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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Landslide survivors spend week at health post as relief stalls

Multiple landslides block road at dozens of places, leaving 20 survivors without adequate food, clothes and other essentials.

KASHIRAM DANGI
ROLPA, AUG 20

Duk Pun Magar, 54, of Kotalbara in Thawang Rural Municipality-5, lost his home and a family member to a landslide on August 13. Since then, he has been spending his nights at a nearby health post.

"I was involved in the rescue efforts in the aftermath of the landslide," he said. "Since I had no home to return to, I have been living here."

Eight days after the devastating landslide killed 13 people in Kotalbara, displaced families are still spending nights at a local health post while relief supplies meant for them remain stalled along a blocked road.

Multiple landslides have blocked the road to the health post at dozens of places, leaving food, clothes and other essentials at Mabang, Pobang and Phuliban.

Buddhi Gharti Magar, chairman of Thawang-5, says the road is unlikely to reopen soon, and moving the supplies by foot would require around 200 porters. "None of the relief materials collected in the survivors' names has reached here," he said.

"A lot of the supplies are heaped up along the way. The ward office and villagers have been trying to make up for the shortfall."

The immediate needs of survivors have so far been met through food and other materials provided by the local unit, its residents and survivors' relatives. Relief brought to Kotalbara by a joint effort of the rural municipality and the Nepal Red Cross Society has been exhausted. Local representatives have complained about poor coordination among relief providers.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF NIM SUBEDI

Displaced people take shelter at a health post in Thawang-5, Kotalbara, Rolpa.

Individuals and organisations have been collecting aid without informing the ward office in advance, making it difficult to know what is coming and what is needed.

"We ask the relief providers to give us a list of the materials they have collected," said Gharti Magar.

"But we do not have complete information about those collecting relief. If we were informed beforehand, we could coordinate with the local administration."

The district administration has instructed relief organisations to follow a one-door system to prevent duplication and ensure that assistance reaches genuine survivors. Assistant Chief District Officer Ghanashyam Gautam said the administration is monitoring implementation and had instructed the district road infrastructure office to clear blocked sections.

"The aim is to prevent duplication in relief collection and distribution, ensure that genuine survivors receive what they need and make proper use of the assistance received," said Gautam. "We have also instructed the road infrastructure office to open the blocked road."

The administration has also asked the organisations involved in relief efforts to submit details of aid collected and distributed.

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Only 53 percent of UML workers renew party membership

Over 327,000 yet to update status—amid grievances, few opportunities for young cadres and push to clean up roll.

GANGA BC
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

The number of CPN-UML members has fallen sharply, with only about 53 percent of committed workers renewing their membership, as the party struggles to rebuild its organisation shaken after last year's Gen Z movement.

According to figures provided by provincial committees, 359,000 members renewed their membership by the mid-August deadline.

The figures are still being updated, party officials said.

The party had 686,700 members on its rolls, meaning that around 327,000 have not renewed their membership.

UML leaders attribute the low renewal rate to growing dissatisfaction among some cadres, a lack of opportunities for those who have not benefited from the party's organisational structure, and limited space for younger members.

The party led by KP Sharma Oli was in power in a coalition government with the Nepali Congress. The September revolt ousted Oli as prime minister last year. In the general convention held in December last year, Oli was re-elected the party chair, despite the message of the movement that a younger generation should lead Nepal's traditional political parties.

The March elections held earlier this year left the party a distant third force, as an overwhelming majority went in favour of the Rastriya Swatantra Party. The Nepali Congress also shrank to a much smaller size, even as it holds the second place in the federal parliament.

The spectacular fall in popular vote—to 1.45 million from 2.84 million in the 2022 election—led the UML to reexamine its organisational base.

Leaders call the renewal process a test of the listed members' commitment to the party, especially following its loss of support base as seen in the March elections. UML General Secretary Shankar Pokharel says the party needs policies that give both older and younger members a sense of future within the organisation.

> **359,000 UML leaders renewed their membership by the mid-August deadline.**

"We need to create conditions in which young people see their future in the party," Pokharel told Kantipur last week. "That is possible only through restructuring the party."

Pokharel, who is also the secretary of a panel led by vice-chair Ram Bahadur Thapa for party restructuring, has proposed a system that brings three generations together and creates a swift mechanism for leadership development and transfer.

A breakdown of the membership renewal figures shows a uniform pattern of update.

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Ruling party chief tells CIAA to act if the executive obstructs its work

Chief commissioner admits government called them to a meet on passport issue.

RSS

CIAA chief Prem Kumar Rai

JAYA SINGH MAHARA
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his secretariat have come under parliamentary scrutiny over allegations that officials of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority were held at the Prime Minister's Office for seven hours and pressured to prosecute officials in a passport procurement case.

Rabi Lamichhane, chair of the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party, said on Thursday that obstructing the CIAA's work was an offence. He urged the commission to act if the government had interfered with its investigation. Speaking at a meeting of the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee, Lamichhane said that, as the leader of the party running the government, he would not object if the CIAA took action against anyone found to have obstructed its work.

>> Continued on page 2

Nepal's journalism classrooms are emptying out

A shrinking media industry, low pay and insecure jobs are pushing students to other fields and overseas, say teachers and media professionals.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

A journalism class in progress at Madan Bhandari Memorial College at Anamnagar, Kathmandu, in this recent photo.

DAYA DUDRAJ
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

The classrooms that once drew aspiring reporters from across Nepal are falling quiet. Fewer students are choosing journalism, a sign of growing troubles in the country's media industry.

At Janapremi World School in Bhaktapur, journalism was once one of the college's defining programmes. Since it began offering journalism at the plus-two level in 2009, students from 57 districts have studied there. At its peak, 76 students enrolled in a single batch. Many alumni went on to work in mainstream media. But the programme has not admitted a new student for four years.

"We ran the programme even when there were only 19 students in the last batch," said Nilesh Acharya, principal of Janapremi World School. "But as the student numbers kept falling, we had no option but to shut down the department."

The college continues to attract a significant number of students to its science, management and law programmes at grades 11 and 12, he said.

The experience is not isolated. Data from the National Examination Board show that the number of schools offering journalism and mass communication at grades 11 and 12 fell from 209 in academic year 2022-23 to 105 in 2026-27. Student enrolment also dropped from 4,303 students to 1,303 over the same period.

The decline extends to university education. Tribhuvan University's Office of the Controller of Examinations recorded 2,760 students enrolling in journalism and mass communication at bachelor's level in 2020-21. By 2024-25, the figure had fallen to 1,132. Enrolment followed the same downward path: 3,097 in 2021-22; 2,059 in 2022-23; 1,277 in 2023-24 and 1,132 in 2024-25.

In the academic year 2020-21, journalism and mass communication were taught at 74 campuses affiliated with Tribhuvan University across the country. The number fell to 61 in 2023-24 and declined further to just 57 by 2024-25.

Purbanchal University has seen a similar trend. Its journalism and mass communication enrolment fell from 122 students in 2021-22 to 74 in 2025-26.

At St Xavier's College in Maitighar, journalism department head Chun Bahadur Gurung has seen the change in his own classroom. "We have taught as many as 34 students in a batch, but now the average is around 14 or 15," he said. Teachers and college administrators point to several reasons: shrinking number of media outlets, low salaries, delayed payments, insecure jobs, the growing preference for overseas education, and stronger demand for subjects perceived to offer clearer career paths.

"Most students who come to us for counselling ask which subject would be best if they want to go abroad," said Acharya. "Out of 1,000 students, perhaps only one shows interest in journalism."

For many students, the attraction of foreign education is reinforced by the perception that journalism offers few secure career opportunities at home. The wider media industry has struggled to create stable jobs and decent working conditions.

"Journalism itself is in a problematic state," said Rishikesh Dahal, an associate professor at TU's Department of Journalism and Mass Communication. "Many media outlets have disappeared and there is no longer the competition we saw before. It is natural for students to turn away from such an uncertain profession."

According to Dahal, the media sector is struggling not only with a shrinking business model, but also with a severe erosion of public trust. "The 2015 earthquake served as an early warning for the media industry, but we failed to prepare, and the Covid pandemic subsequently hit us hard," he said.

The economic difficulties have also changed how journalists work and how audiences consume news. Social media has made publishing and distributing information easier than ever, while weakening the traditional boundaries between journalism, commentary, entertainment and influence.

> Public trust in the media has also eroded, says TU teacher Rishikesh Dahal.

Nepal's media sector came under severe pressure during the Covid pandemic, while the September 2025 Gen Z protests brought further destruction. Journalists were injured and several newsrooms were attacked or burned during the unrest.

Dipesh Acharya, proprietor of the College of Journalism and Mass Communication (CJMC), however, argues that this should strengthen rather than weaken the case for professional journalism.

"Access to information has expanded greatly, but misleading information and clickbait content have also increased," he said. "In such a situation, the role of professional journalism is even more important. But we need to create an environment in which the new generation entering the field can stay."

The challenge, educators say, is that journalism education has not kept pace with changes in the industry.

Manju Mishra, founding principal of CJMC, said social media and new technology had transformed the way information was produced and distributed, but universities and journalism programmes had not adapted at the same speed.

"There is a wide gap between what is taught in classrooms and what happens in real newsrooms," said Mishra. "Without regular internships, newsroom-based practice and access to modern communication tools, it is difficult to make journalism education relevant and market-oriented."

Gurung agrees that the curriculum needs a major overhaul. "We need to ask what kind of curriculum we are teaching," he said. "Is the course suited to the times, or are we still following an old syllabus? A market-oriented and contemporary curriculum is essential."

In his experience, students are increasingly more interested in content creation than traditional journalism. That shift, he said, should not simply be treated as a threat. Journalism education could use it to teach students how to report, verify and distribute credible information across multiple platforms.

"Journalism is not just an academic subject," said Gurung. "It produces skilled people who protect citizens' right to information, uphold accountability and keep public debate alive."

The history of journalism education in Nepal is much older than today's digital media landscape. The institutional development of Nepali journalism is generally traced to the publication of Sudha Sagar in 1898 and Gorkhapatra in 1901. Formal academic journalism education began later at Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, where journalism was introduced at certificate level in 1976. Bachelor's-level study followed in 1981 and master's-level study in 2001.

Prateek Pradhan, editor-in-chief of news website Baahrakhari, said the weakness of media institutions themselves was partly responsible for the declining appeal of journalism as a career. "Media organisations have not been able to properly operate financially, so they could not pay salaries on time," said Pradhan. "As a result, the idea has grown that perhaps one should not study journalism."

He also warned that the public image of journalism suffers when people without a clear understanding of professional ethics become prominent through social media.

"If people can do whatever they want without understanding journalism's principles and values, and those people gain prominence, it discourages students from studying journalism," he said. "There has been little effort to say that journalism is worth studying or that journalism must be kept alive."

On paper, Nepal is doing better than most of its neighbours. In practice, the space for journalism is tightening.

As the world marked World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Nepal's position in the latest World Press Freedom Index 2026 offered a measure of reassurance. Published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the index places Nepal 87th out of 180 countries, the highest in South Asia.

"Journalism must not die, especially at a time when democracy is under pressure globally," said Gurung. "It is not dead. I would rather say it is changing. We need a multidisciplinary approach that matches the times and responds to what the market needs."

Topgay is Bhutan's pick for SAARC chief

His nomination could be discussed at a proposed SAARC ministerial meeting in New York on September 25.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BHUTANESE KING'S FACEBOOK

Dasho Sonam Topgay

Bhutan has proposed Dasho Sonam Topgay as the 16th secretary general of SAARC, in a routine leadership change with the regional group remaining mired in a prolonged political stalemate.

SAARC's incumbent Secretary General Golam Sarwar of Bangladesh is due to complete his three-year term at the end of October. Under SAARC's established alphabetical rotation, it is Bhutan's turn to nominate the next secretary general.

"Thimphu proposed Topgay's name at the SAARC Secretariat in early August and is now seeking concurrence from member states," a diplomat at the SAARC Secretariat told the Post.

The nomination could be discussed at a SAARC meeting proposed by Nepal for September 25 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, according to diplomatic sources. If all seven other member states concur with Bhutan's nomination, Topgay is expected to assume office by the end of October.

SAARC has been unable to hold a summit since 2016. No high-level meeting above the programming committee, which meets at the joint-secretary level, has taken place since 2020, further slowing the regional process.

