THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXIV No. 180 | 8 pages | Rs10

Monday, August 17, 2026 | 01-05-2083

36.2° C Simara 15.0° C Jomsom

Bangladesh says PM will not visit India until Sheikh Hasina extradited

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA, AUG 16

Bangladesh said on Sunday that Prime Minister Tarique Rahman would not visit India until New Delhi extradited Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladeshi former premier who fled during a 2024 uprising.

The countries have had a strained relationship since deadly anti-government protests brought down Hasina's government and prompted her to escape to neighbouring India, where she remains.

She faces the death penalty in Bangladesh after being convicted of crimes against humanity, and Dhaka has repeatedly requested her extradition. Speaking to reporters on Sunday, foreign ministry official A.K.M. Shahidul Karim played down media speculation about a possible trip by Rahman to India next week.

"We are of the view that a propitious environment needs to be created for the visit," Karim told reporters.

"To this end, we have urged the Indian authorities to expedite their efforts to extradite Sheikh Hasina and other fugitives."

India has said Bangladesh's extradition request is "under examination".



AFP

Tarique Rahman

Rahman took office in February and has since visited Malaysia and China, departing from the tradition of Bangladeshi leaders heading to India for their first overseas trip.

India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Dinesh Trivedi, met Rahman last week, fuelling speculation over a possible breakthrough.

Officials from Bangladesh and India have been in contact in recent weeks about the possibility of a visit by Rahman, Karim said.

"But the process has been vitiated by Sheikh Hasina's open media interactions, despite her being a convict in crimes against humanity."

Hasina, a former pro-democracy leader whom critics said grew increasingly autocratic during her 15-year rule, vowed this month that she would return to Bangladesh in December even if it meant imprisonment.

Karim also said the government would pursue a "Bangladesh First" foreign policy rooted in sovereignty and non-interference while seeking mutually beneficial ties with India and other countries.



POST PHOTO: SAROJ OLI

Security personnel and local residents conduct a search and rescue operation following a landslide in Bheri Municipality-2, Jajarkot. **(Report on Pg 2)**

Nepal moves to restore private sector confidence with industrial security force

The decision comes amid repeated incidents of vandalism and property damage as the government seeks to reassure private sector and attract fresh investment.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

In September 2012, Nepal government decided to establish an Industrial Security Force to provide security to industrial firms, particularly those operating in industrial zones.

The decision was taken after a rise in kidnappings, killings, threats and extortion targeting industrialists and businessmen by armed gangs in the post-conflict period.

At the time, militant labour organisations also posed a threat to the smooth operation of factories and industrial firms.

In early 2020, the government removed the permanent presence of Armed Police Force personnel deployed under the Industrial Security Force from several industrial areas. The personnel were redirected to border areas following concerns over the spread of the coronavirus along the borders and across the country.

They were never redeployed.

Again, in September last year, the Gen Z movement caused massive damage to industrial establishments and businesses across the country, with losses estimated at more than Rs84 billion.

The rise in vandalism, looting, arson and theft has discouraged potential new investors, while existing businesses have been compelled to operate in fear.

On July 30, protesters in Golbazar, Siraha, vandalised and set fire to several shops, including AB Mall, before security forces moved in.

The new government led by Balendra Shah has now revived the Industrial Security Force concept.

Last Friday, Nepal launched the Private Investment Protection and Promotion Strategy, which envisions establishing an Industrial Security Force to protect the physical assets of industrial and business establishments.

The strategy also calls for formulating a new industrial policy to guarantee industrial and business security.

Before the launch of the strategy, Prime Minister Shah held a marathon meeting with representatives of small and large businesses and industrialists. Officials say that under the strategy, industrial corridors, industrial areas, special economic zones and industrial villages will be declared peace zones, with arrangements made to prevent any form of undesirable activity in industrial establishments.

> The strategy pledges to designate a focal person at the nearest security unit.

"The strategy has been prepared and implemented following the damage caused to private-sector businesses during last September's Gen Z movement," said Netra Prasad Subedi, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry. "The action strategies include protecting and promoting industries and businesses and attracting investment. Besides, the recent Tarai movement has also caused damage to businesses."

The ministry has requested the relevant ministries and other government agencies to implement the strategy accordingly, he said.

"There are challenges to protecting private-sector properties," Subedi added. "We have the strategy now to protect them. This is the beginning."

The private sector's morale remains low. According to a World Bank report, private investment has been weighed down by weaker investor confidence following the September 2025 unrest.

>> Continued on page 2

Deuba faction's Hindu statement draws new fault line in Nepali Congress

A last-minute five-point declaration promotes Sanatan Dharma as a national identity.

KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

"I am Hindu, I am Hindu, I am Hindu."

Former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who returned to Nepal on Thursday after spending nearly five months abroad, made an emphatic statement at the closing ceremony of a three-day national gathering organised by a faction of the Nepali Congress in Sukedhara, Kathmandu on Sunday.

He further said that his personal faith did not mean he opposed other religions or rejected Nepal's religious freedom. "And I have love and reverence for Buddha and Buddhism. The world today recognises Buddhism. Today, Buddhism is also referred to as a scientific religion and is regarded as such," the former Congress president said. "Likewise, ours is a country that respects nature-based religions. The Rai and Limbu communities follow nature-based religions, and we must respect all of them. I respect them."

The Deuba faction's decision to promote Sanatan Dharma as a national identity has opened a new ideological fault line in the Nepali Congress, while its rejection of Gagan Thapa's leadership threatens to deepen the party's organisational dispute.

The three-day gathering concluded on Sunday with a five-point declaration that commits the party to promoting the religions being practised in the country for centuries as a national identity while pledging to protect Hindu, Buddhist, Kirat and nature-based faiths and the religious freedom of all communities.

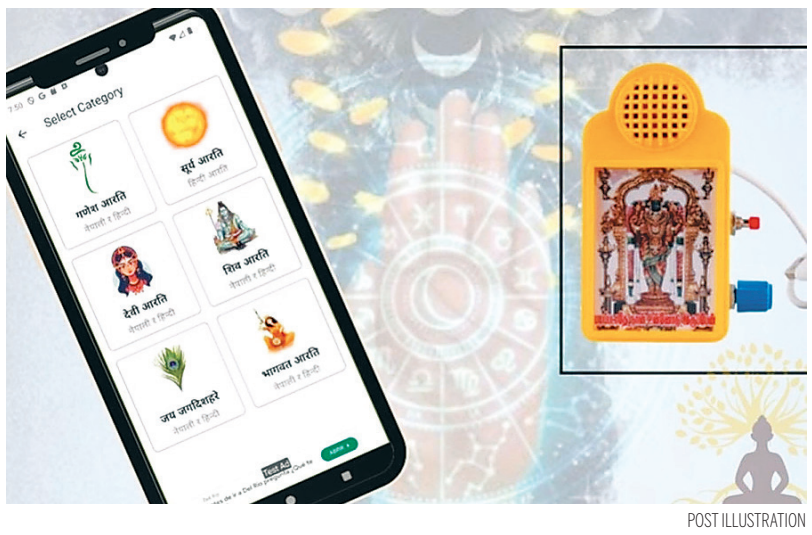
But the religious statement was added at the last minute and was absent from the 20-point conclusion prepared for the gathering, according to Congress leaders. The earlier document described Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural country and guaranteed communities the freedom to practise and preserve their faiths and cultures.

Senior leader Bimalendra Nidhi's political proposal also made no mention of promoting Sanatan religion as a national identity or supporting a Hindu state. The gathering was initially expected to endorse the 20-point conclusion. After Deuba reviewed the proposal, however, a separate five-point declaration was prepared under his direction, a Congress leader said.

>> Continued on page 3

Nepal's faith is finding a new interface

From horoscope apps and digital puja guides to robotic monks and chanting boxes, Nepali developers are testing whether technology can turn religious practices into new services.



POST ILLUSTRATION

The Brihat Karmakanda project launched by two students has evolved into a business.

SAJANA BARAL
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

For centuries, religious knowledge in Nepal has travelled through priests, scriptures and oral traditions. Increasingly, it is also travelling through smartphones.

A growing group of Nepali developers is building apps and devices that put rituals, mantras, astrology and religious texts on demand, betting that technology can make practices rooted in centuries-old traditions fit more easily into modern life.

The market is still small. But the experiments are multiplying.

Five years ago, Nabin Khatiwada and Yubaraj Dhungel, two Sanskrit students from eastern Nepal who studied in Vrindavan, India, started with an unusually simple idea: put a Hindu ritual book on a phone.

Their project, Brihat Karmakanda, has since evolved into a business. The app now offers digital religious texts and horoscope readings, has over 50,000 downloads and attracts over 37,000 monthly active users.

Its newest paid feature suggests where the business may be heading.

Nearly 500 people subscribed to its horoscope service within days of its launch. Annual membership costs Rs299, while five-year and 50-year plans cost Rs999 and Rs2,999 respectively.

"We started by digitising a book," Khatiwada said. "Then we realised there was much more we could do."

The path from Sanskrit text to software was not straightforward. Khatiwada initially struggled with the technical requirements for publishing an app, including obtaining a dollar card to pay Google Play Store fees. After the developer helping him left following the release of Android 13, he taught himself coding and back-end programming.

Today, the two-person operation is split between technology and text. Khatiwada handles programming; Dhungel prepares and types Sanskrit material.

The app initially relied on Google advertising for revenue. Paid astrology has opened another stream, and Khatiwada plans to add artificial intelligence to the platform.

>> Continued on page 2



Inside Nepal's growing faith-tech industry

>> Continued from page 1

Brihat Karmakanda is one small example of a broader shift: religious practice is beginning to acquire the logic of a technology product.

The same impulse is visible in hardware.

Pokhara-based Yarsa Labs has built a battery-powered "chanting box" that plays mantras and devotional songs for a set period. Founder NJ Subedi said the company developed the device after noticing that people often play music during morning and evening prayers.

Designed like a mirror and decorated with Hindu deities and traditional motifs, the device turns a familiar ritual accompaniment into a consumer product.

"We have not actively marketed the technology, but we make it when there is demand," Subedi said.

Technology is also entering Nepal's religious heritage sites, although in a different form.

Bikash Gurung, president of the Nepal Robotics Association, points to a robotic attraction at a Buddhist monastery in Lumbini that has been operating since around 2013. At the Buddha Gram Robotic Live Museum, robotic and animatronic figures recreate episodes from the Buddha's life, from his birth and renunciation to enlightenment and death.

> **In Nepal, religious practice is beginning to acquire the logic of a technology product.**

Gurung sees possibilities beyond museums and attractions.

"Automating some processes at monasteries, temples and cultural sites listed as heritage sites could make things easier," he said. "It would not necessarily interfere with traditional practices."

The bigger commercial opportunity, however, may lie in astrology.

Subedi considers astrology the strongest market for faith technology in Nepal, pointing to Hamro Patro's service that connects users with astrologers by phone. Other Nepali platforms, including Bihebari, use technology to match couples based on horoscopes, gotras and nadi compatibility. Nepali developers have also experimented with building AI chatbots such as Prithvi AI and Jyotish AI around astrology and religious guidance.

"There is a sizeable market for faith tech in Nepal," Subedi said.

What has held the sector back, he argues, is not necessarily demand but attitudes toward monetising religion.

"Our society is not as comfortable with making money from people's faith," he said. "So Nepal has not seen as many faith-tech apps as India."

India offers a glimpse of what that market could become.

There, astrology, spirituality and religious practice have already spawned a substantial digital economy. AstroTalk, AstroSage AI and Astrosure.ai are among the platforms competing for users seeking everything from horoscope readings to spiritual advice.

AstroTalk, launched in 2017, now has more than 70 million users and over 18,000 astrologers, reported journalist Bhuvana Kamath for The Economic Times. Kamath has reported that the platform accounts for about 80 percent of India's online astrology market.

Meanwhile, Astrosure.ai has created a chatbot named Agastya to offer horoscope analysis and mental health advice, drawing around 1.8 million monthly active users.

Other products push the idea further, using generative AI to simulate conversations with religious figures or offer AI-guided spiritual assistance, including platforms like Gita GPT, Quran GPT, and Vedas AI.

Gita GPT, developed by Vikas Sahu using GPT-3.5 technology, lets users ask questions in separate chat rooms modelled on 11 religious figures, including Krishna, Ram, Shiva, Hanuman, Buddha, and Chanakya. The service is available in 16 languages, including Nepali.

Other platforms, such as Devaseva and Sri Mandir, aim for religious services themselves, offering virtual worship (e-darshan), delivery of prasad, and virtual participation in Vedic rituals.

The appeal is particularly strong among younger users.

A survey of 500,000 users by Indian faith-tech company Astroyogi found that most users of digital spiritual services were aged 25 to 35, with Gen Zers accounting for a significant share. Some 53.8 percent of Gen Z respondents said they turned to astrology for answers about life and the world.

Their questions were not confined to traditional religious concerns. Love and relationships, careers, positive energy and "energy cleansing" were among their main interests.

Users were also willing to pay. The survey found that Indian consumers paid between IRs150 and IRs1,999 per consultation for spiritual guidance and counselling.

For Nepali developers, that points to both an opportunity and a question.

The technology is already available. The demand appears to exist. What remains uncertain is how far people will allow software, algorithms and machines to mediate practices that have traditionally depended on priests, astrologers and personal faith.

For now, Nepal's faith-tech industry is still experimenting.

But the experiments suggest that the next priest, astrologer or religious guide may not always be waiting in a temple or sitting across a desk. Sometimes, they may be inside a phone.

Landslides pile on the misery in Jajarkot settlements

The disasters highlight an escalating crisis across Jajarkot, where extreme weather is battering fragile communities still reeling from the 2023 earthquake.



POST PHOTOS: SAROJ OLI

Security personnel and local residents rescue landslide survivors. (Below) Landslides at Bheri Municipality-2 in Jajarkot.



❍ **SAROJ OLI** IN JAJARKOT, **KRISHNA PRASAD GAUTAM** & **JYOTEE KATUWAL** IN SURKHET
AUG 16

Kedar Karki, a resident from Jajarkot, one of the remotest areas in western Nepal, survived the devastating 6.4 magnitude earthquake three years ago. Following the earthquake, Karki's family of seven spent nearly two years inside a flimsy temporary shelter. A month ago, driven out by relentless monsoon rains, they ventured back into their half-ruined mud-and-stone house. When a massive landslide struck the settlement on Saturday evening, the rickety house turned into a deadly trap. Kedar, 52, sustained severe injuries in the landslide and died en route to a hospital in Nepalgunj.

The disaster highlights an escalating crisis across Jajarkot, where extreme weather is battering fragile communities still reeling from the earthquake.

"This landslide has devastated our entire village, causing huge human casualties and physical destruction," said Bhim Bahadur Karki, ward chair of Bheri Municipality-2. The landslide has killed four and left six people injured, all of whom are currently undergoing treatment at the district hospital.

