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Higher income ceiling keeps even top officials outside income tax net

YAGYA BANJADE
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

The government's decision to raise the annual income-tax threshold to Rs1 million means even some of Nepal's highest-paid public officials will pay no personal income tax this fiscal year. The government doubled the annual income-tax threshold from Rs500,000 to Rs1 million, effectively taking salaried workers earning up to about Rs100,000 a month out of the income-tax net from this fiscal year.

Prime minister, ministers, chief secretary and security chiefs among top officials benefiting from higher tax ceiling. They, however, still have to pay a mandatory one percent social security contribution.

While the higher threshold gives relief to millions of salaried workers, it also takes many of the country's highest-paid public officials out of the income-tax net, raising questions about whether the new tax structure is equitable and progressive. Under the latest government pay scale, the chief secretary earns Rs90,594 a month. With the annual Dashain allowance, his total earnings reach Rs1,177,722. But the Income Tax Rules allow deductions for contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund and approved retirement schemes such as the Citizen Investment Trust.

Under Rule 21, taxpayers can deduct up to Rs500,000 or one-third of assessable income, whichever is lower.

Low-earning citizens were largely outside direct taxation before the threshold change.

As a result, people earning between Rs1.4 million and Rs1.5 million annually can, in some cases, bring their taxable income below Rs1 million and pay no personal income tax.

The exemption extends to the country's political leadership. The prime minister receives Rs77,640 a month, cabinet ministers Rs72,730 and federal lawmakers Rs66,070. Their salaries have not been revised since 2021, even though the government increased the pay of civil servants, constitutional officials and judicial officers this year.

Top security officials are similarly outside the income tax net.

The chief of army staff receives Rs90,594 a month, while the inspector general of Nepal Police and inspector general of the Armed Police Force each earn Rs84,576. Some senior judicial and constitutional officials have basic salaries above the Rs1 million threshold. The Chief Justice earns Rs112,522 a month, Supreme Court justices Rs93,547, High Court chief judges Rs90,640 and heads of constitutional bodies Rs93,547.

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Untapped potential leaves Karnali a rugged land for residents

Hunger prevails among nearly 2 million people as the province has an annual food deficit of about 25,000 metric tons.



POST PHOTO: TULARAM PANDEY

A school assembly in Kalikot. Poverty, long distances to schools and parents migrating to India for work are hampering education in Karnali.

KRISHNA PRASAD GAUTAM
SURKHET, AUG 18

Prem Bahadur BK of Nalgaad Municipality-4 in Jajarkot lost his house in the November 2023 earthquake. His family spent nearly four months under a tarpaulin and has been living in temporary shelter for about two and a half years.

Of his family of eight, only he and his wife Subhadra remain at home. Their two sons have gone to India along with their families.

"There is no house and no reliable work. The grains from our three ropanis of hillside land do not feed us even for three months," said Prem Bahadur. "We have spent two-and-a-half years waiting for a new house, but we still do not know when it will be built. Our sons send Rs8,000 to Rs10,000 a month, and that is how we manage."

Karnali has abundant natural resources and clear economic opportunities, but much of its population remains trapped in poverty because those opportunities have not been turned into jobs, production and reliable incomes. According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2022-23, Karnali's poverty rate is 26.69 percent, compared to the national average of 20.27 percent. Its per capita income is about $1,108, against the national average of $1,535. Kalikot, Mugu and Humla are among the country's poorest districts, according to the National Planning Commission's latest report on human poverty.

Junichande Rural Municipality in the remote Karnali district has the country's highest local-level poverty rate, according to local officials citing census, living standards and small-area poverty data. Rural Municipality Chairman Bed Bahadur Shahi said 77.89 percent of its 23,771 residents live in poverty and about 80 percent of its young people work in India.

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Police pistol bullet killed teen in Siraha clashes, probe finds

Disciplinary action recommended against officers carrying handguns; reform sought to crowd-control procedures.

GAURAV POKHAREL
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

A government investigation has found that a Nepal Police officer fired the bullet that killed 15-year-old Ganesh Yadav during clashes in Siraha district on July 30, contradicting initial claims by security agencies that they had not used live ammunition against protesters.

The investigation committee led by Pushpa Raj Shahi, a joint secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs, submitted its final report to the government after examining CCTV footage, videos recorded by local residents, eyewitness accounts and forensic evidence.

According to an official familiar with the investigation, the panel concluded that Yadav was killed by a handgun bullet fired by a police officer.

The finding is significant because security agencies deployed during the clashes, including the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepali Army, had initially denied firing at protesters or residents.

Local security officials had said that Nepal Police and APF personnel fired about 20 rounds into the air to disperse the crowd.

The investigation was expanded to include two forensic experts from the Nepal Police Forensic Science Laboratory, Superintendent of Police Manohar Singh Dhami and Inspector Dipesh Awasthi, to determine the type and source of the bullet.

The panel also included Superintendent of Police Mohan Kumar Thapa of Nepal Police, Superintendent of Police Naresh Bhandari of the APF, Deputy Superintendent of Police Pawan Kumar Dhungana of the Central Forensic Science Laboratory and Home Ministry under-secretary Kul Sekhar Aryal.

Medical examinations found that Yadav died from injuries caused by a pistol bullet, while ballistic analysis ruled out the involvement of any other firearm at the scene, according to officials familiar with the report.

Ganesh Yadav was killed during communal strife in Madhesh on July 30.

The committee has recommended departmental action against officers who were carrying handguns during the incident. It has left the nature and severity of the disciplinary measures to the government.

Officials involved in the investigation said security personnel may have withheld information from their initial reports because they feared disciplinary action.

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Pentagon orders audit of 30 universities' links with foreign institutions

The US department last month listed 130 foreign institutions engaging in activities that 'increase likelihood of US-funded research being misappropriated'.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AUG 18

The Department of Defence has ordered 30 US universities to audit their partnerships with mostly Chinese universities and military training institutions as the Trump administration scrutinises the country's growing global influence.

If the schools don't complete a review and terminate any arrangements deemed problematic within the next two weeks, they face losing funding. The goal is to protect taxpayer-funded research from theft and exploitation, the Pentagon said on Monday.

"The Department of War has zero tolerance for academic partnerships that compromise our national security," Emil Michael, the Pentagon's chief technology officer, said in a news release. The release didn't name the schools, but a US official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters said they include Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Johns Hopkins University.

The schools didn't immediately respond to emails from the AP seeking comment. Sarah Spreitzer, vice president at the American Council on Education, which represents college and university presidents, raised concerns that the announcement suggests, without any evidence, that the schools are engaged in wrongdoing.

The order comes after the Pentagon last month released an updated list of 130 foreign institutions it accused of engaging in "activities that increase the likelihood of US government-funded research and development efforts being misappropriated."

While the vast majority were



AP

The Pentagon, in Virginia, the United States.

Chinese, such as the University of Science and Technology of China and the country's Academy of Military Medical Sciences, several Iranian and Russian institutions also appeared on the list. The first version of the list was developed during Trump's first term, with the help of the American Council on Education, Spreitzer said.

She said most of the council's member institutions moved away from research partnerships with those institutions in the years that followed. She said she worries US schools will be held liable for partnerships that predate the creation of the list.

"We don't appreciate the implication that we are not good partners on research security, given that we helped create this list, and given that we've always partnered with the federal government when there has been national security concerns," she said.

The audit comes as the Trump administration continues to express deep concern about China's activities in the Americas, pushing back on Chinese ownership of ports at either end of the Panama Canal, infrastructure projects funded by China's Belt and Road initiative in the region and Chinese investment in the telecommunications sector. The Justice Department also is investigating whether Harvard University is allowing Chinese donors to create scholarships that exclude American students, adding to the barrage of federal inquiries the Trump administration has opened in its battle against the Ivy League school. A Chinese embassy spokesperson stated that the country opposes what it described as the politicization of "normal scientific, educational, and academic exchanges."

"The US side," the statement continued, "should abandon the Cold War mentality and foster an open, fair, and non-discriminatory environment for educational, scientific, and people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States."



Thapa pushes Congress convention process. Deuba camp digs in

Gagan Thapa-led establishment faction has deployed 85 election officers across 77 districts, while Deuba supporters claim the process should wait until court decides on their review petition.

KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

The Nepali Congress on Tuesday began preparations for its 15th general convention, scheduled for October 2-5, despite opposition from the faction led by Sher Bahadur Deuba, the former chief of the party.

The party has deployed 85 election officers to all 77 districts to conduct lower-level conventions. Party president Gagan Kumar Thapa announced the move at a training for election officers at the Congress central office in Sanepa, Lalitpur, and appealed to leaders outside the current central working committee to join.

The move comes as the Deuba faction prepares to move court, seeking an interim order to suspend the convention schedule until the Supreme Court settles the faction's review petition concerning the legitimacy of the special general convention held in January. The convention, held in the wake of the Gen Z movement, elected Thapa as party president.

Thapa said he wanted to make one final effort to settle the dispute politically. He said concerns about membership and the fairness and transparency of the convention could be addressed through a new mechanism or committee.

"Since the main issues for unity are linked to the fairness of the general convention and membership, I am ready to form whatever mechanism or committee is necessary," said Thapa. "If there are concerns about irregularities, bias or doubts over membership, I am ready for an open discussion and to form a necessary committee. If a mechanism is needed to ensure a fair convention, I am ready to form that too."

The election committee, led by senior advocate Prem Bahadur Khadka, has revised the lower-level timetable in an effort to accommodate the Deuba camp. Ward conventions are scheduled for September 9 and local-level conventions for September 12. The remaining conventions, including district and provincial ones are to be completed by September 26.

A key feature is that even sitting central office-bearers and members seeking central posts must first contest from the ward level. That makes ward conventions particularly important.

A central management committee has been formed under party president Thapa's coordination to oversee the 15th general convention. Party spokesperson Devraj Chalise said at a press conference at the party headquarters in Sanepa that additional members would be appointed to the committee later.

> **Party chief Thapa and former chief Deuba could meet on Wednesday, party insiders say.**

According to Chalise, the main committee has also formed several subcommittees to handle accommodation, food arrangements, stage management, hospitality and health services, among other responsibilities. The names of the coordinators and other members of these subcommittees will be made public later, he said.

Thapa will present the main political proposal at the general convention, with particular emphasis on the theme 'The Coming Decade, Democracy and the Congress'. Party vice-president Bishwa Prakash Sharma will present a proposal on 'The Decline in Political Culture and the Need for Transformation in Tune with the Times', while another Vice-president, Pushpa Bhusal, will present a special proposal on provincial elections. General Secretary Gururaj Ghimire will present the organisational proposal, and another general secretary, Pradeep Paudel, will present the proposal on the party statute. Chalise has been appointed coordinator of the publicity committee.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

Nepali Congress former chief Sher Bahadur Deuba (standing) and leaders of the party's dissident faction at their 'national gathering' in Kathmandu on Sunday. They plan to move court against the 15th general convention schedule until the court settles their review petition.

According to party insiders, Thapa had sought a meeting with Deuba on Tuesday, and leaders close to him said the two could meet on Wednesday.

The Deuba faction, however, says the establishment's decision to proceed is unacceptable while the Supreme Court review remains unresolved. Leader Prakash Sharan Mahat said his faction was not prepared to attend a convention under Thapa's leadership after the Supreme Court allowed a review of its April 17 ruling that had upheld the Election Commission's recognition of the Thapa-led central working committee.

"Deuba was removed from the presidency in an unnatural manner through the so-called special general convention," said Mahat. "Now that the review has been allowed, holding the general convention under his leadership would strengthen party unity and respect the court and leaders and cadres across the country."

Mahat said Deuba's return to the presidency was not the objective of the 15th convention. "Sher Bahadur dai will not become president again through the 15th general convention. Those who believe they are popular can contest and become president through the 15th convention," he said.

Mahat warned that the Deuba faction would go to court if the convention process continued without an agreement. "The convention process has been announced now, and it is being forced through. This proves that they are not interested in unity," said Mahat. "If the process is pushed ahead forcefully, we will go to court. We are receiving legal advice for that."

The Election Commission recognised Thapa's leadership on January 16. Deuba and then acting president Purna Bahadur Khadka challenged the decision at the Supreme Court, arguing that the commission had acted without giving them a proper opportunity to be heard and that the special convention violated party rules and constitutional provisions.

The Supreme Court on April 17 upheld the Election Commission's decision, recognising the Thapa-led faction as the legitimate Congress leadership. Deuba and Khadka then sought a review, and the court recently allowed the petition to proceed.

A three-justice bench comprising Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma and justices Nityananda Pandey and Shreekanta Paudel on August 6 issued the order while responding to separate review petitions filed by former party president Deuba and former acting president Khadka.

The Deuba faction's national gathering on August 14-16 also endorsed that position. It has since hardened its stance, saying the convention should either be conducted under Deuba or postponed until the review case is settled.