An informal meeting of SAARC foreign ministers on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly has also failed to take place in recent years amid the longstanding rivalry between India and Pakistan. A senior Nepali foreign ministry official confirmed to the Post that Nepal has proposed a meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers, comprising the seven member states other than Afghanistan, in New York on September 25. A circular has been sent to the seven member states through the SAARC Secretariat.

"We are hopeful, as some of the heads of the member states have stressed the need to revive the stalled SAARC process," the official said. The meeting, however, is unlikely to take place unless India gives its concurrence.

Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal is scheduled to lead the Nepali delegation to New York.

Reviving the stalled SAARC process, including efforts to convene a summit, is expected to be among the key challenges facing the new secretary general. Topgay, a former chief election commissioner of Bhutan (until 2025), is a seasoned civil servant with more than 38 years of government service.

He holds a bachelor's degree with honours in political science and a master's degree in public administration, along with diplomas in French and human rights reporting.

Topgay served in Bhutan's Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs and held several senior positions, including home secretary; director general of the Department of Law and Order; director general of the departments of Civil Registration and Census and Local Governance between 1986 and 2005.

Eight days on, Thawang landslide survivors still wait for relief

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Survivors, however, complain that official support has been inadequate.

"There is no other alternative to the health post," Mek Bahadur Roka, who is taking refuge at the health post, said. "Our residential house collapsed in the landslide, and now it is difficult for us to live here without adequate support."

With his secondary house also at extreme risk from the landslide, Roka has appealed to the government to build houses in a safe location for those in distress.

Ten displaced families, comprising 76 people, are currently affected in Kotalabara. Some houses were destroyed, and others have become unsafe to reside in. As a result, 15 to 20 people from six or seven families have been sleeping at the health post. The numbers have been fluctuating as families move out when other families offer them refuge.

Health post in-charge Nim Subedi said the facility had opened its rooms, including office space, to displaced people at night. "We have been helping displaced families spend the night in rooms at the health institution," said Subedi. "Even after so many days since the landslide, apart from efforts at the local level, there appears to have been little effort to provide relief and shelter or reopen the road."

According to ward officials, rice is being bought from local shops and distributed to each affected family. Residents of neighbouring Upper Uwa and other villages have also been providing vegetables.

Meanwhile, survivors have no alternative to the health post.

"It is impossible to go elsewhere during the rainy season," Norsang Gharti Magar, another survivor taking shelter at the health post, said. "We will stay here during the monsoon and think about the future later."

Fewer UML cadres are sticking with party

>> Continued from page 1

The Sudurpaschim Province has recorded the lowest renewal rate. Of 63,110 members, only about 17,000 sought renewal. Provincial secretary Ran Bahadur Chand said the tally could rise to around 21,000 after paper renewals are entered into the system.

In Koshi Province, 62,000 of 114,766 members went for renewal, putting the rate at about 54 percent. Madhesh recorded 60,000 renewals from a membership size of 156,195. Provincial secretary Manoj Paudel said the rate could cross 60 percent.

Paudel said the lower figures point to a tighter verification process. In the past, he said, a single person could renew membership for hundreds of people, whereas members are now required to renew in person.

Bagmati recorded about 66,000 renewals from 114,566 members. In Gandaki, 30,500 of the 56,052 members had renewed their status, although provincial leaders expect the figure to approach 60 percent after further updates.

Lumbini reported about 42,000 renewals from 80,579 members, a rate of 52.12 percent. Karnali recorded about 28,000 renewals among 48,538 members, or 57.69 percent.

In Kathmandu Valley, the capital committee covering Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur reported 23,500 renewals from 39,159 members, or about 60 percent.

The party's liaison department, which represents members from outside districts living in Kathmandu, reported more than 8,000 renewals from 13,783 members.

UML Secretary and Organisation Department chief Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal described the renewal drive as encouraging but said the final nationwide figure was still being compiled.

"The membership renewal has been encouraging. Updated figures from the provinces have yet to come," Dhakal said.

He said the party was also cleaning up its membership records, particularly in Madhesh, where large numbers of people had previously been enrolled in bulk.

The latest figures are well below the numbers claimed by the UML in previous years. At its statute convention in Godawari, Lalitpur, in 2025, General Secretary Pokharel reported 662,961 members after renewal.

Before that convention, the UML had claimed more than 1.26 million members. After verification and updating, the figures fell to about 682,000, with 662,961 members recorded as having renewed ahead of the convention.

The latest figures suggest the party is experiencing a significant contraction in its active membership base. Krishna Pokharel, a professor of political science, said the party leadership's policies and working style shape the mindset of ordinary members. He said UML chair Oli had failed to inspire cadres, both in and out of government.

"Cadres assess their future by looking at the leadership. If they believe the leadership can take the party forward, they remain engaged," he said. Repeated failures also eroded the leadership's appeal among voters and cadres.

Pokharel said honest members had become disillusioned after seeing opportunistic leaders benefit from party positions while their expectations went unmet. "Some cadres may have left after seeing little prospect of the UML returning to power," he added.

Lawmakers question alleged government pressure on anti-graft body

>> Continued from page 1

"I want to tell the entire CIAA team that if there has been any weakness on the part of our government and if that has created any obstruction to your work, creating obstacles to investigation and prosecution is itself a form of crime," Lamichhane said. "If you have clear grounds, reasons and evidence of such a problem, you can proceed with the necessary action."

Lamichhane said the ruling party would not exert pressure on the commission if anyone was found to have interfered with its work.

"If there are people involved in such activities and you have the grounds and reasons, you will face no pressure or influence of any kind from us," the RSP chief said.

He also said the government had a responsibility to ensure that constitutional bodies such as the CIAA could work independently and without interference.

Shah and his secretariat have been accused of summoning CIAA officials, including Chief Commissioner Prem Kumar Rai, to the Prime Minister's Office on June 15 and keeping them there for around seven hours while pressuring the commission to prosecute officials in connection with a passport procurement contract.

Shah took up the issue at the RSP general convention in Chitwan on June 21, saying that the CIAA could be questioned for five hours and, if necessary, for five years.

"If the CIAA [leadership] needs to be held for five hours to answer questions and give advice, then we can keep it for not just five hours, but five years, if necessary," Shah said. "We will not do anything against the rules."

The CIAA had not publicly commented on the alleged incident until Thursday.

Chief Commissioner Rai said the CIAA had been invited to the Prime Minister's Office for discussions on the passport issue.

"The prime minister may have invited the concerned parties for discussions and suggestions on the passport issue. We also participated in the discussion," Rai said. "Some areas requiring improvement were identified, and some improvements were subsequently made."

Rai said the case had already been registered and prosecuted.

"As the case has already been registered and prosecution taken place, the legal aspects are now for the relevant authorities to deal with," Rai said, elaborating on the legality of the PMO meeting. "The prosecution document itself clearly states the grounds on which the case was pursued. Therefore, I do not want to go into the matter unnecessarily."

Responding to allegations that the prosecution had been initiated under pressure from the Prime Minister's Office, Rai said the case had not been pursued without legal grounds.

"Looking at the relevant documents, it is clear that the prosecution was not initiated without grounds or without shortcomings being identified," he said.

The prime minister's secretariat has also been accused of pressuring the CIAA to file a case against officials deemed responsible for irregularities in the passport procurement process and to seek arrest warrants against them.

Officials at the commission were reportedly pressured into arresting Tirtha Raj Aryal, director general of the Department of Passports, and Sunil Kumar KC, a director at the department.

Lamichhane's comments come against that backdrop. He said the CIAA should act if it believed the government or people associated with it had obstructed the commission's work.

Rai attended the committee meeting along with commissioners Jaya Bahadur Chand, Hari Paudel and Sumitra Shrestha Amatya and senior CIAA officials.

> The CIAA had not publicly commented on the alleged incident until Thursday.

Opposition lawmakers asked the anti-graft officials to explain what had happened at the Prime Minister's Office and whether the commission had been subjected to pressure. Some lawmakers stressed that the CIAA should be allowed to work independently.

Harka Raj Rai, chair of the Shram Sanskriti Party and a committee member, said concerns over the alleged pressure on the CIAA had been raised both in Parliament and in the committee.

He questioned who would hold the prime minister accountable if the head of the executive himself abused his authority.

"If the prime minister keeps you confined for seven hours, that is an abuse of authority. Who will take action against the prime minister for abusing that authority? He is the head of the executive himself," lawmaker Rai said.

He said the episode had raised questions about whether the CIAA could operate independently and without fear.

Opposition lawmakers questioned the independence of the commission saying that it appeared to be under political pressure. They demanded an explanation of its dealings with the Prime Minister's Office.

CPN-UML lawmaker Padma Aryal said the commission may be working under pressure.

"It appears that the CIAA is under pressure and influence, with attempts being made to use it for political purposes," Aryal said.

She said constitutional bodies must be allowed to work independently if the government is to deliver on its promises of good governance.

Nepali Congress lawmaker Arjun Narsingh KC said efforts were being made to weaken the CIAA.

RSP lawmaker Amaresh Kumar Singh said the CIAA had the authority to investigate the prime minister and ministers and that it should not be answerable to the executive.

Singh also urged CIAA officials to assert the commission's constitutional autonomy when summoned by the prime minister or ministers.

"Do not go if they summon you. The CIAA does not fall under the Prime Minister's Office. Even if you receive a letter, tell them that you are an independent constitutional body," Singh said.

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Reject Deuba's deception

The country's hard-won secular compromise must not be sacrificed on one man's quest for political survival.

In Nepali politics, principles have often been traded as cheap currency. Still, the recent spectacle of Sher Bahadur Deuba, former prime minister and immediate past president of the Nepali Congress, executing a theological about-face is particularly disquieting. Having spent his years at the helm of the grand old party actively suppressing the Mahasamiti's fervour for a return to a Hindu state, Deuba has abruptly emerged as its champion. Upon his return from East Asia amidst money-laundering investigations and Congress's leadership change, he unceremoniously ordered his faction's national gathering to endorse the very agenda he previously blocked repeatedly.

This is a political manoeuvre of a displaced leader attempting to establish relevance.

To understand the utter hypocrisy of this pivot, examine Deuba's own record. During the constitutional debates of 2015, and as recently as the Mahasamiti meetings of 2018 and 2024, Deuba rejected petitions to depart from constitutional secularism signed by hundreds of party members. In his years of power, Deuba repeatedly warned that such reversal of secularism would invite division in society. Now, unseated by a special general convention and pursued by legal scrutiny, he weaponises religion as a shield. He is neither alone nor the first to indulge in this brand of opportunism. Senior politicians have historically used religious cards to keep their business afloat at the expense of festering divisions in society.

The Congress's deposed leader is better off accepting that the separation of religion from governance is the very bedrock of civic peace. If he is looking for reasoning to change his current stance, he could turn to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that religions inevitably divide a citizen's loyalty, as one cannot fully commit to the laws of the state whilst caught between secular duties and the decrees of a religion. If Deuba needs further logic, he could dig up Immanuel Kant's argument that when a government uses religious doctrines to enforce laws, it treats its citizens like children, demanding obedience through divine fear rather than respecting them as rational, autonomous adults capable of moral choices. By mixing the spiritual with the political, Deuba has infantilised the Nepali populace, reducing a complex, pluralistic republic to a congregation.

The real-world consequences of this ideological regression are already visible in regional friction. Pushing a pro-Hindu political agenda systematically alienates Nepal's significant religious and ethnic minorities—Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Kirat communities—relegating them to second-class status. We need only recall the recent communal clashes in the southern plains, where a trivial dispute over loudspeakers rapidly amplified, transforming neighbours into adversaries and prompting curfews.

Moreover, the religious shift cannot be separated from geopolitical shadows. Analysts point to the majoritarian influence of religion-based politics in neighbouring states, where the mainstreaming of religious nationalism has led to systemic polarisation. This model has bled across borders, emboldening Nepal's own regressive groups. By copying this majoritarian pattern, Nepal risks inviting the structural decay seen elsewhere in the region—from the Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka's civil war to the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar.

Politics is the art of compromise and pragmatism. Religion deals in the absolute. When the absolute is dragged into the mud of political factionalism, both are corrupted. In Nepal's context, secularism was one of the hardest-won compromises of a decade-long civil war that dismantled a feudal Hindu monarchy to build an inclusive republic. It cannot be sacrificed on the altar of one man's desperate quest for political survival. If Deuba's faction succeeds in dragging the Congress down this sectarian path, they will set fire to Nepal's constitutional foundations.

