



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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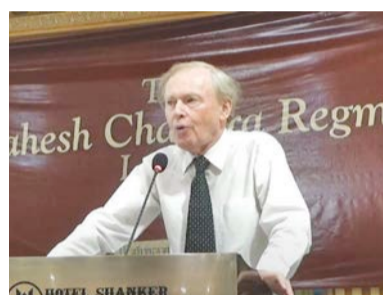
## TODAY

### NATIONAL

Panel formed to resolve disputes over an amendment to the Judicial Council Regulations has failed to find a meeting point with the Nepal Bar Association refusing to budge from its demand to revert the changes. **Pg 2**

In one address on Saturday, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli fired salvos at the CPN (Maoist Centre), supporters of monarchy, the political forces that emerged from the 2022 elections and Balendra Shah. **Pg 3**

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Whelpton looks at the difference between Nepal and China on the one hand and India on the other by evoking colonial history, writes *Abhi Subedi*. **Pg 4**

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Kalika Municipality in Chitwan produces mushrooms worth more than Rs40 million annually. There are 80 households involved in the business. The farmers have started using new technology for the crop. **Pg 5**

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Russian officials threatened the West with an uncontrolled escalation and Ukraine with its destruction as Western leaders discussed the use of their weapons for strikes deep into Russian territory. **Pg 6**

### TKP app



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POST PHOTO: SAFAL PRAKASH SHRESTHA

Devotees tie up an idol of the deity Indra at Nardevi, on the eve of Indra Jatra, following the ancient tradition that marks the festival's beginning. The act symbolises the capture of Lord Indra, who, disguised as human, descended on Earth to steal *parijat* flowers for his mother.

## In Belarus, native tongue is vanishing as Russian takes prominence

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TALLINN, ESTONIA, SEPT 14

When school started this year for Mikalay in Belarus, the 15-year-old discovered that his teachers and administrators no longer called him by that name. Instead, they referred to him as Nikolai, its Russian equivalent.

What's more, classes at his school—one of the country's best—are now taught in Russian, not Belarusian, which he has spoken for most of his

life. Belarusians like Mikalay are experiencing a new wave of Russification as Moscow expands its economic, political and cultural dominance to overtake the identity of its neighbour.

It's not the first time. Russia under the czars and in the era of the Soviet Union imposed its language, symbols and cultural institutions on Belarus.

But with the demise of the USSR in 1991, the country began to assert its identity, and Belarusian briefly became the official language, with the white-red-white national flag replac-

ing a version of the red hammer and sickle. But all that changed in 1994, after Alexander Lukashenko, a former Soviet collective farm official, came to power. The authoritarian leader made Russian an official language, alongside Belarusian, and did away with the nationalist symbols.

Now, with Lukashenko in control of the country for over three decades, he has allowed Russia to dominate all aspects of life in Belarus, a country of 9.5 million people.

>> Continued on page 2

## Oli vows to clean up co-ops as politicians are linked to scam

Police are investigating the cooperative connected to Nepali Congress Vice-president Dhan Raj Gurung.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, SEPT 14

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, who participated in the 63rd meeting of the parliamentary special probe committee at Singha Durbar on Saturday, expressed the government's commitment to controlling irregularities and corruption in the cooperatives sector.

The government would do so on the basis of "the committee's painstaking study". Addressing the committee members, Oli said that the cooperatives that are being run lawfully can still do a great service.

"It is the presence of some people with ill motives that has sullied the whole sector," Oli said.

On Thursday, Minister for Home Affairs Ramesh Lekhak and Home Secretary Gokarna Mani Duwadi attended the panel's 61st meeting. On the occasion, panel members urged the minister and secretary to arrest the culprits of the cooperatives scam who are on the run.

The probe panel, formed on May 28 with a four-point terms of reference (ToR), had its tenure extended by 15 days after it was unable to complete its duty in the given three months. The committee is working to submit its report before the new deadline.

The committee was formed to conduct a study and make recommendations on resolving legal and institutional issues facing the cooperatives as well as on the regulation, supervision, and transparency of

their financial systems. Likewise, the panel will recommend ways to safeguard depositors' savings, investigate crisis-ridden cooperatives and fast-track the return of deposits.

The cooperatives linked with the funding of the now-defunct Gorkha Media Network were also to be probed as per the ToR.

The probe panel was constituted after pressure from the Nepali Congress, which was then the main opposition party. The Congress, accus-

Parliamentary special committee making final preparations to submit its probe report.

ing Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) President Rabi Lamichhane as one of the main culprits in the cooperatives scam, had asked for such a committee's formation.

The committee, while summoning 50 people with suspicious roles in the cooperatives scam, had also questioned Lamichhane and hinted of his involvement. Lamichhane was the managing director of Gorkha Media Network before joining politics in June 2022. His partner Gitendra Babu Rai, who is believed to be hiding in Malaysia, was the chair of the media company.

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## Ornithologists confirm first whiskered tern breeding in Nepal

The bird was spotted nesting at Jagadishpur Lake Bird Reserve in Kapilvastu, where it has hatched chicks.

MANOJ PAUDEL  
KAPILVASTU, SEPT 14

Whiskered tern, locally known as 'Thimaha Fyalfyale,' has propagated in Nepal, reportedly for the first time. The bird was spotted nesting at Jagadishpur Lake Bird Reserve in Kapilvastu, where it has hatched chicks. Dr SK Singh from Janakpur captured the photographs of five chicks from two nests located at the northeastern edge of a mound in the middle of the reserve. "While boating, a whiskered tern nearly pecked at my head," said Singh, who is a physician by profession and has recently developed a passion for wildlife photography. "Proceeding with caution, I noticed two nests with chicks." He managed to photograph three



PHOTO: COURTESY OF DR SK SINGH

A pair of Thimaha Fyalfyale chicks pictured in their nest.

chicks in one nest and two in the other before retreating to avoid disturbing them. Anil Chaudhary, a nature guide accompanying him, observed 60-70 whiskered terns flying and resting in the area. He estimated that there were at least 15-20 nests. The whiskered terns are typically found near seas, rivers, and wetlands across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Senior ornithologist Hemsagar Baral confirmed that this is the first recorded instance of the species breeding in Nepal. "It's good news for the country," he said. "This will attract more attention to eco-tourism."

Last year, in the last week of August, wildlife photographers Sugam Tamrakar and Pemba Sherpa spotted whiskered tern

nests at Jagadishpur Lake, while Nishan Baral discovered nests near Koshi Bridge. However, once the news broke, an influx of photographers at Jagadishpur caused the birds to abandon their nests.

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## NATIONAL

# Justice Raut-led panel fails to resolve dispute over law amendment

As the panelists remained divided, two separate reports were presented to Chief Justice Shrestha making the appointment of judges uncertain.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, SEPT 14

The panel formed to resolve disputes over an amendment to the Judicial Council Regulations has failed to find a meeting point with the Nepal Bar Association refusing to budge from its demand to revert the changes.

Following the protest from the lawyers' umbrella body, the leadership in the judiciary constituted a five-member committee on September 2 to settle the matter through dialogue. Prakash Man Singh Raut, the senior-most justice of the Supreme Court, led the panel.

Ram Prasad Bhandari, a member of the council, Gopal Krishna Ghimire, and Anjita Khanal, president and general secretary of the association respectively, and Yam Bahadur Budha, secretary at the council, were members of the panel.

Despite 10 days of effort, the Raut-led panel couldn't resolve the dispute. Raut and Bhandari disagreed with the association's demand to revert the amendment, while Budha remained neutral. As a result, two separate reports have been presented to Chief Justice Bishowambhar Shrestha.

**The association had earlier staged a sit-in demanding that judges be appointed only after revising the provision.**

"Scrapping the amendment to the regulation is our bottom line. We [Ghimire and Khanal] presented a separate report as the other side didn't agree to our demands," said Ghimire. "Now it is up to the chief justice to find a solution."

The council revised the regulations in September 2023, adjusting the judges' ranking. According to the amendment published in the Nepal Gazette on September 20 last year, the chief registrar of the Supreme Court or the council secretary, if appointed a high court judge, would be ranked right after the chief judge of the high court.

The association has demanded that the provision be revoked, describing it as regressive, biased, discriminatory, arbitrary, and unconstitutional and arguing that it contradicts the principles established by Supreme Court's verdicts.

On September 1, the association started a sit-in demanding that judges be appointed only after revising the provision.

The protest was called off with an agreement to form the Raut-led committee.

The lawyers' body had started the protests as the council was making final preparations to appoint judges across three layers of courts. While four judges' positions are vacant in the Supreme Court, 16 judges are needed in various high courts.

The five-member Judicial Council, led by the chief justice, nominates judges and justices. The council includes the law minister, the senior-most Supreme Court justice, and two advocates—one each picked by the association and the government.

Against the association's demand, the Judicial Officers Society wants to continue the existing provision in the regulation. Opposing the idea of forming the Raut-led panel, the society warned that any decision on legal matters must be made in court, not on the streets. The society is an association of the officials working under the judicial services.

The appointment of judges has become uncertain, as the council's leadership has been caught in the two associations' contradictory demands.

In December last year, the council appointed Lal Bahadur Kunwar, the Supreme Court chief registrar, a high court judge and ranked him second after the chief judge of Patan High Court. The association claims that the amended regulation unfairly demotes judges appointed from among lawyers, placing them below career judges in the hierarchy.

There was a practice of filling around half the vacant judge positions from among lawyers. However, Chief Justice Shrestha gave them less priority, which was also a reason for the protest.

In January, 26 district court judges were promoted to high court positions. Four joint secretary-level officials from the judicial service were also picked as high court judges. But only nine lawyers were appointed judges. The association had demanded that half the judges be appointed from among the lawyers.

In the judicial hierarchy, those appointed to the high court from the lawyers' category are ranked below those promoted from among district court judges or those picked from the judicial service.

"We will devise our future course based on the chief justice's action," said Ghimire. As the chief justice retires on October 6, he wants to fill the vacant positions before that.

# New cases of political leaders' involvement in cooperatives fraud continue to emerge



Prime Minister Oli (third right) attends a meeting of the parliamentary committee formed to investigate the cooperatives scam, at Singha Durbar, Kathmandu on Saturday.

>> Continued from page 1

The company had redirected money from the various cooperatives to run the Galaxy 4k television channel under the network.

Meanwhile, as the parliamentary special committee is about to complete its work, new cases of political leaders' involvement in cooperatives fraud continue to emerge.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police is looking into the alleged fraud involving the Miteri Savings and Credit Cooperative, which is connected to Nepali Congress Vice-president and former law minister Dhan Raj Gurung, and his former wife, Jyoti Gurung.

CIB spokesperson Hobindra Bogati said a complaint was filed against the cooperative's employees and management, and preliminary investigations have started.

"We will investigate how the funds were misused and determine who was involved," Bogati told the Post. "At present, we are focusing on investigating employees and members of the Miteri management."

Bogati said they are yet to investigate persons individually.

After the cooperative's chairman, Kumbharaj Gurung, complained to the Department of Cooperatives last month, alleging that Jyoti Gurung, the general manager, embezzled Rs12.5 million, the Congress vice-president also came under question.

Gurung denies his involvement in the

scam, arguing that his former wife with whom he no longer has contact, had misappropriated the money, and so he could not be held accountable.

Despite Gurung's claim that he separated from his wife in 2019, cooperative chair Kumbharaj reported to law enforcement agencies that the lawmaker continued to pay off the debt in his wife's name until last year.

Various copies of the vouchers Dhan Raj Gurung reportedly used to deposit money into the cooperative's account have surfaced on various media outlets.

**Nepali Congress leader Dhan Raj Gurung is also charged with embezzling the cooperatives funds.**

Upon reaching the cooperative's office at Mahalaxmi, Lalitpur on Friday, special committee members discussed the issue with Kumbharaj Gurung, the chair.

After being charged with embezzling the cooperatives funds, Dhan Raj Gurung, speaking in Parliament on September 10, called for a proper probe so as to clear his name.

The special committee, whose extended timeframe expires on September 22, inspected three government bodies and 13 cooperative institutions on Thursday.

It visited the Department of Cooperatives, the Cooperatives Training Centre at New Baneshwar, and the Crisis-ridden Cooperatives Management Committee Office at Buddhanagar.

The committee also examined several cooperatives, including Swarnalaxmi, Sumeru, Civil, Gautamshri, Kantipur Cooperative, Nepal Cooperative Financial Institution, Miteri, Laligurans, Gorkha Savings, Shiva Shikar, and Nagarik Bikas Cooperative.

