans. He is now Zack “Bahadur” Bennet.”

Bennet hails from New Zealand and was fighting Afghanistan’s Abdul Fazeel before the Dhant vs Koren main event at MFN-17. Bennet won by split decision. He now holds a professional record of 6-0.

“The whole of Soma is in love with Nepali culture. Everyone supports and loves Rabi, Diwiz and Yuki,” Wehbe told the Post. “And this trio love and support them back whole-heartedly.”

“Nepal, invest in MMA”

Wehbe has understood how much Nepalis love this combat sport. And he wants to see Nepal reach great heights in MMA.

“Firstly, the fighters your country has. Rabi and Yuki are already at a high level; not the highest though. There are many more youngsters coming up, such as Rahul [Hamal Thakuri] and Kunjan [Kakshapati], among others,” says Wehbe. “But they need more and better facilities and resources to challenge the world.”

So, what does Wehbe suggest for Nepal?

“Just give some money to Diwiz, and he will take Nepali MMA to the next level,” Wehbe said on a serious note. “You also need a federation for MMA and get affiliated with the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF). And that should be led by Diwiz.”

There is a specific reason why Wehbe has so much trust in Piya.

“Diwiz is a very good guy. It is not easy to let your fighter be coached by someone else. Diwiz brought Rabi to

Soma because he wanted Rabi to get better. These two—Diwiz and Rabi—complete each other. There is no Diwiz without Rabi, and no Rabi without Diwiz.”

He also has high praise for Angdembe.

“Yuki started MMA far sooner than Rabi. There are not many fighters who would want others to get ahead of them. But it was Yuki who told me about Rabi and asked to have him in,” Wehbe said. “Even now, Yuki supports Rabi every time, in every way possible. He does not care if Rabi is getting ahead of them. But I am sure Yuki will also soon get a chance at RTU because he is a good fighter who gives his all.”

Wehbe also has a huge respect for Nepal’s history.

“You all come from a country that was never colonised,” Wehbe said. “There are a handful of countries like Nepal. And the Gorkhali mentality, wow. You must channel this mentality into MMA.”



Wehbe also wants Nepalis to take a lesson from Dhant’s journey.

“I do not want to say that every Nepali should take up MMA,” Wehbe added. “What Nepalis and many others can learn from Rabi is that you just need to chase your dreams and take risks in anything you do.”

After over half an hour of phone conversation and a final question of what he wants from Dhant, Angdembe and overall Nepali MMA, Wehbe responded, “To see these fighters and Nepali MMA improve, improve, improve and improve.”

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Embrace a positive outlook to boost confidence and clarity, dearest Aries. Increased visibility can also lead to romantic developments. Important alliances can be made. Expand your reach by connecting with people.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Consider how you and family can help further one another, dearest Taurus. Hold discussions at the table to explore the mutual and individual dreams of those you love most, brainstorming ways to support each other.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Embark upon a learning journey, dear Gemini. This celestial union brings lucky developments down when curiosity is nurtured and questions are asked. Now is also a good time to spread information that can further your goals.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Be generous with any resources you can spare while Mercury and Jupiter unite, dear Cancer. News of your kindness will spread, and those in a position to lift you may feel moved to do so. You'll thrive in spaces that prioritise compassion.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
You will make an impression wherever you go with little to no effort, dearest Leo. However, putting in the work to look and feel your best will take these sentiments to the next level.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
You will benefit from some alone time, dearest Virgo. Take space to sort through your thoughts and dream big. A spike in psychic sensitivities can help you access divine guidance without even knowing it, so remember to trust your instincts.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Promote inclusivity and give the people around you a chance to shine, dearest Libra. Luckily, you won't have to fight very hard to command the spotlight. Keep good company by your side.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Ideas expand quickly if you are resilient enough to follow through on them, dear Scorpio. Push grand visions to the surface with steadfast effort, and success will find you. Pull back and watch your efforts evolve from the sidelines.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
You're in a position of great potential, dear archer. Connect deeply with your goals and spirituality, allowing them to intertwine and strengthen one another. Be open to divine direction, especially if you sense a higher purpose calling out to you.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
As you see opportunities to level up, be mindful to pursue them with fairness and grace. Though you may have the upper hand, taking advantage of others will come back to haunt you later. Watch how loved ones respond to your success.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
You'll feel starry-eyed and giddy when in the company of that special someone, dear Aquarius. Release your cares and lean into romantic moments. Self-care will also prove extra effective at clearing away negativity.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
You'll have plenty to do, dear Pisces, finding satisfaction with each task completed. The efforts you put forth bring you closer to major milestones and your best life. Focus on wellness as you expand in multiple directions. ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Bus. abbr.
 - Farm structure
 - Pole on a ship
 - Fever
 - Ralph — Emerson
 - Butter substitute
 - Means of restraint
 - Snake
 - Campus VIP
 - Guard at an entrance
 - Primps
 - The best (Hyph.)
 - Billiards game
 - Philadelphia players
 - Turbulent
 - Tea variety
 - Mission
 - Depot (Abbr.)
 - Actress — Moriarty
 - Malediction
 - Makes lace
 - Command for a pooch
 - Polish
 - Money earned
 - Tutor
 - Not as distant
 - Paddy plant
 - Journey
 - Grow smaller
- DOWN**
- Autos
 - Gothic arch
 - Destroy
 - Five-sided shape
 - Bounder
 - Ancient
 - Lofty poem
 - Dolphin relative
 - Early Ford (2 wds.)
 - Toward shelter
 - Actor — Connery
 - Lots and lots
 - Singer — Newton
 - Function
 - Cheer
 - Title for attorneys
 - Gift

