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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Cargo carriers exit Kathmandu Valley via the Kanti Lokpath, an alternative route connecting the Capital, after the arterial road, Prithvi Highway, was severed by the Trishuli floods two weeks ago.

Proposed legal changes raise fears of political interference in Nepal Rastra Bank

Revisions in the existing law could undermine central bank's independence and policy continuity, former governors warn.

YAGYA BANJADE
KATHMANDU, SEPT 13

Nepal's central bank governors have faced political pressure several times before. They, however, have found protection in the courts.

In April 2022, then Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari was suspended by the Cabinet after resisting government intervention. He challenged the decision in the Supreme Court and returned to office after the court ruled in his favour. He went on to complete his five-year term.

The case was not the first time Nepal's judiciary had intervened to protect the autonomy of the central bank. In 2000, the government removed then governor Tilak Rawal and appointed Dipendra Purush Dhakal in his place. Rawal challenged the decision, and nine months later the top court ordered his reinstatement. Rawal said the court took seriously the government's attempt to change the leadership of a sensitive institution without following due process. The episode was among the developments that led to the Nepal Rastra Bank Act 2002, which strengthened the legal basis for the central bank's autonomy.

"That is why the 2002 Act was intro-

duced to make the central bank independent," Rawal said.

"Because of the Nepal Rastra Bank Act 2002, all governors have been able to complete their terms."

Yubaraj Khatiwada, who served as governor through four governments, also faced pressure from both the government and the anti-graft body during his five-year tenure. Yet he could not be removed before completing his term. The protection offered by the law could now be weakened.

Yubaraj Khatiwada says the government may be uneasy with a stable leadership at the NRB.

The parliamentary Finance Committee has proposed amendments to several provisions of the Nepal Rastra Bank Act, including the tenure of the governor and directors, eligibility for the top central bank post, the government's power to issue directives to the bank and the timing of monetary policy announcements.

The draft bill has proposed a slew of changes and it has raised concerns

among experts, who say the amendments could weaken its independence and leave its leadership more exposed to political interference. The most contentious proposal is to reduce the governor's tenure from five years to three, while allowing the Cabinet to extend it by another two years based on performance.

Former finance minister and former governor Yubaraj Khatiwada said the change could make the central bank's leadership unstable.

"Why should the tenure of the governor and directors be shortened?" Khatiwada said. "It seems the issue has come up because the government is uncomfortable with stable leadership at the central bank. We should not put Nepal Rastra Bank in the hands of short-term and unstable leadership."

Under the committee's proposal, the governor, deputy governors and three independent directors would initially serve three-year terms. The Cabinet could then decide whether to extend their tenure by two years.

Khatiwada said the existing five-year term was intended to provide continuity in monetary policy and allow the governor to operate independently. A governor can already be removed under existing law for misconduct, he said, making it unnecessary to introduce a shorter term with

a discretionary extension.

"The two-year extension provision appears to bring the central bank under the government's control by another route," he said. "The issue is the stability of the central bank's overall leadership. The governor's term was set at five years to ensure policy continuity and make monetary policy predictable."

Former finance minister and lawmaker Barshaman Pun also opposed the proposed change.

"A fixed five- or six-year term is appropriate because it gives the executive the opportunity to work independently," Pun said. "Allowing a two-year extension appears to give the executive power to influence how the central bank is run."

Former governor Bijaya Nath Bhattarai went further, arguing that the proposed system could allow successive governments to influence who remains in charge of the central bank. "It is a policy of preventing someone they do not like from remaining governor for long and appointing their own people," Bhattarai said.

"The three-year term followed by a possible two-year extension is a tool for telling the governor, 'We are your bosses. Your tenure will be extended only if we are satisfied with you.'"

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Price surge and LPG shortage put Nepal's capital in a squeeze

Consumers in Kathmandu Valley are cutting back on food and festive preparations as supply disruptions and rising transport costs push up the prices of daily essentials.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, SEPT 13

Shanti Belbase, 53, was planning to make selroti for dar, a heavy meal eaten by women in preparation for fasting during the Haritalika Teej festival, for her three younger sisters, which began on Sunday.

But when she visited the market last week, she was perplexed.

"The prices of all commodities needed to make selroti, such as rice flour, sugar, edible oil and spices, have increased," she said. "Everything is super expensive."

