

Victims of usurious lending demand action, not assurances

They seek cancellation of fraudulent loan papers, return of seized property, tough laws, special tribunal.

SHIVA PURI
BARA, JULY 14

When Home Minister Sudan Gurung walked into a hall at the Nijgadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Tuesday, 32-year-old Shyam Kumari Thakur could not hold back her tears.

The resident of ward 2 of Dhanushadham Municipality had travelled with hundreds of other victims of usurious lending, locally known as *meter byaj*, to seek justice from a state they say has repeatedly failed them.

“My husband was killed, we lost our land and we could no longer stay in our village,” she told the minister, sobbing. “We repaid the loan, but they still murdered my husband. Where are my daughters and I supposed to go now?”

Her husband, Bhojendra Thakur, had borrowed Rs350,000 from a local moneylender in 2011 to expand his small furniture business.

As security, he transferred the ownership of two kattha (677.26 sq metres) of land to the lender under a verbal understanding that it would be returned after the debt was cleared.

Shyam Kumari said her husband repaid Rs900,000 by 2015 after selling another parcel of land, but the lender never returned the property, claiming the debt remained unpaid.

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RSP lawmakers turn critical as Shah government completes 100 days

Ruling party MPs raise concerns over ministers' conduct and question whether the government is living up to its promise of good governance.



RSP whip Prakash Chandra Pariyar speaks in the House of Representatives on Tuesday.

JAYA SINGH MAHARA
KATHMANDU, JULY 14

Rastriya Swatantra Party lawmakers have begun openly criticising the Balendra Shah-led government as it completes its first 100 days in office, raising questions over ministerial conduct, policy decisions and the administration's commitment to good governance.

During a recent House of Representatives meeting, RSP lawmaker Jagadish Kharel warned that the government could not rely solely on the prime minister's popularity and that the dignity and role of lawmakers also needed to be respected.

“Is our role as MPs limited to sitting here and thumping desks? We will not be satisfied with that, and neither will the people,” Kharel said in Parliament.

Through parliamentary debates, social media posts and committee discussions, party members have raised concerns over government decisions, singled out ministers and accused some of failing to uphold the principles of accountability and good governance.

RSP lawmaker Karishma Kathariya demanded that the government apologise to farmers for failing to ensure timely supplies.

“Why does the government's heart not ache when it hears farmers saying

they need fertilisers even before paracetamol when they are suffering from a high fever?” Kathariya questioned. She accused the government of misleading the public by claiming that sufficient stocks were available.

“The government says warehouses are full, but farmers ask why [chemical] fertiliser has not reached their fields. Is the government trading on the tears of farmers?” she said. “The government must immediately apologise to those who feed the country, make the facts public, and announce alternatives and relief measures.”

RSP lawmakers also directly criticised Agriculture Minister Gita Chaudhary in Parliament, accusing her ministry of failing to address farmers' concerns.

“Paddy cultivation is at its peak in Kapilvastu. Farmers in a district with the country's largest agricultural area—84,000 hectares—are once again struggling because of shortages of fertiliser and seeds,” said RSP lawmaker Mohan Lal Acharya. “The agriculture minister was informed about the problem at the very start, but there has been no visible improvement.”

Acharya said officials at the federal, provincial and local levels were blaming one another over fertiliser quota allocations, while lawmaker Buddhi Narayan Shrestha said the federal government had failed to ensure timely supply.

RSP lawmakers have also raised concerns over what they described as unlawful activities allegedly carried out with the backing of state agencies.

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Court hands prison terms to 16 convicts in fake refugee scam

Former deputy PM Rayamajhi receives a four-year jail while former home minister Khand gets two years behind bars.



MATRIKA DAHAL & DURGA DULAL
KATHMANDU, JULY 14

The Kathmandu District Court on Tuesday sentenced former deputy prime minister and CPN-UML leader Top Bahadur Rayamajhi to four years in prison for his role in the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, in which Nepali citizens were passed off as Bhutanese refugees in a scheme to send them to the United States.

Former home minister Bal Krishna Khand was sentenced to two years in prison. Rayamajhi was also fined Rs40,000, while Khand was fined Rs20,000.

A single bench of judge Tej Bahadur Khadka at the Kathmandu District Court on Tuesday determined the sentences for the 16 individuals who were convicted in the case. According to the court's information officer, Shiva Khatiwada, Rayamajhi was convicted

of fraud, organised crime and offences against the state, while Khand was convicted as an accomplice in those offences. Former home secretary Tek Narayan Pandey was also sentenced to four years in prison and fined Rs40,000.