Nepal's future lies in looking forward, not backwards. The gods do not belong in the realm of politics. Deuba might succeed in commanding the support of regressive religious groups with his ideological pivot, but his deliberate divine deception must be rejected by both the public and his faction's cadres.

THEIR VIEW

Law and order still a major concern

Restoring public confidence in the police should be an urgent priority for the government.

It is concerning that the country's law and order situation has not improved as much as expected in the first six months of the new government's tenure. An analysis of police data shows that 21,756 cases under seven major crime categories were filed between February and July, compared with 21,228 in the preceding six months—a rise of nearly 2.5 percent. The seven categories include murder, violence against women and children, attacks on police, robbery and dacoity, mugging, abduction, and theft. While cases in the latter four categories declined, those of murder, violence against women and children, and attacks on police increased. These numbers, however, do not provide the full picture, as many victims do not go to police stations, while some complaints are reportedly recorded as general diaries or written complaints rather than cases. There are also concerns that some police stations discourage the filing of cases in an effort to present a better picture of law and order to their superiors. Such practices distort official crime statistics and embolden the criminals.

In recent times, killings and shootings in busy streets, markets and businesses, extortion at gunpoint, abductions followed by murder, and attacks on police officers have created fear among the citizens. The presence of illegal firearms is an additional concern, particularly as some weapons and ammunition looted from police stations in August 2024 remain unrecovered. Investigations into some recent crimes have also found evidence of modern firearms in the hands of criminals. Moreover, some old and listed criminals released on bail during the interim government have reportedly become involved in extortion, land grabbing, establishing dominance and killings. Police officers are also facing attacks and obstruction while trying to arrest suspects. All this is deeply worrying.

Clearly, the police have still not fully recovered from the trauma of the July uprising, subsequent attacks on police personnel and facilities, and political pressure. Frequent transfers and uncertainty over their career progress also prevent them from performing their duties confidently. Police officers reportedly remain hesitant even when lawful use of force is necessary, waiting for instructions from senior officials. Such practices must change once and for all.

Six months is enough time to expect something more than assurances from the government. It must therefore ensure that police officers receive clear institutional instruction and support to perform their duties lawfully and professionally, while those responsible for abuse, corruption or use of excessive force must be held accountable. Every crime must be properly recorded and investigated without exception. Restoring law and order and public confidence in the police should be an urgent priority for the government.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

Time to introduce charter schools in Nepal?

After decades of politicisation and neglect, Nepal's public education system needs radical systemic and structural reforms.

NIRANJAN KUNWAR

POST FILE PHOTO

Nepal's public education system has been in shambles for a long time due to political instability and poor governance, as documented in a collection of research papers published by Martin Chautari, *School Education in Nepal* (2021). Recent directives issued by the Minister of Education and Sports, Sasmit Pokharel, are attempts to alter course. The current government might indeed be equipped to make sweeping changes due to its historic mandate. Following one of Minister Pokharel's directives, the Curriculum Development Centre is in the process of revising the school-level National Curriculum Framework (NCF) under a task force led by the Dean of Kathmandu University's School of Education. "The goal is not cosmetic change but systemic transformation… and the new NCF must be relevant, responsive and rigorous," he implored at the mid-July orientation session.

Radical restructuring?

Despite good intentions, the NCF revision may not translate to actual change on the ground. Several studies, such as the report by the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre—*Reforming Nepal's education system for greater integrity and improved outcomes*—have pointed out glaring disconnects between policies and practice in Nepal's education sector over the decades due to a culture of corruption, fragile monitoring systems, improper teacher management, and a general lack of trust. It might be time to introduce innovative models of school structure and governance, such as charter schools, which function on the basis of a contract between the government and a committee of stakeholders.

Funded by the government but operating with a degree of autonomy, the first charter school started in Minnesota in the United States in 1991. Since then, it has spread across the country, with each state having their own laws governing the establishment, regulation and functioning of charter schools. Similar public-private models have since been running in other developed countries like the UK, Canada and Sweden. Japan, Pakistan and Qatar also have similar models. An article published in 2016 by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers described how New Delhi was also considering 'government partnership' schools that would bring in private operators to run public schools.

Attempts at decentralising education

During the first half of the 20th century, most public schools in Nepal were founded and managed by local communities, and were called by different names based on differing principles and goals: English, *Bhasha*, Basic, Sanskrit and so on. In 1957, massive protests erupted, especially in Tarai, against the government's directive to use Nepali as a medium of instruction in all schools. Later, the Panchayat government (1960–1990) took control of the education system, mandating "a uniform education system in the country with a single language of instruction". Nationalising and centralising the education system in a diverse, multicultural society was like trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

After the dawn of democracy and neoliberalism in the 1990s, the private sector proliferated and public schools deteriorated. The state began a process of decentralisation in the early 2000s, but the ongoing People's War hampered these efforts. Federalism and a demand for decentralisation were a response to the centralised bureaucracy detached and disconnected from most of the country. Although the current Constitution of Nepal explicitly grants local governments authority to manage all aspects of school education, this has been a point of contention, with teachers' unions staging protests, wanting to be part of the cadre of the central government.

From chaos comes order

A paper published by Kuber Prasad Bhetwal in 2022, *Effectiveness of Local Curriculum Implementation in Nepal*, has a list of findings and suggestions from his field study in Sankhuwasaba's primary schools. Most interviewed teachers supported teaching local curricula that include local issues. Charter schools could similarly be founded with goals and visions that suit local culture, language and needs. But the paper also identifies that building new curricula and systems is hampered by a lack of human resources. Sankhuwasaba's district administrative personnel had minimal experience with local curriculum development and implementation.

Given Nepal's multilingual, multiethnic reality, provincial and local governments are best positioned to deliver education. They should be supported to design unique charter schools and hire and train experts who are more responsive to and knowledgeable about local issues. Perhaps a radical systemic restructuring will be a worthy experiment, although we have to be wary of commercial interests, especially in the delivery of public services. There is already widespread discontent regarding a lack of proper regulation of profit-seeking private schools. But I'm simply offering an option out of the quagmire that has been Nepal's public education system.

We must consider alternatives suitable for a diverse populace. Charter schools won't be perfect, but a massive overhaul will create opportunities to tap into young talents and mobilise them across the country—similar to how Teach for Nepal has been functioning. Since we already have three tiers of government, and the Federal Education Act has still not been passed, this might be a moment to truly imagine a new system that could work with the local and provincial governments to deliver educational services effectively and efficiently. It will undoubtedly be extremely challenging to imagine and implement large-scale changes. But if the government is indeed serious about improving public services and creating a long-lasting impact, it should take bold, radical steps and make arrangements accordingly.

Kunwar has an MSEd in Childhood Education with 25 years of experience in classroom settings and teacher preparation.

It takes a global village

Billions in deposits, a booming tech sector, and rising remittances show Nepal is an engine of enterprise.

STUTI BASNYET

AI GENERATED

Nepal has roughly $53 billion sitting in bank deposits. Around $14 billion enters the country each year through remittances. Its technology sector is now estimated to export more than $1 billion in services. Yet, promising Nepali enterprises still struggle to find the capital, capabilities and markets they need to scale.

That paradox has become harder to ignore as traditional development finance contracts. Official development assistance fell by 23 percent globally in 2025, its largest annual contraction on record, with a further decline projected in 2026. Nepal is simultaneously preparing to graduate from the Least Developed Country status, even as AI rapidly reshapes economies, organisations and the capabilities they need.

Perhaps, then, the question is not only what Nepal lacks. It is why so much of what we already have remains difficult to connect, mobilise and scale.

For me, that question became personal over the past year. After nearly two decades in international development, including more than a decade at USAID, I found myself reconsidering some of the assumptions that had shaped my own career: what was worth carrying forward, what needed to change, and where institutions like ours could add distinctive value.

Over the year, our team worked across all seven provinces and encountered the same paradox.

Entrepreneurs were looking for investors; investors for investment-ready enterprises. Universities were producing graduates; employers were struggling to find the capabilities they needed. Researchers were generating useful evidence, but practitioners often struggled to find, translate or apply it. Development organisations were piloting solutions; businesses with the technology, networks or commercial incentives to help them scale were often not in the same room. More than a shortage of effort, ideas or resources, the constraint was the pathways between them.

We talk a great deal about physical infrastructure in Nepal, and rightly so. But economies also depend on intangible infrastructure: trust, relationships, shared knowledge, credible intermediaries and networks that allow capital, talent and ideas to find one another—and promising solutions to scale.

For instance, $7,200 from FCDO's Nepal in Business-Growth Advisors programme funded an investment-readiness initiative that we delivered for Nepali technology companies. One participant, Raindrop, went on to secure a strategic partner who brings deep expertise as well as investment of approximately $131,000—more than 18 times that initial investment.

Consider the wider capital landscape: roughly $53 billion in bank deposits, $39 billion in lending, and around $14 billion in annual remittances, compared with a federal capital budget of about $14 billion and roughly $400 million in foreign grants. Capital and opportunity exist, but the structures, information, incentives and trust that allow them to meet often do not.

When grants can no longer be assumed—or sustained at familiar scale—what other assets do organisations have to work with? Quite a lot: community trust; deep local networks; institutional knowledge of what localisation, inclusion and equity require in practice; relationships across sectors; data; convening power; and implementation capability.

These assets have economic value too. Private capital cannot replace public or philanthropic resources where markets cannot or will not go. But development resources should be judged not only by what they finance, but by what they unlock: the risk absorbed, institution strengthened, evidence generated, relationship brokered, capability left behind or capital subsequently moved.

So the questions should not only be 'what did we spend?', 'what did we deliver?', and 'how many people did we reach?' But also 'what did we unlock?', 'what became possible because we were there?', and 'what keeps moving when we're gone?'

The same shift, from looking for what is missing to recognising what already exists, raises a larger question: Could this disruption also change how countries like Nepal are seen globally?

For decades, countries like ours have occupied a familiar position in the global development architecture—recipients of money, expertise, technology and ideas.

But Nepal is also a source of them. Companies like Programiz, Veel and SecurityPal AI are building from Nepal for global markets, and industry estimates put Nepal's IT services exports at over $1 billion. Pukar Hamal, founder of SecurityPal AI, describes this potential as 'Silicon Peaks'—a vision of Nepal not simply as a source of global talent, but as a place where technology, companies and ideas can be built for the world.

Add to that a diaspora carrying expertise, relationships and capital across borders, communities and institutions with knowledge outsiders do not possess, and a generation of young Nepalis whose professional and technological horizons are increasingly global.

The next chapter of Nepal's growth must be as much about recognising, connecting, investing in and amplifying existing strengths as filling gaps.

Perhaps the opportunity, then, is not simply to attract more resources into Nepal, but to build pathways that allow what Nepal already has to reach further—to opportunities at home, capital and markets abroad, and problems elsewhere that Nepali talent and enterprise can help solve.

Nepal's greatest untapped potential may lie not in any single institution, sector or source of capital, but in what becomes possible when their strengths come together.

We already have many of the ingredients. The opportunity is to make it easier for these assets to find and reinforce one another, at home and across borders.

Nepal does not sit outside that global village waiting to be helped. We are already part of it, with locally brewed talent, knowledge systems, enterprise and solutions to contribute. But a village is not simply a network to draw from. It requires reciprocity: contributing as well as receiving, sharing what we know and have, and investing in one another's success.

A village is not made strong by its individual houses, but by the roads between them, and people choosing to use them. Those are the roads I want us to continue strengthening: between entrepreneurs and investors, universities and businesses, communities and markets, public purpose and private initiative, Nepal and the world.

Locally led, globally connected. Because when the right ideas find the right support, what begins here can go much further.

Basnyet is a co-founder and managing director of Aadyanta Advisory.

Karnali villagers wait for the China trade that feeds them all year

Residents rely on the seasonal markets for cheaper food and daily essentials while selling herbs and other local products.

KRISHNA PRASAD GAUTAM
SURKHET, AUG 20

July and August are critical months for Chhiring Lama of Mugu. Every year during these months, Lama sells yarsagumba and other medicinal herbs at the 15-day trade fair in Hyajimar, along the Nepal-China border. With the earnings, he buys Chinese clothing, food and other essential goods to sustain his family throughout the year. Lama has been doing so for nearly two decades.