She dropped the idea of preparing selroti, a traditional Nepali rice-based fried bread round in shape.

The price of a 20kg sack of jeera masino rice has reached Rs2,700, an increase of Rs500 per sack.

A litre of sunflower oil now costs Rs300, up Rs60 within two weeks.

The price of sugar has crossed Rs140 per kg, from Rs100. These are only a few examples, but consumers in Kathmandu Valley say they are bearing the brunt of price hikes reminiscent of a decade ago, when an unofficial Indian blockade disrupted daily life across Nepal.

"Above all, there is an acute shortage of cooking gas," said Belbase, a housewife who lives in Chapagaun, Lalitpur. Belbase has cut her kitchen menu and stopped preparing festive dishes.

"I didn't invite guests either this year for Teej."

In Nepal, price hikes or inflation mean hardship for a large section of society. Rising prices can lead to social and economic instability by worsening the living conditions of people with limited incomes, particularly the poor and middle class, who are forced to compromise on their diets.

Amrit Thapa is a private car driver who lives in a rented house in Balkumari. He did not buy rice in a sack last week and instead bought a few kilos at a time. He earns Rs20,000 per month.

"My income almost vanished within two weeks," he said.

"Daily household essentials, children's school fees and rent—it's really very expensive to live in Kathmandu."

Thapa said he borrowed money from friends to buy food for the festivities.

He has returned to using a kerosene stove after the cooking gas shortage persisted for the last three weeks. He said he has not bought fruits or meat since then.

Like Belbase and Thapa, consumers across Kathmandu Valley have been hit hard. Prices of many commodities were already rising following the war in West Asia, which pushed up fuel prices and eventually increased the prices of almost every commodity.

The price hikes and shortage of cooking gas have worsened since the August 26 devastating flash flood in

Rasuwa damaged a section of the Prithvi Highway, severely affecting cargo transport to Kathmandu Valley, the country's business hub.

According to the Nepal Retail Traders Association, the price of mustard oil has reached Rs460 per litre from Rs410 a month ago. Sunflower oil has crossed Rs295 per litre from Rs245. Black lentils have increased to Rs200 per kg from Rs180. Turmeric has risen to Rs525 per kg from Rs450.

The wholesale prices of most vegetables—including tomato, potato, onion, cabbage, cauliflower, French beans, bitter gourd, pointed gourd and pumpkin—have also gone up within a month, according to the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Market Development Board.



POST PHOTO

LP gas shortage in Kathmandu has been worsened by the Prithvi Highway disruption.

Price hikes or inflation mean hardship for a large section of society.

The wholesale price of Nepali tomatoes has increased by 15.38 percent to Rs75 per kg. In retail, they cost Rs120 per kg. Potato prices have surged 7 percent to Rs53.50 per kg, while sword beans have increased by 13.33 percent to Rs85. The retail price of sword beans is around Rs130 per kg.

The wholesale price of bitter gourd has climbed 44.44 percent to Rs65 per kg, while in retail it trades at around Rs100 per kg. The wholesale price of Fuji apples has climbed 29.31 percent to Rs375 per kg. In retail, they cost Rs450 per kg.

The retail price of mutton, which was hovering around Rs1,300 per kg, has reached Rs1,700. The price has increased by nearly Rs400 amid severe bird flu cases reported in the Valley and other districts in July.

The price of a large egg now stands at Rs25 per piece in retail markets, up from Rs22.

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What should Balendra Shah tell the world in New York?

Ahead of the prime minister's first UN General Assembly address, experts, leaders and activists share how Nepal should pitch its climate crisis to the world.

BIKEN K DAWADI
KATHMANDU, SEPT 13

Ten days before Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York, there is much curiosity around how the young leader will frame Nepal's climate vulnerabilities.

Amid mounting economic pressures and the heavy toll of recent Bhotekoshi floods, Shah's upcoming address is expected to present a fierce international demand for climate justice, adaptation financing and equitable accountability.

The Bhotekoshi catastrophe has also renewed a longstanding question for Nepali diplomacy: How can a country with limited influence make its concerns heard in an international system largely shaped by powerful states?

Nepal has been raising the climate justice issue for years, arguing that countries that have contributed little to global emissions should not bear a disproportionate share of the consequences. But that appeal has largely been ignored, or so it seems.