Bhutanese refugee leader Tek Nath Rizal was sentenced to two years in prison and fined Rs20,000.

Keshav Dulal, Sanu Bhandari and Sagar Rai, identified as the principal architects of the racket, were each sentenced to four years in prison and fined Rs40,000 each. Rizal, Dulal and Bhandari were convicted of forgery, fraud, organised crime and integrated offences, while the others were convicted of all charges except forgery.

The court also sentenced Sandesh Sharma and Indrajit Rai, security adviser to then home minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, to four years in prison and fined each Rs40,000.

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21 Pulchowk engineering college graduates join Airbus

Nepal's first aerospace engineering programme has placed 44 graduates at the global aircraft manufacturer over the past three years.

SURAJ KUNWAR
KATHMANDU, JULY 14

Twenty-one graduates from the Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering (IOE), Pulchowk Campus have been selected by Airbus, one of the world's leading aircraft manufacturers, and have begun their international careers at the company's Bangaluru centre in India.

According to Sudip Bhattarai, associate professor and head of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, the graduates are currently undergoing orientation and initial training in Bangaluru. Airbus uses the Indian city as its entry point for newly recruited engineers from across Asia, so Nepali graduates also begin their careers there before being assigned to projects elsewhere.

“This year, 21 students have been selected. They have already



Students selected for Airbus jobs pose for photo at the Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk.

arrived in Bangalore and started work,” Bhattarai told Kantipur. “Graduates from our programme have been joining Airbus regularly in recent years.”

Bhattarai said Pulchowk Campus launched Nepal's first Bachelor of Aerospace Engineering programme in 2018. Although the Covid pandemic delayed the graduation of the

inaugural batch, the first group completed their studies in 2023. Since then, Airbus has recruited graduates from the programme every year.

Six graduates from the first batch joined Airbus in 2024, followed by another 17 in 2025. With 21 students selected this year, about 44 Nepali graduates have joined the company over the past three years.

According to Bhattarai, Airbus initially coordinated directly with the department to recruit students, but the hiring process has since become more structured and institutionalised.

Selected graduates first undergo training in Bangaluru, with Airbus covering their travel, accommodation and initial onboarding expenses. They are then assigned to projects and locations in different countries based on the company's operational requirements.

The department says interest in aerospace engineering has grown

steadily since the programme was introduced. The programme admits 48 students each year, including 12 on full scholarships and 36 fee-paying students. Around 250 students are currently enrolled in the programme.

Because the Covid pandemic disrupted the academic calendar, two batches had to be run in the same year, resulting in five batches studying simultaneously.

Despite the programme's growing international profile, Bhattarai said the department continues to face a shortage of qualified faculty.

Although the department has four permanent teaching positions, only one is currently filled. The remaining courses are taught by contract faculty and part-time instructors from Nepal Airlines Corporation, Buddha Air, Himalaya Airlines, and the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, including both serving and retired professionals.

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Ruling party lawmakers openly criticise their government

>> Continued from page 1

On Monday, vehicles were deliberately parked to obstruct the entrances of the Kantipur Media Group, Onlinekhabar and Himalayan Television offices in Kathmandu. Raising the issue in Tuesday’s House of Representatives meeting, RSP whip Prakash Chandra Pariyar questioned the government over the incident.

He said the Nepali press, which continued to function even when King Gyanendra Shah imposed direct rule and deployed armed soldiers inside newsrooms, would not be intimidated by vehicles being parked outside media houses.

“Just because we are in power does not mean we should allow any form of intimidation or anarchy against the press because someone’s personal interests have been affected,” Pariyar said, urging fellow lawmakers to speak out. While other RSP members remained silent on the issue, the whip chose to confront it publicly.

While many RSP lawmakers have frequently criticised previous governments, arguing that 35 years of mis-governance cannot be reversed by a government that has been in office for only 100 days, Sushant Vaidik argued that the current administration cannot avoid accountability by pointing to past failures.

The lawmaker also challenged the tendency among some RSP leaders to describe incidents such as the self-immolations of individuals like Ganesh Nepali as merely “mental health issues”, arguing that such tragedies require deeper examination



Prime Minister Balendra Shah and RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane walk into Parliament, Tuesday.

by the state.