Lama lives in Mugum Karmarong Rural Municipality, a grueling two-day walk away from Gamgadhi, the district headquarters. China is only a day away. Goods are cheaper and transport is easier.

Usually, the fair starts in late July or early August. But this year, with August already approaching its end, there's no clue when the fair would begin. "It is difficult for us without the Chinese border fair," Lama told Kantipur recently.

For years, many residents of Nepal's remote northern frontier have relied on these Chinese border fairs for both food and income, selling medicinal herbs and livestock products to buy cheaper essentials. But with the seasonal markets in Mugu and Dolpa yet to open this year, communities cut off by difficult terrain are facing higher food costs and uncertainty over how they will sustain themselves.

These are areas that see limited crop production. Karma Chhiring Gurung, a resident of Dolpa's Shey Phoksundo Rural Municipality-3, said the harsh climate and lack of irrigation mean his village can grow only one crop of naked barley a year—and even that harvest does not feed a family for more than three months. Medicinal-herb collection and livestock rearing thus remain the main sources of livelihood. Residents sell herbs like yarsagumba, panchaule and jatamasi, along with local products such as ghee, chhurpi, mountain goat meat and sheep wool, at the fairs.

Residents of Shey Phoksundo have to walk three days to reach the district headquarters Dunai. "With no road access, goods have to be transported by mule," Gurung said. "So we have to pay a huge premium for Nepali rice."

The village has a Food Management and Trading Company depot, but rice is delivered there only once a year, leaving residents dependent on food brought from China, Gurung added.

In Dunai, a 30 kg sack of rice costs between Rs2,500 and Rs3,000. The cost of transporting rice by mule is Rs90 per kg. "We are forced to buy rice in the village for as much as Rs6,000 a sack, almost twice the price," Gurung said.

In contrast, Chinese rice costs between Rs800 and Rs1,000 a sack and can be brought to the village within a day.

Meanwhile, unlike in Mugu and Dolpa, a temporary Chinese market has already been held at Lilong on the Humla border this year. The fair took place from July 30 to August 10. Last year, the border fair at Marim La on the Dolpa-China frontier was held from August 10 to 21. Chinese authorities have yet to provide any information about this year's fair, said Junu Hamal Dhakal, chief district officer of Dolpa.

"The Chinese side makes the final decision on whether to hold the border fair," she said. "We make the necessary security arrangements."

Local representatives are also pushing for the fair, she added. "We have written to the Home Ministry to seek its opening."

The district administration will issue temporary passes to residents once the fair is confirmed, Dhakal said. Last year, it issued passes to around 2,200 people.

Karma Chhoewel Gurung, chairman of Dolpo Buddha Rural Municipality, said cross-border trade between the two countries is limited to the 15-day fair. "If the border crossing were opened year-round," he said, "life for people in the municipality would become much easier."

Residents are also eager for the fair because their medicinal herbs and other local products fetch better prices there. Pemba Bhote of Dolpo Buddha-4, for instance, sold yarsagumba for Rs2.8 million per kg last year.

Bhote said medicinal herbs in Nepali or Indian markets sell for much less, while sellers face repeated inspections and paperwork.

Chhiring Kyapne Lama, chairman of Mugu's Mugum Karmarong Rural Municipality, said communities along the frontier have maintained trading ties with Tibet since 1915. "But that relationship is still limited to temporary fairs," he said. "If the border crossings were opened permanently and roads were built to China, the benefits would extend across Karnali."

Construction of the Gamgadhi-Nagchenagla road, intended to connect to China, began in February 2006. But, according to Lama, only 18 kilometres of the planned 68-kilometre road has been completed so far.

Nepali diaspora is growing fast. Nepal's missions can't keep up

Heavy consular workloads are keeping diplomats busy with routine services instead of trade, investment and economic diplomacy.

RAJESH MISHRA
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Nepal's diplomatic missions abroad are struggling with staff shortages as the number of Nepalis living, working and studying overseas continues to rise. This has increased pressure on consular services and limited the missions' ability to pursue broader diplomatic and economic goals.

The government has repeatedly pledged to strengthen its missions to promote exports, bilateral trade and investment, tourism and economic diplomacy. But missions in countries with rapidly growing Nepali communities say they lack the personnel and resources to deliver even routine services efficiently, let alone pursue those wider objectives.

Japan offers one of the starkest examples.

Nepal opened its embassy in Tokyo in 1965, when roughly 1,000 Nepalis lived in Japan. The mission began with three diplomatic staff. Six decades later, the Nepali community has grown to about 342,000, but the diplomatic establishment has barely changed.

The embassy has five diplomatic positions, including the ambassador. With the ambassadorial post vacant for the past 11 months, only four diplomatic staff are currently working there. Just one position was added last year.

"There were three staff members 61 years ago. Now there are four of us," Harihar Kant Poudel, chargé d'affaires ad interim, said. "The Nepali diaspora is growing every day, but the resources and staffing of the embassy have not increased accordingly."

The increase has been particularly rapid in recent years. Japan had about 97,000 Nepalis in 2021, according to the embassy. By August 2026, the number has risen to around 342,000.

The growing population has brought a sharp increase in demand for passports, document verification, powers of attorney and other consular services. The embassy issued about 19,000 passports in the last fiscal year.

Three years ago, applicants would generally receive services on the same day. The embassy now often asks them to leave their documents and return later.

"The workload is so heavy that we are busy even on weekly holidays," Paudel said.

The pressure is also affecting the embassy's ability to respond to emergencies. Seventy-three Nepali citizens died in Japan last year for various reasons. The embassy had to assist with the administrative and legal procedures following their deaths, including compensation claims and arrangements concerning their remains, including repatriation. Staff sometimes struggle to visit hospitals and police stations because they are tied up with routine consular work.

The embassy has repeatedly asked the foreign ministry for two additional diplomatic staff and two local employees. It has also sought more resources to assess and verify worker demand, inspect employers, address labour disputes, protect workers' rights and visit immigration detention centres and prisons to check on Nepali detainees.

Economic diplomacy has suffered. Japan is a major development partner and an important potential source of investment and trade, but embassy officials say they have little time to pursue those opportunities.

Last year, funds allocated by the foreign ministry for economic diplomacy went unused because the mission's limited staff were occupied with routine consular services.

The embassy in Australia faces similar problems.

Nepal opened its embassy in Canberra in 2007, when only about 7,000 to 8,000 Nepalis lived in Australia. The community now numbers around 300,000. The mission also serves Nepalis in Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and other countries in the region.

PHOTO: CORTESY OF NEPALI EMBASSY IN JAPAN

The Nepali embassy in Tokyo. Nepali community in Japan has grown to about 342,000.

Nepal has 45 missions abroad, staffed by 244 approved positions, including ambassadors and consul generals.

The mission has four diplomatic staff apart from the ambassador, although the ambassadorial position has also been vacant for months.

Tara Gautam, chargé d'affaires ad interim, said hundreds of people visit the embassy for passports, consular services and powers of attorney.

About 150 people come to the embassy each day for passports alone, and staff must process their photographs and biometric data. More than ten applications for powers of attorney, which must be certified by the head of mission, are also received daily.

"I thought the workload would be lighter here than in Saudi Arabia, where I previously worked," Gautam said. "But it is not. The resources and staff are insufficient for the number of people we serve."

The embassy has repeatedly requested additional staff.

Foreign Ministry officials acknowledge that most Nepali missions have been operating with bare minimum staff for years.

Lok Bahadur Poudel Chhetri, spokesperson for the foreign ministry, said the missions were expected to promote Nepal's interests abroad, economic diplomacy, trade and Nepali culture, while also taking on growing responsibilities for the welfare and protection of Nepalis overseas.

"Our missions are providing maximum services with minimum staff," he said.

Nepal currently has missions at 45 locations, including embassies in 31 countries, three permanent missions to the UN and other organisations, and ten consulates general, along with a field office in Visakhapatnam, India.

In its budget speech in May, the government announced plans to close the embassies in Denmark, Brazil and South Africa, the consulates general in Chengdu and San Francisco, and the field office in Visakhapatnam. The closures have yet to be completed.

Experts say Nepal's missions abroad, operating with barely enough staff to function, cannot be expected to deliver on the government's economic diplomacy ambitions.

Former foreign secretary Madan Kumar Bhattarai says strengthening missions in countries where the Nepali population and economic ties have grown rapidly is essential.

"Where there is greater need and a heavier workload, staffing and other resources should be increased," he said. "Given the country's limited financial capacity, priorities should be based on the size of the Nepali diaspora and the economic, commercial, social and cultural importance of each country."

Staffing levels vary considerably among missions.

The Nepali mission in the United Arab Emirates serves a community of around 700,000 Nepalis. The consulate general in Dubai has only four staff, including the consul general.

Several smaller missions, including those in Myanmar, Brazil, Spain, Denmark and South Africa, have only an ambassador and two diplomatic staff positions. Missions in Ottawa (Canada), Islamabad (Pakistan), Cairo (Egypt), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Tel Aviv (Israel), Paris (France), Berlin (Germany), Brussels (Belgium), Muscat (Oman), Manama (Bahrain), Moscow (Russia), Lisbon (Portugal) and Vienna (Austria) generally have an ambassador and three diplomatic staff. The consulate general in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) has four staff apart from the consul general.

The embassies in Canberra, Tokyo, Dhaka (Bangladesh), Bangkok (Thailand) and Seoul (South Korea) each have four diplomatic staff positions apart from the ambassador.

Nepal opened its first overseas mission in London in 1934. It currently has five diplomatic staff apart from the ambassador. Nepal's embassy in Abu Dhabi (UAE) has eight staff, Kuwait seven, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) nine, Doha (Qatar) nine, Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) eight and Washington, DC, seven.

Nepal's permanent mission to the UN in New York has 11 staff, while its permanent missions in Geneva and Vienna have seven and three, respectively. The Nepali consulate general in Kolkata has six staff.

Across all 45 missions, there are currently 244 approved positions, including ambassadors and consul generals. Of these, 47 are held by officials from outside the Foreign Service. They include seven joint secretaries from the civil administration service, seven military attachés, one police counsellor, one intelligence counsellor, nine administrative undersecretaries, two revenue undersecretaries, one legal undersecretary, one accounts undersecretary, nine administrative section officers, three accounts officers, one revenue section officer and five administrative/accounts assistants.

In addition to Foreign Service personnel sent by the ministry, the missions also hire local staff. These include office secretaries, legal advisers, messengers, translators, gardeners, security guards and office assistants, among others.

There are 374 approved positions for local employees. The Foreign Employment Board had been providing financial support for local staff at missions in countries with large numbers of Nepali migrant workers, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Malaysia. The board had been spending Rs25.7 million annually to fund 19 local employees at various embassies. But after the Office of the Auditor General deemed the arrangement contrary to rules, the number of board-funded staff was cut from last year, further increasing the workload on the limited diplomatic staff.

The government has conducted new organisational and management (O&M) surveys for all 17 ministries. Because the surveys were aimed at cutting public expenditure, the Foreign Ministry has been unable to add positions despite its requests for more staff.

The ministry has sought to transfer foreign service staff from the six missions proposed for closure to embassies where additional personnel are needed. However, because the O&M restructuring has not yet been certified by the Prime Minister's Office, the ministry's plan has yet to materialise. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Chhetri said the ministry wants to transfer staff from missions proposed for closure to those in need without imposing additional financial burden on the state.

Under the proposal, the ministry would also cut positions in the administration, revenue and accounts groups at missions and replace them with Foreign Service personnel. It has proposed scrapping two minister (economic) positions at the Nepali embassies in New Delhi and Beijing, five consul-general positions in Hong Kong, Lhasa, Kolkata, Chengdu and Guangzhou, and seven joint-secretary-level positions from the administrative service.

It has also proposed cutting labour counsellor positions in the general administration group in Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Riyadh, Doha and Abu Dhabi, along with the cultural counsellor in New Delhi, the economic counsellor in Visakhapatnam, and nine administrative undersecretary positions, including those from the revenue group in Washington, DC, and Kolkata. The proposal also calls for cutting ten administrative section officer positions at various missions.

Officials from the administrative service have opposed the proposed cuts. Pressure from the administrative service has also meant that Chief Secretary Govinda Bahadur Karki has yet to certify the Foreign Ministry's O&M proposal.