CPN-UMI leader Rishikesh Pokharel, the chair of the Public Accounts Committee of the federal parliament, has also been accused of mishandling cooperatives funds.

Pokharel's wife, Anjala Koirala, was once on the board of Umagauri Agriculture Cooperative directors. She is accused of embezzling Rs120 million with the organisation located in Karsiya Bazar, Ward 4 of Dhanpal Nath Rural Municipality in Morang. The cooperative is now in distress.

Pokharel has denounced such allegations through social media posts.

"I express regret over the misleading reports, propagated by some corrupt intermediaries and certain media outlets, aimed at character assassination," Pokharel said in a statement on Thursday.

# Russian language takes precedence in Belarus as it depends on Russian loans and cheap energy

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Belarusian, which like Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, is hardly heard on the streets of Minsk and other large cities anymore.

Official business is conducted in Russian, which dominates the majority of the media. Lukashenko speaks only Russian, and government officials often don't use their native tongue.

The country depends on Russian loans and cheap energy and has created a political and military alliance with Moscow, allowing President Vladimir Putin to deploy troops and missiles on its soil, which was used as a staging area for the war in Ukraine.

"I understand that our Belarus is occupied. ... And who is the president there? Not Lukashenko. The president is Putin," said Svetlana Alexievich, who won the 2015 Nobel Prize for literature and lives in Germany in effective exile. "The nation has been humiliated and it will be very difficult for Belarusians to recover from this."

Belarusian cultural figures have been persecuted and hundreds of its nationalist organisations have been closed. Experts say Moscow is seeking to implement in Belarus what the Kremlin intended to do in neighbouring Ukraine when the war there began in 2022. "It is obvious that our children are being deliberately deprived of their native language, history and Belarusian identity, but parents have been strongly advised not to ask questions about Russification," said Mikalay's father, Anatoly, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition his last name not be used, for fear of retribution.

"We were informed about the synchronisation of the curriculum with Russia this year and were shown a propaganda film about how the Ukrainian special services are allegedly recruiting our teenagers and forcing them to commit sabotage in Belarus," he said. Mikalay's school was one of the few where paperwork and some courses were conducted in Belarusian. In recent years, however, dozens of teachers were fired and the Belarusian-language section of its website vanished.

Human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, convicted in 2023 on charges stemming from his Nobel Peace Prize-winning work, demanded his trial be conducted in Belarusian. The court rejected it and sentenced him to 10 years.

Lukashenko derides his native lan-

guage, saying "nothing great can be expressed in Belarusian. ... There are only two great languages in the world: Russian and English."

Speaking to Russian state media, Lukashenko recounted how Putin once thanked him for making Russian the dominant language in Belarus.

"I said, 'Wait, what are you thanking me for? ... The Russian language is my language, we were part of one empire, and we're taking part in [helping] that language develop,'" Lukashenko said.

Belarus was part of the Russian empire for centuries and became one of 15 Soviet republics after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Daily use of the Belarusian language decreased and continued only in the country's west and north and in rural areas.

In 1994, about 40 percent of students were taught in Belarusian; it's now down to under 9 percent.

Although Belarusian, like Russian,

**Censorship, bans affect not only contemporary Belarusian literature but also its classics.**



Schoolchildren march during the traditional opening of the school year, known as the Day of Knowledge, in Minsk, Belarus, on September 1, 2018.

is an eastern Slavic language, its vocabulary is considerably different. In 1517, Belarusian publisher Francysk Skaryna was one of the first in eastern Europe to translate the Bible into his native language.

Even speaking Belarusian is seen as a show of opposition to Lukashenko and a declaration of national identity. That played a key role in the mass protests after the disputed 2020 election gave the authoritarian leader a sixth term. In the harsh crackdown that followed, a half-million people fled the country. "The Belarusian language is increasingly perceived as a sign of political disloyalty and is being abandoned in favour of Russian in the public administration, education, culture and the mass media, upon orders from the hierarchy or out of fear of discrimination," said Anaïs Marin, the United Nations special rapporteur for human rights in Belarus.

At the same time, "more people want to speak Belarusian, which has become one of the symbols of freedom, but they're afraid to do it in public," said Alina Nahornaja, author of "Language 404," a book about Belarusians who experienced discrimination for speaking their native language.

Like Ukraine, Belarusians had a desire for rapprochement with Europe

that accompanied their nationalist sentiment, said Belarusian analyst Valery Karbalevich.

"But the Kremlin quickly realised the danger and began the process of creeping Russification in Belarus," he added. That prompted pro-Russian organisations, joint educational programs and cultural projects to spring up "like mushrooms after the rain — against the backdrop of harsh repressions against everything Belarusian," Karbalevich said.

Censorship and bans affect not only contemporary Belarusian literature but also its classics. In 2023, the prosecutor's office declared as extremist the 19th-century poems of Vincent Dunin-Martsinkyevich, who opposed the Russian Empire.

When the Kremlin began supporting Lukashenko against the anti-government protests in 2020, it ensured his loyalty and received carte blanche in Belarus.

"Today, Lukashenko is paying Putin with our sovereignty," said exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. "Belarusian national identity, cultures and language are our strongest weapons against the Russian world and Russification."

Four cities in Belarus now host a "Russia House" to promote its culture and influence, offering seminars, film clubs, exhibitions and competitions.

"The goal is to plant Russian narratives so that as many Belarusians as possible view Russian as their own," said analyst Alexander Friedman. "The Kremlin spares no expense and acts on a grand scale, which could be especially effective and dangerous in a situation where Belarus has found itself in information isolation, and there is almost no one left inside the country to resist the Russian world."

Almost the entire troupe of the Yanka Kupala Theater, the country's oldest, fled Belarus amid the political crackdown. Its former director, Pavel Latushka, now an opposition figure abroad, said the new management couldn't recruit enough new actors, and had to invite Russians, "but it turned out that no one knew the Belarusian language."

"Putin published an article denying the existence of an independent Ukraine back in 2021, and even then we understood perfectly well that he was pursuing similar goals in Belarus," Latushka said.

"The main course was supposed to be Ukraine," he added, with a Russified Belarus "as a dessert."

# Rare whiskered tern breeding captured in Nepal



PHOTO: COURTESY OF DR SK SINGH

A whiskered tern captured at Jagadishpur Birds Reserve in Kapilvastu.

>> Continued from page 1

Unfortunately, Baral was unable to follow up on the nesting activities at Koshi.

This year, the successful breeding of black-winged stilts at Jagadishpur has added another attraction to the site. "We are delighted," said Deepak Bahadur Gurung, the chairman of ward 9 in Kapilvastu Municipality. He noted that stricter measures have been implemented this year to prevent disturbance to the birds inside the lake, ensuring they can rear their chicks undisturbed.

Singh, who originally came to photograph pheasant-tailed jacanas, locally known as jal apara, expressed his joy at setting a new record for the country by photographing the whiskered tern chicks.

The whiskered terns are irregular winter visitors to Nepal and a migratory species during spring. Although there hasn't been specific research on where the birds migrate from, ornithologists speculate that they may come from around the Arabian Sea.

While common in other countries, it is a rare migratory visitor to Nepal. This bird is notoriously difficult to photograph, except during nesting season, due to its highly restless nature, ornithologists say.

The whiskered tern builds its nests using aquatic plants and twigs on the water. Of the eight tern species, this one primarily feeds on insects and small invertebrates. In the breeding season, it is distinguishable by its white face, black head, and light-coloured lower body.

In 1982, more than 400 whiskered terns were recorded at Koshi Barrage.

Forty-one years later, nearly 100 were spotted at Jagadishpur last year, according to ornithologist Hathan Chaudhary. He suggested that the impacts of climate change and rising sea temperatures may have prompted these birds to select Nepal's wetlands as a safer breeding ground.

Jagadishpur lake, which was listed as a Ramsar wetland site in 2003, was declared a bird sanctuary, the country's second, in July 2022. The lake is spread over an area of 157 hectares across Kapilvastu Municipality's wards 9 and 10, and is located some 11 kilometres north of Taulihawa, the district headquarters of Kapilvastu.

The lake has become a favoured spot for nesting birds due to its rich biodiversity, said ornithologist Krishna Prasad Bhusal. "The lake's environment is currently very bird-friendly, attracting various species to nest and rear their young."

Whiskered terns typically lay eggs in July-August, with chicks hatching by August-September. They rear their young for two to three months before migrating back to their summer grounds. The lake, often considered a birdwatcher's paradise, provides a sanctuary for waterfowl in Nepal. According to an IUCN Nepal study, the lake is home to 43 species of fish, 10 species of amphibians, 42 species of reptiles, and 32 species of mammals.

Moreover, as many as 167 bird species have been recorded in the area, including 92 resident species, nine that visit during the summer, 64 winter visitors, and three partial migrants. The lake also hosts globally endangered species such as the fishing cat and eight other rare bird species.

# Oli opens fronts against Maoist Centre, new parties, royalists and Kathmandu mayor—all at once

Asks party members to counter the narrative being set against his party UML.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, SEPT 14

In one address at a function on Saturday, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli fired salvos at the CPN (Maoist Centre), supporters of monarchy, the political forces that emerged from the 2022 elections and Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah.

Oli and his party CPN-UML are engaged in a tussle with these four forces—the main opposition Maoist Centre, people campaigning for the restoration of monarchy that was abolished in 2008, new political parties and Kathmandu's independent mayor for various reasons, mainly after Oli became the prime minister in mid-July.

Oli didn't say anything against the Nepali Congress, the UML's main competitor but now a partner in the current coalition government.

The Maoist party and its leaders have become aggressive against the UML, particularly after Oli pulled out of the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government in July and became prime minister with the support of Congress.

Of late, lawmakers from the two communist parties are engaged in heated exchanges in the House of Representatives. They have intensified attacks against each other mainly after UML Secretary Yogesh Bhattarai, addressing the House meeting on August 28, termed the Maoist insurgency 'violence' while Maoists call it the People's War. Maoist Centre lawmakers promptly objected to Bhattarai's use of the word and demanded the Speaker's ruling to expunge the 'unparliamentary word' from parliamentary records. However, Speaker Devraj Ghimire, who got elected from the UML, ruled on Wednesday that the term wasn't unparliamentary so there was no need to remove it from the records.

The issue has now become a major irritant between the two largest communist parties. A parliamentary party meeting of the CPN (Maoist Centre) on Friday decided to continue its House obstruction until the word 'violence' is removed from record.

Oli, on the other hand, claimed that his party, UML, has the potential to win a single majority in the elections to be held in 2027 and urged the party leaders and cadres to jointly prepare for that. A central secretariat meeting of the party on Friday approved an action plan to build the party into a 'decisive national force' from the next general elections.

"We have a solid foundation to make the mission-2084 [2027] successful by winning a majority in the elections," Oli said at the party function in Kathmandu on Saturday. "If mission-2084 does not succeed, then no one will know what happens after 2084 BS. No one knows what changes will happen and who will be thrown where."

Oli claimed that the Maoist Centre, Dahal's party which is now a distant third force, will further shrink after the new elections. He went on to say that the Maoist Centre could lose half its proportional votes from its last count of over a million and might struggle to become a national party from next elections.

"In their first election, the Maoists received 3.1 million votes. By next elections, they received only 1.4 million votes. In the third, they received 1.3 million votes. Last elections, they received over 1.1 million votes in total," Oli said, citing a newspaper report. "By the next elections, they could receive



UML chair KP Sharma Oli became the prime minister in mid-July after he pulled out support to Maoist Centre.

around 400,000 to 500,000 votes. They will struggle to become a national party."

Then the prime minister took a jibe at the monarchists saying that a large force was now active against the new constitution of Nepal.

Some forces lobbying for the reinstatement of Hindu kingdom in the country are regrouping of late. Durga Prasai, a controversial medical entrepreneur from Oli's hometown Jhapa, is one leading such movement.

Oli once nominated Prasai as a UML central committee member. He was sacked after he started attacking Oli and other UML leaders. Prasai has not stopped attacking Nepali leaders, mainly from the old parties, but the UML has been his unmistakable target.

"Some reactionary forces are trying to weaken the UML in a bid to complicate the situation. We are surrounded by reactionary elements and those who are against this constitution," he said.

Stating that there was an unprecedented build-up of support for a feudal, despotic and authoritarian monarchy, Oli said: "Unknowingly, some people are trying to create a negative atmosphere. Instead of following truth and facts, they have resorted to lies, illusions, conspiracies and tricks."