Nearly 90 percent of the 300 households in Risang were already affected by the 2023 earthquake. The recent landslides have damaged the majority of surviving structures across Paldanda, Chyaumuda, Chisapani, Neta, and Jhyalkhet, according to the ward chief.

Alongside Karki, search teams recovered the bodies of Om Singh Khatri, his mother Rati Khatri, and Bhim Bahadur Karki, on Sunday morning after they went missing on Saturday night.

Local authorities face a daunting rescue effort amid widespread infrastructure destruction.

"Landslides have occurred in almost every single neighbourhood, making it impossible to move from one cluster to another," said ward chief Karki. "The area is entirely shattered, and it is impossible to assess everyone's status right now."

Displaced residents are currently taking shelter at various community buildings.

The District Disaster Management Committee, the Nepal Red Cross Society and Bheri Municipality have provided tarpaulins, tents, utensils and emergency food supplies such as beaten rice, instant noodles and biscuits for the displaced.

"We have distributed non-food items from the supplies available with the committee and by coordinating with non-governmental organisations," said Chief District Officer Khadananda Adhikari. "The municipality has arranged dry food, including instant noodles and biscuits, for the displaced families."

Local community leader Dhan Bahadur Karki said the displaced families were in a desperate situation. "None of us has been able to eat a proper meal," he said. "We neither had enough to eat nor could we sleep properly yesterday. A single tarpaulin has been distributed to each family, but the rain has continued. We have been forced to stay awake again today."

Deputy Superintendent of Police Buddhi Sagar Puri said that approximately 150 people remain trapped in various isolated locations across the ward.

Security forces, including 200 personnel from the Nepali Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police, have been deployed for search and rescue operations.

Several quake-hit settlements in Jajarkot are at high risk of landslides. According to the District Disaster Management Committee in Jajarkot, 68 earthquake-affected settlements in the district are at high danger of landslides.

"The earthquake had already cracked the surrounding terrain," said Chief District Officer Khadananda Adhikari. "The tremors weakened the land's initial structure, and continuous rains exacerbated the instability, leading to further destruction."

Adhikari stated that rescue teams evacuated 16 people from Jhyalikhet, 20 from Chisapani, 15 from Rauterata Danda, and three from Pharula to safer ground.

According to the District Disaster Management Committee, settlements severely damaged by the earthquake—including Sagachaur, Libal, and Detkule in Chhedagad; Laikham in Barekot; Chaur, Chaupani, and Maide in Bheri Municipality; Dungara, Luppakha, and Bhius in Shivalaya; and Chiuri and Pali in Nalgad—are also at high risk of landslides.

Displacements are mounting rapidly in Junichande Rural Municipality-3 as well. The authorities relocated 12 families from Syala due to the landslide threat.

Thousands of earthquake survivors were forced to construct temporary huts on high-risk slopes, riverbanks, and edge-of-cliff farmlands. Geologists had previously warned that post-earthquake landscapes suffer up to an 80 percent higher risk of landslides due to deep structural fractures in the soil.

"Earthquakes shake the rock formations and loosen the topsoil, creating wide fissures," said geologist Santosh Sharma. "Consequently, even brief rain showers or minor shocks can cause entire hillsides to give way."

The water-induced disasters wreak havoc in the quake-affected settlement each monsoon season. On July 13, 71-year-old Jasi Kumari Shahi died and three others were injured inside a temporary hut in Bheri Municipality–2. Eight people perished in Jajarkot landslides last year alongside seven individuals in neighbouring Rukum West.

For survivors, the disaster compounds years of administrative neglect and delayed rebuilding support. "Before the pain of the earthquake could even heal, these landslides have destroyed our remaining homes," said Ramesh Karki, a local teacher at Tribhuvan Basic School. "Without permanent housing, we were already living painful lives in temporary huts. The rain has not stopped, risks are rising, and displaced families are sitting here hungry."

Despite 48,517 beneficiaries being identified in Jajarkot and 34,954 temporary shelters erected, Chief District Officer Adhikari admitted that formal reconstruction work has yet to begin.

The devastating earthquake, with its epicentre in Ramidanda of Barekot Rural Municipality, killed 154 people and damaged around 76,000 houses across Jajarkot and Rukum West. Thousands of earthquake-displaced families continue to live in temporary shelters or quake damaged houses due to the delay in reconstruction and rehabilitation of the victims. The quake victims are exposed to threats from landslides and floods during monsoon while they are left shivering under flimsy huts in winter.

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Infrastructure Development
Departments of Roads
Project Directorate (ADB)
Bishalnagar, Kathmandu

INVITATION FOR BIDS

Date of Publication: 17th August, 2026

Loan and Title:	**Loan No: 3722- NEP;** SASEC Highway Improvement Project (SHIP)
Contract No. and Title:	SHIP/OCB/BLDPDADB/02; Construction of Project Directorate Building with necessary accessories (Completion of Remaining Works)
Deadline for Submission of Bids:	**16 September, 2026, 12:00 (Local Time)**

1. The Government of Nepal has received financing from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) toward the cost of SASEC Highway Improvement Project (SHIP). Part of this financing will be used for payments under the Contract named above. Bidding is open to Bidders from eligible source countries of ADB
2. The Department of Roads, Project Directorate (ADB) ("the Employer") invites sealed bids from eligible Bidders for the construction and completion of Construction of Project Directorate (ADB) with necessary accessories. ("the Works").
3. Open competitive bidding will be conducted in accordance with ADB's Single Stage Two Envelope Procedure and is open to all Bidders from eligible countries as described in the Bidding Document.
4. A pre-bid meeting will be conducted on **31 August, 2026 at 15:00 (Local Time)** at the Department of Roads, Project Directorate (ADB), Bishalnagar, Kathmandu.
5. Only eligible Bidders with the following qualifications defined in the Bidding Document may participate in this bidding:

AACT (NRs.)	Financial Resources (NRs.)	Construction Experience	Bid Security (NRs.)
329.00 million	65.00 million	Construction of Frame Structure Building with Necessary accessories with at least total floor area 40,000 Sq.ft with contract value of NRs.175 million.	4.95 million

6. To obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents, Bidders should contact:
   Attention: Project Director
   Department of Roads, Project Directorate (ADB)
   Bishalnagar, Kathmandu
   Phone No: +977-01-4537492, 4537493, 4514239, Fax No: +977-01-4537488
   Email: pdadb@dor.gov.np
7. To purchase the Bidding Document in English, eligible Bidders should write to address above requesting the bidding documents for **SHIP/OCB/BLDPDADB/02; Construction of Project Directorate Building with Necessary Accessories** and deposit nonrefundable fee of Nepalese Rupees Twenty Thousand Only (NRs. 20,000.00) in the following Revenue Account on or before **15 September, 2026, 17:00 Hours (Local Time)**

Name of Bank	Name of the office	Revenue Account No.	Office Code	Revenue Heading No.	Cost of Bidding Document
Rastriya Banijya Bank, Thamel Branch	Department of Roads, Project Directorate (ADB)	1000100200010000	337013518	14229	NRs. 20,000

8. Deliver your bid to *Department of Roads, Project Directorate (ADB), Bishalnagar, Kathmandu* on or before **16 September, 2026; 12:00 PM (Local Time)** and together with a Bid Security as described in the Bidding Document.
9. Technical Bids will be opened on **16 September, 2026, 13:00 (Local Time)** in the presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend.

Government strategy aims to improve business and industrial environment

>> Continued from page 1

The report said private investment remained almost stagnant, expanding by just 0.2 percent in the last fiscal year 2025-26.

Weak investment reflects persistent weaknesses in the overall business environment, policy uncertainty and continuing challenges in channeling available liquidity into productive investment, according to the report.

The private sector, which contributes roughly 81.55 percent of overall national output and drives more than 86 percent of employment creation, however, remains unconvinced.

"We are the first target every time," said Kamlesh Kumar Agrawal, president of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce. "The latest is the Tarai protest... We still can't be fully certain that the incident will not repeat in the future."

The Shah administration has set an ambitious target of expanding the national economy to nearly $100 billion and raising per capita income to $3,000 within five to seven years, while targeting average annual economic growth of 7 percent.

"Without taking the private sector into confidence, this is not possible," said Agrawal, adding that the strategy is welcome and incorporates suggestions made by the private sector. "If there is anything lacking, it can be reviewed."

To improve the industrial and business environment and increase investment, the government has made timely amendments to laws including the Industrial Enterprises Act, Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, Companies Act, Special Economic Zone Act, and Public-Private Partnership and Investment Act, among others.

But effective implementation of these measures remains questionable, amid declining industrial capacity utilisation and a falling contribution of industry to GDP.

Manoj Paudel, founder and chairperson of Aadhyanta Fund Management, a Kathmandu-based private equity and venture capital firm, said the private sector has been targeted by protests for several decades, but there is no single instance in which the government has protected businesses or assured them that such incidents will not recur.

"Where is the action against the wrongdoers?" he said. "There is no single record."

> **Private sector, which drives more than 86 percent of jobs creation, remains unconvinced.**

He said the introduction of the strategy was a starting point, but its implementation would determine its effectiveness in restoring the confidence of industries and businesses.

"The private sector needs the sense of security that if their business gets vandalised, the state will take strong action against it," he said.

Adopting a zero-tolerance policy against attacks, vandalism and arson targeting the physical assets and businesses of industrial and business establishments is one of the strategies outlined in the government document.

The strategy provides for classifying industrial and business establishments according to their security risks and providing security accordingly. It also calls for mobilising quick-response or rapid-response teams based on the risk of damage to industries, businesses and private property.

The strategy also provides for designating a security focal or contact person at the nearest security unit to address the security needs of industries and businesses.

It provides for waiving applicable fees, penalties and fines, as allowed under prevailing laws and the annual budget and programmes, for industries, businesses, firms and companies that have not been renewed for a long time. The waiver would apply when they update their records, renew their registration, submit required details or deregister within a specified period.

The government also plans to amend environmental regulations and other prevailing laws to allow privately owned industrial and business structures damaged during protests or other movements to be relocated to new sites by requiring only an Initial Environmental Examination.

The government says it has formulated the Private Investment Protection and Promotion Strategy to encourage the private sector to invest with greater confidence and maintain an environment of trust, with the aim of accelerating economic development, attracting investment and generating employment.

A coordination and facilitation committee comprising government and private-sector representatives will be formed to ensure effective implementation of the strategy.

Implementation will be monitored by the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies.

In Karnali, basic healthcare can mean hours of waiting

Vacant specialist posts, overstretched doctors and inadequate equipment render district hospitals unable to meet growing demand. Patients are sent elsewhere for treatment.

MAHESH KC
RUKUM WEST, AUG 16



POST PHOTO: MAHESH KC

Patients wait for treatment at Rukum West District Hospital recently.

Khim Bahadur Oli of Musikot reached Rukum West District Hospital around 9am on Wednesday to have his sick child treated. He saw a doctor nearly four hours later.

After the consultation, he was sent to the laboratory for blood and urine tests and told to return around 4pm for the results. He spent another three hours at the hospital before collecting the reports and joining the queue to see a doctor again. His turn came at 5pm.

What Oli faced is a common experience at district hospitals across Karnali Province, where chronic vacancies, particularly of specialists, have left a small number of doctors handling heavy patient loads.

Some hospitals rely almost entirely on medical officers, while others have gone years without filling specialist posts. Patients seeking even routine treatment are often forced to travel outside their districts.

Rukum West District Hospital has sanctioned posts for three ninth-level specialists and four eighth-level medical officers. Only three doctors are currently working there: a gynaecologist, a medical officer and an orthopaedic and neurology specialist hired through the hospital's own arrangements.

The situation is similar in neighbouring Salyan. The district hospital has sanctioned posts for eight specialists and five eighth-level medical officers, but currently has only one specialist and five medical officers working under scholarship contracts. Critical maternity services have been suspended for a month because the hospital has no gynaecologist.

The hospital has no medical officers in permanent posts. Its chief consultant general physician, Dr Arjun Budha, also went on a month-long leave a week ago, putting the hospital under the care of doctors with scholarship contracts, according to Hospital Development Committee chair Pramod Shrestha.

"We have repeatedly asked the provincial government to fill the posts, but there has been no response," Shrestha said. "We are the ones who have to face the complaints and criticism. The government does not solve the problem. It is unfortunate, and frankly shameful, that the district's largest hospital is in this condition."

The shortage is pushing patients from Rukum West and Salyan to seek treatment elsewhere. In emergencies, the delays can be dangerous, said Rashmi Budhathoki of Salyan.

"When a pregnant woman reaches the hospital, we are told that she needs surgery but that it cannot be done here," she said.

"Having to travel to another district in an emergency puts both the mother and child at risk. People face similar difficulties because other treatments are also unavailable here."

More than 200 patients visit the hospitals in Salyan and Rukum West each day, according to hospital data. The load is so high that doctors themselves are struggling to cope, said Dr Oshan Pun, a medical officer at the Rukum West District Hospital.

Both hospitals officially have 15 beds, but rising demand has forced them to operate up to 40.

Hospital officials say the sanctioned staffing levels do not reflect the actual workload, making it difficult to provide timely and quality care.

Specialists missing, medical officers carry the load

At Jajarkot District Hospital, five medical officers are working against sanctioned posts, but all seven specialist positions are vacant.

Information officer Krishna Khatri said hospital chief Dr Sunil Pun is officially employed as a medical officer but provides specialist care with training as an orthopaedic and neurology specialist.

"He is providing specialist care, which is better than having no specialist at all," Khatri said. "But we lack the technical staff and equipment needed for such services. Still, his presence allows us to provide at least some treatment and refer patients when necessary."

Bhupendra BK took his daughter to the Jajarkot hospital for treatment but was told to take her to Nepalgunj because there was no paediatrician.

"I came here because my child was sick, but they told me there was no child specialist and that I should take her to Nepalgunj," he said. "How am I supposed to get her there?"

Humla faces a similar problem. Its 15-bed district hospital receives more than 100 patients a day and has been forced to manage up to 30 beds.

Acting office chief Dr Bhim Budha said the hospital has nine sanctioned doctor posts. Only six are currently filled: four permanent doctors and two working under scholarship contracts.

Humla civil society leader Karna Rawal said patients still have to spend hours waiting for basic treatment and often leave without receiving the care they need.

"The government must pay attention to this and ensure citizens' right to healthcare is actually implemented," he said.

At Kalikot District Hospital, all three specialist posts have been vacant in the past year. Three of its four medical officer posts are filled, leaving medical officers to provide services in the absence of a paediatrician, gynaecologist or general physician.

Acting hospital chief Dr Ratna Bir Sunar said seriously ill patients arrive almost every day, but the hospital is often unable to treat them.

"Seriously ill patients with various health problems come almost every day," he said. "But without specialist services, we are forced to send them away disappointed. We have repeatedly informed the provincial government in writing and verbally, but the posts have yet to be filled."