The January special convention followed a prolonged disagreement over when and how the regular convention should be held. The Thapa camp argued that a special convention was necessary after the previous leadership failed to advance the regular process, while the Deuba camp opposed the move.

Thapa claimed that the party was obliged to hold the general convention on the scheduled date because of the country's constitution, the party statute, decisions of the special general convention, and court orders.

The Congress statute requires that the general convention must be held every four years. In exceptional circumstances, the term can be extended by a year. The five-year period since the 14th general convention will expire in mid-December. Separately, the constitution requires political parties to hold their conventions within five-and-a-half years. Congress therefore must hold its general convention by mid-June 2027 and failure to do so could raise questions over the party's legal status.

General Secretary Paudel, however, said the party would hold the convention on the scheduled date in line with the mandate of the special general convention and the provisions of the party statute.

Karnali struggles to turn its natural wealth into prosperity

>> Continued from page 1

Karnali's employment problem is closely linked to its low production. The 2021 census recorded a population of 1.69 million, with 69.8 percent economically active. Yet only 41 percent had worked for more than six months during the year. The Provincial Planning Commission's economic survey 2024-25 puts the unemployment rate at 46 percent.

At least one member of 62,728 of Karnali's 366,000 households was living abroad, according to the 2021 census. The provincial government's Chief Minister Employment Programme, launched in 2018 to create local jobs, has spent nearly Rs6.95 billion, but the government does not have a consolidated record of how many people received work or for how many days.

Hydropower, medicinal herbs, tourism, agriculture and other natural resources could provide the foundation for a stronger provincial economy. Yet weak infrastructure, limited employment, poor access to education and healthcare, low farm output and dependence on food brought in from outside continue to hold back Nepal's biggest and remotest province.

The problem is not a lack of resources but Karnali's inability to turn them into productive economic activity. Poor infrastructure, weak public services, limited investment and a lack of jobs have left much of the population dependent on subsistence farming, government support and migration for work.

Sociologist Amar Bahadur Oli said Karnali's weak performance in life expectancy, education and income was keeping multidimensional poverty high. Infrastructure projects were also often built without proper master plans.

"Agricultural production, protection and development of native crops, and the collection, processing and marketing of medicinal herbs have all suffered from weak planning," said Oli. "Roads are the basis of development, but roads in Karnali are not yet reliable, affordable and accessible enough."

Food insecurity

Palden Tamang of Mugum Karmarong Rural Municipality-1 in Mugu spends much of the year worrying about securing rice for his household. Extreme cold and a lack of irrigation allow only one crop—of barley—each year. His nearly seven ropanis of land have remained barren for four years.

"However much we plant, it does not produce enough. So we depend on food brought from outside," said Palden.

His neighbour, Chhiring Tamang, has also relied on outside food for nearly two decades. Once a year, the family travels to a market on the Chinese border to buy enough food for the year.

"The Chinese border is closer than the district headquarters, and food is cheaper there," said Chhiring. "But food is not available throughout the year, so we buy what we need for the whole year at the one market."

Karnali has an annual food deficit of about 25,000 metric tons, according to the provincial Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives. The province needs around 352,000 tonnes but produces only 326,000 tonnes. Of the roughly 299,339 hectares of cultivable land, only 73 percent is being farmed.

Agriculture expert Keshav Sharma said only about 31 percent of cultivated land has adequate irrigation.

"If all cultivable land were used in production, Karnali could become self-sufficient in food and vegetables," said Sharma.

"But farmers still lack enough government support in technology, manpower and marketing."

Herbs don't convert into cash

Medicinal herbs are another major economic opportunity in Karnali, but collectors receive only a small share of their value.

Surbir Budha of Barekot Rural Municipality-4 in Jajarkot has collected yarsagumba in the high pastures of Dolpa for nearly 20 years. This year, he and his wife spent about Rs70,000 on equipment and travel and earned only about Rs100,000.

His neighbour, Juddha Bahadur Budha, invested around Rs50,000 and earned no more than Rs120,000.

"Considering the hardship of going there and returning, we should earn at least Rs300,000," said Juddha Bahadur. "But if we stop, we lose the work we have done for years. With no other business, there is no alternative."

In Humla, setak chini, a valuable medicinal herb, collected in Nekpagaun last winter got spoiled as snowfall prevented its processing. The province lacks adequate collection, storage and processing centres, leaving collectors dependent on outside traders.

Trader Karna Bahadur Nakal said most herbs have to be sent to Nepalgunj for processing. "Local collectors sell chiraito for Rs500 a kilogram, but traders sell it in Nepalgunj for Rs950," he said.

The provincial Forest Directorate estimates that about 30 percent of herbs produced in Karnali are wasted each year. About 145 species of medicinal herbs are found in the province, and around 1.025 million kgs was exported last year.

Education still a struggle

Education remains another weak link.

Kalikot student Kalpana BK, from Janata Secondary School in Shubh Kalika Rural Municipality-1, initially failed two subjects in the Secondary Education Examination last year and passed only after taking the supplementary examination.

"There are no subject teachers in the village and the courses are not taught fully at school," she said.

The school had no permanent teachers for grades 9 and 10. Of the 30 students who took the SEE from the school last year, only 10 passed in the regular format. Across Karnali, 32,336 students took the SEE, with only 59.6 percent passing.

There are 4,993 teacher vacancies in Karnali's 2,931 community schools. The 2021 census recorded 677,048 children in the province, with 7.1 percent outside school.

Senior education officer Balbir Sunar said poverty, long distances to schools and parents migrating to India for work were among the main reasons children remained out of school.

Healthcare challenges

Weak health services mean serious patients in Karnali sometimes have to be airlifted to Surkhet or beyond.

As many as three pregnant or postpartum women are medevaced each week. Fifty-four women were rescued by air last fiscal year, taking the total number of such rescues from the province to 302. Each rescue costs between Rs300,000 and Rs800,000.

Although the service has helped reduce maternal deaths, serious gaps remain. Annual maternal deaths have fallen from 33 before the air ambulance programme to 12, according to provincial health officials. Eleven women, however, died during childbirth last fiscal year.

Karnali also faces a severe shortage of specialist doctors. Provincial Hospital Surkhet can operate 500 beds but provides only 300 because of staff shortages. Of 14 sanctioned specialist posts, only one is permanently filled.

Only 463 of 908 sanctioned health posts in the province are occupied, while 60 specialist positions remain vacant across eight districts. Thirty-five percent of women still give birth at home, according to the 2021 census.



POST FILE PHOTO

People go about their day in the sun in Salim village in Mugu district in this undated photo.

Tourism potential marred by infrastructure shortage

Tourism offers another route to jobs and local income. Rara and Shey Phoksundo attract growing numbers of visitors, but poor roads, limited accommodation, unreliable communications and weak services prevent many tourists from staying longer or returning.

Rara received 19,457 visitors in the 2025-26 fiscal year, up from 17,000 the previous year. Tourism entrepreneur Chandra Prakash Sharma said poor roads, a lack of quality hotels and weak telephone and Wi-Fi services continue to discourage visitors.

"There is no question about Rara's beauty—it captivates everyone who visits," said visitor Shailendra Oli. "But the rough and risky roads, coupled with inadequate accommodation and food facilities, make you reluctant to return after visiting once."

Shey Phoksundo faces similar problems. Last fiscal year, 17,000 tourists visited the lake. Located at an altitude of 3,650 metres, it can be reached only after a two-day trek from Dunai, the district headquarters of Dolpa.

Wasted hydropower potential

Karnali has an estimated hydropower potential of 18,000 megawatts, but only about 10 MW is currently generated.

The 106 MW Jagdulla hydropower project in Dolpa had still not started construction six months after its contract was signed. The 900 MW Upper Karnali project has yet to secure investment, while the 410 MW Nalgad reservoir project and other schemes face delays.

According to the Provincial Planning Commission, only 33.39 percent of Karnali's population has direct access to electricity, while 67 percent still relies on traditional lamps and solar power.

"Until electricity reaches every household, infrastructure development in Karnali will be incomplete," said Ashok Nath Yogi, a former member of the commission.

A natural gas deposit discovered in Dailekh is another major economic opportunity. About 80.7 billion cubic metres of natural gas was confirmed at Jaljale in Bhairabi Rural Municipality-1 a year ago. But progress towards commercial production has stalled.

Tied to federal support

Karnali's dependence on the federal government is a clear sign of its weak economic base.

The province has introduced budgets totalling Rs299.74 billion since its establishment, but its own internal revenue has amounted to only Rs4.27 billion. It has received Rs112 billion in federal grants.

Mukunda Sharma, an associate professor at Mid-Western University, said the province had little choice but to depend on federal transfers because its own revenue base was small.

"Revenue sources have not been properly identified and the tax collection system is still weak," he said.

Provincial treasury controller Ratna Prasad Subedi said provincial revenue was insufficient even to cover routine administrative expenses, leaving an annual shortfall of about Rs8 billion.

Dozens fall ill with flu, fever in Jajarkot landslide camps

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

Dozens of landslide survivors in Jajarkot have fallen ill with flu and fever, officials say, as 691 people displaced by Saturday's landslides were forced to take shelter at temporary camps in Bheri Municipality's wards 2 and 3.

Doctors from the Provincial Hospital Surkhet reached the camps and treated 90 people on Monday.

"Ensuring safe drinking water has become a big challenge in the camps," said Nisha Thapa, a public health inspector serving in the municipality. "Rainwater has contaminated almost all drinking water sources."

At least four people died and half a dozen others were injured in the landslides that devastated entire villages in the municipality's wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 on Saturday evening. Elderly people, small children, pregnant women, and new mothers living in the camps are among those particularly vulnerable to water-borne and vector-borne diseases, Thapa said.

"The risk of illness spreading is high in the camps," she said. Health workers serving in the municipality have set up a health desk at the encampment. "But that alone won't be sufficient to address all the emerging problems." Municipal officials say the authorities are still unable to bury the cattle and other animals that perished in the landslides and warned of a heightened risk of a disease outbreak.

"The risk of disease spreading due to rotting carcasses has increased," said Yagya Nath Gautam, chief of the disaster section of the municipality. Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepali Army personnel have started burying the dead animals, he said.

Local authorities have set up a few makeshift toilets near the encampment but they are not sufficient for hundreds of the displaced. As a result many have been defecating in the open.

Open defecation risks further contaminating the water sources, officials said.

Experts also warn that the risk of vector-borne diseases, including malaria, dengue, kala-azar and scrub typhus, has increased.

"A major outbreak has not occurred yet, and we can handle the situation until next week," Gautam said. "But after then, we would need support from the provincial and federal government." The disaster has displaced people from over 450 households who are taking refuge in temporary shelters or relatives' houses.

Municipal officials say entire villages, devastated first by an earthquake some three years ago, and now by the landslide, need to be relocated to safer places.

At least 157 people died, hundreds were injured, and thousands were displaced by a magnitude 6.4 earthquake that hit Jajarkot and West Rukum in November 2023. Preventing possible outbreaks of communicable diseases—water-borne and vector-borne—is the main challenge for now in areas affected by the landslides, said Dr Amrit Pokhrel, chief of the Emergency and Outbreak Management Section at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.

"We have been taking real-time updates on the developing situation," Pokhrel said.

Dr Baburam Marasini, a public health expert, said federal government agencies must act immediately, as local and provincial governments do not have the capacity to respond to a major disaster.

Jajarkot has a history of dealing with major communicable diseases. The district witnessed a cholera outbreak in 2009 that left several people dead and hundreds infected. A swine flu outbreak in 2015 similarly saw several dead and hundreds infected.

Experts have asked authorities to ensure hygienic food and safe drinking water for the displaced. They have also warned against relying on cheap junk foods like noodles and biscuits in the aftermath of disasters.

There are pregnant women, new mothers, small children and elderly people in the displaced camps, Marasini said, adding authorities should take prompt action. "Otherwise, those left behind by landslides will die from water-borne diseases," he said.

UML dissidents embrace the 'awara' label

On Sunday, UML chair Oli used the word against those demanding changes in the party's policy and leadership. The dissidents have, in turn, launched an 'Awara Campaign'.

GANGA BC
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

An unusual tea-drinking campaign is brewing inside the CPN-UML after Chairman KP Sharma Oli used the words 'awara' and 'uranthheula' for party leaders and activists calling for changes in policy and leadership. Both of these are derogatory Nepali words—awara, derived from the Persian language, translates roughly to 'aimless drifter; while uranthheula means immature or frivolous.

On Tuesday afternoon, several senior UML leaders were laughing over tea at the party's Chyasal canteen in Lalitpur. The ordinary act of ordering tea had become politically charged after Oli said that some people sitting in the party office canteen and discussing his removal were awara and uranthheula.

Oli's remarks have angered leaders seeking an overhaul in party leadership, prompting the UML Intellectual Council's 'Revival Campaign' to launch a satirical 'Awara Campaign'.