Oli also alerted his party workers to the elements allegedly trying to disrupt the law and order situation.

Oli then attacked new political forces such as the Rastriya Swatantra Party, the Janamat Party and the Nagarik Unmukti Party. Oli described them as forces having grown overnight to eat the pie of old forces.

He urged party members to remain vigilant as the new parties had taken away votes from the UML's bank.

"Where did our votes go last election? The groups that did not exist earlier were born and ate the rice from our plates. How did the rice get into their mouths? That's why we have to be watchful," said Oli.

Once coalition partners, the UML and the

Rastriya Swatantra Party are now at a verbal war in Parliament, especially after Oli's party proposed unseating Deputy Speaker Indira Rana. Rana, who was elected from the RSP, has landed in a controversy after revelation that she requested the Kathmandu-based Embassy of the United States to expedite visa interviews for five individuals unrelated to her office. UML first raised the issue in Parliament and asked Rana to resign as deputy Speaker alleging her misconduct.

The prime minister also criticised Balendra Shah, the mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, on Saturday.

He called the mayor "a boy who speaks randomly".

"A new boy came to the scene suddenly. He speaks randomly, like a crazy person but some say he must not be touched. People asked us not to touch him because he has a strong support base. If we don't correct him, he will continue his propaganda against us," Oli said, urging his supporters to counter the negative messaging against the party.

In June first week, Mayor Shah accused UML chair Oli of committing 'policy corruption' while trying to swap the land of Giri Bandhu Tea Estate in Jhapa. The same month, the mayor and UML leaders clashed over jurisdiction as the metropolis expanded a sidewalk in the New Road area.

The mayor and UML leaders are once again at loggerheads over implementing a Supreme Court verdict that prohibits construction on an additional 20 metres on either side of a river in Kathmandu Valley.

Shah often criticises Oli and the UML through social media posts and UML cadres have been countering him. Large numbers of social media users seem to be supporting Shah while criticising the establishment and traditional forces.

The UML is a party with a large number of cadres equipped with a mobile phone, said Oli. "Why aren't our people coming out and writing against our opponents?"



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

A section of the road caves in at Kupandole in Lalitpur, pictured on Saturday.

## KMC to enforce waste segregation rules in all 32 wards

Turning waste to compost has already started in 89 community schools of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, SEPT 14

Residents of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) will soon have to segregate their household waste into degradable and non-degradable categories. The city office has decided to enforce waste segregation rules across all 32 wards.

Officials said, once the new rules take effect, waste collectors who go door-to-door for garbage collection will only pick up segregated waste—degradable and non-degradable.

"We will strictly enforce this rule throughout all 32 wards," said Sarita Rai, chief of the Environment Department at the KMC. "We are outfitting our garbage trucks with separate compartments to keep the waste sorted."

The metropolis started segregating waste in ward 27 in February, and later expanded the practice to wards 5, 7, 10, 12, 24, and 27.

Officials said they were encouraged to enforce the waste segregation rules across all 32 wards due to the programme's success, which started in some wards in the last fiscal year.

"We find waste segregation a doable task," said Rai. "Our experience encourages us to enforce the rules across all 32 wards. We will also encourage other local units to adopt similar measures, which will help reduce the volume of the waste we send to the landfill."

Degradable waste materials are being turned

into compost at the KMC's waste transfer station. Officials said that the metropolis is also using reagents to speed up the compost-making process.

The metropolis uses the compost in city gardens and parks and also distributes some of it to local residents.

Officials at the department said they have installed 1,000-litre compost bins at 89 community schools across the metropolis. These bins are used to convert degradable waste into compost. Also, the city office has been selling compost bins to residents for Rs1,000, which generally cost over Rs3,000 in the market, officials say.

To tackle the city's waste issues, the KMC is not only producing compost from discarded materials, but also generating biogas and electricity.

Waste segregation at the source was one of the solutions Mayor Balendra Shah promoted to address Kathmandu's chronic garbage problem. Upon taking office, Shah urged city residents to start separating waste at home using different bins. However, the initiative faced challenges largely due to a lack of preparation on the KMC's part.

The Kathmandu Valley produces over 1,200 tonnes of solid waste daily, with nearly 60 percent originating from the KMC alone. Experts estimate that 60 percent of the organic waste originating in the Valley can be converted into compost, while the remaining 30 percent of non-degradable waste can be recycled.

## Why are Bangladesh's brightest engineering minds leaving?

The primary motive for engineering students to move abroad is the lack of scope and the poor salary structure in engineering jobs in the country.

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI  
DHAKA, SEPT 14

Every once in a while, the term "brain drain" pops up in discussions to dissect the migration of so many Bangladeshi students to foreign countries. Although the migration takes place in pursuit of higher studies, most of these students have no intention to return to the country. The percentage is even higher for engineering students.

While the outrage and panic regarding the lack of qualified engineering and research graduates in the country might be valid, we must ask the right questions and find out the factors which influence so many engineering students leaving their motherland.

The primary motive for engineering students to move abroad is the lack of scope and the poor salary structure in engineering jobs in the country, according to Iftekhar Amin Ifti, an M.Sc. (Engineering) student at Minnesota State University. "I graduated in Materials Science and Engineering from Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology (RUET). Since there aren't too many job options for a Materials Science graduate in the country, my father advised me to move abroad. But I wanted to stay in Bangladesh since my family, relatives and friends are all here. I started working in a government institute as well. However, a closer look into the Bangladeshi engineering job sector made me change my mind."

"Starting from the highly competitive admission procedure for the public engineering universities to four years of inhumane pressure, graduating with a good CGPA takes an insane

amount of hard work," explained Ifti. "After graduation, you get offered a mere salary of Tk 26,000 – 30,000 while your business graduate friends, who experience a somewhat easier undergraduate life compared to engineering students, might be earning a higher entry salary. Discrepancies like these make all your hard work feel worthless."

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For some, it is the pursuit of better learning resources and research facilities in a more developed education system that influences their decision to leave the country.

"I have always felt that the education system in this country is broken," said Anindya Alam, a fourth-year undergraduate student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). "The classes are boring and the teachers are mostly insincere and uninterested in teaching. I am close to finishing my undergrad now and I still feel the same. I have always liked learning new things and have grown up hearing praises about the teaching process in American universities from my relatives and friends who were in the States. Now that I am about to graduate and pursue a PhD degree, colleges in North America and Europe can provide me with the

opportunities, facilities, and resources that Bangladeshi universities simply cannot."

Another massive factor for moving abroad is merely shifting to a better life in a country with more developed working and living conditions.

"If I must put my motives to settle abroad in one word, it would be to search for a better life," said Shartaz Ahmedur Rahman, an MSc (Engineering) student at Auckland University of Technology. "After the first three months of studying Architecture at the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), I wanted to move abroad. It wasn't driven by academic reasons at that point, but rather by watching the lives of some of my friends who had left the country for their undergraduate studies. After talking to them, the difference in the living conditions and facilities between Bangladesh and countries abroad hit me in the face. By my third year of undergraduate studies,



ILLUSTRATION: MUBTASIM ALVEE/DAILY STAR/ANN

when I was finally able to comprehend my field of expertise, I realised moving abroad was the only option for me."

As I spoke to more and more engineering students, it all circled back to the pitiful working conditions and salary structure for engineers in Bangladesh. In the end, our engineering students are left with one of three feasible options: switching their fields by doing an MBA, sitting for the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) exams, or leaving the country in pursuit of higher studies.

"Anyone who worked in the technical fields in Bangladesh can vouch that it is a massively competitive and stressful field. Either you break yourself mentally and physically to reach the top in the private sector, or you grind yourself to land a government job," said Shartaz. "In the private sector, unless you have backing from your family, it is impossible to sustain a life in Dhaka. The starting salary of most

engineers will come around a little over Tk 25,000; for architects, it may be even less. Moreover, if we look at the massive trend of engineers pursuing MBA degrees after finishing their undergrad, it's evident that there is a huge shortage of technical fields, or the available technical jobs are not paying well enough to keep these graduates interested."

"Even big private companies are not offering their engineers salaries more than Tk 40,000," said Ifti. "Running a family with such a salary in this economy isn't practical. Right now, I am working as a graduate teaching assistant while pursuing my master's, and my monthly allowance here is a little over Tk 120,000 in Bangladeshi currency. I was even able to buy my own car with the savings from my allowance. Back in Bangladesh, it would have taken me more than ten years of constant grinding day and night to reach this pay scale in the private sector."

For someone like Anindya, whose primary motivation is research, he believes that more modern and well-maintained laboratories in engineering universities are necessary to encourage engineering students to stay in the country.

"We need to expand access to the latest technology and ensure adequate funding for research laboratories that inspire engineering students to innovate and pursue research within the country," said Anindya. "Better pay for teachers and training programmes should also be ensured so that they are more sincere in their approach to academia. Finally, universities should introduce more ambitious and fun courses in the curriculum that inspire

students to pursue their interests."

Shartaz believes that employers use the excuse of heavy reliance of engineering graduates on theoretical knowledge to lower the starting salary. "Bangladeshi or Asian engineering curricula are heavily influenced by theoretical knowledge. Eventually, employers use this as an excuse to lower the entry salary and demoralise people to pursue technical fields. There is no work-life balance in the private sector. Despite having a huge ethical guideline from the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) and the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), no one is following that, which is leading to a very stressful environment in the private job sectors."

The talks of reforming the country have been crowding up the internet since the students' movement. One of the key prerequisites for effective reform of Bangladesh is putting a halt to the brain drain and initiating what has been termed as "reverse brain drain". The Indian government, for example, has taken up several schemes to repatriate the scholars who went abroad and they have seen some success through the Ramalingaswami Re-entry Fellowship, which led to more than 550 biotechnologists returning to India from abroad.

To ensure that the best of minds in Bangladesh get to work for the development of their country, it is crucial that our engineers and researchers are provided with enough facilities and options which are lucrative enough for them to consider staying in the country, and maybe even come back to their homeland after they are done pursuing higher studies abroad.

— The Daily Star

OPINION

## Informal jobs

Without training, technology will remain out of reach for many.

NEDA MULJI



In the last decade, informal jobs have mushroomed in Pakistan. Part of the reason is the high income tax levy which makes small firms contain costs by hiring cheap labour for informal jobs. Historically, societies have not been able to grow economically without a structured job market. In Tanzania, Ethiopia and the Czech Republic, for example, cheap labour coupled with the scarcity of capital made informal labour predominate even in industry. Clearly, these economies have suffered stagnation as opposed to Taiwan and Vietnam, where the main driver of growth was the formal jobs sector.

With fast automation in all sectors, labour-intensive economies are likely to spiral further downward. Traditionally, in Pakistan,

more demanding, high-paying jobs. Developments in technology will essentially result in large gaps between those who are unable to rise to the job demands—therefore falling prey to wage stagnation or lay-offs—and those who can upgrade their skills.

In the absence of a higher education system that can develop the skills required by industry, the government will need to establish programmes to upskill workers in a public-private partnership model. Last year, in a bid to contribute to technological development, 100,000 laptops were handed out on a merit basis to university graduates. Initiatives like these are a case of 'too little, too late'. It is not so much access to technology that is required but the skills to be able to use the technology. Access can be provided on the job. Yet, without training, technology will still be out of reach for many.

This brings us back to the critical need for education and training to address the skills gap, for growth to be enabled in all sectors of the economy. Higher education institutes worldwide provide part-time jobs to students that enables them to earn a little extra, develop basic skills that will lay the ground for their professional lives and also to help them engage in some networking with industry professionals. Part-time jobs at university have a



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low-cost labour has meant quick income for families that have many mouths to feed. However, this can at best be a survival mechanism for a fledgling economy. Hope for growth can only come from a sound industrial policy that not only creates formal employment but also upgrades the skill level required for those jobs.

Education and training remain the key drivers of economic, industrial and social development as we have seen in many successful economies. Those that have run into roadblocks after a period of intense growth—such as the Philippines and Argentina—have been burgeoning informal economies. Both economies, once successful, struggled due to the exponential growth of their informal sectors, relying on low-skilled labour.

From street vendors to low-wage domestic staff, unskilled handymen to unlicensed midwives, we have seen the unregulated growth of low-wage jobs in Pakistan. Those in low-skill jobs will always be at a disadvantage due to the unsustainable nature of the work, lack of contracts and zero social or legal protection. What's worse is the lack of economic mobility where generations will be trapped in the disadvantaged strata of society.