Residents of Kalikot say they have to take risks and spend heavily to travel to Surkhet or Nepalgunj when treatment is unavailable locally.

Dolpa has doctors, but lacks the tools to treat patients

In Dolpa, the problem goes beyond a shortage of doctors. Inadequate equipment and technical staff, along with management problems, are also limiting the hospital's ability to provide care.

Both specialist posts at Dolpa District Hospital are vacant, although a consultant general physician is working under a scholarship contract. Two of the four sanctioned eighth-level medical officer posts are filled.

The hospital has eight doctors in total, including a dental surgeon and four medical officers hired under scholarship contracts, said medical officer Dr Ajaya Prasad.

But staffing alone is not enough, he said.

"Although this is a 15-bed hospital, the patient load has forced us to operate up to 25 beds," Prasad said. "We also lack essential medical equipment and technical staff. We have to arrange helicopter evacuations for critically ill patients, and that can take several hours. If we had even two ICU beds here, we could save many lives."

The hospital also urgently needs orthopaedic and neurology specialists and the technical staff to support them, he said, particularly because of the district's mountainous terrain.

Hospitals in other Karnali districts, including Dailekh, Mugu and Jumla, face similar shortages of skilled health workers and infrastructure.

Doctors on duty are struggling to cope

The shortage has also placed a heavy burden on the doctors who remain on duty.

At Humla District Hospital, roughly half of the doctors provide round-the-clock services seven days a week, said acting chief Dr Bhim Budha.

"With so few doctors, we are doing whatever we can to keep the service running," he said. "But it is difficult to make the service as effective as we would like."

At Rukum West District Hospital, Dr Oshan Pun is the only medical officer handling routine outpatient cases. He said the workload is exhausting. "Forget having time for food or rest, sometimes we do not even have time to drink water," he said. "From 9am to 5pm, I examine regular patients. As this is a district-level hospital, I also have to handle emergency cases outside those hours. Doing that alone is extremely difficult."

Two consultant doctors also work at the hospital but generally handle patients within their specialties.

Hospital chief Dr Jeevan Pariyar has administrative responsibilities, leaving Pun to handle much of the routine patient load.

"We are doing everything we can, but the hospital cannot keep operating like this, and it should not," Pun said.

Tek Bahadur Kusari, chair of the management committee under the Rukum West Health Service Office, said filling sanctioned posts should be the provincial government's most urgent responsibility.

"If the government cannot fill the permanent posts immediately, it should at least send doctors under scholarship contracts," he said.

Province says posts will be filled through Public Service Commission competitions

Chhanka Bista, a public health expert from Karnali, said the provincial government bears much of the responsibility for the shortage.

Doctors, particularly specialists, have long been reluctant to work in remote areas, he said. But the provincial government has also failed to enact the necessary laws, advertise vacancies and establish mechanisms to ensure doctors serve where they are needed.

"Having doctors alone does not make a health service effective," Bista said. "You also need skilled technical staff, proper medical equipment, adequate medicines, efficient management, a strong information system and good governance. Stakeholders need to take this seriously and work towards measurable results."

Asked why sanctioned posts remain vacant and whether the province lacks enough medical personnel, Shankar Rijal, head of the medical section at the Karnali provincial Ministry of Social Development, said recruitment would be carried out through the Public Service Commission.

He said the ministry had identified the required positions and submitted a proposal to the Office of the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers.

"We expect the positions to be included in the Public Service Commission's schedule and filled within this fiscal year," Rijal said. "Only then will the current shortage of doctors be resolved."

Non-resident Nepalis keen on domestic ventures, but cite red tape and safety fears

DURGA DULAL
GUANGZHOU, AUG 16

Non-resident Nepalis have expressed strong interest in investing in Nepal, but say cumbersome legal procedures, excessive bureaucracy, political instability and concerns over economic security continue to discourage capital inflows.

Delegates attending the ongoing 11th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) in Guangzhou, China, urged the government to simplify regulations and create a more predictable environment for investment.

Former NRNA president Binod Kunwar, a businessman based in South Korea, said a gap between government rhetoric and implementation remains a major obstacle to investment.

"I have equal investments in both Nepal and South Korea. My experience shows that Nepal suffers from too much talk and too little work," Kunwar said. "We must formulate time-bound plans. Execution must take place on schedule; otherwise, efforts yield no results. Moreover, adequate execution time must be allotted." Kunwar said outdated and restrictive legal requirements often make it difficult for entrepreneurs to operate efficiently, while lengthy administrative procedures add to the cost of doing business.

"Wherever regulatory hurdles exist, the government must intervene immediately to facilitate operations. Furthermore, bank interest rates in Nepal remain exorbitantly high," he said, calling for a review of monetary and regulatory policies.

Former NRNA president Upendra Mahato said Nepalis living abroad closely follow Nepal's development and many want to contribute to it. He urged the government to view that sentiment as an economic opportunity.

"Nepal will ultimately be built by Nepalis themselves. If eloquent speeches and sweet promises could build a nation, it would have been prosperous long ago," Mahato said. "We must now spur development while preserving our heritage and civilisation. That is the resolve we must all make."

Mahato said diaspora capital alone would not guarantee economic development without clear and investor-friendly laws. "You cannot attract capital by threatening or intimidating entrepreneurs; you bring in investment by creating a stable environment and offering robust legal protection," he said. He added that investment by non-resident Nepalis could also help attract wider foreign direct investment by connecting Nepal to international business networks.

NRNA senior vice president Rabin Sherchan said Nepal has significant untapped potential in several sectors and urged non-resident Nepalis to identify emerging areas and increase their investments.

South Korea-based researcher Devi Bahadur Basnet said Nepal could offer opportunities for innovation in medical and protein science. "There are abundant opportunities to pioneer new ventures in Nepal. We must actively search for them," Basnet said, adding Nepal's natural environment could offer advantages for medical research and related investment. But infrastructure constraints, particularly along Nepal's northern border, continue to hamper trade and manufacturing.

Nirmal Sharma Chaulagai, former president of NRNA China, said inadequate infrastructure at border points with China was limiting trade.

He said traders were currently able to import goods through northern border points for only about six months a year because of inadequate facilities.

"Because the government fails to construct infrastructure on time, industrialists suffer severe financial losses as consignment cargoes remain stranded at border checkpoints for extended periods," Chaulagai said.

Another former president of NRNA China, Rohit Agrawal, said investors ultimately needed assurance that their investments would generate reasonable returns. Such assurances, he said, required clear statutory protections. Pointing to China, Agrawal said its pragmatic governance and emphasis on economic security had helped attract global capital and offered lessons for Nepal.

Arun Kumar Subedi, a researcher on investment issues, criticised the bureaucratic hurdles faced by investors in Nepal. He said entrepreneurs investing billions of rupees still had to deal with routine administrative problems at the hands of junior government officials. Citing research, Subedi said around 40 percent of Nepalis living abroad wanted to invest in Nepal, but political instability remained a major deterrent. Officiating Ambassador of Nepal to China Roshan Khanal assured the delegates that the embassy was ready to help identify viable investment opportunities.

Mahat: Deuba's statement takes ownership of longstanding Hindu state agenda in Congress

>> Continued from page 1

It recognised Nepal's traditional religious and cultural heritage as part of its national identity and committed the party to promoting Sanatan religion while protecting Hindu, Buddhist, Kirat and nature-based faiths and religious freedom.

The move faced resistance within the Deuba camp. Nidhi objected to the new declaration, which was absent from his proposal, and exchanged words with Prakash Sharan Mahat on the stage, according to Congress leaders. The five-point declaration was nevertheless read out and endorsed by the gathering.

Political analysts say the move marks a departure from the party's position since the 2015 Constitution, which defines Nepal as a secular state. They see it as an attempt to establish a distinct political identity after losing control to Thapa.

"The decision to adopt the Hindu line may have been driven by Deuba's search for political and personal security," said Krishna Khanal, a political analyst. "Otherwise, religion—whether Hinduism or secularism—does not appear to have been an issue that mattered much to him as a leader."

Khanal said Deuba's decision should not necessarily be viewed as the result of a long-developed political philosophy.

"There may have been an influence of Hindu extremists in India," Khanal said. "The thinking could be that taking this line would make his politics and security easier. I do not see it coming from a long-term ideological view of Nepal. Personally, I do not think Deuba makes much distinction between secularism and Hinduism."

The issue has been present in the Congress for years. At the party's Mahasamiti meeting in February 2024, more than 1,000 members signed a petition calling for Nepal to be restored as a Hindu state. The campaign was led by lawmaker Shankar Bhandari, but Deuba, who was party president at the time, did not formally endorse the demand.

This time, the Deuba camp has gone further by formally adopting Sanatan Dharma as a national identity. The declaration says Nepal's longstanding religious and cultural traditions are part of its national identity and commits the party to preserving Hindu, Buddhist, Kirat and nature-based religions while ensuring religious freedom, tolerance and social harmony.

Congress leader Prakash Sharan Mahat described the decision as an important departure in the party's internal politics after the constitution was promulgated. He said support for a Hindu state had existed in Congress forums before, but the party leadership had not formally taken ownership of it.



POST PHOTO

Congress dissident camp leaders Shashank Koirala, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Shekhar Koirala.

"Until now, the Congress had repeatedly said that secularism was a provision of the constitution," said Mahat. "This time, we have said that Sanatan Dharma is a national identity and have adopted this as a policy through the gathering."

He said the gathering also rejected the social democratic policy advanced by Thapa after the special general convention and returned to BP Koirala's concept of democratic socialism.

"There are two important departures," said Mahat. "One is the return to democratic socialism, and the other, more important one, is the position on Hindu religion."

The decision was not without opposition inside the Deuba camp. According to Congress leaders, Nidhi tried to stop the religious provision from being inserted into the declaration because it was absent from the political proposal presented to the gathering. Another senior leader, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, also expressed dissatisfaction.

Nidhi has consistently defended republicanism, federalism and secularism as achievements of the constitution. Sitaula was coordinator of the constitution drafting committee during the constitution-making process. One Congress leader said Bhandari, who has long advocated a Hindu state and constitutional monarchy, was prevented from speaking at the opening session to avoid creating a Hindu-state atmosphere.

The organisational dispute is even more consequential. The Deuba faction has rejected the special general convention held in January and the central committee elected under Thapa. It has declared that the 15th general convention should be organised by the central committee elected through the 14th general convention and held under Deuba's leadership.

The position directly challenges the Election Commission's recognition of the Thapa-led Congress in January. The commission had ruled that the special convention was valid because the party statute allows at least 40 percent of general convention representatives to demand such a gathering. It also held that general convention representatives are the party's supreme authority.

The Supreme Court in April upheld the recognition of the Thapa-led faction, ending the immediate legitimacy dispute. But the Deuba faction filed a review petition in July, bringing the dispute back in court.

This legal battle has become intertwined with the party's preparations for its next regular general convention. Congress Vice-president Bishwa Prakash Sharma has argued that rejecting the leadership recognised by both the Election Commission and the Supreme Court risks further division in the party.

"A decision made at a programme attended by Deuba himself amounts to contempt of court," said Sharma. "The court's decision to grant permission for review did not make Deuba the party president. Going beyond what the court has said and calling him president is contemptuous."

The Deuba faction, however, argues that the Congress should not proceed with organisational activities while the leadership dispute remains sub judice in court. NP Saud, another Deuba supporter, said holding a general convention while the review petition is pending in court could affect the final outcome of the case.

"If the party moves towards the convention by ignoring the Supreme Court's order on the review, that would amount to its contempt," said Saud. "No action should be taken so as to influence the pending case related to the Congress dispute."

The Thapa camp holds the opposite view, saying that the party cannot indefinitely delay its regular convention because of the court case. Sharma said the existing schedule for the central convention should be upheld, although lower-level time tables could be adjusted by the central committee.

The dispute follows a dramatic year for the Congress. Thapa and Sharma called the special general convention after more than half of the elected representatives demanded it. The Deuba camp boycotted the gathering, but the convention elected Thapa the president and a new central committee. The Election Commission then recognised the new leadership.

The party's crisis deepened after its poor performance in the March elections. The Congress won only 38 seats, down from the 89 it had secured in the 2022 election. Thapa later announced his resignation as party president, taking responsibility for the electoral defeat, but the central committee rejected his move.

Deuba's latest pro-Hindu move gives his supporters a way to preserve their political space as the agenda has an appeal for traditional voters. To critics, it risks weakening the Congress's commitment to the constitutional order and widening the ideological gap with Thapa's reform-oriented camp.

"But anything adopted by the gathering that strengthens the organisation and serves the Congress, democracy and the nation will not be viewed negatively," said Sharma. "We will discuss how such matters can be incorporated."

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Act on monsoon risks

The government must identify where the risks lie before more disasters and deaths expose them.

Nepal's monsoon disasters are becoming a grim annual occurrence. Over the past four months, more than 80 people have died in monsoon-related disasters; nine are missing, and 196 have been injured. On Saturday, three people lost their lives in separate landslides in Jajarkot and Rolpa districts, and last week, a mudslide buried a settlement in Rolpa, leaving 10 dead and three missing. Unfortunately, as we are only halfway through the monsoon season, there is a high risk that the death toll will continue to mount. This alarming situation warrants greater seriousness from the government.

Successive governments have consistently failed to prevent the high number of deaths and destruction caused by the monsoon-related disasters. Their aversion to preventing haphazard road construction in different parts of the country has only increased the vulnerability of Nepal's precarious hill landscape. In many rural hill districts, roads are still built without proper surveys. Local authorities, to meet targets and avoid a budget freeze, often resort to asare bikas, without regard for the dangers of landslides, deaths and displacement. Once constructed, roads are left without proper maintenance and upgrades.

The absence of guidelines about where people can safely build houses in remote hilly areas has also put many lives at risk. At the same time, unregulated riverbed and hill mining has intensified the impact of monsoon-related disasters. For example, in 2024, the Roshi river flood in Kavrepalanchok district killed 78 people, partly due to illegal mining and unregulated crusher industries. Often, these activities occur because of political backing and contract manipulation, yet they operate freely.

In April, Home Minister Sudan Gurung ordered the immediate shutdown of illegal crusher plants after visiting a flood-affected area in Kavrepalanchok district. The Balendra Shah-led government also decided to manage the resources needed to prevent and respond to monsoon-related disasters. Following monsoon disasters, hundreds of rescuers have also been deployed in the affected areas. These steps are welcome but far from enough. Nepal cannot stop the monsoon, nor can it prevent every landslide and flood. But it can mitigate the human costs of predictable disasters.

Shifting the focus from how quickly rescuers reach disaster-affected areas to whether people receive early warnings and whether they trust and act on them is necessary. Equally vital is holding people accountable for haphazard road construction and illegal mining. The public, too, must follow disaster-related early warnings and avoid building homes in risky zones. In Rolpa alone, over 100 households need immediate relocation. Local governments must immediately transfer such vulnerable settlements to safe places and coordinate with the provincial and federal government if necessary. Urgent action is also needed in 134 settlements across all nine local units of Bajura district. In Jajarkot, 200 people who were at risk have been relocated, which is a much-needed step.