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

T	O	P		B	A	N	A	L		P	R	A	M
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7-10-26

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- Strange
- Japanese dog breed
- orange
- Say
- Talk back to
- Nuisance
- Samovar
- Board game
- Waterproof material for roofs
- Leg part
- Howl

- Potato chips, in Britain
- Rye fungus
- Nova
- Loathe
- Crucifix
- Sub- — appliances
- Lab burner
- Act
- Caviar
- The basics
- Child

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64						65					66		

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

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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					6								

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

Your skin needs a Nepal-specific routine

From Kathmandu's pollution to the Tarai's humidity and the mountains' harsh UV exposure, dermatologist Shreya Bastakoti explains how to care for your skin according to where you live.

RIVASH RIJAL

KATHMANDU

There is much noise alongside some genuine information on the internet about how to take care of one's skin. Information on the internet comes from people all over the world and may often not be applicable to Nepal. Given its climate, altitude, and specific problems such as urban pollution, people's needs will differ and require tailored solutions.



SKIN CARE

Dr Shreya Bastakoti is a consultant dermatologist and cosmetic surgeon at Lavana Skin and Hair Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal. She obtained her MD in dermatology from Kathmandu University and received aesthetic training in Bangkok and Mumbai.

Bastakoti, who provides aesthetic services to patients with diverse dermatological concerns, discusses common skincare problems in Nepal and how people can adapt their routines to the country's varied climate, altitude, and seasons.

What are the issues that people living specifically in Nepal face in terms of skincare?

Skin concerns in Nepal vary significantly depending on geography, altitude, climate, and lifestyle.

In the mountainous regions, low temperatures, dry air, strong winds, and high UV exposure can lead to dry and sensitive skin, chapped lips, sunburn, pigmentation, premature ageing, and, in severe conditions, frostbite.

In urban areas such as Kathmandu, air pollution is an important concern. Prolonged exposure to pollutants can disrupt the skin barrier and contribute to dryness, irritation, acne, pigmentation, and premature skin ageing.

In the Tarai and warmer, humid regions, heat, sweating, and friction create favourable conditions for fungal infections, intertrigo, folliculitis, acne, and heat rashes.



tions, intertrigo, folliculitis, acne, and heat rashes.

How does the monsoon season affect these problems compared to the dry season?

The monsoon season, with its high humidity and increased environmental moisture, can significantly influence several skin conditions. The warm, humid climate creates an ideal environment for fungal growth, leading to an increase in fungal infections, pityriasis versicolor, and intertrigo.

Increased sweating and occlusion may also contribute to acne and folliculitis flare-ups. Additionally, people may experience more allergic reactions, including those triggered by pollen, insects, and environmental allergens.

In contrast, the dry season generally has lower humidity, resulting in fewer fungal and moisture-related skin problems, although dryness, irritation, and

skin-barrier disruption may become more prominent. Overall, skincare needs to be adapted according to the seasonal climate.

What is the importance of sunscreen in the high altitudes and plains in Nepal?

Sunscreen is an essential part of skincare throughout Nepal, particularly because of the country's significant variation in altitude and consistently high levels of ultraviolet (UV) exposure.