For sustained industrial growth, STEAM-based and digital literacy programmes need to be established for quick labour mobility—a paradigm shift from low-paying, low-skilled jobs to learning the ropes for

range of benefits, from learning time-management and interpersonal skills to acquiring work discipline; the students are already on a springboard to support their careers.

In Pakistan, however, the jobs that should be open to students are usually taken by less skilled, low-wage earners. In an informal economy, we can't strictly classify jobs as open to 'students only'. There are huge opportunities that we haven't tapped into. We haven't yet explored the options available for certifying students for jobs because all these and much more are being managed in an informal capacity by untrained workers.

In many countries, students work in libraries, cafeterias, or as administrative and research assistants in a paid capacity. There are university portals that list the available on-campus jobs, and any certification options such as for first-aid worker jobs. This is where students find preparatory ground for soft skills that will be required in a more formal job environment. Students can also undertake shadow work or apprenticeships within the university IT, marketing or curriculum planning teams.

Gradually, we may be able to stem the tide of informal employment and bring more citizens into the safety net through training and regulation.

The writer is a teacher, educator, author, and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

# Nepal like a 'yam' between two rocks

WORDS & ECHOES

Recognising history's multidimensional aspects is the reality that nations are grappling with today.

ABHI SUBEDI

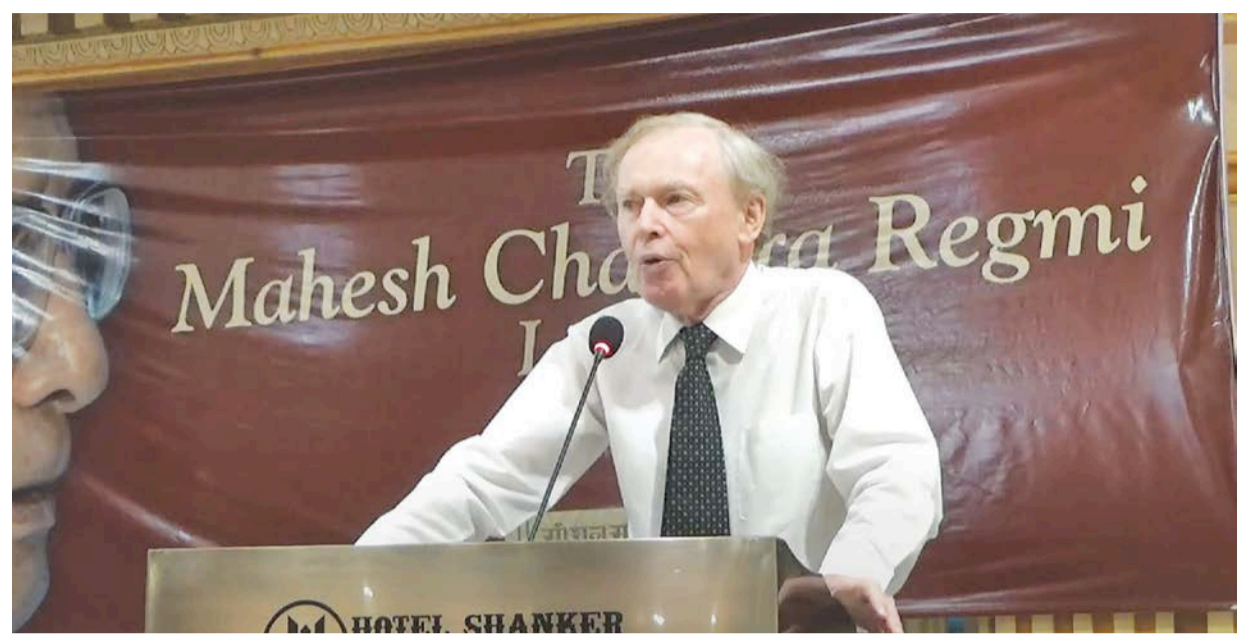


British Nepali historian John Whelpton, who has researched Nepali history and politics, evoked a subject of Nepali historical discussions at the Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2024 on September 11. This was the 17th in the series started by Social Science Baha in 2003 with the lecture of the well-known Nepali scholar Harka Gurung.

Nepali historian and research director of Martin Chautari, Pratyoush Onta, brought this subject to the audience's attention. He presented the outline of Whelpton's works by bringing forth his scholarship and his easy and human approach, as seen in his oeuvre and also in the technical features of them. According to political scientist Hari Sharma, Whelpton's works on Nepali history and society are an act of love that is performed sans huge foreign funds, sans institutional connections and sans any noise of the familiar order. Whelpton's scholarship and studies on Nepal sound more like a literary writer's passion for people and places.

People of different interests and expertise attended the talk series, including senior historian Triratna Manandhar, Kanak Dixit, and the young generation. The lecture, slightly overstretched, went well for several reasons. First, the treatment of the subject by this senior historian, who, according to Onta, entirely created the character of his scholarship from his close connection with Nepal, was interesting.

Second, Whelpton evoked a matter that is most bandied about by Nepali historians, politicians and common people, which is the famous remark made by the founder of modern Nepal, the king of the house of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723-75). Shah said he discovered that Nepal is "a yam between two rocks". This statement, *Dui dhunga bichko tarul or yam*



SCREENGRABBED VIA YOUTUBE

between two large boulders, is included in the text *Badamaharajdhira Shri Pach Prithivi Narayan Shah ko Divya Upadesh* (2002), the jointly edited document by two famous historians Baburam Acharya and Yogi Naraharimath. It has become a famous cliché in Nepali parlance. The *dhunga* imagery has become so entrenched that the former director of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Nirmal Man Tuladhar, found Whelpton's translation of this word into 'rock' inappropriate. This shows how King Shah's aphoristic statement has become part of our imagination.

In the lecture available online, Whelpton does not directly begin with the topic. Even the name of Prithvi Narayan Shah appears a little later in the text, which shows the nature of the discourse's structure. Whelpton uses rock imagery as an important piece of historical memory. That is precisely the penchant of King Shah for action in history and the wisdom that he puts in his exhortations.

He has brought the history of China and India to what may be explained as the imagery of Nepal's geopolitical existence. He cites Leo Rose's view and his explanation of the *yam* imagery and Nepal's clever manipulation of policies between the two big neighbours.

However, it can be easily assessed how Shah himself saw the need to manoeuvre between the neighbours when he used the *dui dhunga* or the two boulders in his exhortation. This need for manoeuvring has become both an existentialist angst

of Nepal and its pragmatism. The subtle story continues even today when the Eminent Person Group on India-Nepal relations have devised plans for a new "peace, friendship treaty with India" replacing the existing one. India has not yet responded to this. As far as I know, no such group of 'eminent persons' exists between Nepal and China.

Whelpton looks at the difference between Nepal and China on the one hand and India on the other by evoking the colonial history. He says, "India, in contrast to both China and Nepal, is the product of what could be called external rather than internal imperialism: That is forced unification by a distant colonial power instead of by conquerors based in an area within the boundaries they created." However, Whelpton does not elaborate on how this postcolonial situation makes a difference in the *yam* and rock conditionality perceived by Shah. John shows how Shah's conquests occurred when "the East India Company was consolidating its control over the Gangetic plain, and China's Qing dynasty was reaching the apogee of its power."

The *yam* imagery of Shah continues to occupy the minds of Nepalis who espouse different political views and ideas about the country's political situation. Those who hold republican ideas look at Shah's view like the spectres of history. Their arguments are imbued a little with the Hamletian dilemma of whether or not to repeat a feudal king's wisdom in modern times. This reminds us of the views of French theorist Jacques Derrida, who,

in his book *Spectres of Marx*, takes up Francis Fukuyama's theory that Marxism, even though it was disposed of in 1989, is not dead.

The feudal king's theory about the monarchical system and the dream of expansion is dead, but his geopolitical perception of history, as presented in the spectre of *yam* and boulder, is not. We are dealing with this reality in everyday life. Whelpton has presented a long analysis of Chinese politics and policies to evoke the conditionality of *yam* and boulder. That the historian Whelpton should write a very readable political analysis of the geo-political conditionality shows that history is an ongoing process of living interpretation.

Whelpton concluded his presentation by evoking a theory of prudence and pragmatism. He advocates what he calls a two-track approach, which he thinks is inevitable. He advocates for a need to 'press for a paradigm shift' and an accommodation approach to India. The same is true of India. As the *yam* between boulders is the reality, approaches should be made to address that condition. Whelpton sees the role of civil society in this. The geopolitical conditions of borders arouse emotions; it has also become the greatest reality in our century. However, recognising the multidimensional aspects of history is what the nations in this region and outside are grappling with today. So, the imagery of *yam* can be a valuable trigger for studying history and planning for the future. Whelpton's Regmi lecture briefly and productively addressed these questions.

## Peoples, missing in broader narratives

Investing in communities will help foster more meaningful Nepal-India ties.

SANJEEV SATGAINYA



In the first week of August, I was in India, on a second visit exactly a year after. This time, my wife and I decided to hop on trains—Delhi to Dehradun to Lucknow to New Jalpaiguri; our journey punctuated by brief halts of two-three days in each city.

Taking a train, we wanted to grab an opportunity to meet people—and more people—along the journey. There

homes I would play and eat, not having an iota of knowledge that I was crossing the border in doing so and that they were actually Indians, not my compatriots.

For my Kathmandu-born wife, India, however, seemed kind of alien to her: That's until 2015 when she first flew to Kochi (Kerala) for a brief language course. Post-2015, we must have travelled together to various parts of India—it would be an overstatement to say the length and breadth of that mammoth nation, but of course from north to south and west to east—a dozen times or more. Over the years, both of us have found new things and have made new friends.

Which India, which Nepal?

In Nepal, and among many Nepalis, there are different Indias. For those born and grown up along the plains, one image of India is integral to their lives. Another India provides people from far-flung remote western districts with a means of livelihood. For

different. Those in New Delhi's power corridors often see Nepal as their backyard. And there are Indians, the peoples, who either know or do not know about Nepal. Some of the remarks from fellow passengers I encountered during my recent trip: "I have been planning to worship at Pashupatinath temple; by the way, how far is Pokhara from Kathmandu?", "Nepal itself is such a beautiful country and yet you come to India for a vacation?", "Why do you have so many government changes so frequently? Who is the prime minister now?", "Have been up to the border (Rupaidiha or Raxaul) but have never been to Kathmandu. I must visit Nepal."

Variables at play

Different variables shape up, strengthen or weaken relations between any two countries. Policymakers and leadership, however, often tend to put excessive focus on some and completely ignore others, which may actually need more attention.

and address them in such a way that they do not derail the core relations.

Kathmandu and New Delhi, in the past years, have been struggling to smooth out the irritants, but while doing so, both should not forget that the peoples of the two countries make the strongest linkage between these two civilisations.

Any exercise by the leadership of either country to take the other head on at the expense of peoples will never allow the relations to be on an even keel. Even today, there are a number of genuine concerns of Nepalis visiting India vis-à-vis mobile connections and digital payments, even though they are, on paper, said to have been addressed. There is a need to sensitise and aware officials on both sides of the border when dealing with the peoples of the two countries. These are some issues that do not cost much but pay off immensely in the long run to strengthen relations.

The Nepali leadership often tends to demonstrate proclivity to stoke hostility towards India, especially when they attempt "to settle a score" with New Delhi. The Indian establishment, which may comprise multiple constituents, including foreign policy mandarins, on the other hand, does not hesitate to sow the seeds of paranoia of losing Kathmandu's "loyalty" to China.

In the wake of recent events in the region, it must have dawned upon New Delhi that if it wants to earn the goodwill of its neighbouring states, it should invest in communities and peoples instead of individual leaders. The Nepali leadership, which is at present dealing with an unprecedented wrath of the public for the delivery deficit, will do well not to have their priorities misplaced.

Nepalis here and there

In 2016, when my wife, son and I arrived at Varkala in Kerala, the man who had come to pick us up at the railway station was a Nepali. He took us to the hotel we had booked, which was owned by a Nepali. In the next three days, we learned that every resort along the Varkala Beach had Nepalis—either managing or working. "We are vacationing in India without needing to speak any other language but Nepali," quipped our son, then 11. "Just that they don't give us SIM cards here!"

Satgainya served as the Editor of *The Kathmandu Post* from February 2020 to September 2022.



SHUTTERSTOCK

was no reason to be disappointed. We met new people, made new friends, shared contacts and even promised: "See you again."