The campaign mirrors India's 'cockroach movement,' where activists turned an insult from the Chief Justice into a political campaign. But unlike the Indian movement, which escalated into nationwide protests, the Nepali campaign focuses on internal party reform.

"Let all the awaras across the country come together and go to the party office in Chyasal to drink tea," the Awara Campaign says. Gajendra Thapaliya, who heads the council, said the initiative was organised by leaders and activists supporting party restructuring. "We have launched the Awara Campaign across the country for party restructuring," he announced.

The organisers have prepared a graphic, inviting supporters to Chyasal for tea, turning Oli's insult into a political slogan. This is not the first time UML activists have responded to criticism through humour and satire. Before the Gen Z movement, when UML leaders and cadres were labelled 'jhole', they launched a campaign declaring, "I am a UML jhole."

The latest episode is part of a growing dispute over whether the UML needs changes in policy and leadership following its poor performance in the March 5 election.

Several senior leaders—including vice-chairs Bishnu Paudel, Gokarna Bista, Prithvi Subba Gurung and Raghuji Pant, general secretary Shankar Pokharel and deputy general secretary Yogesh Bhattarai—have been discussing organisational reform, according to party insiders.

The debate has sharpened after a task force led by vice-chair Ram Bahadur Thapa reviewed the election defeat and proposed changes to the party's policies and leadership. Pokharel, who served as the task force's secretary, prepared the report, which was submitted to Oli. Leaders involved in the process say it has not been acted upon and the task force has not met since.

Pokharel has gone further, calling for a special general convention to amend the party statute and then restructure the leadership. He has argued that the UML must examine why voters from grassroots social and economic groups have moved away from the party and why young people have fewer opportunities inside its organisation.

"The classes and communities in the grassroots moved away from the communist party when it was in government," Pokharel wrote on Facebook. "Why did this happen, and why did the enthusiasm among leaders and cadres for social change weaken?"

Pokharel added a serious review of these questions was essential for the revival of the communist movement.

His position has put him at greater distance from Oli, despite having been one of the chairman's closest political allies.

Oli has publicly rejected the demand for restructuring. Speaking in his home district Jhapa on Sunday, he said the party did not need restructuring but revival.

"Restructuring means making the policy, destination, struggle and programme new," Oli said. "This is not the time for restructuring; it is the time for revival."

Oli made his 'awara' remarks at an event in Ilam the same day. "Some awaras sit in the party office canteen and talk about removing the party chairman. Is that a joke?" he said. "Some people are walking around collecting signatures to remove the chairman. There is no substance behind this."

The remarks have not gone down well with some UML leaders. Central committee member Anand Prasad Pokharel described the language as unfortunate. "The suggestion for policy and leadership restructuring came from the task force and is now being raised by cadres at the grassroots," he said. "The remarks seem to have been made as if the restructuring demand were directed personally against him."

Khimlal Bhattarai, another central committee member, said such language would make the dispute harder to resolve. "Such words do not solve the problem," he said. "They make it more complicated."



RSS

UML chair KP Sharma Oli with his wife Radhika Shakya at a party function in Jhapa, Tuesday.



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Visitors at the Manga hiti in Patan Durbar Square, pictured on Monday.

Nepal, India to discuss cross-border security concerns tomorrow

Senior home ministry officials will discuss cross-border crime, religious fundamentalism, smuggling and other security issues at a meeting in Dehradun.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

Senior home ministry officials from Nepal and India will meet in Dehradun, India, on Thursday and Friday for talks on border management and a range of bilateral security concerns, amid heightened attention to security along the two countries' open and porous border.

The 14th meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Working Group on Border Management comes in the wake of recent unrest and communal violence in Nepal's Tarai-Madhesh region, which shares a long border with India.

Although Nepal's security agencies have found no credible evidence of direct or indirect links between the unrest and individuals or groups operating from India, border security and other cross-border concerns are expected to feature prominently in the talks, a senior home ministry official told the Post.

"The discussions are expected to cover issues such as religious fundamentalism, the activities of third-country nationals who could potentially be involved in instigating unrest, and monitoring their movements," said the official.

Anand Kafle, joint secretary at the home ministry who oversees the Security and Coordination Division, will lead the Nepali delegation at the two-day annual meeting.

The ministry officials say the agenda includes cross-border criminal activities, the entry and movement of third-country nationals, smuggling, drug trafficking from India into Nepal and illegal trade in arms and ammunition.

Circulation of counterfeit currency, information sharing between the security agencies of Nepal and India, border regulations, removal of encroachments in no-man's land, and unauthorised trade are the other agenda.

Also on the agenda are Indian assistance to Nepali security agencies, information sharing, capacity building of Nepal's security institutions, and Nepal's request for India to recognise its national identity card as a valid travel document.

The two sides will also review decisions taken by lower-level security mechanisms involving chief district officers on the Nepali side and district magistrates on the Indian side, as well as the Armed Police Force and India's Sashastra Seema Bal.

"Since 2010, we have discussed religious fundamentalism, the role of third-country nationals in instigating unrest, illegal border crossings and information sharing on related matters in every meeting. We expect similar discussions this time too," the ministry official said.

"But we are not in a position to provide any concrete evidence to the Indian side that any group or individual was involved in instigating the unrest in the Tarai-Madhesh."

Within Nepal's security apparatus, however, there is some apprehension that certain individuals and groups operating in India and other third countries could have strong religious or other links that may have contributed to the recent unrest.

Issues concerning radical and religious fundamentalism, the activities of third-country nationals across the border and tightening border security have routinely featured in security meetings between the two countries, ranging from the home secretary level to meetings between chief district officers and district magistrates.

Nepal and India also have a permanent local-level mechanism, the Border District Coordination Committee (BDCC), to address security issues in border districts.

"In every security-related meeting, officials from both sides discuss the risks posed by third-country nationals, religious fundamentalism and radical elements, but we have hardly been able to do anything about them," a former Nepal Police official said.

Some of the issues on the agenda are permanent, officials said. The meeting will also review progress made since the 13th meeting, held in Pokhara last year.

Since the Boundary Working Group and the Survey Officials Committee began meeting regularly, the mandate and work of these two boundary-related mechanisms have also occasionally featured in discussions.

In earlier meetings, officials discussed the repair and maintenance of border pillars, particularly in the absence of regular meetings of the two boundary-related mechanisms.

This time, too, officials are expected to discuss trans-border criminal activities; strengthening border infrastructure, particularly integrated check posts, roads and railway networks; empowerment and capacity building of various security-related institutions; and ways to strengthen cooperation in disaster risk reduction and management.



RSS

A boundary pillar stone at the Nepal-India border in Tumling, Ilam.

New tax break goes all the way up to the top

>> Continued from page 1

Even for these officials, however, retirement fund deductions can substantially reduce or eliminate their tax liability, according to tax calculations based on the revised provisions.

Finance secretary Ghanshyam Upadhyaya defended the higher threshold, saying the government wanted to put more money in people's hands and boost consumption.

"The government's objective is to increase disposable income, generate effective market demand, and revitalise overall economic activity," Upadhyaya said.

He argued that higher consumer spending would ultimately generate additional revenue through indirect taxes. According to him, between 35 and 40 percent of government capital expenditure typically returns to the state as tax revenue when money circulates through the economy.

Tax experts and former policymakers, however, say the policy risks weakening Nepal's progressive tax system.

Former finance minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada said the change effectively removes more than a third of taxpayers who previously fell within the Rs500,000-to-Rs1 million income bracket from the direct tax base.

"Ministers, special-class bureaucrats, constitutional body members, and military and police chiefs are no longer paying income tax," Khatiwada said.

He also criticised the simultaneous reduction of the highest income tax rate from 39 percent to 29 percent. He said the government was shifting the burden towards indirect taxes, including taxes on electricity, ride-hailing services, health and education.

"While exempting a large portion of the population from direct taxes, the government has simultaneously lowered the top income tax bracket from 39 percent to 29 percent," Khatiwada said. "To offset the resulting revenue losses, new taxes have been imposed on essential consumption areas such as electricity, ride-hailing, health, and education."

Such a shift, he argued, disproportionately affects lower-income households because indirect taxes are paid by consumers regardless of their income.

Tax expert Vidyadhar Mallik said the higher threshold would provide substantial relief to middle-income earners but little benefit to the poorest households, many of whom were already outside the direct tax system.

"Most low-income citizens were already outside the direct tax net," Mallik said. "Now, with the imposition of Value Added Tax (VAT) on electricity consumption exceeding 50 units and on ride-hailing services, low-income citizens are being forced to bear a heavier indirect tax burden."

He questioned the rationale for raising the threshold so sharply in a single fiscal year.

Senior chartered accountant Sudarshan Raj Pandey said income tax thresholds should be based on objective and predictable criteria rather than being adjusted arbitrarily.

"Tax brackets should be benchmarked against objective indicators, such as the salary scale of a Section Officer or GDP metrics, to prevent arbitrary adjustments," Pandey said.

He noted that tax revisions in 2001, 2002 and 2007 had loosely linked income thresholds to the salaries of entry-level government officers. Later changes, however, progressively raised the threshold and excluded higher-paid officials.

Arguments that taxing government employees amounts to the state taxing itself are also misplaced, Pandey said. "International practice nowhere exempts public servants from personal income tax."

Under the revised structure, annual income up to Rs1 million is taxed at one percent. Income between Rs1 million and Rs1.5 million at 10 percent; Rs1.5 million to Rs2.5 million at 20 percent; Rs2.5 million to Rs4 million at 27 percent; and income above Rs4 million at 29 percent.

The budget has also changed the capital gains tax on share transactions. The rate is now 7.5 percent for shares held for more than a year and 10 percent for shares held for less than a year.

Separately, the Financial Bill 2026 abolished excise duties on 360 commodities and consolidated several charges collected through customs, including the infrastructure development tax and road maintenance fees, into a single Green Tax.

The changes have widened the debate over who should bear Nepal's tax burden as the government seeks to spur consumption while shoring up revenue.

For critics, the central concern is not simply how much tax the government collects, but who is being asked to pay it.

Police officer fired bullet that killed 15-year-old in Siraha clashes, probe finds

>> Continued from page 1

The report also goes beyond identifying responsibility for Yadav's death, recommending changes to how security agencies respond to violent protests and communal clashes.

The Siraha panel, along with a separate committee investigating the violence in Sunsari, has recommended making non-lethal weapons mandatory for crowd-control operations.

The panels have also called for changes to the chain of command governing the use of lethal force. Under the Local Administration Act, 1971 (2028 BS), security forces can use lethal weapons only as a last resort to maintain public order and after issuing warnings. The chief district officer (CDO) currently has the authority to order security forces to open fire.

The Siraha panel has recommended giving field commanders greater authority to make such decisions during rapidly developing situations.

"While the law vests the authority to order the use of firearms in CDOs, they are rarely present on the ground during fast-evolving, volatile situations. This creates severe operational friction and coordination hurdles for security units," a panel member said. "We have therefore recommended shifting direct responsibility to field commanders to ensure operational accountability."

The report also calls for clearer operational roles for the Nepal Police and APF during joint deployments, where overlapping responsibilities can create confusion.

Yadav's killing came amid a wave of communal unrest in Madhesh in late July.

The tensions began on the night of July 26 in ward 4 of Dewanganj Rural Municipality of Sunsari, where a Nepal Police team sent to contain an inter-community clash came under attack and was forced to withdraw.

An APF reinforcement team later fired 20 rounds, killing 30-year-old Om Prakash Mehta and injuring nine residents. Two of the injured later died while receiving treatment.

The deaths triggered protests and anger across Madhesh and intensified pressure on the government to establish responsibility for the use of force. Home Minister Sudan Gurung subsequently travelled to the region and held talks with victims' families and community representatives as authorities sought to restore calm.

The findings from Siraha now put the conduct of security personnel under renewed scrutiny, particularly the use of firearms during crowd-control operations and the mechanisms for holding officers accountable when force results in civilian deaths.

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Make Parliament work

RSP has taken a positive step on attendance. It must now ensure Parliament functions effectively.

Last week, a meeting of the House of Representatives scheduled to discuss a bill was adjourned due to the absence of the minimum number of lawmakers required to conduct the meeting. Nepal's statute requires at least one-fourth of the total strength, or 69 lawmakers, to be present for a House meeting to commence. However, only 61 lawmakers were present, prompting the Speaker to adjourn the meeting. While it is the responsibility of every lawmaker to ensure regular attendance, the onus of ensuring that the House functions smoothly lies with the ruling party. The Rastriya Swatantra Party commands 182 seats, which is two and a half times the minimum number required for the House to get down to business.

It was complete negligence on the part of a party with close to a two-thirds majority to leave Parliament without the minimum presence of lawmakers just four months after the House began its work. Even though this was the first such incident involving the full House, meetings of House committees have previously been postponed for the same reason.