Registrar vacancies delay budget approvals at major universities

SUDEEP KAINI
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Major universities in the country have entered the new fiscal year without approved budgets as the government is yet to appoint registrars, leaving institutions dependent on acting officials and restricted interim spending arrangements.

Tribhuvan University, Purbanchal University, Pokhara University, Mid-Western University, Sudurpashchim University, Agriculture and Forestry University and Nepal Sanskrit University are among those with vacant registrar posts. Lumbini Buddhist University and Nepal Open University face wider leadership gaps.

The vacancies followed the government's May 2 decision to remove senior university officials through an ordinance, in an attempt to replace politically appointed officials and introduce competitive selection. Acting officials were later tasked with keeping institutions functioning.

At Tribhuvan University, the country's largest, the consequences are particularly serious. Its budget for the fiscal year 2026-27 was due to be approved by the first week of August, but the Senate has yet to meet.

"Anarchy looms because the government has shown no interest in appointing the rector and registrar," said a TU professor. "The registrar prepares the budget and presents it to the Senate for approval. For now, the university is operating with an advance budget."

The TU has a regular annual budget of around Rs26 billion. An advance budget can cover administrative expenses, but capital expenditure cannot proceed normally until an approval of the spending plan.

The delay is also affecting students. The Senate normally approves the graduation list along with the annual budget. About 95,000 students who have completed their studies under the TU are waiting to be enlisted for degree awards.

"Students can receive their original certificates only after the graduation list is approved," the professor said. "Until that happens, certificates cannot be printed. The government has not paid attention to this, and the university is becoming disorganised."

TU Examination Controller Laxman Paudel said the graduation list had already been prepared but remained pending because the Senate had not met. After approval, students apply to attend the graduation ceremony, allowing the university to print certificates and arrange gowns.

TU spokesperson Nabindra Bhandari said the university was preparing to call the Senate soon to approve the budget and graduation list.

TU Vice-chancellor Bhola Thapa recommended candidates for rector and registrar several weeks ago, according to university and education ministry officials. The names were sent to the Prime Minister's Office, but appointments have not yet been made. Science and Technology Dean Shankar Khanal is acting rector, while Management Dean Mahananda Chalise has been assigned as acting registrar.

Under university law, the vice-chancellor recommends the rector and registrar and the prime minister, as chancellor, appoints them. The prolonged vacancies have left universities waiting for central decisions on posts essential to financial and administrative functioning.

Pokhara University is experiencing a similar problem. Vice-chancellor Devendra Adhikari said the university could not approve its new budget because the Senate could not be constituted without the registrar and other officials.

"The budget has to be approved by the Senate. The registrar and other members needed for the Senate are still awaiting appointment," said Adhikari. "The law allows us to spend up to 33 percent of the previous year's total budget and seek approval later. We are therefore carrying out administrative work under that provision."

Adhikari said the name for registrar had been finalised but the ministry had not made the appointment.

Purbanchal University is also waiting for its registrar. Vice-chancellor Sujan Babu Marahatta said the recommendation had been made and the university would bring its budget as soon as the appointment was completed.

The education ministry says the process is moving ahead. Diwakar Bhujel, an undersecretary at Education Minister Sasmit Pokharel's secretariat, said recommendations for registrars had been received from five universities.

"Names have been received for the appointment of registrars. We are studying them and the appointment process is under way," said Bhujel. The ministry said the process is on to appoint registrars in Tribhuvan, Purbanchal, Pokhara, Mid-Western and Sudurpashchim universities.

Mid-Western University has avoided the immediate budget problem. Vice-chancellor Rajan Suwal said its budget had already been approved by acting officials, but other administrative work was being held up.

"The registrar and deans need to be appointed, but the work is stalled because the registrar has not been appointed from above," said Suwal. "I do not know why the appointment has not happened."

Sudurpashchim University Vice-chancellor Kisan Datta Bhatta said the university had sent a name for the registrar and expected an appointment soon. Its budget had already been approved by the previous acting officials, he said.

Agriculture and Forestry University has also approved its budget. Vice-chancellor Rishi Ram Kattel said no formal recommendation had yet been made for the registrar and Prof Subir Singh was continuing as acting registrar.

"The registrar appointment process has not been started and no recommendation has been made," said Kattel. "The Senate met in June and approved the budget. There is no immediate plan to appoint a registrar; the university is functioning through the acting arrangement."

Kathmandu University had likewise approved its 2026-27 budget in June when its Senate met for the graduation ceremony. Acting registrar Rajiv Shrestha said the budget was passed at that meeting. Prof Bibek Baral was appointed vice-chancellor in August, while Shrestha was retained as acting registrar until further arrangement.

The May ordinance removed senior officials from 16 universities and several health science academies. The government said it wanted to end political patronage, while academics criticised the move for increasing executive control over universities.

The government has since appointed vice-chancellors at several universities, including Tribhuvan, Purbanchal, Pokhara, Mid-Western, Sudurpashchim and Agriculture and Forestry. Registrar appointments lag.

At Lumbini Buddhist University, the government plans to restart the vice-chancellor selection process after receiving too few applications. At Nepal Open University, the process had stalled because the University Grants Commission chairperson's post was vacant. The government has since appointed Prof Khadga KC there.

FOREX

US Dollar	153.44
Euro	179.61
Pound Sterling	209.37
Swiss Franc	192.81
Australian Dollar	109.36
Canadian Dollar	111.46
Singapore Dollar	120.77
Japanese Yen (10)	9.69
Chinese Yuan	22.83
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.87
Qatari Riyal	42.1
Thai Bhat	4.67
UAE Dhiram	41.78
Malaysian Ringit	37.94
Korean Won (100)	11.01

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 313,400
Silver	Rs 4,855

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

China says 'firmly opposes' Trump drone tariffs

BEIJING: China said on Thursday it "firmly opposes" new US tariffs on imports of unmanned drones and their components, after Donald Trump announced duties of up to 100 percent last week. The US president justified the decision on national security grounds, according to a White House statement from last week, as Washington seeks to reduce reliance on imports in an industry China dominates. Most of the new tariffs are due to take effect on September 3. Beijing on Thursday urged Washington to "immediately withdraw" the planned levies. The US measures "overstretch the concept of national security (and) discriminate against relevant Chinese products", commerce ministry spokesman He Yadong told reporters in Beijing. "(The tariffs) disrupt the global drone supply chain and further undermine a fair and competitive market environment. China firmly opposes this," He said. Chinese company DJI, founded in 2006, has captured more than two-thirds of the global drone market in recent years, according to several studies. **(AFP)**

South Korea to send its first container ship through Arctic

SEOUL: South Korea plans its first trial voyage through the Arctic this week as Middle East conflict disrupts global shipping, Seoul's oceans ministry said Thursday, while environmental groups warn the route could accelerate melting of polar ice. Global shipping has been heavily disrupted by war in the Middle East, sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February—prompting shipping companies and governments to explore alternative routes. The voyage follows that of the Chinese container ship "Dubai Tower", which left the eastern port city of Ningbo for Europe this month, heading north through the Bering Strait before turning west along Russia's Arctic coast. The Northern Sea Route (NSR) is only accessible during the time of the year when the ice is melted enough to allow transits without icebreakers. "South Korea's trial voyage is currently expected to depart on the evening of August 22, though the schedule time could change depending on weather conditions, including typhoons," a spokesman for the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries said. **(AFP)**

Rafts on Rome's Tiber River cool down overheated tourists

ROME: Forget the long lines at Roman ruins and overpriced gelato—sweating tourists are enjoying a break from the scorching heat by rafting on the Eternal City's Tiber River. A welcome change from the beaten tourist track, river rafting on the Tiber—long the lifeblood of the ancient city—is a unique and relatively new option for tourists seeking to discover Italy's capital. Starting at the water's edge near the historic Piazza del Popolo, the inflatable rafts float by some of the city's most photographed landmarks, from the Castel Sant'Angelo—the burial place of Emperor Hadrian—to St Peter's Basilica, the dome of which can be seen from the water. After approximately two hours, tours end at an ancient Roman port in the neighbourhood of Trastevere, whose name literally means "Across the Tiber". "It's really nice to get a different view of Rome. It's something special compared with what you can see on foot," said Manuel Frank, 19, a visitor from Germany on a recent "Roma Rafting" tour. **(AFP)**

IMF mission chief: Nepal's economy became more stable over last four years

Sarwat Jahan says Nepal has strengthened its economic buffers and institutions after years of shocks, but must now focus on private investment, job creation and inclusive growth.

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Nepal's economy is significantly more stable than it was when its latest reform effort began in 2022, but the country must now turn that stability into stronger private investment, jobs creation and more inclusive growth, according to Sarwat Jahan, Nepal Mission Chief at the International Monetary Fund.

Speaking to Country Focus, an online news and analysis platform run by the IMF, Jahan said Nepal had completed its first IMF-supported programme in nearly two decades and made significant progress despite navigating repeated economic, political and natural shocks.

"Inflation has fallen sharply, international reserves have increased, and the primary fiscal deficit is lower," Jahan said. "Equally important, the country has improved some of the institutions that support economic policymaking."

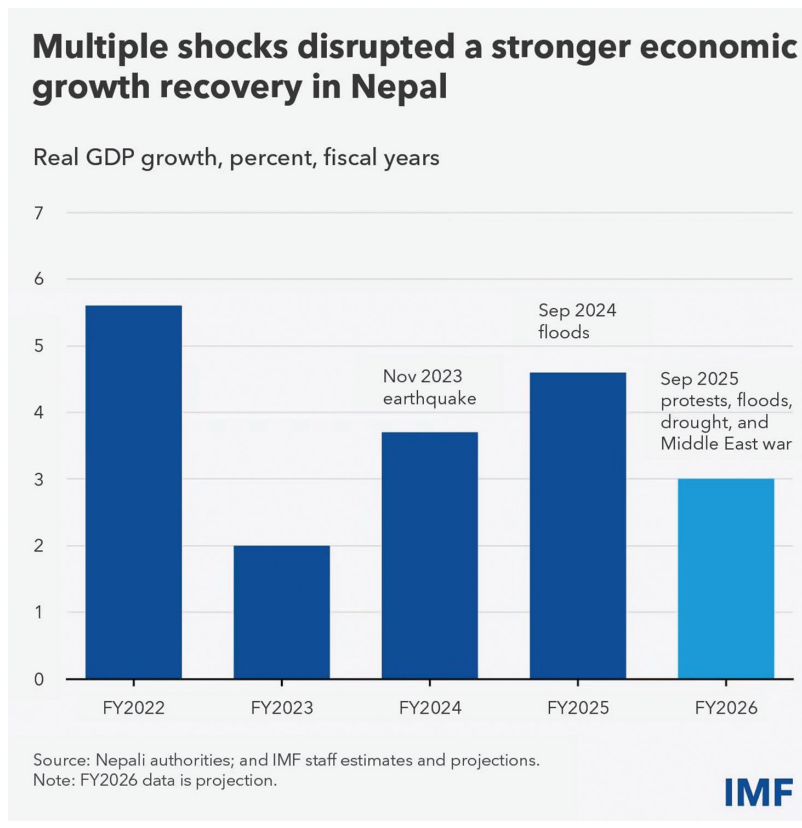
She said the progress was particularly notable because Nepal went through several government transitions, natural disasters and global shocks during the programme.

Since the general elections in November 2022, Nepal has experienced frequent coalition shifts and changes in leadership.

The country has also faced severe natural disasters, including the November 2022 Doti earthquake, the destructive October 2023 Bajhang earthquake, and massive monsoon flash floods and landslides in 2024 and 2026 that displaced thousands and caused widespread casualties.

In September 2025, large-scale anti-corruption protests and demonstrations took place across Nepal, predominantly organised by Gen Z.

"Despite that difficult environment, the reform effort stayed on track," she said, attributing the outcome to a consistent policy anchor, a programme adapted to Nepal's evolving political situation and strong capacity-development support.



The improvement in macroeconomic indicators has been broad-based. Average inflation fell from 7.7 percent in the fiscal year 2022-23 to 1.7 percent in the first half of fiscal year 2025-26, according to Jahan.

International reserves have also increased substantially, rising from around nine months of import cover to more than 12 months. At the same time, public finances improved as the budget deficit narrowed sharply, while public debt remained at a low risk of distress.