In this context, the Post recently asked eight key voices—veteran

diplomats, political leaders, climate experts, activists and writers—what Prime Minister Shah must tell world leaders.

Several of them say Shah should go beyond recounting the devastation and use it to demand practical measures, from stronger early-warning systems and scientific cooperation to dependable financing for recovery and resilient infrastructure.

Their answers vary widely, from regional early-warning cooperation and climate finance to UN reform, strategic autonomy and a more assertive voice from the developing countries. Taken together, they offer a map of the arguments Nepal could take to the world stage.

Former UN assistant secretary-general Kul Chandra Gautam, for one, has called for Nepal, India and China to establish a Himalayan climate-resilience mechanism to share data, improve early warnings and coordinate assistance when disasters strike.

Former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai, meanwhile, argues that Shah should challenge an international order in which powerful countries exercise disproportionate influ-



POST PHOTO

Prime Minister Balendra Shah addresses Parliament in this recent photo.

ence, while making a case for greater representation of poorer nations.

Others say Nepal should resist being drawn into geopolitical camps and instead pursue strategic autonomy, grounded in sovereignty, international law and national interest.

Nepal has estimated that \$4.7 billion will be required for recovery and rehabilitation after the floods.

There is also a question of tone. Shah's political appeal has been built partly on a rejection of conventional political language.

Gopal Bahadur Thapa, veteran diplomat and former foreign ministry chief of protocol, argues that his UN address should reflect that identity, using simple language and striking facts rather than diplomatic formulas. The recent floods, with its missing and dead, could provide the

emotional centre of such a speech, Thapa says, but the address would need to move quickly from tragedy to proposals.

To be sure, a powerful speech can attract international attention, but attention does not automatically translate into funding, technology, institutional reform or regional cooperation. Nepal has estimated that as much as \$4.7 billion (or Rs723 billion) will be required for recovery and rehabilitation after the floods.

Of this, infrastructure accounts for the largest share of the estimated recovery bill, at Rs473.57 billion, or 65 percent.

The value of Shah's visit will ultimately depend on what follows the address, including the alliances he builds and the commitments he secures on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

His first appearance at the General Assembly is therefore both a diplomatic opportunity and a test of political maturity. He can present Nepal as a country seeking sympathy—or as one offering concrete ideas while demanding greater fairness from the international system.

>> Continued on page 3

MONEY

FOREX	
US Dollar	153.19
Euro	177.7
Pound Sterling	207.11
Swiss Franc	187.64
Australian Dollar	109.84
Canadian Dollar	110.44
Singapore Dollar	120.89
Japanese Yen (10)	9.98
Chinese Yuan	22.84
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.79
Qatari Riyal	42.02
Thai Bhat	4.63
UAE Dhiram	41.71
Malaysian Ringit	37.63
Korean Won (100)	11.42
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank	
BULLION	
PRICE PER TOLA	
 Fine Gold	Rs 302,200
 Silver	Rs 4,660
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA	
BIZLINE	

China’s Xi proposes BRICS ‘open-source AI zone’

NEW DELHI: China will lead the creation of an “open-source zone for artificial intelligence” for BRICS countries, President Xi Jinping said Sunday at a summit of the 11-nation group in New Delhi. Chinese AI companies produce world-leading open-source AI models—whose underlying code is accessible for adaptation by users—while US developers have favoured closed-door approaches. The proposal, part of the Chinese leader’s “initiative on open-source and inclusive AI”, included a promise to “support cooperation in the development and application of large language models”, according to a readout of Xi’s speech from state broadcaster CCTV. The initiative would also include establishing “specialised research and training on AI” for BRICS countries, with the goal of “building an open ecosystem for AI”, Xi said. The BRICS bloc, which includes China, Russia and India, was created in 2009 as a forum for major emerging economies seeking greater influence in institutions dominated by Western powers. **(AFP)**