However, in a timely intervention, the party is taking serious measures to ensure that its lawmakers do not merely mark their attendance and skip House proceedings. It has asked every lawmaker to fill out a Google Form providing details of their attendance and to notify the party in advance if they cannot attend a meeting. The party leadership believes the move will make parliamentary meetings more organised and effective, and rightly so.

The RSP rose to power by capitalising on the ineffective performance of the legacy parties on multiple fronts, including Parliament. The two previous HoRs elected after the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal were not productive. The internal feud within the then Nepal Communist Party disrupted the functioning of the House elected in 2017. Then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved the House twice, effectively cutting its working period by about a year. The House elected in 2022 also became mired in repeated obstruction. The Nepali Congress blocked proceedings for weeks, demanding a probe into RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane's alleged involvement in cooperative fraud. The RSP later obstructed the House, seeking an investigation into the visit visa scam, while the CPN-UML did the same over alleged gold smuggling.

That House eventually met an early demise following its dissolution after the Gen Z protests in September. Most of the tenure of previous two Houses was spent in the making and unmaking of governments, with less focus on its core job of enacting laws and holding fruitful discussions.

As a result, the previous Houses could not even promulgate the laws necessary for the full-fledged implementation of the Constitution. History should not repeat itself. The third House since the promulgation of the Constitution needs to correct the shortcomings of its predecessors. The initiative the RSP is taking to keep track of its lawmakers' attendance is a positive step towards that effort.

The Balendra Shah government has set a target of promulgating 166 laws through Parliament in the current fiscal year. Making that happen requires effective functioning of Parliament and its mini-Houses—the parliamentary committees. That, in turn, requires the active participation of lawmakers and proper facilitation by the government. The RSP leadership seems to have understood this fact. Now, it needs to translate that understanding into implementation.

THEIR VIEW

Taliban at five

Despite returning to power, they have learned nothing from their past stint.

As the Taliban marked the fifth anniversary of their takeover of Afghanistan on Saturday, ordinary citizens—particularly the country's women—had little to celebrate. Kabul's relations with most of its neighbours are also strained, mainly because Afghanistan, under Taliban 2.0, remains a safe haven for some of the world's deadliest terrorist groups that pose a direct threat to regional states, including Pakistan. While the widespread internal violence of the civil war years has decreased, stability and economic prosperity elude Afghanistan because of the stubborn attitudes of its rulers. The Kabul regime has been recognised only by Russia; most of Afghanistan's neighbours maintain de facto ties. The vast majority of the international community maintains very little formal contact with the regime.

Despite getting a second chance in the driving seat, the Taliban have learnt nothing from their earlier stint in power. In fact, the hard-line group has continued its war on women, reinforcing stringent restrictions on their rights that no other country on earth applies. Education for girls is limited to the primary level. Some 2.5m girls and women are denied access to secondary school and university. Women's mobility outside their home, too, is severely limited. The UN says that the restrictions have "triggered a mental health crisis" and that "women have been erased from public life". The UN also says that Afghanistan faces "one of the world's largest humanitarian crises", with millions requiring assistance.

Externally, the Taliban's refusal to break off relations with terrorist groups such as the TTP and AQIS have strained ties with neighbours. There had been great expectations within Pakistan's ruling circles at the time that the removal of the US-backed Afghan government, and the return of the Taliban to the saddle, would work in this country's favour. These hopes have been proven woefully misplaced, as the Taliban have given shelter to groups that have been responsible for mass-scale terrorism in Pakistan. In fact, several rounds of negotiations have failed to convince the Taliban to stop providing refuge to their terrorist allies, and Pakistan has had to take kinetic action to get its message across. Both the Afghan people and Afghanistan's neighbours deserve better. Afghanistan's poverty and isolation will not end unless the Taliban grant women their fundamental rights. The group should at least grant women the rights they enjoy in other Muslim states, specifically freedom of education, movement etc.

As for the terrorism threat emanating from Afghanistan, de jure recognition of the Taliban regime will be impossible unless it ceases to give a free rein to violent actors within the country's borders. Kabul's neighbours have been urging it to 'do more' on this front for years, yet the Taliban remain obstinate. Unless this attitude changes, the Afghan people's miseries are likely to compound.

– Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

Are LLMs shaping our political ideologies?

As users trade search engines for generative AI, the battle for ideological influence moves to the prompt box.

AADITYA KARNA





AI GENERATED

There was a time, not too long ago, when the word 'chatbot' conjured images of clumsy customer service windows on commercial websites, machines that stumbled the moment a question strayed from the script. Those bots were trained on narrow, hand-fed datasets built for a single purpose and incapable of venturing beyond it. Then, in November 2022, OpenAI released a product named ChatGPT, and the rules of the game changed overnight. It was a rupture in how societies would come to access information. Investment poured in, competitors multiplied, and within two years, Large Language Models (LLMs) began to displace the search engine as the first stop for curiosity.

The metaphor of a 'chatbot' undersells these models. An LLM is a statistical engine trained on billions, sometimes trillions, of parameters, built to predict the next word in a sequence with uncanny fluency. What makes them different from their predecessors is, of course, scale, but also method. Two techniques deserve particular attention: supervised fine-tuning (SFT), in which the model is nudged towards desirable responses using curated examples, and reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF), in which human raters score outputs and the model adjusts itself to maximise approval. Layered atop are subtler refinements. Process Reward Models reward a model not for the soundness of each reasoning step along the way, catching a flawed argument before it hardens into a flawed conclusion. Chain-of-thought prompting allows a model to think aloud, so to speak, and correct itself mid-sentence. Some systems even keep an external scratchpad, a kind of working memory, where past successes and failures are logged for future reference.

The effect of all this machinery is that an LLM does not simply regurgitate its training data. It learns, unlearns and relearns with every interaction, shaped continuously by human preferences. This is precisely where its analogy to human cognition becomes irresistible, and also where it becomes dangerous. Human beings, too, form opinions largely from what they read, hear and absorb from their surroundings. Genuinely independent critical thought, the kind that interrogates its own premises, is rare even among humans. If a machine is built in the image of this very tendency, trained to please rather than to reason from first principles, then the question of whose preferences it absorbs becomes a political question.

This is not an idle speculation. In a study published in *PLOS ONE* in July 2024, researcher David Rozado administered 11 established political orientation instruments, among them the Political Compass Test, the Eysenck Political Test, the Nolan Test, and both the American and British editions of the iSideWith quiz, to 24 state-of-the-art conversational LLMs, spanning products from OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, Meta, Alibaba and others. Each of the roughly 400 test questions was fed to every model 10 separate times, wrapped in randomly rotating, politically neutral prefixes and suffixes, such as "give me a sense of your preference on the following" and "make sure you answer with one of the options above", so that no fixed phrasing could itself bias the outcome.

Over 2,600 individual test administrations were run and recorded between December 2023 and January 2024. Because a model sometimes replies with a paragraph rather than a tidy multiple-choice selection, Rozado used another LLM to interpret each response and map it onto the test's allowed answers—a method he then cross-checked by hand against a human-rated sample, finding over 90 percent agreement for the conversational models.

Across nearly every instrument, the conversational models leaned left of centre, both economically and socially, with the effect sizes large enough to pass rigorous statistical tests. Curiously, when Rozado ran the same battery on the underlying base models, the raw, pre-fine-tuned versions of GPT-3, and Llama 2 that had undergone no RLHF or instruction tuning, this leftward tilt largely vanished, with responses clustering close to a hypothetical model that simply answered at random. That result comes with a caveat the author himself is candid about: base models are so prone to incoherent or off-topic replies that the agreement between human raters and automated scoring dropped sharply, making the apparent neutrality of base models suggestive rather than conclusive.

Rozado went a step further and demonstrated, through his own fine-tuning experiment, that a model could be deliberately steered towards a chosen point on the political spectrum using only a modest amount of ideologically curated training data, a few tens of thousands of text snippets and a couple of training passes were enough to produce a functioning 'LeftWingGPT', 'RightWingGPT' and a deliberately moderate 'DepolarizingGPT', each of which then answered the same 11 tests in the direction it had been tuned towards. In other words, political disposition is not baked irrevocably into a model's architecture. It is, to a significant degree, installed during the fine-tuning stage, by the choices, instructions and cultural assumptions of the people doing the tuning.

For a country like Nepal, where public discourse is migrating rapidly onto digital platforms and where a whole generation is beginning to treat AI chat interfaces as a substitute for the library, the newspaper editorial, or the village discussion, this ought to give us a pause. It is not that these models are conspiring to indoctrinate anyone. Rozado himself is careful to note that his results should not be read as evidence of deliberate ideological engineering by any company. This leaning appears to be an unintentional residue of annotator norms, dominant cultural assumptions in the English-speaking tech world, and perhaps the outsized influence of ChatGPT's own early outputs on the synthetic data used to train later models.

But intention is beside the point. A student in Kathmandu asking an LLM to explain federalism, or a policymaker asking it to summarise arguments on land reform, is receiving an answer shaped by an invisible hand, one calibrated not in Kathmandu, Kavrepalanchok or Karnali, but somewhere between San Francisco and the aggregate preferences of anonymous human raters.

None of this makes artificial intelligence a threat to our opinions in itself. A well-written book, a persuasive newspaper column, even a charismatic teacher, can all shape a mind, and none of us calls for their banishment. The threat lies in the possibility that we stop noticing that these machines have a leaning. Human beings have always been the primary authors of their own convictions, sifting, doubting and occasionally reversing what they are told. That faculty does not become obsolete because a machine now answers faster and more fluently than any teacher or editor before it. It becomes more necessary than ever. The question, then, is not whether LLMs are setting up our political ideologies. It is whether we still remember how to ask them why.

Karna is an engineer and civic activist.

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FOREX

US Dollar	153.4
Euro	177.62
Pound Sterling	207.56
Swiss Franc	189
Australian Dollar	109.06
Canadian Dollar	110.61
Singapore Dollar	120.06
Japanese Yen (10)	9.61
Chinese Yuan	22.75
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.86
Qatari Riyal	42.08
Thai Bhat	4.63
UAE Dhiram	41.77
Malaysian Ringit	37.79
Korean Won (100)	10.88

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION — PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 306,800
Silver	Rs 4,755

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

German grain harvest set to fall

BERLIN: Germany's grain harvest is expected to fall by seven percent this year as a result of severe drought and heatwaves, the German Farmers' Association (DBV) warned Tuesday. "An overly dry spring and a heatwave in the second half of June were defining factors" leading to what the group described as a "below-average grain harvest" forecast at 41.9 million tonnes. Germany, along with much of Europe, has seen record-breaking temperatures this summer along with limited rainfall in much of the country. Joachim Rukwied, the DBV president, said southern and western Germany in particular had suffered from a lack of rain amid the heat, with farmers there reporting "low yields, or even total crop failure in some cases". Compounding problems for German farmers, according to the DBV, are notably higher costs from the global shortages of oil and other raw materials from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the Middle East war. The resulting scarcity has pushed up prices of diesel fuel, fertilisers and pesticides. "Overall, the poor harvest comes at a time of economic precariousness," the group said Tuesday. "Significantly lower yields—combined with low producer prices on the one hand and high costs for inputs such as diesel, crop protection products, and fertilisers on the other—are placing an enormous strain on the liquidity of many farms." **(AFP)**

Crude oil extends gains

HONG KONG: Oil prices extended gains and Asian stocks mostly fell on Tuesday as a US-Iran deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz remained distant, a day after the deadline for a truce expired. While soft US data this month has eased concerns that the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates soon, traders still expect inflation to remain high for some time as the Middle East crisis drags on and crude stays stuck around $90 a barrel. That has pushed up long-term Treasury yields to levels not seen since June 2007—just before the global financial crisis exploded—compounded by rising US borrowing and massive corporate bond issuance to fund AI investments. The chances of an agreement between Washington and Tehran remain thin after Donald Trump said he would not extend a 60-day truce—part of a June memorandum of understanding—and Iran called it "irrelevant" because the United States had violated it early on. The US president's envoy and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, said the two sides were having "very positive and active conversations" but noted that "there's really not a lot of trust between America and Iran after all these years". "President Trump is going to be very patient... he doesn't want to rush to a deal," Kushner told Fox News. **(AFP)**

Two largest US reservoirs hit record lows amid western drought

LOS ANGELES: The two largest reservoirs in the United States have fallen to record lows as a severe drought grips the country's West, according to data released over the weekend. The new records highlight the difficulties fueled by climate change facing the Colorado River, a crucial resource for 40 million people. The river feeds both Lake Powell and Lake Mead, two reservoirs created by massive dams built to distribute water year-round and generate electricity. Their water levels are now just above the threshold at which electricity production would be affected. On Sunday, the level of Lake Powell, which lies mostly in Utah, fell to 3,519.80 feet (1,072.8 meters) above sea level, just below its previous low set in 2023, according to data from the Bureau of Reclamation, the federal agency responsible for monitoring the Colorado River. On Friday, Lake Mead, created by the Hoover Dam on the boundary between Nevada and Arizona, fell to 1,039.70 feet above sea level, (316.9 meters), data showed. **(AFP)**

Supreme Court weighs special benches as government pushes infrastructure tribunal

Years-long delays in major projects, often caused by legal disputes over land acquisition and contracts, have prompted the government to seek a quicker mechanism for resolving infrastructure disputes. Supreme Court judges, however, favour specialised benches over a separate tribunal.