At high altitudes, UV radiation is stronger because the atmosphere provides less filtration, and exposure is further intensified by reflection from snow and other surfaces. This increases the risk of sunburn, pigmentation, premature skin ageing, and cumulative UV-induced skin damage. Therefore, regular use of a broad-spectrum, high-SPF sunscreen is particularly important for people living at or travelling to higher elevations.

In the plains and lower-altitude regions, although UV intensity may differ,



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prolonged exposure to strong sunlight remains an important concern. Sunscreen helps prevent tanning, pigmentation, photoaging, and long-term UV-related skin damage.

How can people take good care of their skin in these circumstances?

I always believe that good skincare is



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SHREYA BASTAKOTI
Dermatologist Shreya Bastakoti

about keeping it simple and being consistent, rather than using many products. You do not necessarily need an elaborate 10-step routine to maintain healthy skin. The basics—a gentle face wash, a moisturiser suited to your skin type, and a broad-spectrum sunscreen—are often enough for most people.

The routine should also be adapted to the environment. In cold, dry or high-altitude areas, a richer moisturiser and regular lip balm can help protect the skin barrier. In hot and humid regions, lighter, non-comedogenic products may be more comfortable and help reduce excess oil and sweating. Sunscreen should be used daily, especially when there is significant sun exposure, and reapplied when outdoors for prolonged periods.

Most importantly, avoid constantly changing products or following every skincare trend. Healthy skin comes from the right products, used regularly and appropriately for your individual skin needs.

FICTION PARK

So, you want to be a leader?

When everyone around you thinks you can save the country, it becomes difficult not to believe them.

SUGAM GAUTAM

Whenever the Chasmey Poet posted his creations on Facebook, speculation brewed in Deshbhumi. The general public would applaud how the poet had stabbed the leaders with his sharp and witty words. Leaders and their loyalists would scrunch their noses in utter disgust. For a day or two, the poem overtook the political gossip in teashops and chautaris.

"He has always been vocal when it comes to pointing out the ills."

"He is born to write."

"If he corrects his ways and writes in a milder tone, the state will recognise his talent. Might even get the title of 'Thulo Kabi' someday."

Among these commentators, some frustrated men would astound the circle with their eccentric logic.

"Imagine such a young man in politics. He knows where the problem lies. Wouldn't it be amazing to have him as our PM?"

Soon, people around would take their time to imagine Chasmey Poet sitting in the PM's chair; sober, restless, and dedicated to serving Deshbhumi's citizenry.

On the top floor of his house, in his cramped room, Chasmey Poet sat on the bed and readied himself for another striking poem. From the window of his room, Kathland—the capital of Deshbhumi—looked hazy; its hustle and bustle getting to the poet, who quietly chronicled it and its operators.

As he got up from the bed to look for an ashtray, he checked himself in the mirror and, smiling, took off his dark shades. Had he slept with his shades on? Over the years, the dark glasses had become his signature style, and without even realising it, he wore them everywhere.

He liked that young people in Kathland had started buying shades to imitate his style. What was once a trick to shield his bloodshot eyes, he recalled, had become an iconic style among Deshbhumi's youth.

Now, as he gained popularity, he was less worried about his parents finding out about his smoking habit. What did it matter as long as he could compose poems that rattled the powerful chairs in Deshbhumi? The more the Sarkar missed the mark, the more the Chasmey Poet gained—fame, name, and money. It was as if all the Chasmey Poet did was wait for the Sarkar to falter.

After snuffing out the cigarette, he sat at his desk, where papers were strewn about. A minute or two passed in fruitless imagination. In the last few days, he hadn't paid much attention to political matters. After posting on his Facebook wall a few days ago, he hadn't opened the apps, not even once.

Now, as he struggled with words, he realised that he should stop binge-watching web series and focus more on Facebook—

where political updates were frequent, and leaders made important announcements. And what about his all-knowing friends? Why hadn't they come to his house or invited him over for a quick tea chat? He should plan a meeting at Chiya Ghar, where his friends often congregated, with politics always at the center of attention.

As he impatiently waited for the evening, he smoked more and scrolled through his old posts—blatant accusations of the Sarkar's wrongdoings. His latest post—a sharp poem accusing the Sarkar of turning a deaf ear to the farmers' plight—had garnered thousands of likes, with some of his die-hard fans even commenting, "Gajendra aau, desh bachau."