“We cannot dismiss these incidents as personal failures, nor can we reach the truth by simply blaming government offices or bureaucratic decisions. The state is not an inanimate structure; it is a living entity,” Vaidik said.

“When citizens approach the state and feel ignored, when they face humiliation instead of respect while seeking public services, and when they see opportunities slipping away, it is not just an individual’s suffering—it reflects deeper structural prob-

lems within the nation.”

Vaidik said politics could not continue by repeatedly blaming the past.

“The future cannot be secured by blaming history. We have all failed in this. The state has failed. Past shortcomings cannot become an excuse for our government. Today’s responsibility belongs to today,” he said. “A healthy nation does not hide its wounds; it identifies them, treats them and emerges stronger.”

Home Minister Sudan Gurung also came under sharp criticism from RSP lawmakers over the state of border

security, with MPs alleging that ordinary citizens face harassment and heavy taxation for carrying small quantities of personal goods while large-scale smugglers operate freely.

Lawmakers also accused the minister’s private secretariat of becoming inaccessible to the public.

“When citizens try to contact the Ministry of Home Affairs—which is responsible for public security—to register their grievances, the home minister’s personal secretary often does not respond nor answer calls. We have been receiving repeated complaints about this,” RSP lawmaker Afsana Banu said. She accused the minister’s private secretariat of showing “gross irresponsibility” in addressing citizens’ concerns.

Speaking about the home ministry’s responsibilities, RSP lawmaker Ramesh Prasai demanded that the Speaker direct Minister Gurung to appear before Parliament and respond to questions over the government’s alleged failure to improve road safety following a series of fatal accidents.

“A tragic accident recently took place on the Karnali Highway. Did the government mobilise all available resources for rescue operations? Is it true, as the opposition has claimed, that people were left stranded on cliffs crying for help and that rescue efforts were delayed due to negligence?” Prasai asked. He also demanded the government’s long-term plans to prevent similar disasters on the Karnali Highway. “The home minister must come to this rostrum and answer these questions,” Prasai said.

RSP lawmaker Buddhi Prasad Panta expressed frustration that concerns raised by lawmakers in Parliament were not reaching the government.

“As representatives of the people, we do not feel that the issues we raise in this chamber are moving beyond these four walls to reach the government’s ears,” Panta said.

He also criticised what he described as unequal enforcement at border points, where authorities allegedly ignore major smugglers while penalising ordinary citizens carrying small quantities of goods.

“Recently, a video went viral on social media showing locals confronting the home minister, saying that the police administration was ignoring large-scale smuggling of goods and narcotics through major checkpoints while confiscating small quantities of goods worth one or two thousand rupees from ordinary people,” Panta said. “The silence of the home minister and the ministry on this issue is being closely watched by the public.”

RSP lawmaker Kharel used special time in the House on July 6 to raise allegations of corruption at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure, led by Sunil Lamsal.

“A young woman from Dolakha told me she lost her job simply because she did not have personal connections at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure. I investigated the matter and met the secretary. The response a public representative receives from the secretary is: ‘Go to the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of

Authority, go to court.’ A secretary does not need to teach me how to approach the CIAA or the courts,” Kharel said.

“If the wife of a joint secretary gets a job because of nepotism while another citizen loses an opportunity because she lacks connections, where is good governance? When will we actually establish good governance?” he questioned.

RSP lawmaker Kamal Subedi urged the government to address widespread fraud faced by Nepali migrant workers in recruitment fees, wages and insurance-related matters.

“To resolve problems related to foreign employment, the Ministry of Labour must establish a special task force so that we do not have to continue raising these basic issues in Parliament,” Subedi said.

Meanwhile, RSP lawmaker Som Sharma criticised the government’s proposal to increase traffic fines, saying the move failed to consider the country’s economic realities.

“We strongly support traffic discipline and road safety, but considering the current economic situation and the income levels of ordinary citizens, the proposed fines are highly impractical,” Sharma said on July 8.

“Penalties should be a tool for reform, not a financial burden. Increasing fines without considering ground realities will only hurt people’s livelihoods. I hope the government will seriously reconsider the proposal by taking into account citizens’ capacity and practical circumstances before implementing it.”

Rs26.39 million returned to 1,754 cooperatives victims in two months

Depositors from 10 of the 23 cooperatives declared crisis-ridden by the government have received partial refunds.