"These are not just abstract figures," Jahan said. "Lower inflation protects people's purchasing power, larger reserves guard against currency and trade pressures, and healthier public finances give the government a buffer to respond when the next crisis hits."

However, Nepal's economic recovery has repeatedly been disrupted by shocks.

Jahan pointed to the major earthquake in 2023, severe floods in 2024 and social unrest last year as events that increased uncertainty and disrupted economic activity.

More recently, higher energy prices linked to the war in West Asia have added further pressure.

The conflict has disrupted Nepal's economy, pushing up fuel prices, stranding migrant workers and affecting tourism. As a landlocked country dependent on imports and remittances, Nepal faced immediate financial strain, higher transport costs and shortages of chemical fertiliser, which contributed to price increases.

"Each shock interrupted the recovery, and together they weighed heavily on job creation," Jahan said.

The experience, according to Jahan, demonstrates the importance of strengthening economic resilience before a crisis occurs.

"Countries that strengthen institutions and rebuild buffers before a crisis are far better placed to absorb the next one," she said.

Jahan said some of the most important reforms undertaken during the IMF programme were not necessarily the most visible to the public.

Nepal modernised the way its central bank conducts monetary policy and strengthened financial-sector oversight, including through stronger bank supervision and reviews of loan quality.

The government also improved fiscal transparency by publishing financial statements of state-owned enterprises, developed a strategy to mobilise revenue, and strengthened the planning and management of public investment.

Governance-related reforms included upgrading the country's anti-money-laundering law and efforts to strengthen the legal framework and accountability of Nepal Rastra Bank.

"These reforms improve the quality of economic policymaking and ensure that macroeconomic policies are more effective over time," Jahan said.

Despite the progress, she cautioned that Nepal still faces major challenges.

The country needs to foster higher private investment and create more jobs if the benefits of economic stability are to reach ordinary people, she said.

"Stability, in other words, is the foundation for growth, not the finish line," Jahan said.

She also identified vulnerabilities within parts of the financial system, particularly savings and credit cooperatives that serve a large number of people.

Deeper institutional reforms are also needed, with continued momentum essential to address governance weaknesses and rebuild public trust.

The authorities have begun an IMF Governance and Corruption Diagnostic to identify governance gaps and strengthen institutional frameworks, she said.

Jahan said completing the IMF-supported programme should be viewed as an important milestone rather than the end of Nepal's reform process.

"Reforms will continue," she said, identifying strengthening the financial sector, improving social protection and creating conditions for stronger and more inclusive growth as key priorities.

Nepal has demonstrated its commitment to implementing critical reforms despite a difficult environment, Jahan said. Continued reforms could put the country in a stronger position to raise living standards, generate employment and withstand future shocks.

"The IMF will remain a steadfast partner as Nepal pursues those goals," she said.

US national debt exceeds $40 trillion for first time

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON, AUG 20

The US gross national debt has surged past $40 trillion for the first time, government data showed Wednesday, outstripping earlier forecasts at a pace fuelled in part by President Donald Trump's invalidated tariffs.

The uptick in borrowing is a blow to Trump, who promised to cut public spending during his 2024 presidential campaign, and sparked a backlash from US representatives across the political field.

The new record comes as longer-term US obligations linked to social security and health care have been growing, while interest payments have climbed as well.

Total public debt outstanding stood at $40.05 trillion at the close of business Tuesday, according to data released Wednesday by the Treasury Department.

That surpasses an earlier forecast by the Congressional Budget Office that overall borrowing would hit $39.4 trillion by the end of fiscal year 2026.

Rising US debt comes as concerns over inflation and government spending have been driving investor worries, and the cost of borrowing has grown.

The war in the Middle East has also piled pressure on Trump, costing the lives of 18 American service members and $37.5 billion in military spending as the nearly six-month-old conflict grinds on with little sign of resolution.

Defense spending shows no sign of slowing, with the US House of Representatives narrowly passing an annual defense policy bill in July that would authorize a record $1.15 trillion in funding for the Pentagon.

Savings from Trump's commission to slash the US federal workforce and agencies have also been hard to quantify, with independent observers insisting figures claimed by the US government—the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) website currently posts cuts of $215 billion—fall short of actual savings.

Trump's mega-wealthy ally Elon Musk, who led the cost-cutting drive, said in 2025 he believed his stint was "a little bit successful".

Republican Senator Rick Scott joined a wave of lawmakers in condemning the debt surge, urging Congress to "get spending under control and BALANCE THE BUDGET".

"Americans deserve better," he wrote on X.

Democratic Senator Mark Kelly, a retired US Navy combat pilot, accused Trump of enriching himself while running up the national debt.

"The President said he'd pay off the debt in his first term. Well we all knew that was a lie," he posted.

"Instead he ran it up to $40 trillion while he and his family made billions."

Democratic Congressman Ted Lieu accused Trump of having "ushered in the Golden Age of Debt."

Yields on long-term Treasury bonds rose Tuesday to the highest level since 2007, reflecting growing price pressures due to war on Iran and anxiety over US deficit spending.

The increase forces the US government to refinance debt at the highest rates since before the 2008 global financial crisis.

But the US Treasury Department moved to steady the long-term bond market early Wednesday, sending yields lower.

The federal government operates at a deficit and borrows money to help cover its obligations, including its war spending and tax cuts.

"It's been well-known for a while that the United States government was on a pretty unsustainable path with deficits," said Jessica Riedl, a budget and tax fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"Over the last few years, the United States has moved into roughly $2 trillion deficits, even during peace and prosperity," she added.

While deficits of three to four percent of GDP used to worry financial markets, she noted that levels are closer to six to seven percent of GDP now.

"That has made markets more nervous," she said.

As inflation pushed interest rates higher, interest costs on the debt have risen as well, and costs linked to an ageing population are pushing up deficits.

Analysts note that there is no debt-to-GDP level that automatically triggers a crisis.

Although the gross debt marks a symbolic threshold, many economists consider debt held by the public to be the most economically meaningful measure.

"But psychologically, these are the landmarks that warn financial markets that they need to take another look at rising debt," Riedl said.

Federal borrowing surged during the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and increased following the government's response to the downturn triggered by Covid-19, said Caleb Quakenbush, director of fiscal policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

But he told AFP that the trajectory of US budget spending has not been addressed by Congress or US administrations in a "meaningful or durable way."

He warned of uncertainty surrounding the "unprecedented levels of borrowing that we're seeing now."

Bond markets could face steep challenges in a crisis scenario, he noted.

But even outside that situation, the United States could see higher borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, squeezing the economy.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had previously set a goal of cutting the US deficit to three percent of GDP.

What property giant Evergrande's sentence means for China's economy

AFP/RSS

This aerial photo shows the Evergrande logo on residential buildings in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province on December 4, 2023. A Chinese court on Thursday fined Evergrande billions of yuan and sentenced its founder Xu Jiayin to life in prison.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING, AUG 20

For property giant Evergrande, the face of China's real estate woes, an excruciating saga that has dragged on for years culminated on Thursday with court rulings ordering fines and jail terms.

The court in Shenzhen city said it sentenced founder Xu Jiayin to life in prison and fined Evergrande Group and an affiliate more than $2 billion for fraud and other offences.

While the verdict caps the fallout from Evergrande's collapse, challenges posed by a stubborn slump in the once-booming property sector still loom large for China and its leaders.

AFP breaks down Evergrande's fall and what it means for the world's number-two economy:

Why did Evergrande collapse?

Evergrande was once China's leading property developer, propelled by decades of rapid urbanisation and rising living standards across the country.

Listed in Hong Kong in 2009, the firm surged to a peak market value of more than $50 billion under the stewardship of Xu, also known as Hui Ka Yan. But fortunes reversed in 2020, when new regulations from Beijing seeking to limit excessive borrowing in the real estate sector complicated Evergrande's ability to make payments.

Subsequent years saw a drawn-out struggle across the industry to complete construction projects as shares plunged and cash flows dried up.

Evergrande's 2021 default and the 2024 liquidation order by a Hong Kong court have become emblematic of the broader downturn in China's once-mighty property sector.

In August last year, Evergrande shares were delisted from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Xu pleaded guilty to charges of fraud and bribery in April during a public hearing at which he stood accused of "illegally absorbing public deposits, fundraising fraud, illegally issuing loans (and) illegally using funds", among other crimes, a court statement said at the time.

What is the impact on China's economy?

The protracted crisis in China's real estate market—long a key driver of national growth—has heavily impacted the country's economy.

"Evergrande helped make the problem more structural... and it showed the weakness of the system," Alicia Garcia-Herrero, Asia-Pacific chief economist at Natixis, told AFP.

The debt struggles of Evergrande and industry peers including Country Garden, Vanke and Kaisa have had a severe impact on consumer confidence, dissuading many would-be homebuyers from making purchases.

Complicating matters further, the slump in sentiment comes just as many economists argue that China must shift towards a growth model powered more by domestic consumption than investment in real estate and infrastructure.

Garcia-Herrero said there are "so many reasons" for a lack of demand in the housing sector, including stagnant disposable income for households and a shrinking population.

In the latest sign of pressures, new-home prices dropped at a faster pace in July than the previous month, official data released this week showed.

How are leaders responding?

Beijing is attempting to simultaneously manage deep-set issues in the property sector while minimising turbulence for the domestic economy.

Thursday's court rulings are a "decisive signal that the central government hasn't changed policy course (and) it won't bail out the property sector", Dan Wang, a director on Eurasia Group's China team, told AFP.

They are a signal to companies that they must "be debt-conscious", she added.

China's leaders are seeking to spark new life into an economy that has faced slowing growth for years.

Beijing is targeting GDP expansion this year of between 4.5 and 5.0 percent, its lowest official goal in decades.

After government data showed growth slipping below that range in the second quarter, the data for July showed retail sales declining compared to last year.

The data also showed a pronounced decline in the property sector, with investment in real estate development down by nearly one fifth year-on-year through the end of July.

Coventry back in the Premier League after 25-year absence

FILE PHOTOS: AP/RSS

(Top) Arsenal's manager Mikel Arteta is thrown in the air by the players celebrating their Premier League title in London, England, on May 24. (Bottom) Coventry City head coach Frank Lampard is pictured on July 18.

STEVE DOUGLAS/AP
LONDON, AUG 20

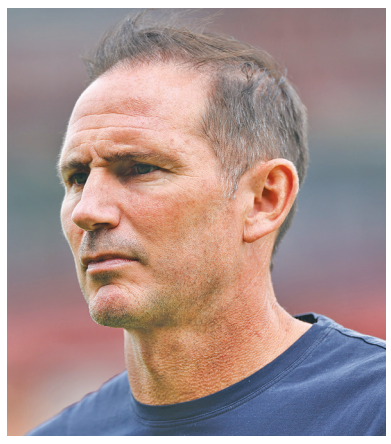
Opening a Premier League season away to the defending champions and title favourites would be something to fear for most promoted teams.

For Coventry, it's purely something to celebrate.

Over the past 15 years, the club from central England has had to deal with being placed into liquidation amid a long fight with hated owners, plunging into the fourth tier of the English game, and also losing its home—thereby necessitating a groundshare with three different teams located within 40 miles (64 kilometres). Now Coventry is back in the top division after a 25-year absence. The message to Arsenal on Friday: Bring it on.

"It was a great year for us and the celebrations were great—it went beyond football in this city," Coventry manager Frank Lampard said of the team's promotion to the Premier League. "It went to a place where the city and football club went through tough times so it heightened the feeling of what was achieved. I'm very excited to be here and get a club that's been out of the Premier League for 25 years and get them back in. It is exciting at this moment but we want to challenge and do well."

Arsenal vs Coventry will be the first of 380 games in a season that is starting later than usual because of the elongated World Cup and is hard to predict because of the raft of managerial changes in the offseason—not



least the departure of Pep Guardiola after 10 era-defining years at Manchester City. There appears to be one constant: the new-found stability and belief at Arsenal, which flexed their muscles on Sunday by swatting aside City in the Community Shield. It therefore promises to be a tough start for Coventry–if a joyful one at the same time.

Key matchups

The standout fixture might be Newcastle hosting Liverpool on Sunday. They are among the nine teams starting the Premier League season with a new coach.

Newcastle's progress will be interesting, given the Saudi-controlled team has lost three key players in Anthony Gordon, Bruno Guimaraes and Sandro Tonali in the offseason—a year after selling Alexander Isak to Liverpool. Isak is expected to get a hot reception at St James' Park.