The government aimed for zero deaths in monsoon-related disasters this year. Instead, authorities have recorded 85 deaths so far. These deaths must only push the government to acknowledge the fact that it fell short in adequately focusing on prevention before disasters struck. Rather than treating monsoon-related destruction and deaths as an annual ritual like past governments did, it should treat them as a year-round governance challenge and prioritise prevention, early action and preparedness. The government must identify where the risks lie before more disasters and deaths expose them.

The growers must lead change

As long as the state undermines farmers' plight, we cannot claim to act in the true interests of citizens.

STARTING POINT

MADHUKAR UPADHYA





POST FILE PHOTO

Two Nepali farmers from the Sarlahi district were released on bail from an Indian jail on August 7 after spending 38 days in custody for allegedly 'smuggling' fertiliser from India. They had crossed the border to buy fertiliser for their paddy fields: a routine practice in border areas where residents regularly purchase essential goods, including agricultural inputs, from across the frontier whenever domestic supplies run short.

Driven by desperation to secure enough fertiliser for their annual staple crop, their experience reveals the plight of thousands of Nepali farmers who, ahead of every planting season in May–June, anxiously track two things: the skies, hoping for timely and adequate rain, and government depots, waiting for fertiliser. For far too long, uncertainty on both fronts has disappointed them. Inadequate rainfall and unreliable fertiliser supplies remain two of the most critical and overlooked constraints in Nepal's agriculture sector, despite successive governments' plans and policies claiming to prioritise agriculture in public spending.

Nuances often overlooked

As debates over Nepal's declining food production continue in academic circles and policy corridors, the practical nuances that keep the agricultural system functioning are often overlooked. The case of these two farmers has brought one of the most critical of these nuances into sharp focus: the heavy reliance on cross-border sources of agricultural inputs. Unlike in previous years, when small quantities of fertiliser for personal use were generally permitted, Indian authorities have now adopted a stricter approach. This tighter enforcement may not be coincidental; it follows Nepal's own stricter customs measures, which impose duties on merchandise valued above Rs500 (previously Rs100) entering from India, which has impacted Indian border markets dependent on Nepali customers. These developments have introduced a degree of strain into bilateral relations, affecting communities on both sides of the border.

When domestic fertiliser supplies run short, farmers in the Tarai region are often constrained to buy from markets across the border. That desperate measure proved costly for these two men, who not only spent more than five weeks in jail but also faced sharply reduced harvests this year for lack of fertiliser. Their ordeal highlights deeper weaknesses in Nepali agriculture: the persistent uncertainty of fertiliser availability just before the main planting season, a problem successive governments did not address effectively; the desperation that pushes farmers to seek inputs wherever they can; and the way shifting relations with neighbouring countries shape the daily lives, livelihoods and local economies of communities that depend on cross-border trade.

Loss of food production, for whatever reason, be it lack of inputs, disasters or diseases and pests, is not merely a farmers' issue; it is a national concern of immense gravity affecting us all. Any problem farmers face anywhere in the country signals a shortcoming in our agricultural pursuit and must be addressed accordingly. For instance, dry spells in the middle of the monsoon, once rare exceptions limited to a few areas, have become routine. In 2022, farmers in western Nepal were forced to abandon their newly planted crops and move across the border to earn a living after a prolonged dry spell. In 2026, farmers in Salyan and Banke districts couldn't plant paddy due to inadequate rain. Likewise, delayed monsoon rains in October damaged ready-to-harvest paddy across large swaths in both 2021 and 2025.

These and other similar episodes have long sent clear distress signals calling for meaningful, ground-level support. Yet, we have consistently failed to interpret them correctly or respond with the required urgency. Consequently, agriculture has gradually lost its appeal, driving many farmers to abandon farming in favour of the labour market.

Rising food deficit

The state's prolonged failure to answer these calls is starkly reflected in Nepal's relentlessly rising food import bill, which has doubled over the past eight years. In the last fiscal year alone, the country imported food worth Rs434.26 billion, making food its second-largest external dependency after petroleum products. The issue is not so much the volume of imports itself, because every country imports food at some scale. The difference lies in the nature of that dependence.

Many of the world's largest food-importing nations are also among the wealthiest. However, when a country like Nepal imports food to meet basic sustenance needs, the resulting external dependence becomes a serious vulnerability, especially when a significant share of national income comes from remittances, which currently account for over a quarter of GDP—the highest among countries in the region. Imported food cannot secure long-term resilience; the only sustainable path to limit import bills is to strengthen local production.

In the face of mounting climate challenges, our failure over the decades to address nuances in agriculture is likely to cost us more than we may presume. The United Nations has warned that the rapidly developing El Niño weather system is likely to push about 50 million people globally into acute hunger before the end of 2027, in addition to the hundreds of millions already facing dangerous levels of food insecurity. South and Southeast Asia are likely to get less rainfall than usual, causing serious problems for agriculture. This foreboding should serve as a critical reminder that this fast-approaching crisis will be far greater than any we have faced before. How will we manage the El Niño fallout when we haven't even been able to ensure a reliable supply of fertilisers?

Governance challenge

The current government is committed to taking strict measures to improve governance, yet the pace at which these changes are being pushed through feels abrupt. Any reform is bound to fail if the system is not prepared to absorb it. Deep-rooted mismanagement, however unacceptable, cannot be undone overnight. Existing systems have long adapted to involve complex linkages across different layers of society; these interdependencies must be carefully considered when addressing governance, particularly in cross-border markets and their linkages with agriculture that feeds the nation.

Understanding these interdependent connections is essential before attempting broader governance reforms. Effective improvement requires a clear grasp of the lives of those at the lowest rungs of society, particularly the lives of the thousands who till the soil to make a living. This will not happen without practical measures that address the full range of underlying issues. Addressing them requires understanding social norms, policies and institutions formed deep in history. Those details determine whether policies work or fail.

As long as those who plough the fields and grow our food end up in jail while following ordinary practices, or are driven across the border when drought ruins their harvest, we cannot claim to be acting in the true interests of the citizens in whose name we seek better governance. Meaningful change must begin from the bottom, not the top. Otherwise, corrective measures risk harming those most in need of support and protection, causing them to lose faith in the very government they elected with a supermajority.

Upadhya is a senior watershed expert.

MONDAY INTERVIEW SAMRAT UPADHYAY

In art, unlike in factual science, there is no absolute wrong or right

Even though I have spent most of my adult life in America, my internal identification remains firmly Nepali.

Born in Nepal and now based in the United States, acclaimed author Samrat Upadhyay stands among the few writers of Nepali origin shaping international literature in English. Leaving for America in 1984, his creative roots have remained steadfastly anchored to his homeland. Currently a professor of Creative Writing at Indiana University, his celebrated bibliography, culminating in his latest work *Dark Motherland*, consistently explores the nuances of the Nepali context for a global audience.

In this expansive conversation with *Kantipur TV's* News Chief **Rupesh Shrestha**, Upadhyay reflects on decades of writing across continents, the shifting landscape of Kathmandu, and the enduring resilience of the Nepali psyche in an increasingly interconnected world. Excerpts.

When you look back at the Nepal you left and compare it to the country you visit today, what are the most striking differences?

There is an immense difference. I was born and raised in the Kathmandu of the early eighties, which was a far more spacious and walkable city. Today, that has changed entirely. Technology has transformed the landscape over the years. Through social media, Zoom, and WhatsApp, we feel much closer to the rest of the world even while sitting here. One thing I find absolutely fabulous now is the restaurant scene in Nepal. I brought a group of my students here recently, and we found world-class cuisine. There is a unique skill here where a single restaurant can serve authentic Nepali *dal bhat* alongside pizza and pasta, and it is all genuinely delicious.

The infrastructure has also seen a massive shift. I took my students to Mustang during this trip, and seeing the highway to Muktinath looked amazing. It looks very much like the highways we have back in the US.

While the physical transformation is significant, certain attitudes—the Nepali psychology, if I may—remain the same. There is a specific kind of kindness and a social nature inherent to Nepali people that hasn't changed, which I find very beautiful.

You often mention your early days writing for *The Post*. Even after decades abroad, the stories of Nepal seem to never let go of you. Why is that?

It is something of a mystery, really. A writer is often attracted to certain subject matters instinctively. I lived in Nepal for the first twenty-one years of my life, so my attachment to this place is constant. For many in the diaspora, that longing actually intensifies once they are away. It becomes mixed with a certain kind of nostalgia.

Beyond that, I feel there are still so many stories about Nepal that remain untold, particularly in the English language. I enjoy exploring those narratives. I have just published my seventh book, yet I feel as though I haven't even begun to exhaust the stories I want to tell. For a writer living in the US, the Nepali story is 'exclusive'. Non-Nepali writers who attempt to write about this place have a very different understanding. Even though I have spent most of my adult life in America, my internal identification remains firmly Nepali.

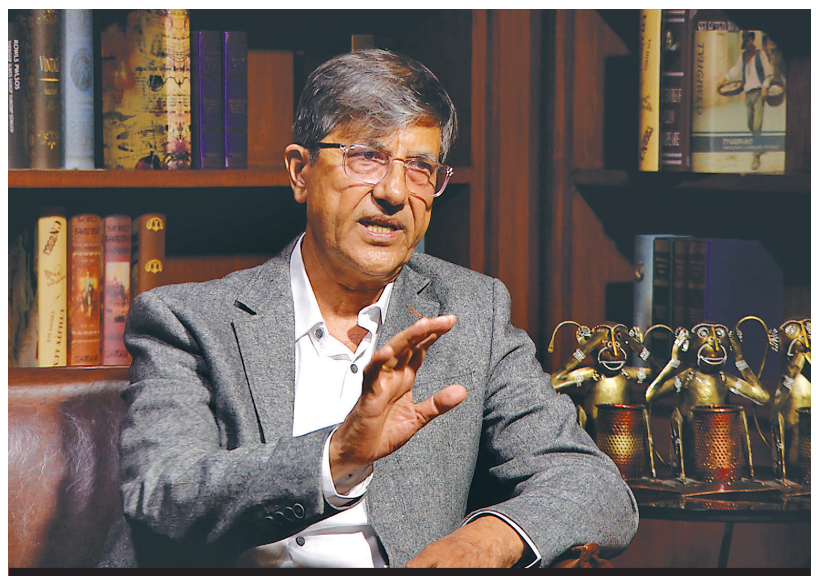
At what point did you start seeing yourself as 'Nepali American' rather than just 'Nepali'?

In the beginning, when the American media started identifying me as a 'Nepali American' after I got my citizenship, it felt quite strange. I thought to myself, "Am I really a Nepali American?" I always considered myself just Nepali.

Taking an American passport was actually a very practical decision. For the longest time, all the way through my PhD, I was on an F1 student visa. Even when I got my first job, the green card process was only just starting. My wife used to ask me why I hadn't sorted it out after so many years. The primary motivation was travel. With a green card, I had to drive four hours to Chicago just to get a Schengen visa for Europe. An American passport simply opened up the world for me. Now, with the Non-Resident Nepali citizenship being available since last year, I feel I have the best of both worlds. It is a privileged position that allows me to do a lot.

Does it ever feel contradictory or difficult to balance those two identities—living in the West but mentally residing in the stories of the East?

As a writer, you understand that these situations are often best explained through creative language. My identity isn't exclusive; it is hybrid. If I count the years, I have actually lived in America longer than I lived in Nepal, so I owe something to my American readership as well.



Samrat Upadhyay, acclaimed author

POST PHOTO

This hybridity is very evident in my daughter. She was born in the US, and while we taught her the culture and the language—she speaks Nepali well—a large part of her identity is American. Some people in the diaspora are surprised she speaks Nepali, even if she has a bit of an accent. She can navigate Kathmandu, go shopping, and even bargain in the 'Nepali style'. People here are often charmed by that—a girl who looks Nepali, speaks with an accent, but knows exactly how to haggle. That hybridity is part and parcel of the modern diasporic life.

In today's world, does a writer need a 'global' passport to become a truly international talent?

That is a complex question. I wouldn't say it is an absolute necessity because the publishing industry has become more fluid. There are Indian writers living in India and Nepali writers living here who are publishing successfully in the US while holding their original passports. However, I think the length of time I have spent in America and the discipline of my writing have helped me more than the passport itself.

That said, the passport does help in practical ways, such as when you are invited to international literary festivals. When they ask about your citizenship for payment structures, having that status simplifies things. It allows me the freedom to focus on what I want to do: writing.

Your first book, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, was a global success in 2001, even being reviewed by the *New York Times*. Now, your seventh book, *Dark Motherland*, is out. How do you view this journey over the last two decades?

It has been an amazing journey, but one filled with many challenges. When I started, I had a certain naivety. I thought that once I published one book, the path would be paved with gold and every subsequent book would be easy because I had 'mastered' the craft.

The reality has been exactly the opposite. Each subsequent book has become more challenging, sometimes even a kind of mental torture. You want to become a better writer with every project. If you don't challenge yourself, you atrophy. Each novel teaches you how to write it. There is no guarantee that because you wrote one good book, the next one will follow the same format. You are a new writer and a student of writing every single time. Even as a professor of creative writing, I feel like I am starting from scratch with every new book.

Is it difficult to maintain the psychological authenticity of Nepali characters while living so far away?

That aspect isn't as difficult as people might think. There is criticism that one cannot write accurately about Nepal while living in America, but for me, the greater challenge is the structural integrity of the book itself. I am a writer of human psychology, and that doesn't change. A person in the 14th century had the same basic aspirations and emotions as someone today. Technology and settings change—perhaps the relatives have moved to Europe or the houses are bigger—but the core psychology of happiness, sadness, and family dynamics remains universal.

When you bring your American students to Nepal, do you notice a difference in how they perceive the world compared to students here?

Culturally, there are differences, but the underlying psychology is similar. Everyone wants similar things, though they might manifest differently. An American student might immediately dream of becoming a millionaire, while a Nepalese student might dream of becoming a *karodpati*, but the ambition is the same.

When *Arresting God in Kathmandu* was first reviewed in the *New York Times*, the reviewer mentioned they hadn't realised people in Nepal struggled with the same things as people elsewhere. I found that quite funny. Of course they do! Why would that be a surprise? But the old Western image of Nepal was a 'Shangri-La' where people were poor but spiritually happy. I think my work helped diffuse that exoticism.

The primary difference I see is in the method of education. In Nepal, the system is often lecture-oriented, where students take notes, and the teacher provides inherited knowledge. In the US liberal arts system, everything is based on conversation and the room to experiment. When I first went to the US, I intended to study commerce, but I discovered I could follow my interests into theatre, journalism and literature. My classes now are very discussion-oriented. My students often disagree with me, and that is a democratic process where new knowledge is created through dialogue.