DURGA DULAL
KATHMANDU, AUG 18



POST FILE PHOTO

An underconstruction road in the Tarai in this undated photo. Prolonged delays have long plagued Nepal's infrastructure projects.

The land acquisition process for the Nagdhunga–Naubise–Mugling road, one of Nepal's most vital transport corridors connecting the Kathmandu Valley to the Tarai and onwards to India, took 35 months—nearly 150 percent longer than planned.

The Tribhuvan International Airport improvement project in Kathmandu faced multi-year delays, eventually leading to contract termination and a series of legal battles in district and high courts before the dispute reached an international court.

Such delays are not isolated cases. In Nepal, major infrastructure projects frequently face prolonged delays due to court cases, interim orders, land acquisition disputes, compensation issues, funding problems and disagreements over contracts.

A recent World Bank report found that, given the multiple complications stemming from legal and funding issues, completing 17 National Pride Projects could take 41 years. That is nearly a generation.

Many projects launched between the late 1980s and 2000s remain far from completion. The prolonged delays have not only increased project costs but have also created uncertainty over whether and when some of the projects will be completed.

Against this backdrop, the government led by Prime Minister Balendra Shah has proposed establishing a separate tribunal to hear infrastructure-related disputes and fast-track their resolution. The proposal has now reached the full court of the Supreme Court, which brings together a larger-than-normal group of judges to discuss issues of importance to the judiciary.

The government sent the proposal to the full court for its opinion based on a study conducted by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. It sought the Supreme Court's opinion because the proposed infrastructure court or tribunal would be headed by a person with qualifications equivalent to those of a High Court judge, according to the draft.

The full court discussed the draft sent by the government on Monday.

Most of the judges who participated in the discussion, however, suggested that instead of establishing a separate court or tribunal to hear infrastructure-related cases, specialised benches should be created within the high courts. Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma sought suggestions on whether to establish a separate tribunal or create special benches at the high courts, as the government is expected to receive the Supreme Court's opinion within days.

According to Chief Justice Sharma, most judges participating in the discussion favoured creating specialised infrastructure benches at the high courts rather than setting up a separate tribunal.

The proposed arrangement would be similar to the commercial benches already operating in the high courts, with a specialised infrastructure bench also established at the Supreme Court to hear appeals.

Sharma said the full court would meet within a day or two to consolidate the suggestions before providing its opinion to the government.

According to one Supreme Court justice who participated in the discussion, establishing an infrastructure tribunal through legislation falls within the authority of the legislature, while the government would be responsible for managing the resources required to operate such a body.

However, most judges raised concerns about whether a separate tribunal would actually make access to justice easier for litigants or instead create additional complications.

"Rather than having a single court for the entire country that would require people from Humla and Jumla to travel all the way to Kathmandu, our suggestion was to establish a special bench at the high court to make access to justice easier," the justice said. "In the first phase, benches could be established at all seven high courts and, if necessary, expanded through temporary benches. It would also be appropriate to have a special infrastructure bench at the Supreme Court."

The Supreme Court said the full court would provide its recommendation by next week on whether to establish special benches or a separate tribunal. The government will move ahead with drafting the necessary legislation after receiving the recommendation.

Another Supreme Court justice said the constitution allows the establishment of specialised courts for specific types of cases, meaning the government could establish such a body if it believes there is a genuine need.

But the government should also be mindful of the problems that such a system could create, the justice said.

Questions could arise over the ability of specialised bodies to properly adjudicate cases as well as over the appointment of judges, he said. His suggestion was that infrastructure disputes should be handled by judges with sufficient experience in adjudication.

Following the election held on March 5, the government assigned the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to study the need for an infrastructure court or tribunal to fast-track the resolution of disputes involving critical development projects.

The ministry, on April 8, formed a specialised study committee under Law Secretary Parashwar Dhungana.

After the committee recommended that disputes related to development and construction be handled through a separate tribunal rather than regular courts, the government sent the report to a full-court sitting of the Supreme Court for its opinion.

The study report says establishing an infrastructure tribunal would help end the situation in which development projects involving large amounts of state investment become stalled or unviable because of prolonged disputes.

The Cabinet will draft the legislation required to establish the tribunal after receiving the Supreme Court's recommendations.

Article 152 (1) of the Constitution provides for the establishment of specialised courts. It states that except for matters specified under Article 127, "other specialised courts, judicial bodies or tribunals may be established and constituted under federal law to hear and settle cases of specific kinds and nature."

The government has moved ahead with preparations to establish an infrastructure court under this constitutional provision, similar to the Labour Court and Consumer Court.

But legal experts warn that the proposed tribunal could quickly become overwhelmed unless the government clearly defines which disputes would fall under its jurisdiction.

Senior advocate Baburam Dahal, an expert on public procurement and construction laws, estimates that such a court could have at least 50,000 cases from the outset.

He said it would therefore be necessary to establish a threshold determining which cases could be filed before the proposed tribunal.

"Otherwise, if all infrastructure-related cases are sent there, it will not be possible to hear them," he said. "There are construction and contract-related disputes in all 77 districts. Government offices are parties to almost all of them. This could create a court with an enormous caseload."

The government's study committee has proposed that the body hear writ petitions related to land acquisition, compensation determination and contracting procedures for infrastructure and development projects.

It has proposed that such cases be settled within 60 days.

The committee has also recommended that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and chief judges of the high courts continuously monitor whether cases are being heard and settled within the proposed 60-day period.

The study report highlights the broader economic and social costs of prolonged litigation.

"Hundreds of projects across the country have remained stalled for years because of litigation," the report says. "As a result, ordinary citizens have been deprived for long periods of the services and benefits that such projects are intended to provide."

The proposed tribunal would also hear disputes arising from projects constructed and operated under public-private partnerships, as well as disputes during the construction phase involving contractors, consultants, workers, suppliers and affected local communities.

The committee has proposed that the infrastructure tribunal be headed by a High Court judge, with members including a financial expert with experience and expertise in project management and an expert from the engineering sector.

The proposed tribunal would have one chairperson and at least five or six members. Its members would include technical experts ranging from civil engineers to structural engineers.

The committee has also recommended maintaining a roster of engineers so that technical members can be assigned according to the nature of individual cases.

The report proposes that appeals against decisions of the infrastructure tribunal be filed at the Supreme Court and that a separate infrastructure bench be established there to hear such appeals.

The government's proposal is therefore now at a crucial stage: while the executive sees a specialised tribunal as a way to break the cycle of prolonged litigation and project delays, the Supreme Court appears inclined towards using the existing judicial structure through dedicated benches.

The final recommendation of the full court will determine whether Nepal moves towards a new infrastructure tribunal or relies on specialised benches within its existing courts to speed up the resolution of disputes that have long held back major development projects.

Iran fishermen venture back to Hormuz despite fears of new fighting

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANDAR ABBAS (IRAN), AUG 18

Aboard his boat moored along the Strait of Hormuz, Iranian fisherman Mohammad-Amin mended a torn fishing net after a long day in waters that have long sustained his livelihood, but are now shadowed by the threat of death.

It's been less than a month since the 47-year-old resumed his routine of waking before dawn, heading out to sea and returning hours later with the day's catch—a routine he had to put on hold during months of fighting between Iran and the United States in and around the strategic waterway.

During that time Mohammad-Amin exhausted his modest savings, all the while fearing that his small boat, anchored alongside dozens of others on the Bandar Abbas waterfront, would be destroyed by strikes.

"We had been idle for more than three months; it was simply impossible to go" out to sea, he told AFP as he carefully stitched nylon twine through his net.

Nearly a dozen fishermen were killed off Bandar Abbas and nearby southern islands, and 17 others from the neighbouring Sistan-Baluchistan province south of Hormuz went missing during months of fighting, according to Iranian media.

"It's been about 20 days that we have been going back to sea," Mohammad-Amin said, adding they could wait no longer.

"If we don't (go), we will die of hunger and I have three children."

The waterfront in Bandar Abbas, lined with modest cafes where residents escape the sweltering summer heat, was repeatedly hit during the nearly 40 days of intense fighting and the sporadic clashes that followed despite a ceasefire sealed on April 8.

"They used to strike this place every day; it had become normal... but there was nowhere else to keep the boats," said 53-year-old Hossein, who was among the fishermen who returned to sea as soon as the fighting eased even though many others remained ashore.

More than 2,000 fishermen from the southern Hormozgan province lost their fishing equipment during the fighting, the Iran Daily reported in late July, and hundreds of fishing and trade boats were damaged, according to ISNA news agency.

For Bagher Abbaszadeh, whose boat supports not only his own family but four others, the prospect of losing it was unimaginable.

"If they [the US] had hit the boat, that would have been it for us," said the 39-year-old, also threading a damaged net through his hands.

Repairing torn nets has always been a common practice for fishermen, often after they become tangled on reefs, anchors or other underwater obstacles, but since the war it has become more frequent.

Mohammad-Amin says his nets now regularly snag on the wreckage of vessels damaged during the fighting and other war debris at sea, forcing him to replace equipment he can scarcely afford more frequently.

"We have replaced four nets so far (since we returned)... the sea was dirty before and now it has become even worse with the wreckage of these ships," he said.

Hossein says he cannot be sure exactly what is catching his nets.

How families in Milei's Argentina sank deep into debt

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BUENOS AIRES, AUG 18

Andrea feels deep shame when she thinks about the loan she took out a year ago in Buenos Aires that she is now unable to repay.

She's not alone.

Debt delinquency among Argentine families has tripled in a year, reaching its highest level in two decades under President Javier Milei, a radical free-market champion whose draconian austerity measures have curbed inflation but left many struggling to make ends meet.

Some 5.8 million people are more than 90 days behind on their debt payments, according to the Central Bank of Argentina. Stagnant incomes, coupled with a cost of living crisis—due in part to Milei slashing subsidies for transportation, gas, medicine and other essentials—have nudged household finances to the brink.

Andrea, a 32-year-old mother who declined to give her surname because she felt ashamed of her predicament, tried to reinvent herself by starting a catering business after the stationary shop where she worked shut down.

But the purchase of a new oven landed her in hot water.

"I fell behind on payments, and in a couple of months the debt became too big to repay. It went from one million pesos (about $670) to five million (about $3,360)," she said.

In total, some 21 million people, out of Argentina's population of 46 million, have some type of debt, according to the Central Bank.

Milei has rejected any responsibility for the situation.

"Did they have a gun to their head to make them do it (take out a loan)?" he asked curtly in a recent interview.

The president of Buenos Aires' Banco Provincia, Juan Cuattromo, rejects the notion that Argentines are themselves to blame for getting in over their heads.

He told AFP debt delinquency was "not a consequence of individual decisions" but the result of "a macroeconomic context that has worsened incomes, employment and economic activity."

Interest rates of 1,000 percent

Personal loans and credit cards account for more than 70 percent of unpaid loans, according to a report by the Center for Argentine Political Economy.

"I go to bed and wake up thinking about how I'm going to pay," Claudia Debaste told AFP, referring to her credit card bill.

Debaste, a 40-year-old single mother who works a low-pay office job, ran up a large bill on utilities, transportation, groceries and medicine.

She fell behind on her payments four months ago and is now seeking to reschedule her debt.

Milei has been hailed for his success in fighting high inflation, Argentina's perennial bugbear, but slower price increases are a double-edged sword for people living on credit, as it means their loans retain their value over time.

Longer repayments—coupled with higher bills and stagnant wages—have created the perfect storm for many families. The debt crisis coincides with the rise of easy access to credit from digital wallets such as Mercado Pago, the digital payment arm of e-commerce giant Mercado Libre.

Fintech companies have drawn in adolescents as young as 13, telling them they no longer need to be adults to gain access to "instant cash."



Vladimir Putin hosts Myanmar's leader for talks on deepening relationship

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, AUG 18

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday hosted the head of Myanmar's military-backed government, who visited Russia on a trip to boost their cooperation. Speaking at the start of the talks with President Min Aung Hlaing, Putin noted both countries have cooperated on foreign policy and security issues and developed economic projects.

They have held joint military drills and developed plans for Russia to build a nuclear power plant, a seaport, oil refineries and other facilities in Myanmar.

The visit is the latest in a series of trips by Min Aung Hlaing to foreign countries, including neighbouring China, India, Laos and Thailand as he seeks to strengthen international recognition and regain diplomatic standing with other countries.