It's also the start of a new era at Etihad Stadium when Man City host Bournemouth later Sunday. It's Enzo Maresca's first league match in charge of City as Guardiola's replacement, while City will have to get used to life without Rodri after the Spain star's move to Barcelona.

Players to watch

Premier League clubs' spending on new players is approaching $3 billion already in the summer transfer window so watch out for debuts by the most expensive of the recruits. Morgan Rogers ($156 million) in Chelsea's match at Fulham on Monday, Elliot Anderson ($155 million) for City against Bournemouth, and Tonali ($133 million) for Tottenham at Brentford. An under-the-radar signing might be Greece winger Christos Tzolis, who joined Arsenal from Club Brugge. He has looked sharp in preseason, including picking up two assists in the Community Shield.

Out of action

Certain to be missing for Arsenal's opening match of its title defence is France centre back William Saliba, who is a long-term absentee because of a back injury. Liverpool will not only be starting a season without Mohamed Salah for the first time in a decade, but are still missing striker Hugo Ekitike as he recovers from Achilles tendon damage.

PSG start Ligue 1 defence with eye on Champions League hat-trick

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, AUG 20

Paris Saint-Germain kick off their Ligue 1 campaign as overwhelming favourites to win a sixth successive title, but will have one eye firmly on their bid for a third straight Champions League crown.

The capital giants eased to a record-extending 14th French top-flight triumph last season, despite often prioritising their European ambitions.

They start their Ligue 1 campaign against Rennes on Sunday, hoping to make a quick start before the Champions League begins on September 8.

"When the season starts, everyone says the league is easy," said head coach Luis Enrique. "Nothing is easy—I don't recall any easy French league campaigns, at least not in the last three years."

Their six-point winning margin over second-placed Lens last term was the second closest they have come to slipping up domestically since being beaten to the title by Lille in 2021.

Two seasons ago, they finished a whopping 19 points clear of closest challengers Marseille.

Across the past five campaigns, PSG have enjoyed an average title-winning margin of 10 points.

After finally ending their long wait to translate that success to Europe in 2024/25, they backed it up with a second successive Champions League final victory, over Arsenal on penalties in May.

Only three clubs have won three consecutive European Cups—Real Madrid, Ajax and Bayern Munich.

"Everyone thinks we can win, but that's just theory. Now we have to prove on the pitch that we're up to the task," Luis Enrique said when asked about PSG's Champions League chances this season. "Historically, it's hard to find a team that wins all the time, but we're trying to be right there alongside those kinds of teams."

Qatar-backed PSG have once again strengthened in the transfer market and held on to all of their most important players.

Ferran Torres has joined from Barcelona after scoring Spain's winning goal in the World Cup final, while France left-back Lucas Digne has returned as back-up for Nuno Mendes.

"Like last year, we're still hungry for victories, trophies," said PSG midfielder Vitinha. "It's very difficult to maintain those levels, but we're still hungry, and we'll be aiming to win."

PSG comfortably rotated their side in Ligue 1 last term to boost their Champions League hopes and will be expecting to be able to do so again this time around.

Ballon d'Or holder Ousmane Dembele only started 11 of their 34 Ligue 1 games last season.

Coaching chaos

Lens impressed by finishing second to PSG last season and led the table for long periods before falling away. They could not hold on to coach Pierre Sage, who left for mid-table Premier League club Crystal Palace.

However, they passed their first test under new boss Dino Toppmoeller with flying colours by defeating PSG with 10 men in the Champions' Trophy last weekend and will be expecting to compete for second place again.

"I have a great rapport with the coach. He called me very soon after his appointment, while I was still on vacation," said Lens playmaker Florian Thauvin. "We share the same vision of football. We get along really well and see things the same way."

It has been a summer of managerial overhaul in Ligue 1.

Luis Enrique is one of only four coaches, alongside Lyon boss Paulo Fonseca, Rennes' Franck Haise and Le Havre's Didier Digard, to have kept their jobs across the 16 clubs who also started last season.

Marseille have replaced the sacked Habib Beye with Bruno Genesio after they missed out on Champions League qualification, while Carlo Ancelotti's son Davide Ancelotti has taken Genesio's place at Lille.

Former Chelsea and Atletico Madrid left-back Filipe Luis has joined Monaco and Liam Rosenior is aiming to bounce back from his miserable stint at Chelsea with Paris FC.

AFP/RSS

Lens' Montenegrin midfielder Andrija Bulatovic (bottom) falls as PSG's Moroccan defender Achraf Hakimi looks on during the French Super Cup (Trophée des Champions) match at the Stade Bollaert-Delelis in Lens, northern France, on August 16.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Today is your day, Aries, so live it up! If it seems like things have been rather intense lately, don't worry, they're apt to lighten up quite a bit today.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Be careful that you aren't acting in a way that you dislike in others, Taurus. You could find that you're slowly taking on the traits of the people you despise. Lighten up a bit and put a smile on your face.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
The day's general mood should fit quite well with your agenda, Gemini. There's no need to fixate on the negative. Keep things light and upbeat and worry about the consequences later.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
You may need a translator to get through to people today, Cancer. It could be hard to make decisions, but not impossible. Today's tip is to err on the side of adventure. Trust that good luck will pull you through if you take risks.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Use your power resources today, Leo, as you have a great deal of dynamic energy at your disposal. You have the ability to transform and conquer anything now. Note that your spirit of adventure is apt to be more acute than normal.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
You could be asked to make some spontaneous decisions today that you might not feel entirely comfortable making, Virgo. You could feel you don't have enough facts to make an educated decision about what to do next.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Emotionally, you may feel as if you're running up against a brick wall, Libra. It could be that your first reaction is to drown your sorrows in drink. Escapism is only a temporary remedy.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Your emotions could be extra powerful today, Scorpio, although something may not feel as if it's sitting right. It could be a feeling of manipulation. Perhaps you've misjudged someone else's sensitivity.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Take hold of this day as if it's your own and use it to grow your dreams, Sagittarius. You'll find a great deal of power and dynamism in the air urging you to take the adventurous route. There's no need to hold back.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
There's a fiery tone to the day that can't be ignored, Capricorn. You may find that adjustments need to be made in your own plan of attack in order to get on the same page with other people.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
There's an extra spark in your eye that people won't be able to ignore. Today's a good day to get your point across, because you'll find people more open and receptive to new things than usual.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Take yourself on a mental adventure today in which you explore new aspects of your world. Discuss philosophy and religion. Get to the core of a matter that seriously interests you.

HOROSCOPE.COM

CROSSWORD

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14 Greek letter
15 Forearm bone
16 Email folder
17 Higher
18 Stopper for a barrel
19 Officer trainees
21 Funnel-shaped flower
23 Pro —
25 Shoestring
26 Artists' paints
30 As — — a pin
34 Overly
35 Inscribe
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38 Shapeless mass
40 High-flown poem
41 Pennsylvania port
42 On — — (equivalent)
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47 Elder
50 Most poor
52 Couples
54 Dregs
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57 Delivered a speech
61 First Arabic letter
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65 Before (Prefix)
66 Bill of fare
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7-16-26 © 2026 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

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44 Hard-winged insect
45 "What's the big —?"
48 "— Town"
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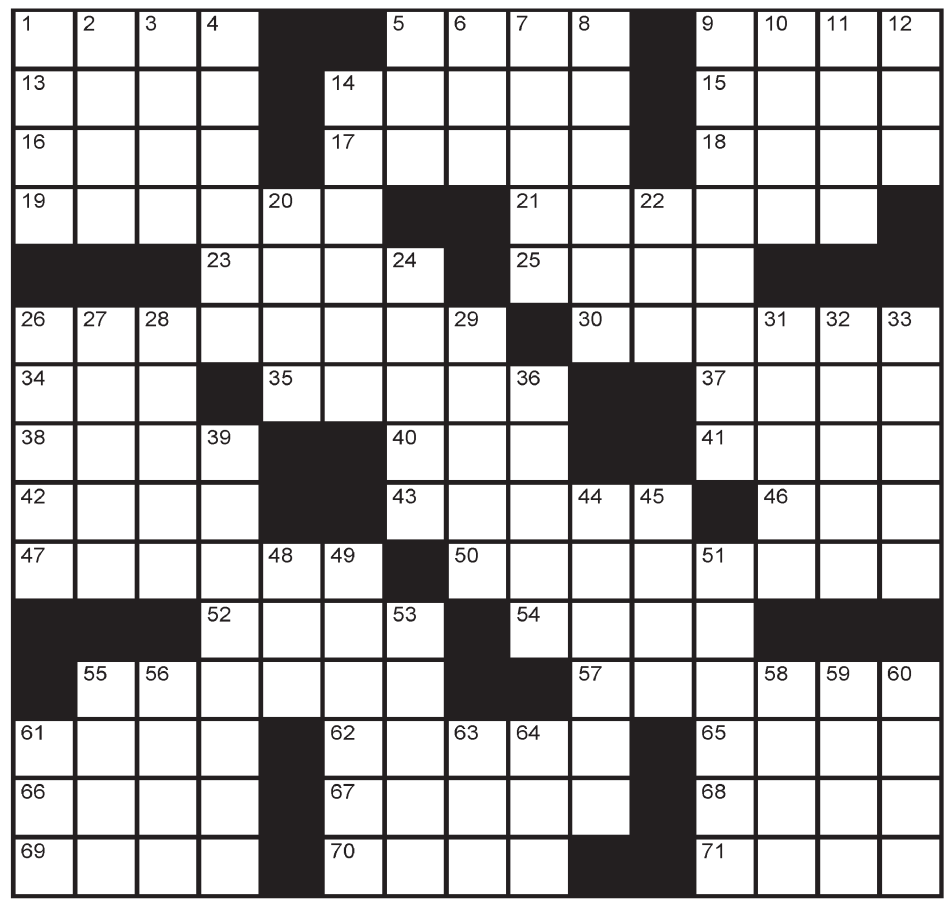
53 Put the ball in play
55 Toward shelter
56 Hollywood and —
58 Leg part
59 Lab burner
60 Whitetail
61 Elec. unit
63 Writer — Fleming
64 Recipe direction



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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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No.SC6109 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

AI is already in Nepal's classrooms. Now teachers need to know how to use it

AI-in-education specialist Ronda Zelezny-Green argues that local AI tools and a focus on AI sovereignty can help Nepal build a more sustainable approach to technology in education.

ANISH GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU

Artificial intelligence is already finding its way into Nepal's classrooms, even as the education system is still figuring out how to respond to it.

Teachers and students are using generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, according to Ronda Zelezny-Green, an international consultant specialising in AI in education and digital skills and the research lead for the British Council Nepal's AI4ED project.

The question, she says, is no longer whether AI should be used in education. It is how it can be used to improve learning without creating new problems. "The teachers are ready and open to using generative AI," Zelezny-Green told The Post. "So now it's about figuring out how to use it to advance education and learning."

The first phase of AI4ED involved a national mixed-methods study of 800 teachers. The research found that geography had less influence on AI use than expected. Teachers in urban and rural areas were using AI in broadly similar ways.

Age, however, made a significant difference. Among teachers aged 30 or younger, 94 percent were described as fast AI adopters with experience using AI. Among those aged 50 or older, the figure fell to 54 percent.

Perhaps more striking was what teachers themselves identified as the biggest obstacle.

It was not infrastructure.

It was training.

"They don't know where to get training, and the government isn't providing it," Zelezny-Green said. "So they are using AI, but almost blindly."

The gap could become increasingly important as AI tools become more common in schools. Knowing how to operate an AI chatbot is not the same as knowing how to use it responsibly or effectively.

Zelezny-Green, who has worked on digital skills and education technology across 80 countries, says teachers globally are struggling with the same problem, not just in Nepal. "There simply isn't enough teacher training," she said.

For Nepal, that training needs to be designed around the country's own education system rather than imported wholesale from technology companies. Teachers need to understand not only how to prompt an AI system, but also how to assess its answers, protect sensitive information, and recognise the ethical risks of using such tools.

Data protection is one particular concern. Teachers may not realise that information entered into AI systems can be used for training or other purposes. Responsible AI adoption, therefore, cannot be limited to teachers. Schools, students, and parents all have a role to play. "It needs to be an ecosystem of responsibility shared among everyone who uses AI," she said.