How do you react when a student tells you they think you're wrong?

I view it as just an opinion. I am still a student of writing myself. While my immediate instinct might be to think 'I know better', it is entirely possible the student is right. In art, unlike perhaps in factual science, there is no absolute right or wrong. It's all part of a larger conversation that helps us understand how to build a society where we can manage disagreements. In my classroom, we discover things together.

Does that same sense of disagreement apply to your own work? Do you ever look back at what you wrote the day before and hate it?

Constantly. You might write something with great passion and think it's brilliant, only to look at it two days later and think it's rubbish. Then, two days after that, you might decide it's not so bad and try to extract something useful from it. That is the torture I mentioned—the constant self-doubt. I am my own harshest critic. But that dialogue with your own work is what prevents the illusion of mastery. A reflective life, where you challenge your own opinions, makes you a better person and a better artist.

Your latest book, *Dark Motherland*, took about a decade to write. It feels like a departure from your earlier realism. What sparked that change?

It was supposed to be a different novel entirely—a story about a *Manglik* widow. But then the Gorkha earthquake happened. It was devastating. My parents were here in Nepal, living in a tent, and for a while, we didn't know who was alive or dead. Real life intruded in a profound way, and I couldn't continue with my original vision.

I started thinking: What would happen if a dictator took advantage of such devastation to come to power? That is how the character 'PM Papa' was born. At the same time, we were seeing the rise of Donald Trump in America. Many people viewed him as a clown initially. I remember being in Europe and confidently telling someone he would never become the nominee. Well, we know what happened. I once spoke to a Hispanic audience in Minnesota who told me they called him 'Cornhair' in Mexico, so I stole that for a character called 'President Cornhair'.

So, *Dark Motherland* became this sprawling novel that challenged me. I let myself go because a novel has to teach you how to write it. It is probably the most hybrid of all my works.

Read full interview at kathmandupost.com

FOREX

US Dollar	152.99
Euro	176.97
Pound Sterling	207.04
Swiss Franc	188.14
Australian Dollar	108.38
Canadian Dollar	110.26
Singapore Dollar	119.59
Japanese Yen (10)	9.6
Chinese Yuan	22.69
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.75
Qatari Riyal	41.98
Thai Bhat	4.62
UAE Dhiram	41.65
Malaysian Ringit	37.44
Korean Won (100)	10.8

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 305,200
Silver	Rs 4,710

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

easyJet strike sees 100 French flights cancelled

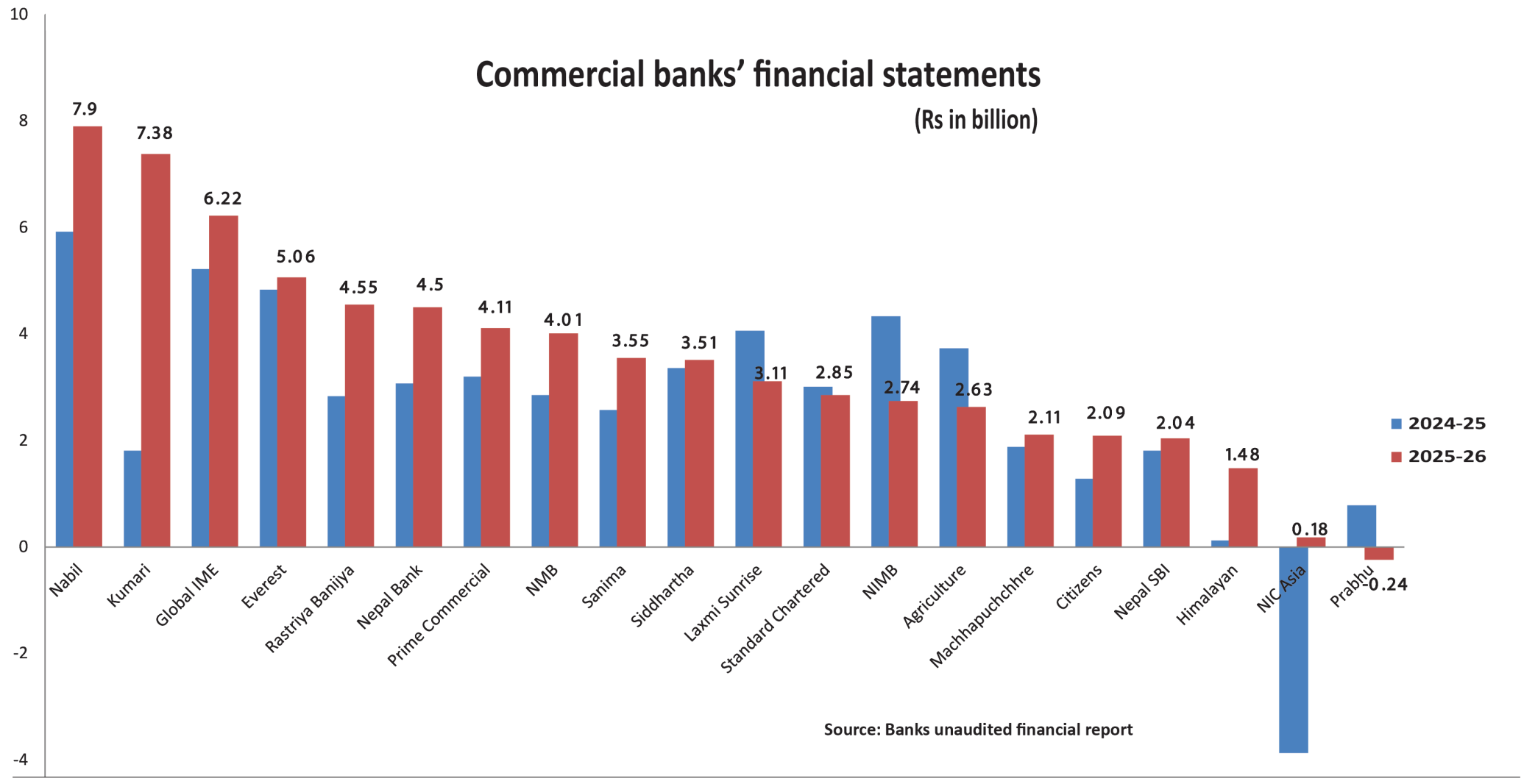
PARIS: British budget carrier easyJet has called off about 100 flights out of French airports on Saturday and Sunday because of a strike by cabin crew furious over repeated changes to their schedules. Unions said about half of the company's 900 French-based cabin crew would join the strike, which would affect about half of the flights out of two Paris airports, Nice, Bordeaux and Lyon. The airline's management has called the action "opportunistic" as it falls on a major national holiday weekend when airports are busy. France is a key market for the low-cost airline, which was recently taken over in a $7.7 billion deal by US private equity firm Apollo. **(AFP)**

Chinese ship sets off for Europe through Arctic, halving travel time

BEIJING: A Chinese container vessel has set sail for Europe through the Arctic, part of new weekly service on a route that cuts shipment times in half but which environmental groups warn could speed up the melting of polar ice. The "Dubai Tower" left the eastern port city of Ningbo on Saturday evening heading north, where it will pass through the Bering Strait, then turn west through the frigid waters along Russia's northern coast. It is expected to reach Felixstowe in the United Kingdom on September 7, followed by stops in Hamburg and Gdynia, Poland later that week, according to a timetable published by Sea Legend. **(AFP)**

Bank profits jump despite sluggish credit demand

Banks earned Rs69.78 billion in the last fiscal year, ended mid-July, as improved loan recoveries and lower provisioning lifted profits.



YAGYA BANJADE
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

Nepal's commercial banks recorded a 32 percent increase year-on-year in net profit in the last fiscal year, despite weak economic activity, sluggish credit demand and a sharp rise in excess liquidity in the banking system.

According to unaudited financial statements published by the country's 20 commercial banks, their combined net profit rose to Rs69.78 billion in the fiscal year ended mid-July, from Rs52.79 billion a year earlier.

Bankers say the increase was driven largely by stronger loan recoveries in the fourth quarter, which allowed banks to reverse some impairment charges and reduce provisioning for potential loan losses.

The rise in profits comes as the wider economy continues to face weak demand. For the third consecutive year, banks have been holding large amounts of excess liquidity, private-sector credit demand has remained subdued, domestic industries have been operating at only around 42 percent of capacity, and the prolonged crisis in the cooperative sector has weighed on consumption.

Santosh Koirala, president of the Nepal Bankers' Association, said the increase in profits did not reflect a significant expansion in lending.

"Loan disbursement showed negligible improvement over the fiscal year, resulting in only marginal gains in net interest income," Koirala said. "The bottom-line growth is almost entirely driven by notable recoveries of bad loans."

He said the improvement in loan recovery could indicate a gradual revival in real estate transactions and a greater willingness among borrowers to repay their debts.

The improvement, however, was uneven across the banking sector. Sixteen of the 20 commercial banks reported higher profits. Himalayan Bank recorded the largest percentage increase, with its profit rising by more than 1,100 percent from a low base. Three banks reported lower profits, while Prabhu Bank posted a net loss.

In terms of absolute profit, Nabil Bank was the largest earner, with a net profit of Rs7.90 billion, up 33 percent from Rs5.92 billion a year earlier. Kumari Bank followed with Rs7.38 billion, Global IME Bank with Rs6.22 billion and Everest Bank with Rs5.06 billion.

NIC Asia Bank reported the smallest profit, at Rs180 million, but this represented a recovery from a loss of Rs3.87 billion in the previous fiscal year.

Bank executives and analysts caution that the increase in profits does not necessarily signal a broad-based recovery in the banking sector.

Sudesh Khaling, chief executive officer of Everest Bank, said regulatory concessions introduced by Nepal Rastra Bank, including loan restructuring and rescheduling in selected sectors, had also supported banks' balance sheets.

"While loan recovery improved for several large institutions, lowering provisioning write-offs, liquidity remains heavily trapped in the banking system while fresh credit demand is virtually absent," Khaling said. "Banks cannot sustain profit growth over the long term unless underlying economic fundamentals improve."

Despite stronger recoveries in the final quarter, the sector's asset quality deteriorated. The average ratio of non-performing loans (NPL) rose to 5.35 percent at the end of the fiscal year 2025-26, from 4.51 percent a year earlier.

Five commercial banks reported NPL ratios above 7 percent. Prabhu Bank had the highest ratio at 15.55 percent, while Everest Bank had the lowest among the banks, at 0.49 percent.

At the same time, banks' total provisioning for bad loans fell to Rs37.30 billion by July 17, from Rs44.69 billion a year earlier. The reduction in provisioning helped lift banks' reported profits.

Net interest income, a key source of earnings for banks, increased by just 1 percent to Rs192.35 billion in the last fiscal year, from Rs189.84 billion a year earlier, reflecting the limited growth in lending.

Four banks ended the fiscal year with negative distributable profits, while 16 recorded positive distributable profits. Based on their net profits, banks had an average dividend capacity of 13.42 percent.

Banks also transferred Rs4.82 billion to regulatory reserves in the fourth quarter because of uncollected interest, in line with Nepal Rastra Bank rules requiring 51 percent coverage.

The sector's average earnings per share increased to Rs19.96 from Rs16.42 a year earlier.

Bhuwan Dahal, former president of the Nepal Bankers' Association, said the results showed a widening gap in the performance of individual banks rather than a uniform recovery across the sector.

"The fourth-quarter financial statements present a mixed picture. Banks that managed their portfolios prudently showed strong indicators across credit flow, recovery, and non-performing loans," Dahal said. "However, several institutions saw no credit growth, poor recoveries, and elevated loan-loss provisions, causing their distributable profits to shrink."

At the broader economic level, the financial and insurance sector is projected to grow by 9.16 percent in the fiscal year 2025-26, according to the National Statistics Office. The projected growth is 1.61 percentage points higher than in the previous fiscal year.

The NSO attributed the growth to increases in bank deposits and loan disbursements, as well as higher renewals of life and non-life insurance policies. It also cited increased value addition from the Social Security Fund, Employees Provident Fund, Citizen Investment Trust, stock market transactions and merchant banking activities.

The NSO revised its estimate for financial and insurance sector growth in the fiscal year 2024-25 to 7.55 percent, compared with 9.96 percent in the fiscal year 2023-24.

Despite the projected increase in output, the sector's contribution to Nepal's gross domestic product fell slightly to 6.72 percent in the last fiscal year from 6.78 percent a year earlier.

Meanwhile, nearly Rs1.5 trillion in excess liquidity was sitting in the banking system by mid-July. Steady remittance inflows, combined with weak domestic demand for loans, resulted in loanable funds accumulating throughout the fiscal year.

The large pool of idle funds, despite the increase in bank profits, underscores the disconnect between the financial sector's earnings and broader economic recovery. Banks have more money available to lend, but businesses and households have remained reluctant or unable to borrow at the scale needed to drive a stronger expansion in economic activity.

Despite booming economy, young Moroccans still dream of Europe

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RABAT, AUG 16

When 72,000 would-be migrants crossed from Morocco to the Spanish exclave of Ceuta last month, it revived memories of previous European migration crises, but a key difference this time is that many weren't fleeing destitution or conflict.

In fact, Morocco's economy is booming, at least on the surface, but experts say the persistent allure of life on the other side of the border is rooted in deeper anxieties, particularly among the young.

Even with 70,000 of the migrants pushed back in the days immediately after crossing and dozens dying in the attempt, the pull remains strong, with Moroccan authorities saying they have taken measures against fresh calls on social media for a mass crossing on Saturday, a public holiday in Spain. The Moroccan economy grew by five percent in 2025, with the country investing heavily in infrastructure, especially around preparations for the 2030 World Cup, which it will co-host with Spain and Portugal.

Some experts point to persistent, deep inequalities between urban and rural areas, with youth unemployment in the latter at 27 percent compared to 9.5 percent nationally.

And while Spain suffers from similarly high levels of youth and total unemployment, Spanish GDP per capita is around eight times that of Morocco's according to World Bank figures.

Nevertheless, the people who took part in the mass attempt to reach Spain "seem more diverse" than usual, said Mohamed Benaissa of the Northern Observatory for Human Rights (ONDH), based in the Moroccan region bordering Ceuta.

A good number of those who risked death to reach Ceuta "are in relatively acceptable socio-economic situations", he told AFP.



AFP/RSS

Migrants play with a ball as they wait to enter a short-stay migrants centre CETI at Trampolin beach in Spain's north Africa's Ceuta enclave on Saturday.

Many who crossed did so after abruptly quitting their jobs as waiters, labourers or fishermen.

Said Tribak, who spoke to AFP shortly after leaving Ceuta at the height of the crisis, was one of them.

The 38-year-old craftsman from Tangiers dropped everything to head to the border town of Fnideq after hearing via social media that the frontier was open.

He travelled with his children but upon seeing the chaos at the border, he took them home before returning again to swim across on his own.