○ PRAKRITI DAHAL
KATHMANDU, JULY 14

More than 1,700 depositors of troubled cooperative institutions have received around Rs26 million in refunds over the past two months, according to data from the Problematic Cooperative Management Committee.

The committee, which has been overseeing the assets, liabilities and loan recovery of crisis-hit cooperatives, said 1,754 depositors from 10 of the 23 cooperatives declared problematic by the federal government received Rs26.39 million by June 29.

The government established a revolving fund after amending the Cooperatives Act through an ordinance to facilitate refunds to depositors. The fund consists of government seed money, which will be reimbursed later, and money recovered from loans issued by troubled cooperatives. “We are using the available funds to gradually refund depositors,” said Dilli Raj Acharya, chairperson of the committee.

The committee also completed savings adjustments worth Rs17.95 million for 141 depositors by June 29. Savings adjustment refers to offsetting a depositor’s savings against outstanding loans owed to the same cooperative.

During the same period, the committee recovered Rs43.28 million from 154 borrowers. Including refunds and savings adjustments, the committee managed Rs44.34 million, which benefitted 1,895 people.

However, cooperative victims have criticised the refund mechanism, arguing that the process lacks fairness and transparency.

Although the committee says it has prioritised small depositors with savings of up to Rs10,000, Kushal KC, chairperson of the National Campaign for Safeguarding Cooperative Depositors, said many victims remain dissatisfied.

“Victims are not satisfied with the current process. The distribution system is not equitable. Some people have received all their money back, while others haven’t received anything,” KC said. “Whatever funds are available should be distributed proportionally so that every depositor receives at least a partial refund.”

He also questioned the lack of clear criteria for payments and warned that regulatory bodies would have to take responsibility if funds become insufficient in the future. According to the committee’s data, depositors of Shiva Shikhar Multi-Purpose

Cooperative received the largest share of refunds, with 869 people receiving Rs3.26 million.

Similarly, 215 depositors of Kantipur Savings and Credit Cooperative received Rs989,716, while 158 depositors of Tulasi Multipurpose Cooperative received Rs2.05 million.

Other refunds included Rs1.16 million to 349 depositors of Laligurans Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Rs513,000 to 88 depositors of Agricultural Development Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Rs140,000 to 26 depositors of Gorkha Saving and Credit Cooperative and Rs142,000 to 23 depositors of Oriental Cooperative.

The committee also provided smaller refunds to depositors of Hamro Sagarmatha Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Pashupati Saving and Credit Cooperative and Nagarik Kalyan Multi-Purpose Cooperative.

On the recovery side, the committee collected Rs34 million from 77 borrowers between mid-April and mid-May, Rs12.77 million from 53 borrowers between mid-May and mid-June, and Rs2.33 million from 24 borrowers between mid-June and June 29. The revolving fund was created in April with an initial capital of Rs600 million. Of this, Rs250 million came from the government, while Rs350 million was mobilised through cooperative savings and loan recoveries. Money recovered from borrowers is continuously added back to the fund to support further refunds.

The federal government has so far declared 23 cooperatives crisis-ridden. The liabilities of three institutions with relatively smaller obligations have already been settled. Of the remaining 20 cooperatives, partial refunds have been distributed to depositors of 10.

The scale of the crisis remains significant. According to the committee, around Rs46 billion needs to be returned to nearly 76,000 depositors affected by the troubled cooperatives.

Among them, 17,000 depositors have claims below Rs25,000, while another 9,000 have deposits ranging between Rs25,000 and Rs50,000. A total of 36,522 depositors have claims of up to Rs100,000, while 21,619 depositors are owed between Rs100,000 and Rs500,000.

The number of depositors with claims exceeding Rs500,000 stands at 18,303. The committee said most affected savers are small depositors, with only a minority holding larger amounts.

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WORLD

Ticking time bomb?
Europe’s ageing
population brings
challenges

● **ADRIEN DE CALAN**/AFP
BRUSSELS, JULY 14

The population of the 27-nation European Union will peak in 2029 before falling in the coming decades, according to a report published Tuesday that spotlights the major challenges the bloc faces from an ageing population.

Today there are 450.6 million people, but researchers say this will peak at 453.3 million in 2029 before a slow long-term decline. The population will fall to 398.8 million people by 2100, an overall drop of 11.7 percent and a level that was last experienced in the 1970s. Europeans are living longer than ever before thanks to vastly improved healthcare, and better life and social conditions.