Accustomed to hearing "Chasmey Poet," he felt like a different person when people called him Gajendra. The Sarkar—

"Have you gone through the comments on your last post?" Mr Gaudel asked and looked at Gajendra, who was already lighting a cigarette.

"Yeah, yeah, I did this morning. All that useless stuff about how I should lead Deshbhumi," he coughed, unable to contain his laughter.

"People are so frustrated, I can see that," Kunwar—the owner of a low-key meme

He sat at his desk, where papers were strewn about. A minute or two passed in fruitless imagination.



SHUTTERSTOCK

as ruthless as it could get—had repeatedly delayed the payment to sugarcane farmers from the southern plains. As if reciting the old poem would inspire a new one, the poet read out the last lines:

"They have given loads of sugar, And in exchange, The Sarkar is robbing them of the salt."

In the evening, at Chiya Ghar, the poet and his friends occupied a table in a far corner, where no one could overhear them. If someone caught a whiff of their conversation, it could be bad for their reputation, especially the poet's.

Not only the poet but his friends—both of them—were also leveraging the internet to a great extent. In the country full of bumpkins, earning dollars through the internet was nothing short of pure brilliance.

page—said in a low voice.

"They keep making mistakes. Look at the count on my Facebook wall. And look at their pleas. People think I should replace them," said the poet and snickered like it was the best joke of the evening.

"But I think we are underestimating ourselves, guys. I'm not talking about myself. I am also unsure about Gaudel, but Gajendra has a real chance in politics." Kunwar was serious, his eyes darting between his friends.

Gajendra could dismiss this. It was not the first time Kunwar was trying to lure his poet friend into politics. What did he actually see in Gajendra? What did he know besides composing poems?

"Why don't you join a party and start on your own, Kunwar?" the poet asked his friend, who, cupping his chin, said,

"Because I'm not as popular as you are."

"Hello, waiter? Get us three bottles of beer with three glasses," Gaudel ordered, finding it important to keep the momentum going. There was no objection from the other end.

"If you look at the pattern in politics, it's actually the opposite in our case. First the post, then popularity," Kunwar looked at Gaudel and asked, "Isn't it right?"

Gaudel nodded, adding, "The main thing is popularity, and people already like how you go against the Sarkar every time."

"And what about us? You think we can't influence people? People wait for my page's posts to make sense of what's happening every day," Gaudel said, gauging the poet, who already looked submissive and deep in thought.

"Make me your secretary and watch how

had no clue.

"The minister was even suggesting putting some sort of restriction on social media. Totally absurd," Gaudel remarked.

Within a second, Kunwar exploded. "The youths on social media have announced that they are staging nationwide protests against the Sarkar. You know what? This is the right time for us."

Drunk and furious, the poet thought of the minister and struggled to find the right words to start the poem. Kunwar—who was eyeing the poet all the while—was puzzled because the poet looked lost.

"Gajendra, I need your phone right now," it was Kunwar.

"What for?"

"Okay, okay, I don't need it. But write yourself."

Now, the poet understood what Kunwar was implying, and for a split second, in his drunken state, he felt like calling him by this name: "The Mastermind Kunwar."

"It's hard to think of a poem now, especially in this drunken state," Gajendra said, baffled as his friends watched him expectantly.

"Ah, see! We can't wait for your brain to click with the poem," Kunwar heaved a sigh.

"Just put up a status directly, or let me do it for you," Gaudel was equally irritated now.

The urgency perplexed the poet. These friends, he thought, knew better about the internet, and perhaps even politics.

"Here, do whatever the hell you want," Chasmey Poet pushed his phone towards Kunwar. The poet was on his seventh glass of beer.

It took only two minutes for Kunwar to think of and write the post on the poet's wall. It read:

"We are governed by goons who think our youth are useless. I fully support your protest against the Sarkar. Go and teach them a lesson."

That was it. People went berserk on Facebook, sharing the post, commenting on it, and cursing fiercely at the Sarkar. Everyone began to chant Gajendra's name as he busied himself with more drinking.

But Mastermind Kunwar knew the intensity of the status and what it could do in Deshbhumi tomorrow. At worst, he knew, the Sarkar would buckle under the pressure of the protesting youths. Others had no clue, not even Gajendra. But Kunwar knew that this was only the beginning, and his orchestration would have to grow bolder as politics evolved in Deshbhumi.

Gautam is a writer from Pokhara.