Nepal also faces another challenge—and an opportunity—in the language gap.

Many of the most widely used AI systems perform far better in English than in Nepali and other local languages. Zelezny-Green says current tools can produce inaccurate translations and culturally unrealistic representations.

But she sees that weakness as an opportunity for Nepal to develop its own solutions.

Smaller language models can be cheaper to develop and maintain than the massive systems behind popular commercial chatbots. Nepal could potentially develop models designed specifically for Nepali and other local languages, using resources already available in the country.

"You have Nepali books here. You have the resources, and the government could support this," she said. The biggest challenge, she argues, would be access to the computing power needed to train such models—and the political will to make it happen.

That leads to a broader question about who controls the technology, data and infrastructure on which AI depends.

Zelezny-Green argues that Nepal should think seriously about "AI sovereignty"—the idea that countries should not become entirely dependent on foreign companies for AI technologies and infrastructure. "Wholesale reliance on foreign AI technologies, especially expensive American ones, will not be sustainable in the long run," she said.

But developing local technologies does not solve the question of how AI should be used in classrooms. One of the biggest changes may need to come from the way students are taught and assessed.

For years, education systems have talked about the importance of creativity, collaboration and problem-solving. Generative AI makes those skills even more important because students can now outsource many conventional forms of homework to a chatbot.

Instead of treating this only as a cheating problem, Zelezny-Green argues that schools need to rethink assessment itself. "If a teacher puts in little effort, why should a student work hard when they can simply ask ChatGPT or Claude to do their homework?" she said.

She believes education needs "a new social contract" around AI. That does not mean abandoning foundational skills. In fact, she argues the opposite.

Students first need strong foundations in reading and writing, critical thinking and critical media literacy. They need to be able to recognise misinformation, disinformation and AI-generated content before they can be expected to use AI responsibly.

This is also why she rejects the idea of simply banning AI from schools. "One of my biggest pet peeves is the idea that we should simply ban AI," she said.

Even students who are not encouraged to use AI will encounter it outside school, she argues. They therefore need to understand what the technology is, what its risks are and how to use it responsibly.

For Nepal, that requires policy to catch up with practice.

The country has several policy frameworks dealing with digital development and artificial intelligence. But, according to Zelezny-Green, there is still a gap when it comes specifically to education.

"The biggest gap is training, but there is also a policy gap," she said. The AI4ED project, she says, could provide evidence for developing such a policy. The challenge is to avoid treating AI as a technological solution to every problem facing Nepal's education system.

For Zelezny-Green, technology remains secondary to the people using it. "AI in education is a tool, and it will always be a tool," she said. "It is not a magic wand."

Technology will continue to change. The more important question, she argues, is whether teachers, students, parents, and policymakers are prepared to lead that change.

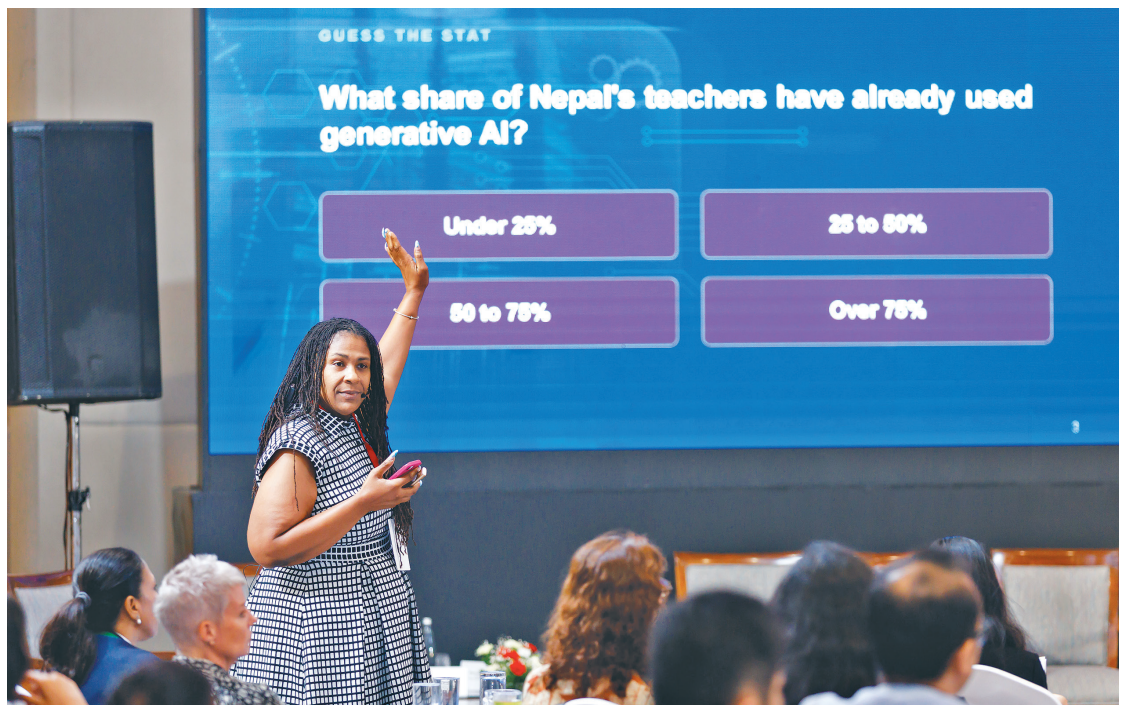

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL NEPAL

Zelezny-Green speaking at the 'Teaching and Learning Futures Nepal: AI for Equitable Education' conference in Kathmandu on August 18.

Your research found that women's access to devices and AI does not necessarily close the gender gap. Why is that?

We can't simply assume that providing devices and internet access will ensure equal participation. One key factor is time poverty. Women and female teachers often have far less time to practice and develop their AI skills because they are also responsible for unpaid care work.

You said AI could help address problems beyond education. What possibilities do you see?

One of the most innovative uses of AI is in addressing climate change, such as predicting floods and other disasters. That is important for education because schools are increasingly affected by climate-related events. AI is also being used to solve long-standing mathematical problems. If it can solve complex maths problems, what about some of these other problems? People need to be more imaginative about what AI can potentially be used for.

You have described AI sovereignty as important for Nepal. What does that mean in practical terms?

Countries do not have to surrender national resources, such as people's data and data centers, to support AI technologies. Nepal needs to consider what AI sovereignty and independence should look like. Wholesale reliance on foreign AI technologies, especially expensive Western ones, will not be sustainable in the long run.

With all things digital, whether it's social media or AI, it comes down to how we approach them. So, if you had to roughly weigh the ways people are using AI for harm against the ways they're using it to improve society, are you more worried or hopeful about where we're heading?

I'm hopeful because I think there are enough people using AI for good, but there will always be bad actors.

We're having to think about things we never had to before to stay safe online. One example is voice cloning. For example, having a family passphrase can help verify someone's identity if their voice has been cloned.

That's why education has such an important role in the AI era. Almost no one is learning about digital citizenship—what it means to be a responsible citizen in an AI-enabled world. School curricula can help address this, but we're not really seeing it yet, either globally or in Nepal.

'What Empire Took, What Empire Left' examines museums, borders and return

Eleven artists examine the journeys of South Asia's displaced cultural heritage.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

What Empire Took, What Empire Left: Museums, Borders and the Politics of Return in South Asia', an exhibition about the effects in South Asia during Western Occupation, is opening at Taragaon Next, Boudha on August 23. The day will begin with a symposium, followed by the exhibit's official opening.

Supported by the Saraf Foundation and curated by Arshiya Mansoor Lokhandwala, the exhibit brings together eleven artists from across South Asia and its diaspora to examine how the sacred deities, manuscripts, and ritual objects have been removed from living contexts and reclassified within Western museums. This exhibition confronts that rupture.

The exhibiting artists are Temsüyanger Longkumer, Reetu Sattar, Shaurya Kumar, Raqs Media Collective, Mithu Sen, Divya Mehra, Marium Ghani, LN Tallur, Roshan Mishra, Bishal Manandhar and Jagath Weerasinghe.

"As museums globally confront the colonial histories embedded within their collections, restitution has become one of the defining cultural questions of our time," says Lokhandwala. "This exhibition brings South Asia into that urgent discourse, asking not simply what should return, but who holds the power to own, interpret and determine the afterlives of displaced heritage."

'What Empire Took, What Empire Left' takes as its starting point a central provocation: what happens when the sacred is violently dislocated—not only from place, but from time, ritual, and meaning?

Spanning Nepal's emptied temples, the dispersal of India's bronzes, Gandharan sculpture from Pakistan, and the erosion of Bangladesh's terracotta heritage, the exhibit traces a region-wide history of cultural dismemberment.

Through contemporary artistic practice, it builds a counter-archive that positions acts of return as a form of epistemic resistance.

What Empire Took, What Empire Left
When: August 23 (Opening)
Where: Taragaon Next, Bauddha
Time: 4:30 pm onwards (Opening)
Entry: Free

Gen Z gets a moody, existential horror in 'It Ends'

With its minimalist approach, the movie almost feels like a pandemic-era production.

LINDSEY BAHR

Every generation deserves its own postgrad malaise movie. Not every attempt is going to be "The Graduate" or "Frances Ha," but even when they're mediocre, they're also often a pure expression from a young filmmaker about what their contemporaries are feeling at that exact moment.

Though the details may change — the clothes, the hairstyles, the gadgets, the soundtrack — the vibe kind of stays the same even in a high concept horror like "It Ends," in which four friends find themselves on an endless road to nowhere. It's kind of reassuring, unlike, say, the encroaching doom of adulthood.

"It Ends" was written and directed by Alexander Ullom, who graduated from college during the pandemic and is open about how he struggled with dissociative depression. You don't need to know this to watch the film, but it makes sense once you've met James (Phinehas Yoon). He's the rational and inquisitive one whose seen-it-all-already jadedness about his future is its own kind of poison.

Somehow, however, he hasn't alienated his high school friends. They still like him enough to help him move into his new apartment (which is, by all accounts, super depressing). We meet them as they all cram into a white Jeep Cherokee to find some food. Tyler (Mitchell Cole) is driving, and Fisher (Noah Toth) is leading a spirited discussion about which animals they'd pick to defend them (10,000 rats, 50 hawks, one man with a gun, or five gorillas etc., etc.).

It was, apparently, a popular meme for a time. Day (Akira Jackson) is navigating with her phone's maps app and wondering whether she could choose gorillas trained to use guns as a loophole.

Tyler is the outlier in this group, the one who didn't go to college. He went into the military and has been working for some time in HVAC. He's even talking about wanting to get married sooner rather than later. And he's the only one with a discernable Southern accent (they're apparently in Florida).

The others are all just out of college and really feeling it. Day is ambling around on job search sites, trying to put her graphic design degree to work. James has an entry level engineering job and his future all mapped out (although the way he describes his inevitable life in a Midwestern city in which he's married with kids and making six figures sounds like a death sentence). He'd rather, he says, be in a medically induced coma hooked up to "oxy serotonin" cocktails.

Personally, I prefer Noah Baumbach's line from "Kicking and Screaming" about wishing they were just retiring after a lifetime of hard work to the drugged out coma thought, but I long ago aged out of the postgrad demo.

Is it believable that these four would have stayed friends in high school and beyond? Not really, especially Tyler. But there needs to be a few different types to handle their new predicament of seemingly being stuck forever on a country road in this Jeep. Some hope in vain for a way out. Some are content to pass the time as happily and aimlessly as they can (learn dances, tell jokes, scream sometimes).

James just wants to understand. And then there's the question of the zombielike people in the woods who attack when they stop for more than 90 seconds, which is good for a few jump scares. The metaphors might not be especially subtle, but the film does have a kind of hypnotic appeal.

With its minimalist approach, "It Ends" almost feels like a pandemic-era production. It's a neat concept that wears a little thin after a while, but it's a movie that shows promise not only in Ullom's ability to create a sustained, ominous mood, but in his eye for casting a group of talented and essentially unknown actors.

Ullom's bio says that he "makes films for anyone going through stuff." And Gen Z, like all the generations before them and all the generations after, are certainly in the thick of "going through stuff." Maybe "It Ends" is just what they need.

"It Ends," a Neon release in New York and Los Angeles on Friday and nationwide Aug. 28, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "pervasive language." Running time: 89 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

– Associated Press

AP/RSS

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