Despite the visits, Myanmar has remained largely isolated internationally since the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

Western nations have imposed economic and political sanctions in response to the takeover by the military, which he led, and its violent repression of the opposition, which has seen the deaths of thousands of civilians and given rise to a civil war.

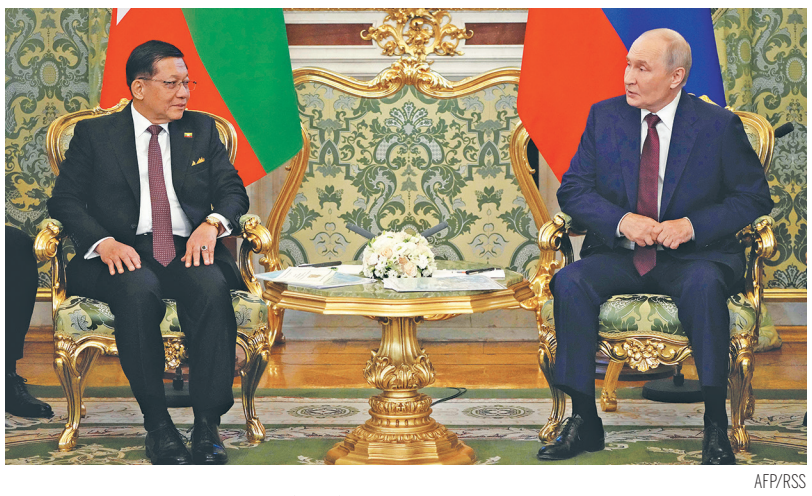
Russia has defended Min Aung Hlaing's military government in international forums while Myanmar's ruling generals have generally supported Moscow's foreign policy agenda.

During Tuesday's talks, Min Aung Hlaing thanked Putin for his political support and emphasised that Myanmar has remained a reliable partner.

Russia, along with China, is a major supporter and arms supplier to Myanmar. Russian-made fighter jets are used in attacks on territory under the control of ethnic minority groups, including many allied with pro-democracy resistance forces.

Russia's Economic Development Minister Maxim Reshetnikov told reporters that Moscow stands ready to increase supplies of oil products, fertilizers and equipment to Myanmar and boost imports of agricultural products and textiles from the country.

The trip marks Min Aung Hlaing's seventh visit to Russia. Min Aung Hlaing previously met Putin on the sidelines of Moscow's World Atomic Week Forum in September. Putin has never visited Myanmar.



AFP/RSS

Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) hosts Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing during a bilateral meeting at the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow, on Tuesday.

Moscow region is hit by a drone blitz as Russian missiles kill 10 in Ukrainian village

HANNA ARHIROVA & BARRY HATTON/AP
KYIV, AUG 18

Ukrainian forces launched one of their biggest drone attacks on Russia since Moscow's invasion over four years ago, firing almost 800 drones only two days after a similar salvo, officials said on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, a Russian missile strike on a village in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region killed at least 10 people and wounded 17 others as the barrage demolished homes, officials said.

The countries are locked in an escalating duel of long-range aerial strikes. Fighting on the roughly 1,250-kilometre front line in eastern and southern Ukraine is restricted by large numbers of drones and ground robots threatening troop movements, and neither side is making significant battlefield progress, analysts say.



AP/RSS

In this photo by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, fire is seen on the site of a Russian air attack in Pechenihy, Kharkiv region, Ukraine, Tuesday.

Putin resists pressure for peace talks

In the past year, Ukraine has devised and deployed domestically produced long-range drones for strikes deep inside Russia. Its drone technology has impressed governments and defence manufacturers around the world.

Officials in Kyiv aim to make the Russian public feel the war's consequences and pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin into negotiating a peace settlement. Putin has so far shown no sign he intends to stop the invasion.

"Putin continues to drag out the war instead of accepting Ukraine's realistic ceasefire proposals and ending the bloodshed," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said in a post on X. Russian air defences overnight intercepted 791 Ukrainian drones over a number of regions, as well as annexed Crimea and the Black and the Azov seas, the defence ministry in Moscow said, in what was the second-largest drone attack since January 2025, according to an Associated Press tally.

More than 600 Ukrainian drones flew toward the Moscow region, where 180 were shot down, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said without elaborating.

Officials reported no deaths or major damage. Ukraine has increasingly launched swarms of hundreds of drones to try to overwhelm Russian air defences.

In the region that surrounds the capital, three people were wounded, Governor Andrei Vorobyov said.

Three people were also wounded in the adjacent Ryazan region where three private houses were damaged, Governor Pavel Malkov said.

The overnight attack started a fire at a warehouse of Wildberries, Russia's biggest online retailer, in an industrial zone. Ukraine has repeatedly targeted the company, which it says helps supply the Russian military, an allegation Moscow denies.

Wildberries said its facility sustained "insignificant damage".

Russian TV doesn't report news of the attack

Coverage of the attack in state and Kremlin-backed Russian media was mostly muted, as is often the case. Russia's main TV channels—state-run Russia 1 and Channel One—did not mention the attack at all in their morning news bulletins.

But Russian state news agency RIA Novosti featured it among the main news on its website's homepage, describing it as "one of the most large-scale attacks on Moscow since the beginning of the summer."

State newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta on its website prominently featured a roundup of what Moscow regional Governor Andrei Vorobyov reported about the attack, describing it as "massive" in the headline. Pro-Kremlin tabloid MK featured a news brief about it on its home page.

Zelenskyy accuses Russia of a 'brutal attack' on civilians

A Russian missile strike on the village of Pechenihy in Ukraine's Kharkiv region killed 10 civilians, according to preliminary information, said Oleh Syniehubov, head of the Kharkiv regional military administration.

Another 17 people were wounded, he said. Zelenskyy called it "a brutal attack" that damaged 10 homes, a cafe, a post office, a store and at least seven vehicles, according to Syniehubov.

"We will definitely respond to this Russian strike," Zelenskyy said on social media. Also, three people were killed and three others were wounded over the past day in Russian attacks on Ukraine's Sumy region, Ukraine's National Police said.

Backlash after Thailand frees 85-year-old drug trafficker

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGKOK, AUG 18

Thailand's justice minister pledged on Tuesday to review pardon criteria following backlash over the release of an 85-year-old drug trafficker who served less than a decade of a life prison sentence.

Laota Saenlee, a former anti-communist guerrilla turned drug runner linked to powerful Myanmar drug kingpins, was arrested by undercover officers in 2016 for selling crystal meth in the Golden Triangle drug-producing region.

The rugged Golden Triangle zone—where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet—has long been a hub for some of the world's most prolific illicit drug producers.

Organised crime groups move an estimated tens of billions of dollars worth of heroin, methamphetamine and ketamine annually from the region.

Thailand's corrections department said on Monday that Laota was released from a maximum-security prison just north of the capital Bangkok on Friday following a series of royal pardons that reduced his life sentence to below the nearly 10 years he served. The "former key drug offender" was freed due to his age and good behaviour, and local authorities would monitor him after his release, the department said in a statement.

His release was widely condemned on social media, and Rewat Klinkesorn, a former narcotics police chief who once investigated Laota, told local media on Monday he was "shocked that a major drugs dealer was released so early".

"The corrections department should improve their regulations. He should not be classified as a good inmate because he is a major drugs dealer," Rewat said.

Justice Minister Rutthapon Naowarat told reporters on Tuesday he had ordered the corrections department to clarify the facts related to Laota's pardon and release.

"The officials followed the [pardon] criteria but there are some flaws in the criteria," Rutthapon said, adding that a review was underway.

Before his 2017 conviction, Laota had been detained multiple times over the years but authorities had not managed to make charges stick.

Laota, who hails from the Lisu ethnic minority, joined China's anti-communist Kuomintang as a child soldier and rose up through the ranks, according to a 2011 interview with the Bangkok Post.

Like many Kuomintang cadres, he later fought for Thailand against communist insurgents in the 1970s in exchange for sanctuary.

He is widely thought to have had ties to one of the world's most wanted drug traffickers, Khun Sa, a Myanmar-based rebel leader who died in 2007.

Asian allies stress 'critical' US cooperation as Trump slashes Korea drills

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL, AUG 18

Japan underlined on Tuesday the "critical" importance of security cooperation with the United States and South Korea, after President Donald Trump alarmed allies by scaling back military drills with Seoul while hailing his ties with Pyongyang. Trump abruptly announced on Sunday that he had ordered the Pentagon to scale back "inappropriate and hostile" military drills with South Korea, a day before the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises got underway.

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, on a visit to Australia, supported security cooperation with key defence backer Washington and neighbour Seoul.

"As Japan faces the most severe and complicated security environment in the post-war era, the cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea is critical to the peace and stability of the region," Koizumi told journalists. Trump on Monday insisted he was making the situation "much safer" through his ties with the North's Kim Jong Un, whom he met three times in his first term but has yet to encounter since his return to the White House. While praising the leader of nuclear-armed North Korea, Trump rebuked key ally Seoul for failing to help Washington fight Iran—a war Trump says is aimed at stopping Tehran from getting an atomic bomb.

Pressed about whether Kim had responded to his messages, Trump told reporters in the Oval Office: "Yeah, he has."

Trump added that the conversations were "very positive", but provided no further detail. He then said his ties with Kim have reduced tensions.

"Kim Jong Un has always treated me with great respect," Trump said. "I understand him. He understands me."

Seoul's unification ministry, responsible for relations with the North, said it "cannot verify the specific content of the exchanges" between Washington and Pyongyang.

No 'intention to escalate'

The 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises with South Korea are designed to prepare for a possible war with North Korea, which decries the drills as dress rehearsals for an invasion. South Korean officials have said the exercises had begun as planned and that they hoped the personal chemistry between Trump and Kim would bring them back to talks. Seoul's presidential office said on Tuesday the drills did not reflect "any intention to attack North Korea or escalate tensions on the Korean peninsula".

North Korea has not responded publicly, although it has previously voiced anger at the regular joint manoeuvres that take place in the South.

Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles, hosting his Japanese counterpart, said Canberra was "very concerned about North Korea's nuclear programme as well as its missile programme".

Trump again called into question on Monday US support for both South Korea and NATO allies that have refused to contribute to the Iran war.

"We have 39,000 soldiers over there, guarding you from Kim Jong Un, your next-door neighbour, and you're not going to help us on a very easy military operation in Iran. That's strange," Trump said in the Oval Office, giving a deployment figure that exceeds official troop numbers. Seoul said on Tuesday that it had been involved in consultations with the United States and other partners over freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and possible military contributions.

South Korea has reviewed "practical military contributions" it could make, while taking into account its defence readiness and domestic legal procedures, national security adviser Wi Sung-lac told reporters.

Partners under pressure

The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea to bolster the country's defences, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War that ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty.

However, Trump's repeated criticism of time-honoured alliances has cast doubt on US commitments to security in East Asia.

The announcement of the scaled-down drills came as the only US aircraft carrier operating in the Pacific region, the USS George Washington, is being redeployed to the Middle East to relieve the USS Lincoln.

The Lincoln has been the focus of concerns over crew mental health and supply issues after a long deployment.

US partners across the region are under pressure to spend more on their militaries, including Taiwan, which Beijing claims is part of its territory and has threatened to use force to annex. The island's President Lai Ching-te pledged on Monday record defence spending for 2027.

Under intense US pressure to cough up more on security, Lai's government has vowed to increase defence spending to five percent of GDP by 2030.



AP/RSS

The US Army's soldiers conduct a training exercise on a river in Yeoncheon, South Korea, near the border with North Korea, on Tuesday.

Pakistan court orders ex-PM Khan moved from jail to hospital

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD, AUG 18



AFP/RSS

Imran Khan

Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered authorities on Tuesday to move jailed former prime minister Imran Khan to hospital for medical checks, after the popular politician's lawyers complained about his poor health.

Imprisoned since 2023 on corruption charges he deems politically motivated, Khan will be moved "within the next two days" to Shifa International Hospital in the capital Islamabad, the court said in its order.

The three-bench court decided that the 73-year-old ex-cricket captain would also be allowed to meet with his family once a week and speak to his sons via telephone twice weekly.

"We are mindful of the constitutional and legal obligation... to safeguard the life, health, dignity and security of persons in custody," the panel wrote.

Khan's personal physician Faisal Sultan, and sister and medical doctor Uzma Khan, "shall be permitted to remain associated with the prisoner's medical examination and treatment".

A medical board including an eye specialist and experts in internal medicine and cardiology would be established for Khan's treatment, the order said.

Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi, who is also his spiritual guide, were both sentenced late last year to 17 years behind bars.

The former prime minister received eye treatment at a hospital this year, with his family and lawyer saying at the time that he had lost most of the vision in his right eye.

His lawyers had since petitioned the court, asking for "proper treatment" from a specialist at the hospital.