All eyes on US Fed to tackle high inflation

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve goes into a key rate-setting meeting this week with markets expecting policymakers to pull the trigger on a rate hike to tackle persistently high inflation—and analysts say central bank chief Kevin Warsh’s credibility is on the line. The world’s largest economy has been dealing with years of higher-than-target inflation, and prices have surged in the wake of US President Donald Trump’s war on Iran, his signature tariff policies and the ongoing AI boom. The Fed has held rates steady since January, choosing to wait to gauge the effects of energy price shocks and to let the tariffs’ effects on prices ripple through the economy. In recent weeks, however, several Fed policymakers—including Warsh himself -- have hinted that if inflation does not show clear signs of slowing, the central bank will have to act by raising interest rates. On Friday, new data on consumer inflation for August showed it remaining steady at 3.4 percent -- no change from the month before, but still well above the Fed’s long-term two percent target. Market expectations of a 25-basis-point rate hike on Wednesday surged in the wake of the data, with the probability at more than 85 percent according to CME’s FedWatch tool. **(AFP)**

Ukraine’s economy hobbled by Russian strikes

KYIV: Ukraine’s economy is being crippled by intensifying Russian strikes hitting key sectors and its GDP could slump by 1.5 points in 2026, Kyiv officials said Saturday, warning of a “very difficult” winter ahead. Russia, which devastated Ukraine’s energy sector during the course of 4.5 years of war, has since this summer stepped up a campaign of missiles and drones that Kyiv is struggling to intercept. These have severely restricted grain exports in the Black Sea—a crucial source of Kyiv’s revenue. The strikes have also targeted steel companies, another key sector, as well as supply chains—notably in the rail sector—and major warehouses. “The economy is in the most difficult situation,” Ukraine’s Prime Minister Sergiy Korytskiy said during the annual Yalta European Strategy forum in Kyiv. He said the intensity of the strikes and the level of destruction have increased. “We anticipate a very difficult winter in terms of both critical infrastructure, which is being destroyed every day by Russian attacks, but also in terms of overall economic conditions in the country,” said Ukraine’s economy minister, Oleksandr Kravchenko. **(AFP)**

○ **GAURAV POKHAREL & BIMAL KHATIWADA**
KATHMANDU, SEPT 13

Nepal has sought Chinese assistance to rebuild the road linking Syaphrubesi with the Rasuwagadhi border crossing, the key trade route in the north, which was severely damaged by the August 26 floods.

China has responded positively to Nepal’s proposal and indicated that it is willing to help, although no formal agreement has yet been signed, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development has said.

The roughly 16-km Syaphrubesi-Rasuwagadhi road was being upgraded under a Rs6.5 billion Chinese-funded project when the August 26 floods swept away large sections, severely damaging the border crossing and cutting a major trade link between Nepal and China.

The project completion period was 39 months.

The government is now looking at a temporary track to restore access to Rasuwagadhi while working on a longer-term plan to rebuild the road in a safer location. Discussions with China on the plan are continuing.

“China has given us a verbal commitment to provide assistance, although a written agreement has not yet been signed,” Infrastructure Development Minister Sunil Lamsal told Kantipur in an interview.

“We understand that they are preparing for it, and regular discussions are also taking place.”

The government is meanwhile assessing temporary options to restore access to the border point.

“The route is not only a trade corridor between Nepal and China. There are many settlements along it as well,” Lamsal said. “For now, we are preparing to use a temporary track to keep the route to Rasuwagadhi open. In the long term, we need to build a safer road, but for the time being we will make do with a temporary track.”

He added, “For now, we are preparing to operate through a temporary track until Rasuwagadhi. In the long term, we need to build a safer road, but for the time being we will make do with a temporary track.”

He said the government was examining safer ground around the existing road alignment as it works to reopen the crossing.

“We are also discussing various alternatives,” Lamsal said. “We have sent a proposal to the Chinese government asking for support in restoring the border point, and we have held discussions with them.”

Rasuwagadhi emerged as Nepal’s main alternative trade route with China after the Araniko Highway and the Tatopani border area suffered repeated disruptions, particularly following the 2015 earthquake.

The crossing handles imports including electric vehicles, electrical



POST PHOTO

The government is also considering relocating people living in areas exposed to glacial lake outburst floods and other hazards.

goods, ready-made garments, footwear, agricultural products, telecommunications equipment, machinery used by hydropower projects, vehicles and industrial machinery. Nepal exports smaller quantities of handicrafts, woollen goods, medicinal herbs, noodles, copper utensils and agricultural products to China, according to the Rasuwa Customs Office.

Electric vehicles account for around 60 percent of total imports through the crossing, according to customs officials.

“Large numbers of electric vehicles used to come through Rasuwagadhi. But after the flood on July 8, 2025, many of them were sent directly to the Chobhar dry port customs office,” said Rajendra Dhungana, chief customs officer at Rasuwa.