Tribak described his life as "not bad", but told AFP: "I thought I would earn more if I put in the same effort there as I do here."

Benaissa said the mass crossing by such people was a "deeper sign of a crisis of confidence in the future" and in "the ability of institutions to guarantee adequate social protection and equal opportunity".

"The image of a European El Dorado remains very strong" in Morocco, sociologist Soumaya Naamane Guessos told AFP.

"Europe is associated, in young people's minds, with success and upward social mobility," she said, adding that social media played a key "amplifying role".

According to a recent survey by the ONDH, 74 percent of 500 young people living near the border said they followed accounts or content related to preparing to emigrate. Morocco has also experienced youth-driven social movements, such as the GenZ 212 collective, which last year organised mass protests calling for better health and education services.

As Opel turns to Chinese partners, its hometown frets about the future

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RUSSELSHEIM (GERMANY), AUG 16

As Germany's Opel slashes its engineering ranks and partners with China's Leapmotor, anxiety is running high in Ruesselsheim, the city it has long dominated.

Struggling like many other European automakers, Opel is expanding its partnership with Leapmotor to build a new SUV, tapping the Hangzhou-based company's expertise on electric vehicles and low-cost production—while leaving Opel's local engineers to perform more old-fashioned vehicle design work.

Stellantis, Opel's multinational parent company, said in April that it would cut 650 engineering jobs—from a total workforce of 1,650—at its Ruesselsheim development centre, amid a wave of job cuts across the German auto industry.

Those developments have unleashed concerns in this Rhine River city, where Opel was once the mighty engine of prosperity. For their part, the mass-market carmaker's executives say they are trying to adapt to the "reality" of stiff global competition.

For Daniel Bremm, a local representative of the IG Metall union, the main risk is technological downgrading, the possibility that the engineering centre would be reduced to a mere "adaptation hub" for vehicles designed elsewhere within the Stellantis group or in China.

"In France and Italy, they are hiring, whereas in Germany, we are only cutting jobs," Bremm lamented, saying that governments in Paris and Rome seemed to be lobbying the parent company more aggressively.

"The arrival of Chinese manufacturers in Europe is a reality," Opel boss Florian Huettl told AFP. He noted that Chinese carmakers had captured nine percent of the EU market over the first five months of 2026—a figure that rose to 10.5 percent in June.

Huettl said the Leapmotor partnership would combine German industrial know-how with the Chinese company's software expertise "to create the best of both worlds".

The Ruesselsheim teams would in turn refocus on their core competencies—vehicle parts such as chassis, seats, lighting, steering and driver-assistance systems.

German automakers are ramping up cost-cutting measures in response to a sluggish European market, overcapacity in the EV sector, and the rising strength of Chinese rivals.

Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Porsche have all announced cost-reduction programmes.

For Opel, these measures are part of a long-term trend.

Founded in 1862 by Adam Opel, the company produced sewing machines and later bicycles, before venturing into car manufacturing in 1899 at its Ruesselsheim site.

Long a symbol of German industrial might, the brand dominated the West German market and sold well across Europe in the 1970s thanks to successful and affordable models like the Kadett and the Rekord.

It subsequently went into gradual decline under the ownership of the American group General Motors, which long restricted its international expansion to avoid competition with other GM subsidiaries.

Opel was acquired in 2017 by France's Peugeot Group, which in turn merged with Fiat-Chrysler in 2021 to form Stellantis.

The workforce at Ruesselsheim has shrunk from a 1970s peak of around 42,000 employees to approximately 6,800 by the end of 2025.

Opel is no longer even the town's largest employer.

The city's mayor, Patrick Burghardt, noted in an interview with AFP that that position is now held by the nearby Frankfurt airport.

These latest job cuts "naturally have an impact" on the city, Burghardt said.

Although he understood Opel's need to remain competitive globally, he worried that a strategy of cutting German engineering expertise could eventually "come back to haunt them in the long run". None of the employees contacted by AFP wished to comment on the site's future.

Concerns have been compounded by the decision to manufacture the upcoming SUV—developed in partnership with Leapmotor—in Zaragoza, Spain, rather than in Ruesselsheim.

There was, however, a bit of good news this summer when Stellantis decided to allocate production of the next-generation Opel Astra and DS4 to Ruesselsheim, securing the plant's operations beyond 2029.

This decision is part of a one-billion-euro ($1.2 billion) investment plan for Germany running through 2030, which includes the construction of a new Ruesselsheim headquarters known as the "grEEn-campus".

That came as a relief to Opel's workers and the city, though anxieties remain high as the broader auto industry remains under pressure and questions remain about the future shape of the Chinese partnership.

The municipality is not waiting to find out, instead seeking to accelerate its economic diversification, hoping to find new areas of growth beyond the Opel plants.

Opel has committed to releasing 140,000 square meters (1.5 million square feet) of industrial land, which the city plans to transform into a technology hub dedicated to green hydrogen. "We have two hearts beating in our chests," Burghardt, the mayor, told AFP.

Ukraine launches one of its largest aerial attacks of the war, killing at least 6 people in Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AUG 16

Ukraine launched hundreds of drones across Russia on Sunday, killing at least six people in one of Kyiv's largest aerial attacks of the war.

Kyiv has stepped up its attacks on Russia this year, with long-range missiles and swarms of drones targeting military industries and energy facilities. It has also increasingly pummelled giant Wildberries depots, burning billions of dollars' worth of merchandise belonging to the Russian online retail giant. Those attacks have brought the war home to the Russian public nearly 4½ years into Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Ukraine also came under Russian attack, with drone strikes destroying homes and torching Kyiv's landmark book market.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said it had destroyed 822 Ukrainian drones overnight.

Some 600 drones were detected headed toward the Russian capital, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said, with a third of those destroyed over the Moscow region itself.

An 83-year-old man was killed after a Ukrainian drone hit a private home in the Moscow region, local Governor Andrey Vorobyov said. He also confirmed that a Ukrainian attack had sparked a blaze at a Wildberries warehouse in the town of Podolsk.

A drone attack targeted three towns in Russia's southwestern Rostov region, killing five people, local Governor Yury Slyusar said. The attack, with more than 150 drones, damaged several homes and a railway station and sparked a forest fire.

Russian strikes kill 5 in Ukraine

A Russian missile attack on Ukraine's Kryvyi Rih killed two people and wounded 14 others, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote on social media Sunday. He also said that one more person had been killed in the city of Sumy.

ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine's largest steel producer, confirmed that one of its sites had been hit in a missile attack and that operations had been partially suspended.

Elsewhere, a man and a woman died when their home was hit by a Russian strike in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, said Ivan Fedorov, the head of the local military administration.

Russian attacks also sparked fires throughout the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, wounding six people.

A blaze took hold at one of the city's largest book markets, tearing through kiosks huddled close to the Pochaina metro station. Firefighters fought back the flames, which sent plumes of black smoke across the capital, and picked their way through rubble where the market's crowded pavilions once stood.

"Wherever the Russians can reach with their ballistic missiles, they strike civilian infrastructure," Zelenskyy said.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Sunday that it had targeted a metallurgical plant in Kryvyi Rih and several military-industrial sites in Kyiv, including a manufacturing facility for Ukraine's Flamingo missiles.

The domestically produced missiles are increasingly key to Ukraine's long-range attacks on Russia, with Zelenskyy announcing Saturday that Kyiv had used the weapons to attack a rocket research and production center in Samara approximately 900 kilometres from the Ukrainian border.

NATO jet downs drone in Romanian airspace

Romania's Ministry of National Defense said on Sunday that a Spanish Air and Space Force F-18 fighter jet shot down a drone that had entered Romanian airspace.

The drone's entry into the NATO member's airspace was detected by surveillance systems at 4:44 am, the ministry said, about 24 kilometres north of the eastern city of Galati near the border with neighbouring Moldova. Moldova is a landlocked country between Ukraine and Romania.

A Spanish F-18 aircraft that was performing air policing duties "made radar contact with the target and received engagement approval," the ministry said.

"The drone was safely shot down by the F-18 aircraft at 05:01."

The ministry later said that drone debris was also reported in the Black Sea around 10 am on Sunday, about 1.5 kilometres from the coastal city of Constanta.

Officials did not specify the drone's origin.

The incident comes weeks after Romanian pilots shot down three drones over three days as Russia intensified attacks against Ukraine near the border. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Romania has reported dozens of drone incidents, including some that have crashed and exploded on its territory.

Acting Foreign Minister Oana Toiu said in a post on X that the Spanish deployment in Romania was scaled up "at the request of Romania and NATO to bolster the Eastern Flank following prior drone incidents," and that it was Spain's fourth such deployment.



AP/RSS

Firefighters try to put out a fire at a city book market following a Russian missile attack in Kyiv, Ukraine early on Sunday.

Thousands await aid after deadly Indonesian quake

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RUTENG, INDONESIA, AUG 16



AFP/RSS

A motorbike stops next to a collapsed building following a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in Borong, East Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara on Sunday.

Help could not come soon enough on Sunday for thousands of evacuees on Indonesia's Flores island after a powerful earthquake killed 53 people, injured dozens and damaged hundreds of houses and buildings.

Some 5,000 people fled their homes as the 7.7-magnitude quake hit the island early Saturday, followed by nearly 1,000 aftershocks of varying intensities in the hours that followed, officials said.

People in some areas were left without electricity and telecommunications and at least one emergency access road remained inaccessible.

"We need food, drink, medicines and diapers for the children," Umri, a resident of Nangahale village on the north coast of Flores, told AFP on Sunday morning.

The 55-year-old, who like many Indonesians uses one name, has been hiding out on a hilltop for 24 hours with others afraid to return home.

At Kisol village a few hours away, Bertolomeus Tiga, 42, told AFP his house was one of several collapsed by the quake that also brought down part of the local church.

"The police came yesterday and collected all the data, but there's no aid yet. The most important thing is probably staple foods. Food and drink... medicine," he said.

Bertolomeus said villagers were afraid to return to compromised homes and buildings.

"For the time being, we're still taking refuge outside. We're still living outside."

Widespread damage

The head of Indonesia's BNPB national disaster agency, Suharyanto, said at least five helicopters, several planes, a naval vessel and search and rescue ships were on their way to help.

The agency upped the death toll late on Sunday to 53 from 47 the day before, with 135 people injured. There were no reports of missing persons.

Survivors were in urgent need of assistance in the form of emergency tents, food, medicines, blankets, camp beds, mats, clean water and electricity generators, according to rescue officials.

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

The affected areas have few, if any, high-rise buildings.

BNPB spokesman Berton Suar Pelita Panjaitan said at least 914 houses on the island were severely damaged and hundreds of others to a lesser degree. Dozens of public buildings were also affected, including 93 educational and 36 health facilities and 38 government offices.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said on Saturday preparations were under way to bring aid to thousands 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.

'Ring of Fire'

In Ruteng, a town about 200 kilometres from the worst-hit part of the island, AFP saw heavy machinery clearing rubble from the street on Sunday.

The local hospital had been badly damaged, and patients were evacuated to tents erected outside.

A woman underwent an emergency C-section in an intact storage room converted into a temporary operating theatre, hospital spokeswoman Yohana Raisita Damalia Mari said.

"Thank God, the surgery went smoothly and both the patient and her baby are safe," she said.

Herybertus Geradus Laju Nabit, mayor of the Manggarai regency, told AFP it was impossible to predict when the aftershocks would end.

"Therefore, our first appeal is: be vigilant. Stay alert," he said.

After Saturday's quake, Flores residents ran for the hills as the sea retreated, a possible sign of an approaching tsunami.

A tsunami warning was later lifted, but authorities urged people not to return to damaged buildings for fear that aftershocks may bring them down.

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

Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its location in the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

Flores was struck by a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in 1992 that triggered a tsunami and killed about 2,500 people.

A devastating 9.1-magnitude tremor in 2004 struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 throughout the region, about 170,000 of them in Indonesia.

It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

Iran accuses Qatar of thwarting probe into fate of pilots

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN, AUG 16

Iran accused Qatar on Sunday of thwarting efforts to work out what happened to three pilots Tehran says were captured during the Middle East war, though the Gulf state has denied detaining them.

The Islamic republic had previously reported one pilot killed and others missing after a sortie to Qatar in March, but had not claimed at the time that any of them had been captured.

"A team of experts from the Iranian Air Force has been waiting for several months to travel to Qatar to conduct an on-site investigation," said General Mohammad Bagherzadeh of the Iranian armed forces.

"However, due to persistent delays by Qatari authorities, the return of our brave pilots to their homeland remains impossible," he added, according to the Tasnim news agency.

He called on Doha to authorise the team to travel to Qatar.

Bagherzadeh had accused Qatar on Saturday of having captured three Iranian pilots who were carrying out an operation against the United States' Al Udeid air base in early March and demanded their release.

Qatar denied holding the pilots and said an invitation had been sent to Iran "to be briefed on the details of the search & rescue operations in April, but the Iranian side has yet to respond".

> Iran's military retrieved body of pilot Kazemi, who died during attack on Al Udeid Air Base.

Last month, Iran's military said it had retrieved the body of pilot Majid Kazemi, who was killed during the attack on Al Udeid Air Base.

The largest US military base in the Middle East, it hosts forward elements of US Central Command, as well as its air and special operations forces.

In early March, Qatar's defence ministry said it had shot down two Iranian Sukhoi Su-24 bombers.

It was not immediately clear whether they were the same aircraft referred to by Iran, as Qatar and other countries across the region faced retaliatory attacks following the US and Israeli strikes that triggered the war.

It was the first time a Gulf country had reported shooting down an Iranian aircraft since the war broke out on February 28.

The Middle East war broke out when the United States and Israel attacked Iran which retaliated with attacks across the region.

Diplomatic efforts led to an April ceasefire that ended nearly 40 days of fighting, followed by the signing of a framework for peace talks in June that later collapsed.

Iran and the United States have since traded fire sporadically, with fighting mainly centred in southern Iran and around the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar, which took part in mediation efforts to end the fighting, came under fire after the truce broke down, reporting attacks on its territory and at least one Qatari tanker transiting the strait.

Chad opposition leader calls for unity after presidential pardon

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
N'DJAMENA, AUG 16

Chad's main opposition leader Succes Masra has called for reconciliation with President Mahamat Idriss Deby, shortly after being freed from prison under a presidential pardon.

"We need forgiveness, unity and peace. Gathered here today, we reaffirm to the entire nation our determination to build a reconciled Chad," Masra on Saturday told hundreds of supporters at his party headquarters in the capital N'Djamena. The former prime minister and leader of the opposition Transformers party was released late Friday after spending more than a year behind bars. Masra had been serving a 20-year prison sentence for incitement to hatred and complicity in murder following a trial that Human Rights Watch (HRW) described as politically motivated.

"My conviction is that we must work together. We are ready to start tomorrow morning," Masra said.