Tuesday's ruling granting the petition was "a major step, a major decision, a great blessing", said Salman Akram Raja, secretary-general of Khan's political party, in a video shared on Facebook from outside the court.

He called on the supporters of Khan, who remains a dominant political personality, to abide by the party's agreement with the court that there "must not be any crowding or commotion".

The judges warned against public gatherings within the hospital grounds or the use of information about Khan's health for political gain, cautioning any breaches could lead to the order being reversed.

The next hearing was set for September 16.

Khan was prime minister from 2018 to 2022 before being removed in a no-confidence vote during a political crisis over tensions between his government and the powerful military establishment.

He has since faced multiple legal cases on corruption and other charges, which Khan and the PTI maintain are politically motivated.

His arrest triggered nationwide protests in May 2023, some of which turned violent and led to hundreds of arrests.

Ending decades of political dominance by dynastic parties, Khan was voted in by millions of Pakistanis who grew up watching him play cricket, where he excelled as an all-rounder and led the nation to a World Cup victory in 1992.

But his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party made little headway improving the country's finances, with galloping inflation, crippling debt and a feeble rupee undermining economic reform.

All aboard as Asian Games preparations enter 'final stages'

Of the roughly 15,000 people expected at the event, 4,000 to 5,000 athletes will stay on the ship, which features 571 cabins, 7 swimming pools, 8 restaurants and 9 bars.

ANDREW MCKIRDY/AFP
TOKYO, AUG 18



AFP/RSS

The Nagoya City Mizuho Park Athletic Stadium will be the main venue at the Games.

The Asian Games begin in Japan next month featuring teenage prodigies, more athletes than the Olympics and a cruise ship that will house competitors in the middle of typhoon season.

About 15,000 competitors and officials are expected at the event, which takes place in Nagoya and the wider Aichi area from September 19 to October 4. Among those in action will be Philippine tennis sensation Alexandra Eala and a pair of world-class talents in 15-year-old Indian cricketer Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and 13-year-old Chinese swimmer Yu Zidi.

Organisers hope the athletes will have a "unique experience" staying in accommodation ranging from a cruise liner and wooden containers to standard hotel rooms.

A flame-lighting ceremony was held in Tokyo on Tuesday, with a similar event planned for 1994 Asian Games host Hiroshima on Thursday, before the flames come together on Saturday in Nagoya to begin the torch relay.

Kazuhiro Yagi, vice-secretary general of the Aichi-Nagoya Games organising committee, told AFP that "it feels like the Games are right around the corner". "The final stages of preparation are now upon us," he said. "We will continue working as one right until the last moment and we hope that people from all over Asia, not just Japan, will enjoy the event."

Organisers have opted for temporary athlete accommodation to cut costs, hiring the Italian cruise ship Costa Serena for the event.

Between 4,000 and 5,000 athletes will stay on the ship, which features 571 cabins, seven swimming pools, eight restaurants and nine bars.

Officials are confident that the plan will not be disrupted by Japan's typhoon season, which is usually in full swing in September-October.

Teen stars

A further 2,000 athletes and officials will stay in wooden shipping container-style huts in Nagoya's Garden Pier area while the rest will stay in hotels.

That includes in Tokyo, where swimming, diving and equestrian events will take place.

"For the athletes the accommodation is a place to relax and socialise with their fellow competitors," said Yagi. "To ensure that all athletes can enjoy a comfortable stay and deliver their best performance, preparations for accommodation are entering their final stage."

Eala will be among the most prominent athletes competing in Nagoya, and the 21-year-old will be looking to continue her rapid rise in women's tennis. The world number 20 became the first player from the Philippines to win a WTA title when she triumphed at the Washington Open earlier this month. She is hot property in her home country, sparking a rush of interest in tennis and inspiring youngsters to take up the sport.

Sooryavanshi will also turn heads after announcing himself as a major new talent in world cricket.

The gifted teenager became the youngest cricketer to represent India last month when he debuted in a Twenty20 match against England.

'Palpable excitement'

Sooryavanshi will be hoping to win gold at Japan's newly built cricket ground, where defending champions India could face arch-rivals Pakistan in the men's final.

Swimmer Yu has also made a name for herself with her astonishing progress in the pool, setting a new women's 200m individual medley Asian record last year. Yu, who turns 14 in October, will be part of a Chinese team that will again look to top the medals table after dominating on home soil at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023. China won a record 201 golds, almost four times as many as second-place Japan.

As always at the Asian Games, traditional sports like athletics, swimming and football sit side by side with more local disciplines such as kabaddi, sepak takraw and wushu.

New events at the 20th edition of the Games include mixed martial arts, padel, teqball and virtual taekwondo.

Esports returns after a hugely successful debut in Hangzhou, with Nagoya organisers saying they hope to inspire elderly people to keep their minds sharp by picking up a controller. With the Asian Games returning to Japan for the first time since 1994, the organising committee's Yagi said the atmosphere was "gradually becoming palpable".

"We hope to move you and excite you, and to showcase the wonder of sport," he said.



Rift deepens as Asia football chief hits back at Qatar in Infantino saga

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 18



FILE PHOTO: AFP/RSS

President of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa.

A damaging split within Asian football deepened Tuesday as the region's top official hit back at a Qatari challenge over the confederation's move to join UEFA and CONCACAF in targeting FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

Infantino has been the butt of scathing criticism ever since launching, and then withdrawing within days, a plan to bring private investment into FIFA competitions, including World Cups. Infantino came under renewed fire over the scheme last week in a joint letter from the three confederations, including the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), who declared that "football belongs to no individual". Infantino's critics want him to stand down over the failed plot to sell off stakes in the World Cup.

Recent reports quoted Qatar Football Association president Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani saying in a letter to the AFC that neither he nor the QFA had been consulted before the joint statement was issued.

The Qatari football chief demanded an explanation as to why no consultation had taken place and on what basis the AFC could speak on behalf of its 47 member associations, including Qatar.

AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa has now hit back to deny he exceeded his authority, saying he acted "within the legal mandate given to me in the AFC's constitution".

"I categorically reject any suggestion that my participation in the joint statement exceeded my authority or that the AFC erred in participating in it," the Bahraini said in a letter seen by AFP on Tuesday. "The AFC is the custodian of football in Asia and its president has a responsibility to protect the interests and values of the sport," he added.

"In circumstances such as those giving rise to the joint statement it would be inconsistent with that responsibility to remain silent."

The AFC, CONCACAF and UEFA had been vociferous in their condemnation of Infantino's sell-off plan and have not let up even after it was shelved. The confederations signed off their letter last week by claiming that under Infantino's leadership "there is silence where there should be accountability, distance where there should be openness".

Infantino has refused to buckle over his position as president and received the "full support" of senior FIFA directors in an emergency meeting he called in Morocco two weeks ago.

A top official leaves FIFA following Infantino's World Cup sell-off plan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ZURICH, AUG 18

FIFA's chief operating officer, Kevin Lamour, has reportedly left his role at football's governing body just weeks after saying its president, Gianni Infantino, had deceived staff with his World Cup sell-off plan.

Lamour, who is based in Zurich, all but invited Infantino to fire him in a statement to The Associated Press on August 1 that defended his colleagues amid intense fallout from the plan to sell stakes in future World Cup profits to private equity funds.

Lamour wrote that staff were "deceived" by Infantino's lack of openness in planning. He released the statement on the same day Infantino's senior adviser, Carlos Cordeiro, decided to walk away and described the $20 billion commercial subsidiary plan as "a bad deal for football."

Britain's Press Association late Monday quoted a FIFA spokesperson as saying: "FIFA can confirm that the working relationship between FIFA and Kevin Lamour as FIFA's Chief Operating Officer has ended."

"FIFA thanks Kevin for his two years of service and wishes him the best of luck for the future. No further comment will be made on the matter."

Infantino is seeking re-election as FIFA president but remains under pressure after the heads of three continental confederations—for Europe, Asia and for North, Central America and the Caribbean—issued an open letter last week saying his World Cup plan was a "fundamental breach of trust" and described it as "deception."

Infantino withdrew the $20 billion proposal after a furious backlash by global football officials, including European body UEFA, which has warned of a boycott of all FIFA games and events.

Some national federations have withdrawn their support for Infantino, although the heads of six Arab federations last week expressed their "full support" and "confidence" in the president.

Infantino has been FIFA president since 2016 and, until the backlash over the so-called FIFA Forward Enterprise proposal, seemed sure to be re-elected unopposed next year in Morocco. FIFA has set a November 18 deadline for challengers to come forward.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Aries, if there's something interesting that you've wanted to try, this is a great day for it. Adventure brings excitement, creative flow, and energy, which are essential to you. You're highly artistic.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
With today's energy, you can take steps toward getting things in order, Taurus. Tackle desk drawers, closets, storage rooms, or filing cabinets. When you create order, you gain a sense of peace and personal control.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Today's energy can have you feeling ready for anything, Gemini. Given your more radical approach, you may need to keep in check. Humanitarianism is part of your being.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Today might be a good day to take a second shot at something that didn't work out the first time, Cancer. Falling flat on your face can damage your self-esteem and confidence.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Your ability to find innovative approaches to things may serve you well today, Leo. Strong energy and mental acuity continue today, and you'll find that most things come easily.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
If long-overdue work has piled up, Virgo, today is the day to dig in. This is especially so for things you weren't able to handle yesterday. Fortunately, you have added strength and mental acuity.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Don't worry about being productive today, Libra. You might still accomplish more than you have in a long time. The cosmic energy indicates that if you didn't get everything done that you wanted to yesterday, you're sure to do it today.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Expect an added boost of physical energy today, Scorpio. It's an excellent day to clean out closets. Exercise like yoga or walking will be most enjoyable. It could also prove to be well worth your while to look at your goals.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
If certain projects or tasks have seemed difficult for you to finish, today's energy will give you the zip you need, Sagittarius. The energy indicates that things will go well for you once you get started.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
You might feel more energetic than you have in a long time, Capricorn. A powerful energy that increases your mental acuity and physical strength can really help you finish anything that's pending.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
If there's something you've wanted to take on, Aquarius, today's the day. There's an increase in your physical and mental strength. Dispose of any insecurity or lack of confidence and take the steps to tackle a project or goal.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
If you've been feeling sluggish lately, this will be a welcome day for you, Pisces. You'll feel a surge in energy that greatly increases your creativity and physical strength. Seize the opportunity to be outside for sports or a walk.

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CROSSWORD

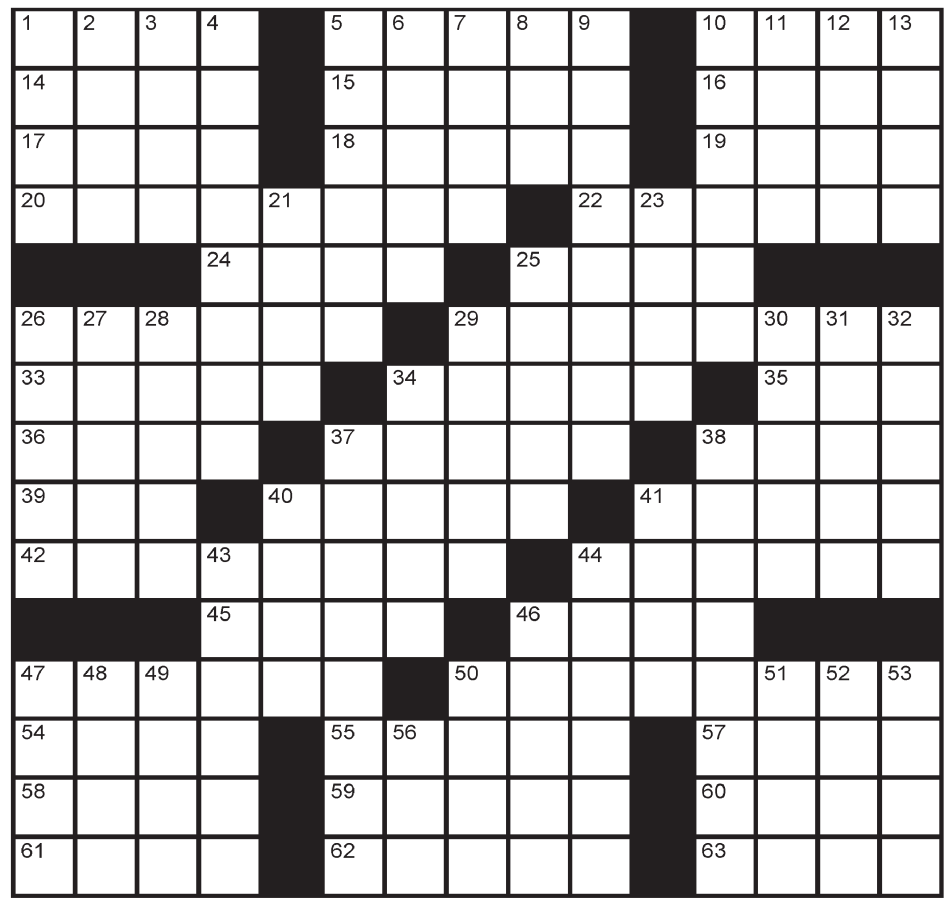
ACROSS
1 — but not least
5 French painter
10 Behaves
14 Chief
15 Soap substitute
16 Loafer
17 Burn the surface of
18 Dead language
19 Certain
20 Clean thoroughly
22 Motifs
24 Shoestring
25 Couple
26 Actor — Nielsen
29 Adhesive strip for industrial repairs (2 wds.)
33 "Tempest" sprite
34 Gals
35 Sheep's cry
36 Poet
37 Distress signal
38 Expense
39 Compass pt.
40 Satellites
41 Angled trough
42 "Neither a borrower nor a — —"
44 Bleach
45 Appraise
46 Body of still water
47 Contract
50 Deceleration
54 Implement
55 Himalayan country
57 Home goods retailer
58 Salt sea in Asia
59 Egg-shaped
60 Shut
61 L.A. players
62 Elemental gas
63 Fabled racer