“So we did not have consolidated data on how many vehicles entered through Rasuwagadhi.”

Rasuwa Customs had set a revenue collection target of Rs25.5 billion for the current fiscal year.

In the first month of the fiscal year, it collected Rs1.86 billion against a target of Rs1.78 billion.

In the second month, from mid-August to mid-September, the target was set at Rs2.04 billion. So far, Rs900 million had been collected by August 25, a day before the floods struck the border area.

The disaster completely wiped out the border point and its surroundings.

It remains unclear when it can reopen. Customs officials say it is no longer possible to rebuild the customs office and other facilities at their former locations.

“Imports of garments and footwear had picked up from mid-August ahead of the upcoming festivals,” Dhungana said. “The border was operating well, and revenue collection was exceeding the target. The flood swept everything away within moments.”

Located about 152 km north of Kathmandu, Rasuwagadhi has become an important gateway for Nepal-China trade and a major source of customs revenue. It also plays a role in border management and economic activity in the northern region.

According to a historical document published by the Rasuwa Customs Office, the customs office was established at Rasuwagadhi in 1956 to facilitate trade between residents of Rasuwa and people in the Kerung area of Tibet.

Tatopani had traditionally served as the main land route for Nepal-China trade. But the 2015 earthquake caused extensive damage in Sindhupalchok and left the crossing shut for a prolonged period. Rasuwagadhi subsequently grew into Nepal’s principal northern trade route.

After the Rasuwagadhi crossing resumed operations, trade through the route expanded and commercial

activity in the area increased. China formally recognised it as an international border crossing in 2017, further increasing its importance.

The crossing was hit by another major flood on July 8, 2025, when the Lhende river, near the Nepal-China border, swelled and swept away the Miteri bridge. The customs yard at Timure was also inundated, destroying vehicles and containers parked there. The crossing resumed operations about six months later, on January 1, 2026.

But just months after reopening, the border point was again devastated, this time by the August 26 Bhotekoshi flood.

The government is now preparing to restore the crossing once again after the Bhotekoshi disaster.

The disaster also raised questions about whether Nepal had received adequate warning from the Chinese side, as the floods originated upstream in Tibet.

Lamsal, however, said the disaster appeared to have caught China off guard as well.

“It seems the Bhotekoshi floods were also ‘unpredicted’ for the Chinese side,” he said. “There was some disturbance upstream, but nobody noticed it. China also suffered significant damage.”

Videos circulated on social media after the disaster suggested that people on the Chinese side had also

Lights out in Laos as electricity exports surge

○ **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
VIENTIANE, SEPT 13

Isolated, under-developed Laos brands itself the “Battery of Southeast Asia”, powering its neighbours with dozens of hydroelectric plants, but frequent power outages leave its own people in the dark.

Exports of electricity to neighbouring countries including Thailand and Vietnam are a key source of revenue for the landlocked nation, designated as a least developed country by the United Nations.

But most of the power generated leaves the country and, combined with an ageing grid, that results in frequent outages and sometimes having to import electricity to meet demand.

When the power cuts out after dark in Vientiane, families wander outside to avoid the stifling heat indoors, using cell phones to light their way.

At one of the two main public hospitals, a doctor in the paediatrics emergency department is used to watching medical equipment suddenly shut down until the generators kick in.

“Over the past three to six months, we’ve often faced electricity problems, especially at the children’s centre,” said the doctor, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

“A ventilator came to a halt, but we do have a generator at the hospital.”

When old wiring recently caused an electrical fire in the alley outside the hospital, a blackout cut power to X-ray, ultrasound and ventilator equipment, she said.

Elsewhere in the city, a front-desk staffer at a health clinic said power outages occurred two to three times a week, usually announced beforehand.

Without a generator, “we have to reconnect the electricity from a



AFP/RS

A local villager walks across a rice field to fish in Hadxayfong district, Vientiane, with high-voltage transmission lines spanning the Mekong River behind him as part of the network through which the country exports electricity to neighbouring Thailand.

store next to us”, said the staffer, who also requested anonymity in a one-party communist state where authorities do not tolerate dissent.

When the power is restored, the cry rings out across the city: “It’s back!”

Laos exported around two-thirds of its total generated electricity in 2023, according to the World Bank, but experts say that figure is now even higher.