"They know that outside the government, we are the main political force. Nothing can be built in the future without us."

A presidential decree published Friday granted pardons to Masra and eight other jailed opposition figures.

The measure cancels their prison sentences but does not erase their convictions, meaning they retain criminal records and cannot run for office. A 42-year-old economist and one of Chad's most prominent opposition figures, Masra fled into exile in neighbouring Cameroon in 2022 after a protest was violently suppressed by security forces, leaving many dead.

He returned a year later under an agreement reached with the Chadian government and was subsequently appointed prime minister.

Five months later, he ran against Deby in the May 2024 election, finishing second with nearly 20 percent of the vote. Deby won around 60 percent in a poll that was widely contested and boycotted by much of the opposition.

The Central African country of around 20 million people has been led by Deby since 2021, when he took power at the end of a military transition following the death of his father, longtime ruler Idriss Deby Itno.

In October 2025, Chad adopted constitutional changes creating a renewable seven-year presidential term with no limit on re-election.

The Ukrainian social media channels tracking Russian missiles

BARBARA WOJAZER/AFP
KYIV, UKRAINE, AUG 16

The chances of a missile attack on Kyiv that night were around 50 percent, according to the administrator of a social media channel monitoring Russian air raids.

His channel, Aeris Rimor—roughly derived from the Latin for Searcher of the Skies—is one of dozens sending real-time messages about incoming drones and missiles.

Ukrainians consult them to track potential Russian attacks, like people check weather applications for storms but with less certainty, shorter warning, and deadly stakes.

During one recent overnight attack, AFP journalists were granted rare access to shadow "Esko", the channel's administrator, on condition that his identity and some details of the operation remained undisclosed.

The 19-year-old, sporting a budding beard, usually operates from home, filling lulls by watching the TV show Criminal Minds or honing his drone-flying skills on a simulator.

Twenty-six minutes after midnight, the air raid alert rang, soon followed by a red dot glitching across the map on a screen in front of him.

"Oh, a missile on Kyiv," he said.

Switching to Telegram, he sent a message to 150,000 followers: "KYIV TARGET!"

"It's going to hit Kyiv in about a minute," he said.

He then sent out the names of the districts being targeted, quietly lamenting a few typos.

Seconds later, explosions echoed over the capital. The red dot disappeared from the map, only for another to pop up shorty after.

"You have to literally stay on duty and stare at the screen the whole time, because you can easily miss it," said Esko, who did not appear to struggle, even late into the night.

Esko was looking at a live map used by Ukraine's air defence units.

Red icons—depicting Russian drones—were dotted across the map and disappeared as they were downed by Ukraine's air force.

Bedtime dilemma

The channels are tolerated by authorities but operate in a legal grey area as they use information from air force contacts.

Esko would not reveal publicly how he accessed the map.

In its nightly attacks, Moscow increasingly fires ballistic missiles, flying up to thousands of kilometres (miles) per hour and reaching Kyiv within three minutes of an air raid warning.

This poses a haunting dilemma for those in the capital.

Either go to a shelter—the metro or a basement—in advance, accepting a disrupted and uncomfortable night of half-sleep.

Or stay home and face the risk of a hit, particularly dangerous for those in high-rise buildings in heavily targeted districts.

Sometimes authorities warn hours before a likely attack.

Telegram channels—sifting through intelligence data—close the information gap, putting out daily forecasts on the probability of different types of attacks.

Esko said people often reach out asking for advice.

"You can only say: something might happen... but decide for yourselves."

On a recent night in Kyiv when there were mixed signals about a Russian strike, Kateryna Reshetnyk had gone down to the subway.

She based her decision on "a parallel analysis of several channels that have been posting truthful information for a long time."

She had set up folding chair next to the turnstiles with her mother and grandmother—their beds for the next hours.

"But no one knows for sure what will happen or not. You just rely on your intuition and survival instinct," the 34-year-old said.

'Tension rising'

Hundreds of others, armed with mats, tents and pillows, had done the same.

Dogs snored next to their owners, who were glued to their phones, screens lighting up weary faces.

"We track what's happening and where, because our relatives, friends and colleagues are all over Kyiv and the region, so at least we understand what is happening and where," Reshetnyk said.

The night passed without a major strike.

Ukraine's air force grudgingly tolerates the monitoring channels.

"We can't ban them. They exist, they inform the public, for some people that's convenient," spokesman Yuri Ignat told AFP.

But he warned those running them not to post "excess information ... that the enemy can use against us."

With people making potentially life-or-death decisions based on his posts, Esko said he felt the weight of responsibility.

Much of his life now is spent on the screen, tracking hundreds of drones on only a few hours of sleep.

But he prefers busy nights, rather than uneasy periods of calm when Russia is stockpiling for future attacks.

"You keep waiting, waiting, waiting, and then you start posting warnings because the tension is rising. And still, nothing happens. You post again, and nothing happens..."

"And then they hit."

Five nominees unveiled for NSJF Pulsar Sports Award

NSJF eliminates paid voting to ensure a fairer contest for the 23rd Pulsar Sports Award's People's Choice category.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF NSJF

Nominees for People's Choice category of NSJF Pulsar Sports Award.



Pooja Dhami (left), manager at Khalti by IME, and Niranjan Adhikari, president at NSJF, sign an MoU in Kathmandu on Sunday.

NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

The Nepal Sports Journalists Forum on Thursday announced five athletes representing five different sports disciplines as the nominees for the People's Choice category at the 23rd edition of the Pulsar Sports Award.

The list includes volleyball spiker Meena Sunar, footballer Puja Rana, karateka Sanu Maya Thing, cricketer Sher Malla, and mixed martial arts fighter Rabindra Dhant. The winner will be determined through public voting and announced during the main awards ceremony scheduled for September 3 (Bhadra 18).

The players were selected by a committee led by NSJF secretary Anil Malla Thakuri. The other members were AIPS-ASIA's treasurer Niranjan Rajbanshi, Himesh Ratna Bajracharya, Prajeet Shakya and Birat Jung Rayamajhi.

About the nominees

Sunar is an emerging volleyball star. She captained Everest Volleyball Club and led Nepal Police Club to a third-place finish at the CAVA Women's Club Championship. Internationally, she earned a silver medal at the CAVA U19 Championship in Sri Lanka and a bronze at the CAVA U20 Championship in the Maldives.

Rana, a key defender, delivered standout performances during the Asian Cup Qualifiers in Uzbekistan last year. She has also established a strong overseas profile, playing in professional leagues for Transport United in Bhutan, as well as Farashganj FC and Nasrin Sports Academy in Bangladesh.

Karateka Thing secured team kata gold and individual kata silver at the South Asian Karate Championship. She represented Nepal at the World Karate Championship in Cairo and claimed gold at the UKKS One Ultimate Kata and Kumite Challenge.

Malla, an off-spinner, took a wicket on his very first ball during his ICC T20 World Cup debut against England in February. He earned his national team call-up following a standout campaign with Lumbini Lions in the Nepal Premier League Season 2, having previously won the inaugural NPL title with Janakpur Bolts. He also captained Sudurpashchim Province to the Prime Minister Cup final.

Meanwhile, Dhant, who has earned the moniker 'Bajhang ko Bagh', made history as the first Nepali fighter to enter the "Road to UFC" tournament. Having won his opening fight in May, he is currently sharpening his skills at Bali-based Soma Fight Club ahead of his next bout in Shanghai on August 28. Dhant also claimed the bantamweight title at Matrix Fight Night 17 in India by defeating Chungreng Koren.

Voting mechanics

Along with unveiling the nominees, the NSJF announced a major shift in the category's voting mechanics.

Renewing its sponsorship agreement with 'Khalti By IME' as the official digital voting partner, the forum announced that fans will no longer have to pay to cast their votes.

Under the new model, the public can cast one free vote daily for their preferred athlete until 11:59 pm on September 2.

"The voting process was revised to address concerns that athletes with wealthier fanbases previously held an unfair advantage," said NSJF President Niranjan Adhikari. "We believe this format levels the playing field."

Votes cast via the Khalti app will account for 50 percent of the total score. The remaining 50 percent will be evaluated through votes from NSJF members, national chief coaches, and public interaction on the official Facebook pages of the NSJF Pulsar Sports Award and Pulsar Nepal.

The winner of the People's Choice Award will receive a Pulsar motorcycle. Winners across the remaining categories—including Para Athlete, Special Award, Lifetime Achievement, and Asian Sports Journalist—will receive Rs100,000 each.

Shusmita Thapa Magar begins her pro MMA journey with win

Magar has a pro Muay Thai record of 7-0 and a pro kickboxing record of 2-2. Now, she has entered MMA.

NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 16

Shusmita Thapa Magar has already tested her might at Muay Thai and kickboxing. Now, she has started her pro mixed martial arts journey in style: she registered a win in her debut.

Magar defeated India's Shalu Sharma by unanimous decision at a co-main event at Ronin Fighting Championship-3 in Bengaluru on Saturday night.

Magar, who has a pro Muay Thai record of 7-0 and a pro kickboxing record of 2-2, had previously fought at Ronin Fighting Championship-2. However, it was in kickboxing and she had defeated Aarti Khatri, again by unanimous decision.

Magar seemed to be enjoying her fight against Sharma, who had an upper hand in grappling. However, Magar found her way around and used Sharma's grappling against her.

Out of the three rounds of five minutes each, Magar dominated all three. In the second round, Magar had Sharma on the mat for most of the time and kept pounding with her elbow. Sharma even got a cut on her eyebrow.

The punches continued in the third round as well.



The only thing Magar seemed dissatisfied with was she was not able to knock her opponent out.

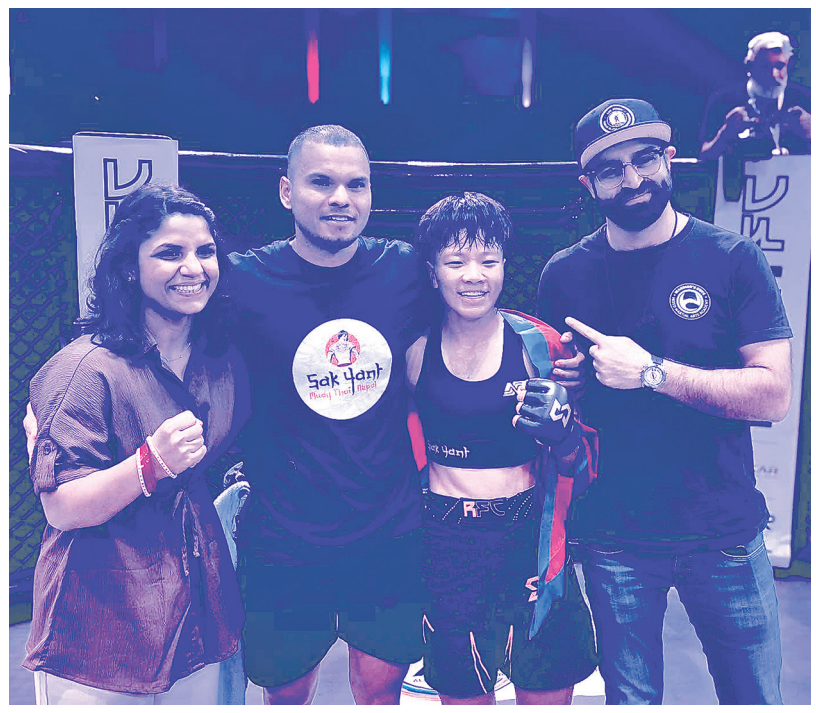


PHOTO: COURTESY OF KHAGENDRA KSHETRI

Shusmita Thapa Magar (second from right) poses with her coach and friends after her win at the Ronin Fighting Championship in Bengaluru, India, on Saturday night.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Aries, consider that artistic expression can happen in many ways. It isn't always about drawing a picture, singing a song, playing music, or acting. The way you arrange your home or workspace is an artistic expression.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
You may find that today brings great physical strength and energy, Taurus. You may want to do some really challenging, physical work. This is the day for it, so why not go to it?

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Get into doing things today, Gemini. Activities that require focus or creativity are supported. Your physical strength and energy will compel you to do something active.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
When you have a project like cleaning your home, you can be quick when you put your mind to it. This is a good day to get a lot accomplished. You'll probably enjoy it very much.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
If you've been feeling tired or sick lately, this will probably turn around for you today, Leo. Bouts of moodiness can be a real drain. Your emotional state has a pronounced effect on the way your body feels.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
You'll probably be busy today, Virgo, and this may suit you just fine. This can really work in favor if you have some tasks to catch up on. Being energetic, active, and productive is natural for you.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Today, Libra, your ability to stand up for your decisions and not let others sway you may be enhanced. This will be especially strong if you've solved a problem. You may find that others try to change your decisions.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
You may feel a need to get moving today, Scorpio. Almost everyone at times prefers quiet activities, books, art, and even just sitting around to physical activity. But your health can suffer if you're too inactive.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Finish any work that still needs completion, consider doing some cleaning and organizing, or see about getting out for a little warm weather fun. Whatever you choose, make sure it's active.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
This is an excellent day to express your natural creativity, Capricorn. The arts will more than likely be very important to you. You may find that nothing brings you more pleasure on days like this.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
If you feel tired, Aquarius, you may need to close your eyes and listen to soothing music. You work hard most of the time, so do your body and mind some good and just relax and listen to your favorite music.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Today could bring some strong feelings, Pisces. This may not be new, as you generally tend to feel things deeply. Finding a way to express this could sometimes be tough for you.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