But an ageing population poses challenges for society and the EU economy, and while migration could help, it's not the fix Europe might hope for. The EU executive's Joint Research Centre said life expectancy at birth reached 81.5 years in 2024.

By 2050, nearly one in three EU residents will be aged 65 or older, compared to one in five today, the centre said. By 2100, life expectancy could exceed 90 years for women and 86 for men. Such trends present “significant challenges”, the EU said, including labour shortages, strained public budgets, and pressure on care and education systems.

It is, however, not all negative as the report points to the rise of the “silver economy”—a growing market for goods and services for older citizens.

Migration can help offset some effects of Europe's demographic change, the researchers said, but it would have a limited impact on “fully” addressing the challenges posed by an ageing population.

But as fertility rates fall, migration counterbalances the negative effects of an ageing population and labour force contraction, the report said.

“Migration is a necessity,” EU commissioner Dubravka Suica told reporters. Fewer babies are being born to each woman in Europe, a decline that has been steady since the 1960s.

The fertility rate fell to 1.34 children per woman in 2024, well below the replacement level of 2.1 needed to keep the population stable without migration.

The median age of a European was 44.9 in 2025, and there are major disparities between EU countries. Ireland is relatively young with a median age of 39.6 years while Italy's was 49.1.

“We are living longer, healthier lives than ever before—one of our greatest achievements. But demographic change is reshaping our societies, our economies and our labour markets,” Suica said in a statement.

“We must act now to turn this transformation into an opportunity,” she added. The EU insists the bloc must boost productivity and cut unemployment to offset the effects of a shrinking workforce.

Currently around 20 percent of working-age Europeans are outside the labour force, the report said, while some eight million young people are neither in employment, education nor training.

US strikes Iran, vows to
reimpose naval blockade

● **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
TEHRAN, JULY 14

The United States launched a fresh wave of strikes on Iran on Tuesday after President Donald Trump vowed to reimpose a naval blockade, prompting Tehran to respond with strikes on targets in countries around the region.

Trump said a negotiated deal was still possible, but fighting surged to a scale unseen since an April ceasefire. Iran hit two ships in the Strait of Hormuz, killing a crew member, according to the United Arab Emirates. A Norwegian tanker was also hit by an explosion caused by an unidentified device off the Omani coast early Tuesday, the crisis response company MTI Network said.

The US military said it had hit targets across Iran including in the port cities of Bushehr and Bandar Abbas to “degrade Iran's ability to attack commercial shipping”.

Local authorities said the US struck “four points” in Bushehr—which hosts Iran's only civilian nuclear power plant—as well as an Iranian border area near Iraq and Kuwait.

Since last week, renewed US attacks have killed at least 28 people in Iran, according to an AFP tally based on Iranian media and official announcements. After the strikes, Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced they had in turn fired missiles and

drones on Bahrain, targeting a residential building for US forces and other facilities.

Bahrain said it had intercepted “several treacherous aerial attacks launched by Iran” and accused Tehran of targeting civilians, after explosions and sirens were heard in Manama.

Trump's declaration on the Hormuz blockade and the scale of the renewed fighting have called into question efforts to bring a permanent end to the war. Iran started blocking the strait after US-Israel attacks in February, which prompted Washington's blockade on Tehran's ports—but restrictions eased after the sides agreed a preliminary deal in June.

‘Act of war’
Monday was the quietest day for crossings of Hormuz by commodity vessels since June 13, before the preliminary deal briefly boosted traffic through the strait.

Maritime tracker Kpler said only seven commodity vessels used the waterway—though the data did not include any vessels using the non-Iran approved route hugging the Omani coast. Trump said on Monday that the United States was “taking over” the strait and would slap a levy of 20 percent on all cargo shipped through it, drawing mockery from Iran and prompting Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to

warn Washington against adopting a policy of “piracy”.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) said Iran's ports on the waterway would be blockaded from 2000 GMT on Tuesday. Oil prices shot up more than five percent on Tuesday after the fresh US strikes, having already surged the day before. Tehran launched attacks on other US allies in the region, including Jordan, which said it had shot down four missiles from Iran.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their strikes targeted US forces at an air base and urged Jordanians to issue a “serious demand for the removal of the occupying American bases from the region”.

Iran insists it only targets US interests in the Gulf, but its military command spokesman said any collaboration by Gulf countries with the United States would be considered “an act of war”.