One former technical expert at state utility Electricite du Laos (EDL) put the figure at around 80 percent.

In the decade to 2024, annual electricity exports more than tripled, from 12 terawatt-hours (TWh) to 38 TWh, according to official data—enough to power Paris for a year and a half.

In 2023, they brought in \$2.65 billion, according to the government, often sold in deals struck by the

state with businesses that invest in Laos’s infrastructure.

“Transmission lines from most projects are ‘dedicated’ to their customers,” said Grant Hauber, an Asia adviser at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

“Meaning they are not connected domestically to Laos consumers.”

Much of Laos’s distribution grid dates back to the 1970s, and now struggles to keep pace with an increasingly modern economy of tourism, massive infrastructure, urban development and air conditioning.

In Vientiane, a power line once used for one household now covers whole apartment blocks with many units, straining old transformers.

In rural areas, if a tree falls onto the power lines, it can cause a blackout for one village, sometimes several, because there is no backup.

Bounchan Manochit, a shop

owner in northern Luang Prabang province, said that with no lights, wild animals may enter residents’ homes at night.

“We can’t see them,” she said. “It can be dangerous.”

Almost all of Laos’s population of eight million has access to electricity, up from just 15 percent in 1995, according to the government.

But EDL, charged with maintaining the grid, is tackling large debts incurred during the expansion and due to consumer subsidies.

With hydropower accounting for 80 percent of production as of 2024, supply dwindles in the dry season from March to August.

At times, Laos has struggled to provide power to its neighbours and finds itself importing energy, at significant cost, according to a recent World Bank report.

“Electricity production has already fallen short of domestic demand and export contracts on several occasions,” it said.

Laos’s main export market is Thailand but it is diversifying its client and energy mix.

Vietnam has recently stepped up imports, including through Laos’s Monsoon Wind project, the region’s largest wind farm that became operational last year.

Researcher Le Hong Hiep of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute noted the growing demands of Vietnam’s manufacturing sector and the country’s own issues with energy production—but said politics also played a part.

“Vietnam also wants to import more electricity from Laos to increase its leverage over Laos,” part of a wider contest with China for influence in Vientiane, he said.

The energy from the Monsoon Wind project is destined only for Vietnam.

“Zero for local,” noted the former expert at EDL.

China, Russia, India seek economic cooperation at BRICS

○ **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
NEW DELHI, SEPT 13

BRICS leaders including China, Russia and India entered a second day of talks in New Delhi on Sunday, discussing “inclusive global growth”, after reaching a rare agreement calling for calm in the Middle East.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for “cooperation” within the bloc, which he has said represents “50 percent of the world’s population, 40 percent of global GDP and more than 25 percent of global trade”.

“The power of BRICS lies in our diversity and cooperation,” Modi told leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, on the final day of talks. BRICS was created in 2009 as a forum for major emerging economies seeking greater influence in institutions dominated by Western powers. The group is seeking to bolster its global influence and address conflict, trade turbulence and energy security.

“We have tried to push inclusive global growth,” Modi said.

“We may be rooted in different realities, but together we rise through cooperation and blossom for humanity,” he said.

The first day of the summit on Saturday was dominated by the conflict in the Middle East.

BRICS foreign ministers had failed to agree on a joint statement in New Delhi in May, with Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates divided over the war that began with US-Israeli strikes on February 28.

However, leaders—who also included Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian—issued a statement after intense diplomatic efforts by host India. “We express deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions in Middle East/ West Asia,” the joint statement said, adding that the BRICS countries “call for exercising maximum restraint”.

Modi maintains cordial relations with both Iran and US ally Israel, but is also careful to strike a delicate balance in India’s ties with Washington.

INTERVIEW

Why Deepa Bhasthi wants translations to keep their ‘accent’

The International Booker-winning translator discusses preserving the soul, musicality and rhythm of a language, and why a translation should not erase its cultural roots.

International Booker Prize-winning translator **Deepa Bhasthi** is in Kathmandu as one of the mentors at a three-day literary translation workshop at Kathmandu University’s Dhulikhel campus.

The workshop, organised jointly by Kathmandu University’s Department of Languages and Mass Communication and the University of Chicago’s South Asian Literature in Translation (SALT), brought together writers and translators working with Nepali, Maithili, Tibetan and Nepal Bhasa.