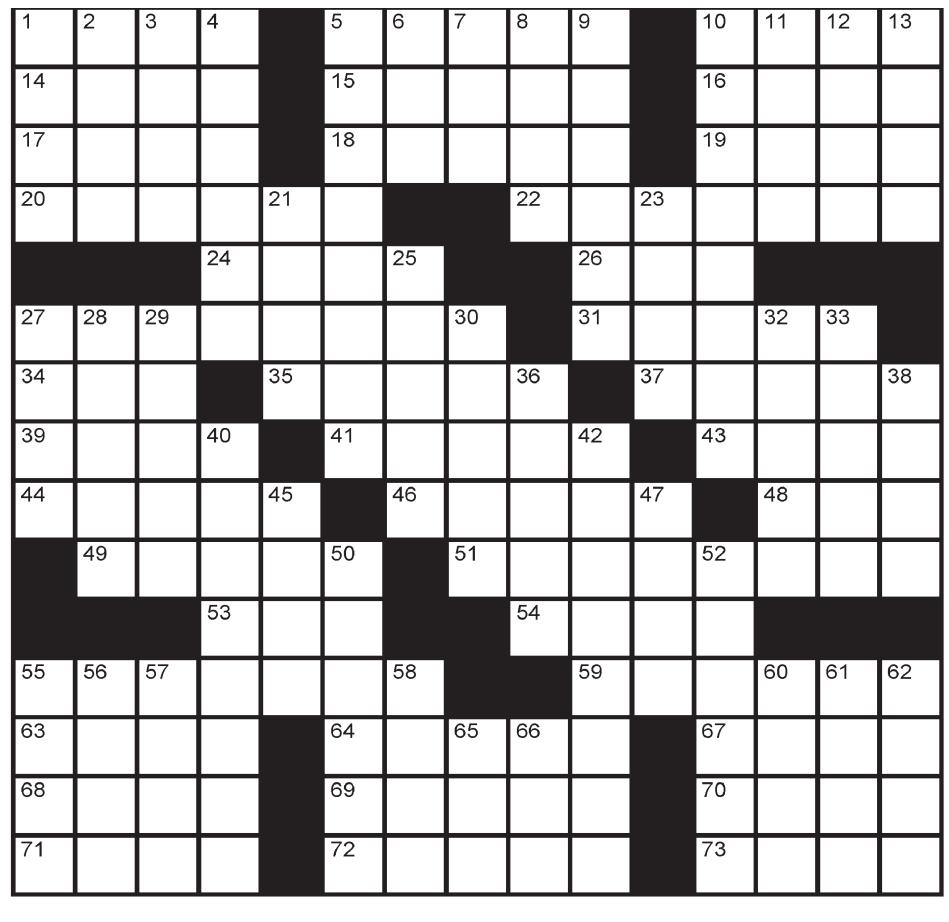
ACROSS
1 Ringing of bells
5 Polite form of address
10 Ariz. neighbor
14 — breve
15 Painkiller brand
16 Recording medium
17 Edges
18 Chopped
19 — vital
20 Tried a bite of
22 Marathon participants
24 Old flames
26 Distress call letters
27 Church VIP
31 Chinese, say
34 Honest —
35 "Walker, — Ranger"
37 "— Gantry"
39 Wander
41 Delaware's capital
43 Wise
44 Old gold coin
46 Not once
48 Half score
49 Fractional part
51 Fateful
53 Born (Fr.)
54 Back of the neck
55 Amply provided
59 Departs
63 Running shoe brand
64 Oust
67 Missile housing
68 Wisc. neighbor
69 Extra
70 — podrida
71 Vehicle on runners
72 Pulled
73 At hand

DOWN
1 Fragment
2 Lamb's pen name
3 Charity
4 Endured
5 Drove crazy
6 Boxing great
7 Calendar abbr.
8 Affirm
9 Gorgon
10 Cutlery
11 Narrative
12 On — — (equivalent)
13 Farm birds
21 Go out
23 Snout
25 Anglo- —
27 Funny fellow
28 Roughly
29 Extend to
30 Washed against
32 Violin name
33 Desert in Israel
36 Roll of the dice
38 Actress — Russo
40 Continent
42 Remembered
45 Genealogy diagram
47 Mature
50 Hate
52 Time of year
55 Crashes against
56 Wicked
57 Fragrant tree
58 World's fair
60 Execrable
61 Jazz great — Fitzgerald
62 Fly high
65 Forefoot
66 Prior to

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

C	O	R	P			C	O	O	P		M	A	S	T
A	G	U	E		W	A	L	D	O		O	L	E	O
R	E	I	N		A	D	D	E	R		D	E	A	N
S	E	N	T	R	Y				P	R	E	E	N	S
			A	O	N	E		P	O	O	L			
	E	A	G	L	E	S		R	I	O	T	O	U	S
P	E	K	O	E		Q	U	E	S	T		S	T	A
E	R	I	N		C	U	R	S	E		T	A	T	S
S	I	T		S	H	I	N	E		W	A	G	E	S
T	E	A	C	H	E	R		N	E	A	R	E	R	
			R	I	C	E		T	R	I	P			
S	H	R	I	N	K				G	L	A	Z	E	D
T	A	O	S		E	R	A	T	O		P	E	T	E
A	T	O	P		R	O	B	O	T		E	R	N	E
R	E	D	S		S	E	C	T			R	O	A	D

7-11-26 © 2026 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS



SUDOKU

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

No.SC6103 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

No.SC6104 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

There's life left in your old jeans

Re-Kriti turns discarded denim into bags and accessories, while asking consumers to reconsider what they buy, what they throw away, and what waste can become.

SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI
KATHMANDU

Growing up in New Road, one of Kathmandu's busiest shopping hubs, Nasana Bajracharya watched her neighbourhood change around her.

Stores that once sold food, electronics, and other goods gradually became clothing shops. By the time she finished school, she remembers seeing clothes almost everywhere she looked.

It left her with a question. "Who wears these many clothes?" she wondered. And if people were buying so much, what happened to everything they no longer wore?

During the second year of her BBA, she participated in a startup idea competition. When asked to come up with a business idea, textile upcycling was the first thing that came to her.

That idea eventually became Re-Kriti.

Four years into its work, Re-Kriti has upcycled around 2,200 kilograms of jeans. More than 700 customers have handed over their old jeans to be transformed into bags. The organisation has also provided income-generating opportunities to 11 women artisans.

But getting people to see an old pair of jeans as raw material rather than rubbish has not always been easy.

"People did think that products made from discarded fabric are of low quality," she says. Some expected products to cost between Rs200 and Rs500 simply because the material had already been used. The reasoning was: If it is old, why should I pay much for it?

For Bajracharya, Nepal's textile waste problem cannot be separated from the fast-fashion industry. Clothing stores have multiplied, online shopping has expanded, and people are consuming more clothes without necessarily using what they already own.

And getting rid of clothes does not necessarily solve the problem either. Donation is often treated as an easy answer to unwanted clothing. But Re-Kriti's founder argues that donating transfers the responsibility if there is no demand for what is being given.

Charity and thrift stores can also accumulate clothing that nobody wants, leaving the problem unresolved.

At Re-Kriti, however, clothes that have already reached that point are given another possibility.

Some materials arrive from garment factories, where unused fabric may be discarded despite being new. Others are purchased from thrift stores that have been unable to sell them. Customers also bring in their own old jeans.

Used denim is washed, sorted and eventually cut and stitched into new products. During its early days, the team could use only around 60 to 70 percent of a pair of jeans.

Today, the founder estimates that around 95 percent of each pair can be upcycled. Pockets and smaller pieces can become wallets, key rings and bag charms. She says only a few sections, such as the zipper and upper belt portion, remain difficult to repurpose.

Working with waste, it turns out, requires learning how to waste less of it.

The organisation deliberately works with local women artisans, particularly home-based tailors. Women may receive sewing and other vocational training through municipalities, wards, and different programmes, but learning a skill does not guarantee having somewhere to use it.

Household and caregiving responsibilities can make conventional working hours difficult. And when women cannot commit to a 10-to-6 job, formal employment opportunities shrink.

Re-Kriti therefore designed part of its production around home-based work, sending quality-checked materials to the artisans.

Of the 11 women who have received income opportunities through Re-Kriti, six currently receive consistent work, while five others are engaged when production increases.

She remembers one home-based tailor who had previously been poorly paid and treated badly elsewhere but had few alternatives. After beginning to earn through Re-Kriti, the founder says she noticed a change not only in her income but also in her confidence.

The first two years, Bajracharya says, felt like "hitting a wall".

People sometimes bought Re-Kriti products because they admired the cause. That support was encouraging, but she quickly realised it was not enough to sustain a business.



WHY DO IT

So Re-Kriti studied online inquiries, marketplace responses and feedback from previous customers to understand what people actually wanted.

That process led to one of the most important lessons Re-Kriti has learned about sustainability.

"The product is the hero," the founder says.

In the beginning, Re-Kriti emphasised words like 'upcycled' and 'sustainable'. For people already concerned about the environment, that message could be persuasive.

For everyone else, sustainability alone was not enough; the product also had to be attractive and useful.

That realisation pushed Re-Kriti to invest more in product development, marketing and how its work was presented on social media.

Sometimes, however, the old material carries a value that no new fabric could replicate.

One customer had kept a pair of her father's vintage jeans long after he had stopped wearing them. The jeans no longer suited his style, but she had preserved them anyway.

After discovering Re-Kriti, she sent the jeans three weeks before her birthday and asked the team to turn them into a bag. Along with them came a handwritten note thanking the team for allowing something that belonged to her father to become something she could now carry herself.

Stories like these, Bajracharya says, become "fuel" during periods when sales are poor and she questions why she started the business at all.

Re-Kriti has also tried to take upcycling outside its own production space.

Since 2025, it has organised five 'Upcycling Mela' events at colleges. Around 150 students and 20 teachers have participated, either bringing old jeans for Re-Kriti to transform or taking part in upcycling activities themselves.

That participation matters because Bajracharya believes Nepal does not necessarily suffer from a lack of conversations about sustainability.

If anything, she thinks there are too many.

Every Environment Day, every Plastic Free July and at sustainability programmes throughout the year, similar conversations return.

"We are only having conversations," she says. "We are having too many conversations, honestly."

What is missing, she argues, is action.

A person may hear repeatedly that overconsumption is harmful, but the idea becomes different when they hold an old pair of jeans, work with it and see it become something useful.

That is also why she believes changing consumer behaviour is more realistic than waiting for the fashion industry to transform itself. Consumers, however, make choices every time they purchase something.

Perhaps that is Re-Kriti's larger experiment. Its work begins with jeans, but the question it poses is not whether an old pair can become a bag. It is whether people can learn to look at what they already own differently.

A pocket can become a wallet. A scrap can become a key ring. A father's old jeans can become his daughter's birthday bag. A skill learned by a home-based tailor can become a source of income.

And a pair of jeans someone was ready to throw away can still have somewhere to go. For Re-Kriti, sustainability begins there.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RE-KRITI

A model poses with a Re-Kriti bag made from old jeans.



Founder Nasana Bajracharya



The organisation works with local women artisans, particularly home-based tailors.

New Kathmandu festival brings Tarkovsky, Kapadia and Nepali cinema together

The five-day 'Licchavi Cinema Festival' will bring films from Nepal, Asia, and beyond to Kathmandu.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

Licchavi Cinema Festival' will hold its first edition in Kathmandu from 11 to 15 September 2026 at QFX Cinemas, Chhaya Centre, showcasing a curated programme of feature films from Asia and world cinema.

The festival grows out of Licchavi House's commitment to cinema and cultural dialogue, as well as filmmaker Khyentse Norbu's (Founder, Licchavi House) long-standing connection to Nepal.

The inaugural selection brings together films from Nepal, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Thailand, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia. The programme places contemporary Asian cinema alongside major works from different periods and traditions, including films by Andrei Tarkovsky, Payal Kapadia, Khyentse Norbu, Deepak Rauniyar, Abinash Bikram Shah, and Tashi Gyeltshen.

The films include 'The Cup', 'Elephants in the Fog', 'White Sun', 'The Red Phallus', 'All We Imagine as Light', 'Ghost School', 'Stalker', 'La Haine', 'Perfect Days', and 'Memoria'.

"What we are doing with this first edition is placing our own cinema in conversation with the world," says Abishek Budhathoki, festival curator, Licchavi Cinema Festival. "Cinema literacy is not a specialist skill. It belongs to any audience willing to engage. We envision Licchavi Cinema to be part of that growth, and open to anyone who wants in."

The festival takes the Garuda as its emblem to protect what is lasting in cinema, and to carry it toward audiences who might not otherwise encounter it. In Nepal, and across Buddhist and Hindu traditions, the Garuda is a protector and messenger, a figure that moves between realms and carries word from one to the other, belonging fully to neither sky nor earth.

The 'Licchavi Cinema Festival' will be held with the support of Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the European Union.

Licchavi Cinema Festival
When: 11 to 15 September
Where: QFX Cinemas, Chhaya Center, Thamel
Time: Will be released soon
Entry: Tickets will be available soon on Khalti



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LICCHAVI CINEMA FESTIVAL

Italian Carabinieri recover stolen Renoir, Cézanne and Matisse artworks worth millions

The three artworks recovered are 'Fish,' 'Still Life with Cherries,' and 'Odalisque on the Terrace'.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MILAN

Italian authorities recovered three artworks by Renoir, Cézanne and Matisse worth millions of euros that were stolen earlier this year from a private museum near the northern city of Parma, police said Friday. Five people were detained.

A statement from the Italian Carabinieri's art recovery squad said the artworks were discovered in the possession of one of the suspects during searches ordered by prosecutors in the Parma province and neighboring provinces. The five suspects detained are believed to belong to an organized crime group responsible for numerous thefts of homes, businesses and other properties. Police also recovered stolen goods worth tens of thousands of euros.

Meanwhile, Brazilian police said late Thursday they located eight stolen works by Matisse following an apartment raid outside Sao Paulo. There were no apparent links between the two thefts.

The three artworks recovered in Italy are "Fish," a painting by Auguste Renoir, "Still Life with Cherries," a pencil and watercolor by Paul Cézanne, and "Odalisque on the Terrace," a color aqatint by Henri Matisse. Authorities said the Cézanne was valued at 6 million euros ($7 million), the Renoir at 3 million euros ($3.5 million), and the Matisse at 20,000 euros ($23,000).

The heist at the Magnani Rocca Foundation, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Parma, took place on the night of March 22-23, police said. Video distributed by authorities showed the thieves entering through a broken door window and then taking the three artworks down from adjacent walls before exiting and escaping through the gardens in a matter of minutes.

Investigators said they retrieved important evidence at the scene, including a pickaxe and fire extinguisher with their serial numbers removed. Forensic officers were able to reconstruct the serial numbers, which linked them to an apartment building accessible to one of the alleged members of the criminal gang.



AP/RSS

The suspects were all born in Moldova and resided in the Parma area, authorities said.

Established in 1977, the foundation hosts the collection of art historian Luigi Magnani and includes works by Dürer, Rubens, Van Dyck, Goya and Monet.

The museum believes a structured and organized gang was responsible for the theft, which the alarm interrupted, local media reported.

The crime followed a series of high-profile heists at major European museums, including the theft in October of French crown jewels and other items valued at 88 million euros ($101 million) from the Louvre in Paris.

Brazilian police said the eight stolen works by Matisse were valued at more than 1 million reais ($193,000) and found in the city of São Bernardo do Campo, outside Sao Paulo.

Sao Paulo police said in a statement they arrested one man at the scene for allegedly holding the prints for another person who was taken into custody in April during an unrelated art theft probe.

The recovery of the artwork marks a major breakthrough in a case dating back to December 2025, when two intruders broke into São Paulo's Mário de Andrade library. A total of 13 pieces of art and history were stolen. Five works by Brazilian artist Cândido Portinari are still missing.

Matisse (1869-1954) is one of the most celebrated artists of the colorful expressive style. Brazilian police recovered eight prints which are named "Le Clown," "Le Cirque," "Monsieur Loyal," "Cauchemar de L'Eléphant Blanc," "Le Codomas," "La Nageuse Dans L'Aquarium," "L'Avaleur de Sabres" and "Le Cowboy." They were made for an artbook named "Jazz."

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