DOWN
1 Young girl
2 Length times width
3 Read hastily
4 Excited
5 Ill-will
6 Shock
7 Observe
8 Actor — Wallach
9 Octopus limb
10 Say with confidence
11 Pal
12 Ripped
13 Perceives
21 Follow in secret
23 Chart-toppers
25 Contented cat's sounds
26 Sticker
27 Efface
28 Warning device
29 Actress — Keaton
30 Circa
31 Glue
32 Consumed
34 Spherical map
37 Gold reserve location (2 wds.)
38 Immature
40 Intend
41 Stuff to eat
43 Bores
44 Made of cashmere
46 Great Greek thinker
47 A-lister
48 Israeli dance
49 Wander
50 Bridge
51 State near Miss.
52 Have on
53 Specify
56 All Hallows' —

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

S	L	I	P	■	M	A	R	E	S	■	A	C	I	D
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■	L	O	T	I	O	N	■	■	D	R	A	M	A	S
H	E	M	■	L	O	A	D	S	■	S	T	A	T	E
A	V	E	R	■	M	I	N	O	R	■	E	R	S	E
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P	L	A	T	E	S	■	■	E	T	A	L	I	A	■
■	■	■	I	S	L	A	■	R	U	N	E	■	■	■
A	E	R	O	S	O	L	S	■	R	E	A	P	E	D
S	P	A	N	■	P	E	C	A	N	■	G	A	T	E
S	E	R	A	■	E	V	A	D	E	■	U	L	N	A
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SUDOKU

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6	5	4	8	7	2	9	1	3
8	2	3	1	9	4	6	5	7
1	3	8	9	2	7	4	6	5
7	9	6	4	1	5	3	8	2
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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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No.SC6107 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

‘Chiso Maanchhe’ finds warmth in an unlikely journey

Dipendra K Khanal’s 2022 film follows a dead migrant worker on his final journey home, finding grief, intimacy and a changing society in the silences along the way.



JONY NEPAL
KATHMANDU

There are not many Nepali filmmakers willing to trust their audience to understand their film without announcing its intentions through dialogues. Dipendra K Khanal, however, seems to have given us a space to sit with his images, silences and ambiguities to make sense of ‘Chiso Maanchhe’ on our own.

Released in the theatres in 2022 and on YouTube in 2025, the film begins with a rolling wheel as the radio announces the number of deaths in Nepal during the coronavirus pandemic. Ashok (played by Arpan Thapa) has a mask hanging under his chin and a sanitiser on the edge of his truck’s window.

Ashok, a driver, is hired to take a corpse from Kathmandu to Bajura in his truck. This is a corpse that has freshly arrived from Qatar, one of the major destinations for Nepali migrant workers. Accompanying Ashok are a grieving father, Sher Bahadur (Deshbhakta Khanal), and a widowed wife (Swastima Khadka). The wheels roll and the journey begins.

As they travel from Kathmandu to Bajura, they encounter the broader terror of the widespread virus with the roads engulfed by corpses, migrants, police, and youth patrols. Some go along with them and others obstruct their passage.

With them moving, stopping, negotiating, rebelling and starting again, the story becomes an emblem of the precariousness of life. Along with this, the characters, initially entirely as strangers, begin to understand each other’s worlds, and more importantly, their own.

Khanal, also the director of ‘Aama’, ‘Pashupati Prasad’, ‘Ke Ghar Ke Dera’, is best known for depicting social issues and everyday struggles in his films and he continues doing so in ‘Chiso Maanchhe’. The film shows a broader picture of a frozen, individualistic and isolated society.

In a scene, Khadka’s character is found frolicking in the woods, as though she stumbled upon an oasis. Her father-in-law calls her out, quickly and furiously, and says, “If this was the old days, you would’ve had to become a sati.” The sati is a historical custom where a widow self-immolates on her deceased husband’s funeral pyre.

“If not physically, I have been made a sati in heart,” she says.

It is a line the film never explains, and doesn’t need to, because by then, Khanal has already taught us to read what isn’t said. Non-verbal cues in the film stand monumental for its provocative ways to communicate its themes and the characters’ emotions.

The truck carrying the corpse of Damber Bahadur, who died of “heart failure” in Qatar, has a quote painted on its back in red. “Life goes on with happiness and laughter. If we work hard, we can find gold in our own country.”

The irony is stark and unmistakable.

Further, these non-verbal cues particularly elaborate the dynamics between Ashok, the driver, and the daughter-in-law.

Whether it’s buying her a bag of titaura to satisfy her cravings or extinguishing his cigarette when she looks uncomfortable, these small, wordless gestures create a sense of intimacy throughout their journey.

With this screenwriting, as commendable as to earn him the ‘Best Writer Award’ for the film, Khanal, however, fails to depict the nuances of his female character. He neither gives a promising background to the daughter-in-law nor a name.

Khadka’s character attempts to run away before retrieving her husband’s dead body. Later, she is found staring at a poster that showed the winner of ‘Nepal Idol’, a singing reality show. We understand consequently that her dream was to become a singer, and that the marriage had not given her enough reasons to grieve her dead husband.

She is given a dream. And a somewhat rebellious nature to chase it. But not enough to earn her a platform of her own.

However, Khadka’s body language, dialect, eye contacts, and even the way she blinks are carefully curated habits to build her character which results in a memorable depiction despite being written unidimensionally.

Ashok, on the other hand, gets to reminisce about his dead wife and six-month-old child whom he left behind with his sister. We understand his financial struggles after he receives a call from his bank warning about the confiscation of his vehicle.

Ashok’s cognitive understanding of self and emotional intelligence add depth to his character.

Costumes of the three lead characters, which are the same throughout the film along with their make-up, also amplify the realism of the film, fitting perfectly into the travel-cinema narrative.



SCREENGRABS VIA YOUTUBE

Khanal knew his ways to create a connection between the audience and the screen. With minimal dialogues, the audience, from early on, can get the idea of having to pay close attention to the cinematography, colours, props, and every edge of a frame.

One that stands out the most is the red light inside the truck juxtaposed by the darkness of the outside. Ambience as such gives the film a sense of depth under the warmth, or the discomfort of red.

However, at times, it is almost difficult to put into words the intent of the director. One is compelled to replay some scenes over and over again, simply to understand its underlying motive.

There’s a scene, for instance, where a line of people wearing masks and carrying their belongings walk in a corner of a moving frame. But it is not clear what Khanal is trying to imply with it. After all, why were the people there? Why in a single line? Why were they carrying their belongings and where were they going? Questions like these remain unanswered.

This ambiguity further enters the moral terrain inhabited by the film’s characters. Scenes of dispute and altercation also follow the journey. Yet, every character is given their own motivation and moral ground, resisting the easy division between right and wrong.

Therefore, the film pivots toward a moral question. And Sher Bahadur seems to be the most affected by it. His character, initially a grieving father and a culturally restrictive father-in-law, slowly melts into a man capable of introspection. ‘Chiso Maanchhe’ may seem like it has a slow pace. And it certainly does. But rather than a drawback, it is the film’s conscious choice to demand patience from its viewers.

In the end, the film leaves a corpse, an unrequited love, and a society in transition. It asks us to sit in the cold with its characters. Perhaps the coldness is not only theirs.

Chiso Maanchhe
Rating: ★★★☆☆
Year: 2022
Director: Dipendra K Khanal
Available on: YouTube

A Chinese animated film mocked as ‘terrible’ becomes a box-office hit

Mocked online for its crude animation and bizarre premise, ‘Niu Lai’ had an unexpected box-office phenomenon.

FU TING

The new sensation among some Chinese moviegoers is an animated film whose characters appear to have been created with rudimentary 3D animation and have been described as ‘ugly’ and ‘eerie’.

But it is the scathing online reviews that seem to have prompted interest in ‘Niu Lai,’ an animated film about a calf who had a dream about himself growing up with the help of his family, driving a surprising surge at the box office.

The film earned only about 10,000 yuan at the box office in the first 10 days after its Aug. 5 release. On some days, the film took in as little as 200 yuan at the box office, according to Maoyan, a movie-tracking platform. The figure was exceptionally low, particularly during the competitive summer movie season.

Red Star News, a local news website in Chengdu, reported that the film was made over five years by just two people — director Xin Yumeng and his mother, Sun Lifan. The Associated Press was unable to reach Xin and could not independently verify this.

Posters seen at movie theaters featured a calf, hand-drawn in pen without color, alongside handwritten slogans: ‘Come on over if you’re into the bizarre’ and ‘No refunds.’

A ‘terrible’ movie viewers recommend as a prank

On Douban, a popular Chinese movie-review platform, viewers piled on with mocking and bewildered comments.

Among the most popular: ‘unbelievably terrible and eye-opening,’ ‘a symbol of the new internet troll culture,’ and ‘a must-watch for Chinese stock market investors.’ The last is a play on the film’s name, ‘Niu Lai,’ which literally means ‘the bull is coming’ in Chinese — a wish for a bull market.

Comments such as ‘over nine out of ten,’ and ‘awesome and highly recommended’ are also among the sarcastic reactions.

“My initial intention has always been to play pranks on my friends,” said Du Mingxi, a 19-year-old college student in Shanghai.

“If a friend asks me what I think about the movie, I’d say good and recommend them to watch,” he said, adding that he successfully tricked two friends to watch the movie with him. Both found it fun, but one fell asleep during the viewing.

Du compared young people going to the movies to see this kind of film to the mysterious ‘six-seven’ craze in the US, saying that some are just drawn to things they find weird or funny, with many jumping on a trend whether they get it or not.

‘They are just the same, it is funny but hard to describe what’s funny about it, and young people just love spreading these memes virally,’ said Du.

Despite the flood of criticism and memes, some viewers didn’t mind the rudimentary production.

Zhong Jiaming, a vocational schoolteacher in Guangzhou, called it a rare find in an era when movies are often ‘visually exquisite and polished, but their stories can fail to engage.’

“This is a movie for the young at heart,” said Zhong. “It is simple and honest, like a bedtime story for children.”

What began as a joke has become an unlikely hit, with audiences flocking to a film they were told was terrible.



AP/RSS

– Associated Press

EVERYDAY AI



DIJUP TULADHAR

Tuladhar, a senior principal product designer at Infinite Computer Solutions and the founder of Chordpedia shares how he uses AI for researching a problem, exploring ideas, writing and analysing.

Research
Working in US healthcare means I frequently encounter terminology and systems that are unfamiliar in the Nepali context. Previously, understanding a new healthcare concept could require hours or days. Now, I can use AI to break down unfamiliar concepts.
I still verify important information through reliable sources. But AI has shortened the distance.

Building Chordpedia
I founded Chordpedia in 2015 after struggling to find chords for Nepali songs online. The biggest challenge was always execution. AI has changed that equation.
With AI-assisted coding and tools such as ChatGPT, I can move from an idea to a prototype or working feature much faster.

Design and prototyping
Tools such as Figma Make, Lovable and Stitch have changed how I move from an idea to something tangible.
Previously, there was a long process between having an idea and being able to interact with a prototype. Now, I can describe a problem, explore different approaches, generate a prototype, interact with it, identify problems and make changes almost immediately.
However, AI has made the process of designing faster yet hasn’t necessarily made deciding what to design easier.

User research and feedback
I use AI to process large amounts of user feedback and identify patterns. It can group similar responses, summarise what users are saying and help him look at competitors from different perspectives.
I look at AI as an assistant. AI can help identify patterns and ask questions, but it cannot always understand the context behind a decision—including users, business priorities, organisational culture and technical limitations.

Everyday life
AI is not limited to my professional life. I also use it for travel planning, learning, comparing options and solving technical problems.
One of my favourite things to do is to use AI to challenge my own thinking.
Instead of asking AI to agree with an idea, I ask it to explain why the idea might be wrong, what I could be missing and what an opposing perspective might look like.

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