Bhasthi became the first Indian translator to win the International Booker Prize in 2025 for her translation of Banu Mushtaq’s ‘Heart Lamp’, a collection of 12 short stories written over more than 30 years that chronicle the everyday lives and struggles of women in southern India.

In this conversation with *Post*’s **Anish Ghimire**, she talks about why a translation should retain the ‘soul’ and rhythm of its original language, the importance of reading more South Asian literature, and why she has ‘nothing kind to say about AI’.

‘Heart Lamp’ became the first collection translated from Kannada to win the International Booker. What was particularly difficult about translating Mushtaq, not just linguistically, but culturally and emotionally?

Every translation project comes with its own challenges and constraints. The characters in Mushtaq’s stories are Muslim, but the problems they face are not restricted to the Muslim community. They are the experiences of women living under patriarchy around the world. That relatability is what made it easy for me to understand these characters.

Culturally, though, they were very different from my lived experiences, so I did a lot of research. I like to call it ‘method translation’ because I really tried to get into the culture to the best of my abilities. Obviously, it’s not possible to live like these characters, but I watched a lot of Urdu serials and films, and listened to Sufi-infused music to set the mood.

Emotionally, I’m not a very emotional reader. Reading is very different from reading as a potential translator of that work. I’m not very sentimental in that



COURTESY OF PRASHIM MAHARJAN

way. I see it as a story and as language, so you can’t let that affect you.

I don’t think it would make for a good translation if you approached something too emotionally. You have to step back from being a fan of the work and look at it from a much more critical perspective.

You speak about “translating with an accent” rather than making a text sound completely natural in English. What does an accent allow a translation to retain?

The soul of the original language—the soul, the musicality, the rhythm of that particular language.

Because, there is no such thing as standard English. I don’t think it even exists. Also, I don’t think that’s the point of translation at all. Otherwise, it just becomes a very clinical, very literal, very dry work without the essence.

You need a soul to have a life. Languages have these souls. Obviously, we can’t carry them over to another linguistic culture

perfectly, but we can try to do so to the best of our ability.

Adding to that, what do you think should remain untranslated in a translation?

I don’t think there’s a one-rule-fits-all idea in translation. It depends on the project: what to retain, what to leave untranslated. I think it’s a word-by-word choice that one has to make: whether something should remain untranslated or be transliterated.

Who is the translator ultimately responsible to—the original writer, the original language, the reader, or the text itself? And what happens when those responsibilities conflict?

I think the conflict is always going to be there, especially in the case of Kannada and English. They are very different languages, with almost nothing in common, so the conflict will always exist. But again, I think some of the best literature exists within these conflicts.

I can’t really speak for all translators, but for me, I am always led by language. The language is important to me. I am not taken in by the fame of a writer.

For me, the question is: how best can I convey the linguistic culture of Kannada into English? That’s my area of interest.

Nepal has a rich literary tradition in Nepali and many other languages, but relatively little Nepali literature reaches international readers through translation. What do you think is required for more South Asian literatures to travel across linguistic borders, not just into English, but between each other?

There just have to be more translations.

We’ve always had a culture of translation in South Asia, if you want to look at it that way. Because we’re all thinking in two or three languages. We’re always translating between these languages, whether we’re at home, at work, or with friends. We speak different languages in our heads. We live in different languages.

As AI becomes increasingly capable of translating languages, what do you think it still struggles to understand about a literary text? And what might be lost when we allow a machine to make those choices for us?

I have nothing kind to say about AI.

I don’t think AI is anywhere close to being capable of translating literary fiction. When AI is capable of shedding tears over sorrow, laughing at a silly joke, and, you know, being human, then I’ll decide to worry.

If an AI produces a translation that readers cannot distinguish from a human translation, does it matter who translated the book?

That’s a very interesting question.

It might not matter to the person who is giving the prompt, but I think it is an insult to hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution. It is insulting to a person’s intelligence and critical-thinking abilities to take something a machine has produced and try to pass it off as something a human has done.

Am I completely against AI as a technology? Yes, for sure. Am I against it in creative fields? Oh my goodness, yes!

AI has its uses in some fields—science, medical science, and so on—so please use it to do whatever it can there.

But we don’t need this stupid ‘80s social media trend, or to feed all these big tech companies at our expense. I mean, come on, at what cost? We are all seeing what is happening because of these big tech companies.