Trains have always fascinated me since my childhood when I got my first experience on the locomotive from Rupaidiha to Nanpara. For someone who grew up in a Nepalgunj village, I had many friends at whose

those in Kathmandu and some hill regions, there is one India that harbours a dark malevolence. For some ultranationalists and a section of Nepali politicians, there is another India that is expansionist, a hegemon and a major threat to Nepal's sovereignty.

In India, and among many Indians, the case, however, seems to be a bit

The conduct of Nepali politicians and the Indian establishment's tendency to view things through the warped prism often tend to make already challenging relations even worse. Amid the rapid flux in the region and the world, Nepal and India are likely to face more challenges and complexities, but in the larger interest of both countries, they must manage

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The Kathmandu Post solicits well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces from our readers.

Please email your pieces or pitches, a high-resolution headshot, and a one-line bio to tkpopinion@gmail.com.

Please google your pitches before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the Post or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece is important.

Make sure that your piece is original. Authors who plagiarise or get AI tools, including ChatGPT, to write their pieces are blacklisted.

The Post receives dozens of pitches daily from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.



— Editors

## FOREX

US Dollar	134.53
Euro	149.16
Pound Sterling	176.48
Swiss Franc	158.82
Australian Dollar	90.05
Canadian Dollar	98.99
Singapore Dollar	103.54
Japanese Yen (10)	9.56
Chinese Yuan	18.96
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.85
Qatari Riyal	36.90
Thai Bhat	4.03
UAE Dhiram	36.63
Malaysian Ringgit	31.28
Korean Won (100)	10.12

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

## BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold	Rs 156,300
 Silver	Rs 1,860

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

## BIZLINE

## Cash-strapped Maldives says no need for IMF bailout

**COLOMBO:** The Maldives says its financial troubles are “temporary” and the luxury tourist destination has no plans to seek an International Monetary Fund bailout after warnings of a possible sovereign default. Foreign minister Moosa Zameer said the Indian Ocean archipelago, best known for its upscale resorts and celebrity visitors, was pressing ahead with tax hikes to meet its debt servicing obligations. “We have bilateral partners who are very sensitive to our needs and our situation,” Zameer told reporters in Colombo on Friday night. “I seriously don’t think it is a time where we will be right now engaging with the IMF... The issue that we have is very temporary because currently we are having a dip in reserves.” He said tax reforms, along with the rationalisation of state-owned enterprises, would improve liquidity. Zameer was visiting Sri Lanka along with Finance Minister Mohamed Shafeeq to meet with local central bankers and other officials. (AFP)

## ESPN and other channels return to DirecTV with a new Disney deal

**CALIFORNIA:** DirecTV announced on Saturday it had reached a deal with Walt Disney Co that will restore ESPN and ABC-owned stations to its service after a nearly 2-week dispute that blacked out those networks for millions of viewers across the US. The end of the impasse came in time for sports fans to watch ESPN’s slate of college football games on DirecTV. It also will ensure that ABC’s telecast of the Emmy Awards on Sunday night will be available in more major markets where viewers subscribe to DirecTV’s pay service. ABC had been unavailable since September 1 on DirecTV in several markets where the station is owned by Disney. Those were located in the San Francisco Bay Area; Fresno, California; New York; Chicago; Philadelphia; Houston; and Raleigh, North Carolina. DirecTV’s 11 million subscribers abruptly lost access to ESPN, the ABC-owned stations and other Disney-owned channels such as FX and National Geographic during the Labor Day weekend in a dispute over carriage fees and programming flexibility. (AP)

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KERKENNAH, TUNISIA, SEPT 14

Off a quiet Tunisian island, Sara Souissi readies her small fishing boat. As a woman in the male-dominated trade, she rows against entrenched patriarchy but also environmental threats to her livelihood.

Souissi began fishing as a teenager in a family of fishers off their native Kerkennah Islands near the city of Sfax, defying men who believed she had no place at sea. “Our society didn’t accept that a woman would fish,” she said, hauling a catch onto her turquoise-coloured boat. “But I persisted, because I love fishing and I love the sea,” said Souissi, 43, who is married to a fisherman and is a mother of one.

A substantial portion of Tunisia is coastal or near the coast, making the sea an essential component of everyday life.

Seafood, a staple in Tunisian cuisine, is also a major export commodity for the North African country, with Italy, Spain and Malta top buyers, and revenues nearing 900 million dinars (\$295 million) last year, according to official figures.

Tunisian women have long played a major role in this vital sector:

## How technology helped Subedi, a mushroom farmer

A returnee from a foreign land, Subedi sold mushrooms worth Rs20 million last year. This year, he aims to double the income.

RAMESH KUMAR PAUDEL  
CHITWAN, SEPT 14

Kamal Subedi brought home around Rs20 million last year selling mushrooms. This year, he aims to double his income.

Mushroom grower Subedi has a farm in Padampur, Kalika municipality, producing two varieties—oyster and button.

Last year, Subedi cultivated button mushrooms for only three months. This year, he prepared an air conditioner (AC) for mushroom cultivation, which he can use to produce mushrooms around the year.

The AC chamber involves cooling, humidity, heating, CO2 control, fresh and return air mixing, exhaust and microcirculation. This equipment efficiently controls the climate for mushrooms in various air conditioning systems.

Subedi expects that, as button mushrooms are comparatively more expensive, production round the year would double his income. Subedi, originally from Nawalparasi, went to Belgium in 2002. He trained for two years on mushroom farming during his five-year stay in the European country.

He also migrated to other countries for a job and returned to Nepal four years ago.

Initially, he worked in another person’s mushroom farm.

“After returning from the foreign country, I worked on mushroom farms in Bhairahawa and Jugedi,” said Subedi.

In December 2022, he leased a land plot in Padampur and started growing mushrooms.

Starting with an initial investment of Rs500,000, he gradually expanded the investment. Observing good income from mushrooms throughout



POST PHOTO: RAMESH KUMAR PAUDEL

The AC chamber involves cooling, humidity, heating, CO2 control, fresh and return air mixing, exhaust and microcirculation.

the year, Subedi installed an AC chamber.

Production grew significantly after the installation of the AC chamber.

“Though it is called an AC chamber, it is an air handling unit. This technology creates appropriate humidity and temperature for mushroom production,” Subedi said.

An AC chamber costs around Rs1.1 million. Subedi has 12 such chambers. The provincial government provided him with a subsidy for one unit, and he managed to purchase 11 AC chambers on his own. “I have invested Rs40 million in total. Of that, Rs20.5 million is from loans,” Subedi said.

Though the price of oyster mushrooms fluctuates, the price of button mushrooms is stable around the year, Subedi said. “Sometimes, from Rs200 a kg, the price of mushrooms drops suddenly, and I have to sell it for as low as Rs100 per kg.”

He said that button mushrooms fetched up to Rs350 a kg. “With that income and demand for button mushrooms in mind, I prepared for commercial farming and installed the AC chambers.”

AC chamber technology for mushroom farming is new in Nepal. Mushrooms are being produced with its use in Bhairahawa, Sarlahi,

Gaidakot, Jugedi, and Kathmandu.

“I learned the skill in a foreign country and started producing something in my own country. I have a plan to take mushroom cultivation forward in a more manageable way with new technology,” Subedi said.

Kalika Municipality produces mushrooms worth more than Rs40 million annually, said Mayor Binod Regmi. “There are 80 households involved in mushroom farming.”

The farmers have started using new technology for the crop, which has made some of them entrepreneurs and generated jobs.

Most of the mushroom is grown in

ward 2 of Kalika Municipality.

“Since last year, I’ve started producing mushroom seed as well. The sales of seeds are also going well,” said Subedi. He has hired 26 workers. However, it is difficult to retain them. Subedi has also imported the equipment from New Delhi, India, to sprinkle water in the chamber.

Seventy percent of the mushroom he produces is consumed in Chitwan while the rest is supplied to Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Surkhet.

Farmers who have installed AC chambers require electricity 24 hours. Any fluctuation in power supply affects production.

## India accuses Samsung, Xiaomi of colluding with Amazon, Flipkart

REUTERS  
NEW DELHI, SEPT 14

Samsung, Xiaomi and other smartphone companies colluded with Amazon and Walmart’s Flipkart to exclusively launch products on the e-commerce firms’ Indian websites in breach of antitrust laws, according to regulatory reports seen by Reuters.

Antitrust investigations conducted by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) have found that Amazon and Flipkart violated local competition laws by giving preference to select sellers, prioritising certain listings, and steeply discounting products, hurting other companies, Reuters reported this week.

The CCI’s 1,027-page report on Amazon also said the Indian units of five companies—Samsung, Xiaomi, Motorola, Realme and OnePlus—were “involved in the practice of exclusive” phone launches in “collusion” with Amazon and its affiliates, breaking competition law.

In Flipkart’s case, a 1,696-page CCI report said the Indian units of Samsung, Xiaomi, Motorola, Vivo, Lenovo and Realme conducted similar practices.

The inclusion of smartphone makers like Samsung and Xiaomi in the case could increase their legal and compliance headaches.

“Exclusivity in business is anathema. Not only is it against free and fair competition but also against the interest of consumers,” CCI’s additional director general GV Siva Prasad wrote in the Amazon and Flipkart reports,

in identical findings.

Reuters is first to report the smartphone companies have been accused of anticompetitive behavior in the CCI’s reports which are dated Aug. 9 and are not public.

Xiaomi declined to comment, while the other smartphone makers did not respond to requests for comment.

Amazon Flipkart and the CCI did not respond, and have not so far commented on the reports’ findings.

Both the CCI reports said that during investigations Amazon and Flipkart “deliberately downplayed” allegations of exclusive launches, but officials found the practice was “rampant”.

Counterpoint Research data shows that South Korea’s Samsung and China’s Xiaomi are two of India’s biggest smartphone players, together holding an almost 36 percent market share, with China’s Vivo on 19 percent. India’s e-retail market is set to exceed \$160 billion by 2028, up from \$57-60 billion in 2023, consultancy firm Bain estimates.

The investigation findings are a major setback for Amazon and Flipkart in a key growth market where they have faced the ire of small retailers for years for hurting their offline businesses.

The CCI has also said both companies used their foreign investments to provide subsidised rates for services like warehousing and marketing to a select number of sellers.

Some of the smartphone companies—Xiaomi, Samsung, OnePlus, Realme and Motorola—have been

ordered to submit their financial statements for three fiscal years to 2024, certified by their auditor, to the CCI, according to an internal CCI document dated Aug. 28, also seen by Reuters.

The investigation into Amazon, Flipkart and their sellers was triggered in 2020 by a complaint from an affiliate of the country’s biggest retailer association, the Confederation of All India Traders, which has 80 million members.

The CCI will in coming weeks review any objections to its findings from Amazon, Flipkart, the retailer association, and the smartphone companies, and could potentially impose fines along with mandating companies to change their business practices, people familiar with the matter said.

Indian retailers have repeatedly accused Amazon and Flipkart, and smartphone companies, of exclusive phone launches online, saying shoppers suffered as they didn’t get the latest models and customers looked for them on the shopping websites.

“Exclusive launches had not only severely affected the ordinary sellers on the platform but also the brick-and-mortar retailers who were provided mobile phones at a much later date,” both CCI reports said, citing analyses of data from smartphone companies.

Indian research firm Datum Intelligence estimates that 50 percent of phone sales were online last year, up from 14.5 percent in 2013. Flipkart had a 55 percent share in online phone sales in 2023, and Amazon 35 percent.

## China’s economy softens in August as Beijing continues to grapple with lagging demand

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BEIJING, SEPT 14

China’s economy softened in August, extending a slowdown in industrial activity and real estate prices as Beijing faces pressure to ramp up spending to stimulate demand.

Data published by the National Bureau of Statistics Saturday showed weakening activity across industrial production, retail sales and real estate this month compared to July.

“We should be aware that the adverse impacts arising from the changes in the external environment are increasing,” said Liu Aihua, the bureau’s chief economist in a news conference.

Liu said that demand remained insufficient at home, and the sustained economic recovery still confronts multiple difficulties and challenges.

China has been grappling with a lagging economy post-Covid, with weak consumer demand, persistent deflationary pressures and a contraction in factory activity.

Chinese leaders have ramped up investment in manufacturing to rev up an economy that stalled during the pandemic and is still growing slower than hoped.

Beijing also has to deal with increasing pressure to implement large-scale stimulus measures to boost economic growth.

While industrial production rose by 4.5 percent in August compared to a

year ago, it declined from July’s 5.1 percent growth, according to the bureau’s data released.

Retail sales grew 2.1 percent from the same time last year, slower than the 2.7 percent increase last month.

Fixed asset investment rose by 3.4 percent from January to August, down from 3.6 percent in the first seven months.

Meanwhile, investment in real estate declined by 10.2 percent from January to August, compared to last year.

**Retail sales grew 2.1 percent from the same time last year, slower than the 2.7 percent increase last month.**

The figures released on Saturday come after trade data for August saw imports grow just 0.5 percent compared to a year ago.

The consumer price index rose 0.6 percent in August, missing forecasts according to data released Monday. Officials attributed the higher CPI to an increase in food prices due to bad weather.

But the core CPI, which excludes food and energy prices, rose by just 0.3 percent in August, the slowest in over three years.

## Tunisia fisherwomen battle inequality and climate change



Tunisian fisherwoman Sara Souissi, 43, defied men who believed she had no place at sea. AFP

## Under the table

In Raoued, a coastal town on the edge of the capital Tunis, the Tunisian Society for Sustainable Fishing launched a workshop in June for women’s integration into the trade.

But most of the women attending the training told AFP they were only there to help male relatives.

“I want to help develop this field. Women can make fish nets,” said Safa Ben Khalifa, a participant.

There are currently no official

numbers for fisherwomen in Tunisia.

Although Souissi is formally registered in her trade, many Tunisian women can work only under the table—the World Economic Forum estimates 60 percent of workers in

informal sectors are women. “We want to create additional resources amid climate change, a decrease in marine resources, and poor fishing practices,” said Ryma Moussaoui, the Raoued workshop coordinator.

Last month, the Mediterranean Sea reached its highest temperature on record at a daily median of 28.9 degrees Celsius (84 Fahrenheit), Spain’s leading institute of marine sciences said. The strain on sea life and resources has been compounded in countries like Tunisia by pollution and overfishing.

Rising temperatures make the waters uninhabitable for various species, and unsustainable fishing like trawling or using plastic traps indiscriminately sweeps up the dwindling sea life and exacerbates pollution.

“They don’t respect the rules,” Souissi said about fishers using those methods. “They catch anything they can, even off-season.”

## ‘Unfavourable environment’

In 2017 in Skhira, a port town on the Gulf of Gabes, 40 women clam collectors formed an association to enhance their income—only to see their hard-won gains later erased by pollution.

Before its formation, the women earned about a tenth of the clams’ final selling price in Europe, said its president, Houda Mansour. By cutting out “exploitative middlemen,” the association helped boost their earnings, she added.

In 2020, however, the government issued a ban on clam collecting due to a severe drop in shellfish populations, leaving the women unemployed.

“They don’t have diplomas and can’t do other jobs,” Mansour, now a baker, explained.

In hotter, polluted waters, clams struggle to build strong shells and survive. Industrial waste discharged into the Gulf of Gabes for decades has contributed to the problem.

It has also forced other species out, said Emma Benkahlia, a fishing economics researcher at the University of Tunis El Manar.

“The water became an unfavourable environment for them to live and reproduce,” undermining the fishers’ revenue, she said.

“Because they couldn’t fish anymore, some sold their boats to migrants looking to cross the Mediterranean illegally,” she added, calling for more sustainable practices. Souissi, who only uses relatively small nets with no motor on her boat, said she and others should fish responsibly in order to survive.

“Otherwise, what else can I do?” she said, rowing her boat back to shore. “Staying at home and cleaning? No, I want to keep fishing.”

## WORLD

## BRIEFING

## Russia, Ukraine exchange 206 prisoners in second swap in two days

**KYIV:** Russia and Ukraine conducted a major exchange of prisoners on Saturday, 206 in all, in their second such swap in two days, following negotiations mediated by the United Arab Emirates, officials said. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that all 103 Ukrainians returned were from the military—82 soldiers and privates and 21 officers. Russian Defence Ministry said that the 103 Russian soldiers exchanged had been taken prisoner in the border Kursk region where Ukrainian forces launched a surprise incursion in August. “Our people are home,” Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app. “We have successfully brought back another 103 warriors from Russian captivity to Ukraine.” Zelenskyy posted pictures of servicemen wrapped in the national blue and yellow flag, hugging each other, talking on mobile phones and posing for group photographs at an undisclosed location. The exchange was mediated by the UAE, Emirati state news agency WAM said. It was the country’s eighth such mediation since the start of 2024, it said. Kyiv and Moscow have frequently exchanged prisoners since Russia’s invasion in February 2022, and Saturday’s swap was the third since Ukraine began a cross-border incursion into Russia’s Kursk region in early August. Ukrainian officials have previously said its troops had captured at least 600 Russian soldiers during the incursion, and that this would help it secure the return of captured Ukrainians. (REUTERS)

## Iran says new research satellite launched into orbit

**TEHRAN:** Iran on Saturday blasted a new research satellite into orbit, state media said, in the latest such development for an aerospace programme that has long faced Western criticism. “The Chamran-1 research satellite was successfully launched and put into orbit by the Ghaem-100 carrier,” state television said. The satellite, which weighs around 60 kilograms, is designed to test hardware and software systems for orbital manoeuvre technology, the TV report said. The device was designed and built by Iranian Electronics Industries affiliated with the defence ministry, state TV said. Western governments including the United States have repeatedly warned Iran against such launches, saying the same technology can be used for ballistic missiles, including ones designed to deliver a nuclear warhead. Iran has countered that it is not seeking nuclear weapons and that its satellite and rocket launches are for civil or defence purposes only. The Ghaem-100 rocket which carried the latest satellite is manufactured by the aerospace organisation of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, an arm of the military. (AFP)

## Funeral held for Turkish-American activist killed in West Bank

**DIDIM, TURKEY:** Hundreds of people waving Turkish and Palestinian flags gathered for the funeral on Saturday for Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, a Turkish-American activist killed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Turkey’s Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmus and main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Ozgur Ozel were among mourners at the ceremony in the Turkish Aegean coastal city of Didim. A guard of honour carried the 26-year-old’s coffin, which was draped with a Turkish flag. “The blood of Aysenur Eygi is as sacred as that of every Palestinian martyred, and we will follow it until the end. As the Turkish nation, we are fully committed. As a state, we are fully committed,” Kurtulmus told reporters. (REUTERS)

## Harris promoting her resume and her goals rather than race as she courts Black voters

Kamala Harris embodies her identity as a woman of colour rather than making it an overt part of her pitch.

○ ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, SEPT 14

While President Joe Biden was hosting a celebration of Black excellence at the White House with lawmakers, advocates and celebrities this past week, Kamala Harris was instead headed off to Pennsylvania.

The nation’s first Black vice president talked with Pennsylvania voters about supporting small businesses, building more housing and expanding the child tax credit. She said the country “needs a president of the United States who works for all the American people.”

What she did not do was spend time talking about her race or gender or the prospect that she would be the nation’s first Black and South Asian woman to be president if she defeated Republican Donald Trump.

As Harris courts voters, she embodies her identity as a woman of colour rather than making it an overt part of her pitch, choosing instead to emphasize her policies and resume.

She will be making her case to minority voters in a number of key settings in the coming days. She is scheduled to speak on Saturday night at a Washington awards dinner sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, conduct an interview with members of the National Association of Black Journalists in Philadelphia on Tuesday, and attend an online rally Thursday headlined by Oprah and involving groups such as “Win with Black Women,” “White Women: Answer the Call,” and “South Asians for Harris.”

Harris, throughout her career, has been “many different firsts, and has never really led with that as a descriptor,” said Brian Brokaw, who man-



Supporters cheer as Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris waves during a campaign event, on September 12, in Greensboro, North Carolina. AP/RSS

aged Harris’ winning campaign for California attorney general in 2010.

“Her life story and her identity and her background and her job experience have all been critical parts of her campaigns,” he said. But he added that “becoming the first—that has never actually been part of her core rationale for why she should be elected an office. It just happens to be a important result of her elections.”

Harris’ identity, too, is evident in how she chooses to engage with voters. A member of a historically Black sorority while attending Howard University, Harris spoke this summer in Houston at the annual assembly of another sorority, where she told the women “it is so good to be with you this evening, and I say that as a proud member of the Divine Nine. And

when I look out at everyone here, I see family.” It’s a different approach from Hillary Clinton’s in her 2016 Democratic campaign for president, when she put front and centre her potential to break the glass ceiling. Harris’ aides and allies say with no time to lose in a compressed campaign this year, it is perhaps more valuable to focus on voters rather than herself.

North Carolina’s Crystal McLaughlin, who attended a Harris rally in Greensboro this past week, acknowledged Harris’ candidacy as an important “historical moment” but added that what is more important is to look at “who wants to do what’s right.” Still, she said Harris’ identity matters even if it is not the focus on her campaign.

## China condemns German navy’s transit of Taiwan Strait

○ REUTERS  
BEIJING, SEPT 14

China’s military on Saturday condemned the transit of two German navy ships through the Taiwan Strait saying it increased security risks and sent the “wrong” signal, adding that Chinese forces monitored and warned the vessels.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own, says it alone exercises sovereignty and jurisdiction over the strait. Both the United States and Taiwan say the strait—a major trade route through which about half of global container ships pass—is an international waterway.

The People’s Liberation Army’s Eastern Theatre Command said the passage of the two ships—a frigate and a supply vessel—was “public hyping”, and that its navy and air forces monitored and warned them throughout.

“The German side’s behaviour increases security risks and sends the wrong signal. Troops in the theatre are on high alert at all times and will resolutely counter all threats and provocations,” it said in a statement.

China’s embassy in Germany said in a separate statement it had lodged “representations” with Berlin, saying Taiwan belonged to China, a position the democratically elected government in Taipei strongly rejects.

“The question of Taiwan is not a matter of ‘freedom of navigation’, but of China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” it said.

The Taiwan Strait is Chinese waters “and there are no so-called ‘international waters’ at all”, the embassy added.

China urges Germany to avoid any “interference” that would jeopardise the healthy and stable development of bilateral relations, it added.

Taiwan’s government says only the island’s people can decide their future.

US warships sail through the strait around once every two months, drawing the ire of Beijing, and some US allies like Canada and Britain have also made occasional transits.

China, which has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, has over the past five years stepped up military activities around the island, including staging war games.

However, Taiwan’s defence ministry said last month it believes China lacks the ability to “fully” invade Taiwan as it does not have the equipment, a remark which on Saturday drew a rebuke from China’s defence ministry.

“The Democratic Progressive Party authorities’ claims are absurd and ridiculous,” spokesperson Wu Qian said in Beijing, referring to Taiwan’s ruling party. “The complete reunification of the motherland is a historical inevitability.”

Also on Saturday, Taiwan’s coast guard said it had again sent ships to monitor and warn away four Chinese maritime police vessels sailing in restricted waters near the Taiwan-controlled Kinmen islands, which sit right next to China’s coast.

## Myanmar junta makes request for foreign aid to cope with deadly floods

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TAUNGOO, MYANMAR, SEPT 14

Myanmar’s junta chief made a rare request on Saturday for foreign aid to cope with deadly floods that have displaced hundreds of thousands of people who have already endured three years of war.

Floods and landslides have killed almost 300 people in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, which dumped a colossal deluge of rain when it hit the region last weekend.

In Myanmar, more than 235,000 people have been forced from their homes by floods, the junta said Friday, piling further misery on the country where war has raged since the military seized power in 2021.

In Taungoo—around an hour south of the capital Naypyidaw—residents paddled makeshift rafts on floodwaters that reached the roofs of some buildings.

Around 300 people were sheltering at a monastery on high ground in a nearby village.

“We are surrounded by water and we don’t have enough food for everyone,” one man said. “We need food, water, and medicine as priority.”

Outside another temple, Buddhist nuns in pink and orange robes waded through knee-deep water.

“I lost my rice, chickens, and ducks,” said farmer Naing Tun, who had brought his three cows to higher ground near Taungoo after floodwaters inundated his village.

“I don’t care about the other belongings. Nothing else is more important than the lives of people and animals,” he told AFP.



Flood-affected residents wait for a rescue boat to pick them up in Taungoo, Myanmar’s Bago region on Saturday, following heavy rains in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi. AFP/RSS

The rains in the wake of typhoon Yagi sent people across Southeast Asia fleeing by any means necessary, including by elephant in Myanmar and jetski in Thailand.

“Officials from the government need to contact foreign countries to receive rescue and relief aid to be provided to the victims,” junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said on Friday, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper. “It is necessary to manage rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures as quickly as possible,” he was quoted as saying.

Myanmar’s military has previously blocked or frustrated humanitarian assistance from abroad.