What do you think young translators worry about too much—and what should they be worrying about instead?

I don’t think young translators worry enough about critical thinking. Everyone is so geared towards doing everything quicker. I think translators don’t read enough. I always say you have to read more than you write, and listen more than you talk.

And we should read more South Asian literature. We’re very happy to read translations from French, Italian and German, which we should, but we also need to read stories from our own part of the world. That’s the only way we’ll have the confidence to tell the world, ‘Hey, our story is my favourite.’

Talking about books, can you give me your 3 quick book recommendations?

I’m currently reading ‘Brotherless Nights’ by V V Ganesananthan, which is incredible.

Anything by Claire Keegan, especially ‘Foster’.

And thirdly, I’d recommend a Kannada book, ‘Karimayi’, written by Chandrashekhara Kambara and translated by Krishna Manavalli.



AP/RSS

Banu Mushtaq (right), author of ‘Heart Lamp’, and translator Deepa Bhasthi hold the trophies after winning the International Booker Prize, in London on May 20, 2025.

Call for contributions

The Kathmandu Post invites well-researched and creative pitches for ‘Fiction Park’ stories and feature articles—travelogues, book reviews, and pieces on technology, culture, and lifestyle. To ensure your articles get our attention, please keep the following things in mind when inquiring about and submitting your pieces.

All your stories should be pitched to the Features desk, not the editor. Email your piece or pitch (along with a high-resolution headshot and a one-line bio) to tkpfeatures@gmail.com.

We will respond only to well-written stories and pitches that have original ideas. Plagiarism will lead to blacklisting. We suggest that you Google your pitch before writing to us. If you’re submitting an article that the Post or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece offers something new.

The Post receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers and students. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you.



SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUBE

Swoopna Suman in a scene from his music video ‘Yaad Haru Ma’.

BHUMIKA SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU

New Baneshwar, one of Kathmandu’s busiest traffic junctions, is no longer defined only by the sound of horns and rushing vehicles. It also carries the memory of a day when a movement altered the country’s political course.

A year has passed since September 8, 2025.

The voices that had been humming for years grew louder that day. A year later, the government has changed, and many of those voices continue to echo.

Art became one of the ways those voices found expression.

What could not be said directly was said in verse, colour, sound and in performances. Photographs, paintings, music, poetry and theatre created a space to document, process and remember the movement.

‘Yaad Haru Ma’ by Swoopna Suman, which premiered on September 6, 2026, serves as a

farewell letter to those who lost their lives during the movement.

The entire song speaks through the voice of someone who has passed away, reassuring, apologising, and asking not to be endlessly mourned.

Similarly, Neetesh Jung Kunwar’s song ‘Speechless’ released on September 7, 2026 describes a complete silence, where even ‘motherland’ fails to carry the weight of what happened.

‘Yaad Haru Ma’ offers comfort, but ‘Speechless’ sits with abandonment.

On September 8, 2026, Katha Ghera, in collaboration with Freedom Studio, staged a playback theatre performance, ‘Remembering September 8’.

Akanchha Karki, the production’s director, describes theatre as an “empathy-generating medium”.

In that small room, Karki believes, something larger happens, not just performance, but collective healing, collective catharsis.

That same day, ‘K?’ (K?) organised with

A year later, the Gen Z movement lives on in art

Songs, theatre, photography and visual art continue to document, mourn and make sense of a movement that transformed Nepal’s political landscape.

Kaalo.101, Nepal Point, Photo Circle, and several other collaborators, opened its doors for the public. This is an ongoing art exhibition that will run for a full year, until September 8, 2027. It is open Wednesdays to Sundays 4 to 6 pm at Kaalo.101, Lalitpur.

Visitors can contribute as they wish with artworks, stories, or thoughts.

A day later, on September 9, 2026, another group of Gen Z youths staged their own play at the old parliament building in New Baneshwar. It retold the movement’s story, from the protest to the election that eventually elected Balendra Shah as the Prime Minister.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KAALO.101/INSTAGRAM

Ongoing art exhibition ‘K?’



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FREEDOM STUDIO- KATHA.GHERA/INSTAGRAM

Katha Ghera Productions, in collaboration with Freedom Studio, staged the play ‘Remembering September 8’ on Tuesday.