## Russia threatens Ukraine, West as long-range strikes decision looms

○ REUTERS  
MOSCOW, SEPT 14

Russian officials threatened the West on Saturday with an uncontrolled escalation of war and Ukraine with the destruction of Kyiv as Western leaders discussed whether to allow Ukraine to use their weapons for strikes deep into Russian territory.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late on Friday that his plan to achieve victory depended on Washington’s decision, a clear reference to the authorisation for long-range strikes that Kyiv has long sought from NATO allies.

Andriy Yermak, head of Zelenskyy’s office, said on the Telegram messaging app on Saturday: “Strong decisions are needed. Terror can be stopped by destroying the military facilities where it originates.”

Kyiv has said such strikes are critical for its efforts to restrict Moscow’s ability to attack Ukraine, but allies have so far been reluctant to permit them, citing fears Moscow will treat them as an escalation and doubting their efficiency.

While no official decision on the matter has been announced so far, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov alleged it had already been made and communicated to Kyiv, and that Moscow would have to respond with actions of its own.

“The decision has been made, the carte blanche and all indulgences have been given (to Kyiv), so we are ready for everything,” the RIA news agency quoted Ryabkov as saying. “And we will react in a way that will not be pretty.”

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who now serves as deputy chairman of the country’s security council, said the West was testing Russia’s patience but it was not limitless.

## ‘Shame must change sides’: France’s mass rape plaintiff becomes feminist icon

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MARSEILLE, SEPT 14

Walking into court each day with her head held high, the ex-wife of a Frenchman on trial for orchestrating her mass rape in her own bed for almost a decade has become a feminist icon.

With her now trademark auburn bob and dark glasses, 71-year-old Gisele Pelicot has become a figurehead in the battle against the use of drugs to commit sexual abuse.

Her life was shattered in 2020 when she discovered that her partner of five decades had for years been secretly administering her large doses of tranquilisers to rape her and invite dozens of strangers to join him.

But she has decided not to hide and demanded the trial of Dominique Pelicot, 71, and 50 co-defendants since September 2 be open to the public because, as she has said through one of her lawyers, it should be up to her alleged abusers—not her—to be ashamed.

“It’s a way of saying... shame must



Gisele Pelicot (centre) arrives to attend a session of the trial of her former partner Dominique Pelicot accused of drugging her for nearly ten years and inviting strangers to rape her at their home in Mazan, a small town in the south of France, in Avignon, on September 11. AFP/RSS

change sides,” her attorney Stephane Babonneau said as the trial opened.

Since then, feminist activists have used her stylised portrait by Belgian artist Aline Dessine, daubed with the words “Shame is changing sides”, to show support and call for protests.

The artist with 2.5 million followers on TikTok has given up all rights to the image.

## ‘Very brave’

Outside the courtroom in the southern town of Avignon on Friday, protester Nadege Peneau said she was full of admiration for the trial’s main plaintiff. “What she’s doing is very brave,” she said.

“She’s speaking up for so many children and women, and even men” who have been abused, she added.

Gisele Pelicot in August obtained a divorce from her husband, who has confessed to the abuse after meticulously documenting it with photos and videos. She has moved away from the southern town of Mazan where, in her own words, for years he treated her like “a piece of meat” or a “rag doll”.

She now uses her maiden name, but during the trial has asked the media to use her former name as a married woman.

Her lawyer Antoine Camus said she had transformed from a devoted wife and retiree, who loved walks and choir singing, into a woman in the seventies ready for a battle.

“I will have to fight till the end,” she told the press on September 5, in her only public statement outside court in the first days of the four-month trial.

“Obviously it’s not an easy exercise and I can feel attempts to trap me with certain questions,” she added calmly.

## ‘Not in vain’

The daughter of a member of the military, Gisele Pelicot was born on December 7, 1952 in Germany, returning to France with her family when she was five.

When she was only nine, her mother, aged just 35, died of cancer.

“In my head, I was already 15, I was already a little woman,” she said, describing growing up “without much love”.

Her older brother Michel died of a heart attack aged 43, before her 20th birthday.

She has said she was never one to publicly show emotions.

“In the family, we hide tears and we share laughter,” one of her lawyers had reported her as saying.

She met Dominique Pelicot, her future husband and rapist, in 1971.

She had dreamt of becoming a hairdresser but instead studied to be a typist. After a few years temping, she joined France’s national electricity company EDF, ending her career in a logistics service for its nuclear power plants.

At home, she looked after her three children, then seven grandchildren, and did a little gymnastics.

Only when the police caught her husband filming up women’s skirts in a supermarket in 2020 did she find out the true reason behind her troubling memory lapses.

Camus, her lawyer, said his client “never wanted to be a role model”.

“She just wants all this not to be in vain,” he said.

# Liverpool stunned by Forest, Haaland hits another two in Man City win

Erling Haaland's double sent Manchester City three points clear at the top of the Premier League in a 2-1 win over Brentford.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LIVERPOOL, SEPT 14

Liverpool's perfect start under Arne Slot came to a stunning end as Nottingham Forest won 1-0 at Anfield on Saturday, while Erling Haaland's double sent Manchester City three points clear at the top of the Premier League in a 2-1 win over Brentford.

Earlier, Manchester United eased the pressure on Erik ten Hag with a comfortable 3-0 win at Southampton.

Forest had not won at Anfield in the top flight for 55 years but the home faithful were stunned when Callum Hudson-Odoi fired in the winner 18 minutes from time.

Haaland's form at the start of the season remains unstoppable.

Liverpool had won all three of their opening games under Slot without conceding, including a 3-0 win away at Manchester United two weeks ago.

But the Reds were sloppy and sluggish after the international break and made to pay.

Luis Diaz hit the post and Diogo Jota wasted a big chance to put Liverpool ahead before half-time.

And they were punished when Hudson-Odoi latched onto Anthony Elanga's pass, cut inside and unleashed an accurate strike low beyond Alisson Becker.

Victory lifts Forest into fourth with eight points from their opening four games.

Haaland denied hat-trick history City took full advantage of Liverpool's defeat to move clear at the top by stretching their 100 percent record to four games despite a disastrous start.

John Stones was recalled by Pep Guardiola for his first club start of the season but the England international's poor clearance teed up Yoane Wissa to open the scoring after just 22 seconds at the Etihad.

However, Haaland's form at the



Manchester City's Erling Haaland kicks the ball during the English Premier League match between Manchester City and Brentford at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, England on Saturday.

start of the season remains unstoppable, even if the Norwegian just missed out on a record third consecutive hat-trick in the Premier League.

The 24-year-old's powerful deflected effort brought City level before he showed a combination of strength and skill to shrug off Ethan Pinnock and dink the ball over the onrushing Mark Flekken.

Only the post denied Haaland another hat-trick after half-time but he now has nine goals in four games this season.

United had been left to fester on their humbling by Liverpool for two weeks over the international break, but bounced back after a slow start at Southampton.

The Red Devils needed a penalty save from Andre Onana to deny Cameron Archer before two goals in five minutes just before half-time swung the game decisively in the visitors' favour.

Matthijs de Ligt nodded in his first United goal before Marcus Rashford ended his six-month drought by finding the bottom corner with a curling effort.

Southampton are yet to register a point in four games since their return to the top flight and inflicted more damage on themselves when captain Jack Stephens saw red for a wild lunge on Alejandro Garnacho.

The Argentine dusted himself off to then round off the scoring with a thumping finish into the roof of the net in stoppage time.

"Once Andre stopped the penalty, straight after, we scored a goal with Matthijs de Ligt, the game was all ours and we dominated the game from that point," said Ten Hag.

Third-placed Brighton remain unbeaten but were unable to break down Ipswich in a 0-0 draw at the Amex.

Crystal Palace came from 2-0 down to salvage a 2-2 draw against Leicester thanks to Jean-Philippe Mateta's double.

West Ham also struck late through Danny Ings to snatch a 1-1 draw at Fulham.

Arsenal face Tottenham in the north London derby in the pick of Sunday's action.

# France bids final farewell to Olympics with Champs-Elysees parade

The final event of an acclaimed summer of sports saw tens of thousands of fans gather on the French capital's most famous avenue.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS, SEPT 14

France bid a final and reluctant farewell to the Paris Olympics on Saturday with a parade on the Champs-Elysees followed by a concert featuring artists from the opening and closing ceremonies.

The final event of an acclaimed summer of sport saw tens of thousands of fans gather on the French capital's most famous avenue where President Emmanuel Macron is set to decorate many of the medal winners with the country's top civilian awards.

Around 4,000 police were called out for a final test, having won almost unanimous praise for the way they kept the Games and their 12 million spectators safe during the Olympics and Paralympics.

Around 70,000 people claimed free tickets for Saturday's event in a matter of hours, with the parade of athletes, volunteers and public sector workers set to be followed by a multi-artist concert on a stage around the Arc de Triomphe.

"Saying thanks, not just to the athletes but to everyone who made these games magic, I think it's fabulous," said France's most-decorated track athlete, Marie-Jose Perec, who lit the cauldron at the start of the Games on July 26.

"It's a beautiful way of saying goodbye because everything must come to

an end and tonight it will all be over," the visibly emotional 200m and 400m gold triple gold medalist told reporters as she arrived.

After months of gloom and self-doubt in the run-up to the start of the Olympics on July 26, Paris and the country at large threw themselves into the spirit of the Games.

They embraced new national sporting heroes such as triple gold medal-winning swimmer Leon Marchand while finding fresh reasons to celebrate veterans such as judoka Teddy Riner who won his fourth Olympic title.

"Thank you, thank you, it's been incredible!" Riner shouted to the cheering crowd.

The French team finished with a record medals haul of 64, including 16 golds, securing fifth place on the international table.

The Paralympic Games from August 28-September 8 were hailed as "the most spectacular ever" by the head of the International Paralympic Committee, Andrew Parsons.

### Escapism

Analysts say the Games served as a form of escapism for many French people as well as generating a rare form of national union and pride.

"Everything worked, everything functioned and French people rediscovered the virtues of national cohesion," the head of the French Olympic Committee, David Lappartient, told

reporters.

France's embattled president is seeking to take advantage of this more positive mood, having faced wide-spread criticism for his decision to call snap parliamentary elections in June which blindsided Olympics organisers.

The vote resulted in a hung parliament and historic gains for the far-right National Rally party.

"We need to respond to this spirit of the Games, of this national harmony that was expressed," Macron told the Parisien newspaper on Friday.

He was the main instigator of Saturday's event, which was not originally part of the Olympic or Paralympic programme.

The centrist leader has also announced his intention to create an Olympics-inspired "national day of sport" every year on September 14.

"We need to spend time together at a day of sport, which would take place in the street, schools, in dedicated sports centres," he told the Parisien.

Saturday night's concert will feature singer Chris, formerly of Christine & the Queens, who performed at the Paralympics opening ceremony, as well as blind Malian duo Amadou & Mariam among others.

Around 300 French athletes and parathletes took part in the parade which featured 7,000-800 people in total, including volunteers and public sector workers such as refuse collectors.



Volunteers of Paris 2024 Olympics and French athletes who participated in the 2024 Olympics and Paralympics take part in a parade in front of the Arc de Triomphe monument on the Champs Elysees on Saturday.

## HOROSCOPE

### ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Don't allow your passions or emotions to rush you today, dearest Aries. Luckily, you can harmonise your intellect, companionships, and personal dreams. Spending time amongst your biggest cheerleaders will bring major healing.

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Don't rush your ideas, dearest Taurus, no matter how motivated and excited you may be. Pulling the trigger prematurely could lead to messes and disorganisation, and you'd be better off strategising first. Set boundaries to protect your vulnerabilities.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Don't let others lure you into a false sense of security, dearest Gemini. Though you'll crave solid foundations to walk upon, issues could arise from people who say only what you want to hear. Your confidence elevates as the afternoon sets in.

### CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Others may try to put you in a tough spot today, dearest Cancer. Remember that your destiny is within your hands, and don't be afraid to stand your ground and ruffle feathers if the alternative is being pushed around.

### LEO (July 23-August 22)

People could seem extra confrontational, dearest Leo, especially when the future seems uncertain. Though you'll have no problem stepping up to drama as it arises, it may be best to conserve your energy for happier times.

### VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Frustrations could emerge if you feel left behind by peers, dearest Virgo. Don't compare your milestones to those around you, trusting in your process toward finding success. Make a few wishes, bracing for impending change.

### LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

The finish line you've been racing toward will feel close and far away, dearest Libra. Hiccups from the past or a fear of upsetting the balance could lead to roadblocks, and it'll be important that you rise above emotion.

### SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Your intuition guides you, though temporarily separating yourself from others may be necessary to get a clear message. Work on healing by releasing stress while nurturing the body. Watch your mood around loved ones.

### SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

You may tire of your typical Sunday outings, Sagittarius. The same old social scenes won't have the power to keep your attention, though gravitating toward creative types can help you carve out new options for fun.

### CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You may feel bored and slightly unmotivated today. As the afternoon sets in, take a proactive approach to changing up your routines and finding personal gratitude. Have fun with your structures, bringing excitement to even the most mundane tasks.

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You'll feel eager to push for your dreams and execute plans you've been sitting on, dearest Aquarius. Your confidence elevates this morning. Inspire others by speaking positively when you interact with others this afternoon.

### PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Don't attempt to force movement, inspiration, or fun today, dearest Pisces. You'll find much comfort while embracing solitude from the privacy of your home. Allow your grief, fears, and anxieties to dissolve, if only temporarily.

## CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
1 Be apparent
5 "Fear the Walking —"
9 Banjo player — Scroggs
13 Load
14 Throb
15 Skid
16 Like the Sahara
17 Object from antiquity
18 Ebb —
19 Attentive
21 Biting bug, colloquially
23 Actor Holm
24 Color
25 Perfumed
29 Where planes park
32 Mammoth
33 Rack and —
35 Just marvy
37 — Arbor
38 Melted together
39 Mine's yield
40 Luau fare
41 Mimic
42 Animal life
44 Up and comer
47 Expert
49 — "Town"
50 Feeling poorly
51 Victory
55 Affaire d'amour
59 Cornet
60 — lazuli
62 "It Was a Very Good —"
63 Eager
64 Woeful cry
65 Madame Bovary
66 Promontory
67 Time long past
68 "... how — your garden grow?"
DOWN
1 Criticize
2 Mata —
3 Norse deity
4 "My Big Fat Greek —"
5 Affair of honor
6 Annex
7 Two final-sale words
8 Crew member
9 High regard
10 Settled on a branch
11 Unrefined
12 Snide look
14 Wrinkled fruit
20 Destiny
22 U.K. locale
25 Hit
26 Religious law
27 Tennessee — Ford
28 Stone fruit
29 Rows
30 Run — of the law
31 Chili con —
34 Employ
36 Necklace piece
38 Good behavior (2 wds.)
42 Movie
43 Calmed
45 Injuries
46 Hobo
48 Newsstand booth
49 Easier said — done
50 Wander
51 Eye part
52 Nimbus
53 Paddy plant
54 "20,000 Leagues" captain
57 Approached
58 Times
61 — excellence

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

Crossword grid with words filled in: HALE, ALUM, FINER, SEGO, RASP, ALARM, TIED, METH, OD, COURSE, ANEW, SHAM, PRESIDE, CARPORT, REMIT, SARI, SOW, ENOS, OTTER, BALE, PAT, PETE, BUGLE, SLEEPER, CLOSEST, DEMOTE, PELTED, OPEN, TABLE, IRMA, EELY, TRIBAL, NOIR, SET, ATOM, GYRE

Large crossword grid with numbers 1-68 indicating starting points for clues.

## SUDOKU

Sudoku grid with numbers 1-9 in some cells, representing yesterday's solution.

Sudoku grid with numbers 1-9 in some cells, representing today's puzzle.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FIVE PICKS

# Affordable suburbs for Nepali students in Sydney

Planning to study in the capital of New South Wales? Here is a list of suburbs suitable for Nepali students to study and live in.



## Strathfield

Strathfield is known for its diverse community, with many international students living there.  
**Distance from City:** 14 km  
**Transport Fee:** Around AUD 4-6 (one-way by train, Opal card)  
**Housing Costs:** AUD 150-250 per week for shared accommodation

### Pros:

Easy train access; short and direct commute to the city area. It has direct trains to Newcastle and Canberra as a stop for the express train. The train arrives in short time intervals.

### Cons:

Sometimes, the place can be too crowded, making it hard to travel on trains and buses during peak hours. With the rapid growth of local populations, getting rental houses and apartments is difficult.

## Parramatta

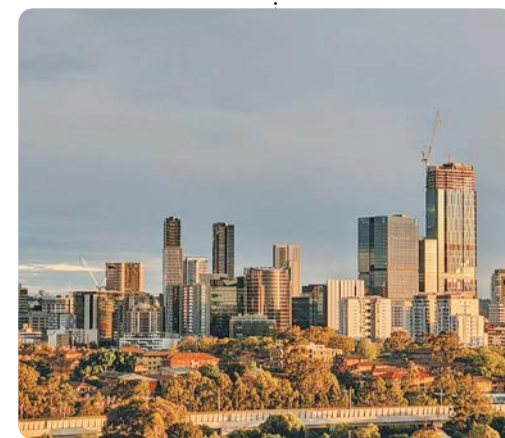
Parramatta is a major hub with good public transport connections, including trains, buses, and ferries.  
**Distance from City:** 23 km  
**Transport Fee:** Around AUD 4-8 (one-way by train, Opal card)  
**Housing Costs:** AUD 180-300 per week for shared accommodation

### Pros:

This place is accessible for Nepali students, with many Nepali grocery shops nearby, helping them meet their daily needs.

### Cons:

Far from the city centre.



## Ashfield

Ashfield is known for its cultural diversity and affordability. It's just a short train ride to the city, making it a convenient location for students.

**Distance from City:** 9 km

**Transport Fee:** Around AUD 3-5 (one-way by train, Opal card)  
**Housing Costs:** AUD 160-260 per week for shared accommodation

### Pros:

The Nepali community is very strong and active in this place. They regularly conduct events at Nepali festivals, which helps the students overcome homesickness.

### Cons:

Many Nepali students might prefer to avoid their community, making this place less than ideal for those looking to form new social circles.



## Burwood

It has good public transport links to the city and universities. The suburb features a range of shopping centres, gyms, and recreational areas, making it an ideal student spot.

**Distance from City:** 12 km

**Transport Fee:** Around AUD 4-6 (one-way by train, Opal card)  
**Housing Costs:** AUD 170-280 per week for shared accommodation

### Pros:

Many Nepali restaurants, grocery shops, consultancies, real estate, and gold shops are available in this area.

### Cons:

Limited nightlife and entertainment options compared to more central suburbs. It might appeal less to those seeking a vibrant social scene.

## Hurstville

Hurstville is a bustling suburb with a large Asian community, offering plenty of affordable housing and food options.

**Distance from City:** 16 km

**Transport Fee:** Around AUD 4-7 (one-way by train, Opal card)  
**Housing Costs:** AUD 150-250 per week for shared accommodation

### Pros:

It is easy to access public schools and hospitals, and the rent is quite cheap compared to other suburbs.

### Cons:

The suburbs can be crowded and noisy, which might be a downside for those seeking quieter living conditions.



## Ramesh Bhushal's 'Chhalbato' launched

The book is about the writer's travels from the Karnali river to the Ganges.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIMAMSHA DHUNGEL

Bhushal with his daughter during the book launch.

### POST REPORT KATHMANDU

Journalist Ramesh Bhushal released his debut book 'Chhalbato; Kailash Dekhi Ganga Samma' on Saturday at Nepal Pragma Pratisthan.

Published by FinePrint, the book details his experiences on his journey from Kathmandu to Kailash Mansarovar, from the source of the Karnali River in Tibet to India's Ganges. It is a sociological observation of the places travelled, covering references from the climate to the forest, from the Dalai Lama to the oppressed communities.

Bhushal in the book launch, shares, "When I set on this forty five days of adventure, I had no intention of coming up with this book."

Hari Sharma, who hosted a conversation with Bhushal at the book launch, explained that the writer has highlighted Tibet's sociological and political scenarios. He further adds, "Although a student of Environmental Science, Bhushal is also a student of society, which is mirrored in this book."

At the end of the event, Bhushal thanked and expressed gratitude to his supporters for his creative endeavours and shared that this book is the result of his love for the earth and the environment.

FICTION PARK

## Collecting fragments of identity

Caught between her Nepali roots and Indian identity, Tamang recalls the day when democracy and violence collided.

### ANUVISHUB SANJAY TAMANG

Those bloods in her memories still stink. What was it about the violence that philosophy, history and literature often find themselves captive to the glory of displacement? She might, too, have found placid glamour in her pages. The radiance dimmed, and memories were exhausted, reclaiming its space against the interminable flow of time visible on its surface. Only after several years, and the patches that still have not worn out under the weight of time and cobwebs, had become memories of a past comprehensive and meaningful whole.

For the world to see, as testaments to the moments of wholeness, there are only the faded marks of guns and memoirs of bygone eras, she wrote.

### Mrs Tamang

She wasn't too sure, though. But then again, on the Sunday of June in the year eighty-six, her identity as a Nepali was shaken and pushed around, molested tyrannically by her Indian self.

She blamed herself for every camouflaged, inhuman figure that crossed into the battlefield on that cursed day, for it was she who had elevated the conductor of this brutal and bloody symphony to power. It had been she who had walked to the nearest polling booth and, blinded by the promises of the future, had pressed the button, which set the stage for the jazz of destruction, like expending energy in turning the key of a music box, that was to play, in the future, a tune unpleasant to her ears. In another sense, the movement of her fingers, from the inside of the right pocket of her wooden green knitted sweater to the surface of the white ballot box, was much like the determined fluttering of a butterfly's wing. This metaphor only came to her after she had spent some time reflecting on the happenings of those ten days in June and the morose October.

In time and space, the slightly blue and predominantly black election ink was much like the patterns on the wings of those false mongers of hope and beauty. They had to be wrong because, in several ways, the fluttering

of those fingers had put into action a butterfly effect that brought a storm released onto herself, a butterfly effect that traversed years and not continents. Hadn't it? Hasn't democracy been sold to us just as butterfly stickers are sold, in hope for Spring, and doesn't the election ink remind one of one's democratic right over nature, a nature which unfolds in front of her, awaiting her capture? At least the believers had said so, she wrote.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and all the earth, and all the creatures that move on the earth."

### (Un)exist

She wanted to see it; holding on to the bamboo scaffolding, struggling to collect fragments of her own identity in the faith of violence and concrete, she glanced over the cold carcass of a young man.

The first thing she noticed, on

seeing it, was the familiar face dressed in the radiance of blood under the Autumn sky, which was temporary relevance, like those dying of slow and painful death, stretched over years and nights of humiliating sickness; she wished for liberty, all at once, regardless of if it came with a more severe and more harrowing ache if it promised to be short-lived. She hoped for the complex to cease to (un)exist, to vanish entirely because there was, now, an unevenly halved tapestry ripped through the middle, one she never wrote a history on without any trace of Darjeeling or her butterflies.

### She first noticed the familiar face dressed in the radiance of blood under the Autumn sky.

If the state could unleash violence upon the band once, what was stopping them from doing it again? If the liberty of the Indian dream can be pierced into once, what safeguards its sanctity from then on? There were several ques-

tions she had to ask yet.

When families fall apart, to convince oneself of the happy times and that they were indeed natural, one visits the family home, which is at once a graveyard of pleasant memories and an ever-blossoming garden of prejudices, hatred, and a nostalgic repulsion. The same family home also brings to one's mind, and in a way asserts it, the fact that it doesn't exist as it did in the past anymore. The place at once embodies all three tenses, regardless of the one the individual chooses to inhabit: the untainted past, the smeared moment of destruction and the perpetually scarred time to come.

The subjects of all tragedies have the choice to hold on to the past post-conflict as her mother had after the colonial assault and complex migration of brutality, constantly paranoid of losing the one saree she had managed to salvage from before the colonial and imperial displacement. But an altogether realisation of the past, the decimation, and the insignificant future is essential for those who have been hurt to keep themselves from becoming distended among the slick layers of time and their endlessness.

### The World Somewhere

She would remind herself of the time before it and the absolute tyranny of the midnight of June in eighty-six. She wouldn't let the patches fade away into a whole, and she couldn't because, to her, the only way of shedding her guilt and grief was to write about the horrors of it. As if by revisiting the cathedral of pain and squalor scripting in papers, she would bequeath some authority to the work of her future, all of which would always touch the reader with a jaundiced caress, the unwelcome nature of that one Summer and the aversion of October, the same year. And that is when she broke her resolve but had doubts.

Mrs Tamang is 82 years old.



Tamang is a Kathmandu-based writer.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANUVISHUB SANJAY TAMANG