Trump formally notified Congress last week that the US had resumed military conflict against Iran, the White House confirmed to AFP, giving the Pentagon an additional 60 days to operate in the region without congressional approval.

Trump also threatened to destroy Pickaxe Mountain, a deeply buried nuclear site near Natanz where Western intelligence suspects Iran is building an undeclared enrichment facility.

France flaunts firepower, unity
with allies in huge parade

● **MATHIEU RABECHAUT**/AFP
PARIS, JULY 14

France on Tuesday showcased military power and unity with European allies in its largest-ever national day parade, as European rearmament gathers pace in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The final July 14 parade presided over by President Emmanuel Macron, the event brought together thousands of French troops, hundreds of European ones and two dozen foreign

heads of state and government, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The parade, which marks the storming of the Bastille fortress in the French revolution and is by far the largest such event in any western European nation, was held a day after Macron hosted a new summit of Ukraine's allies, four-and-a-half years into the full-scale Russian invasion.

Other European leaders attending the parade included German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and, on

one of his last foreign engagements, British Premier Keir Starmer, who has spearheaded with Macron European efforts to support Ukraine.

With nearly 6,700 troops, 98 aircraft, 31 helicopters and 315 vehicles, a record number of military personnel were marching the traditional route between the Arc de Triomphe and the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

‘At the cost of blood’

“What is marching past is a Europe united and determined to support Ukraine in the face of Russia—a Europe confident in itself,” deputy defence minister Alice Rufo told RTL radio. Tens of thousands of members of the public braved a scorching heatwave to attend the celebrations, having obtained special QR codes to allow them to cross the security perimeter.

Around 500 soldiers from the so-called Coalition of the Willing of mainly European nations supporting Ukraine against Russia were marching. Symbolically, 25 Ukrainian soldiers followed the troops of coalition members. Macron, who has pressed for a strategically autonomous Europe less dependent on the United States, on Monday said Europe would fight for freedom, even if it required its own troops shedding blood.

“Yes, we cherish freedom and the rule of law. And yes, we stand ready to fight to defend them. Always, and at the cost of blood if necessary.”



Troops march during the annual Bastille Day military parade as a national flag flutters under the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs-Élysées Avenue in Paris on Tuesday.

Ukraine downs 5 Russian
ballistic missiles as Kyiv
looks to boost its air defences



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife Olena Zelenska leave after the Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées avenue, in Paris, on Tuesday.

● **ILLIA NOVIKOV**/AP
KYIV, UKRAINE, JULY 14

Ukraine's air force said on Tuesday it intercepted five ballistic missiles launched by Russia in a raft of overnight attacks, although other missiles and drones got through and hit warehouses and a school in the capital of Kyiv.

It was the first time in almost two weeks that Ukraine said it had downed Russian ballistic missiles, which are harder to stop than drones or cruise missiles and have pumelled the country in Moscow's 4-year-old full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian air defences likely used the US-made Patriot surface-to-air guided missile system that is the most effective way of countering ballistic missiles, but ammunition for it has been in short supply amid the Iran war despite European efforts to make up for the shortfall.

Paris cheers Ukraine along the Champs-Élysées

Along the cobblestoned Champs-Élysées in Paris, crowds cheered Ukrainian troops marching in the annual Bastille Day parade, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy received an ovation from European leaders who showed solidarity with Kyiv. Ukrainian aviators trained in France flew aboard two Mirage 2000B fighter jets alongside French air force pilots. Zelenskyy was in France seeking a remedy to his country's air defence problem, and he announced Monday that Ukraine is joining with nine other nations to form a coalition that will build a shared ballistic missile shield for Europe. Ukraine and its partners could jointly develop a mass-produced, low-cost system in the next 12 months, he said.

The Bastille Day parade featured about 500 troops from the coalition of the willing group of countries that have pledged to help with Ukraine's postwar security. French President Emmanuel Macron called it a great honour to welcome them to the parade.

Tuesday's attack in Kyiv caused fires at two warehouses and also damaged a school, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement it targeted military

manufacturing facilities that produce long-range missiles and drones.

Moscow is seeking to choke off Ukrainian strikes on oil facilities deep inside Russia that have caused critical fuel shortages, frustrating the public and, Western analysts say, are hindering the Russian army's advance on the front line. Ukraine's air force said one ballistic missile and 25 drones struck 17 locations, while falling debris was reported in 10 locations.

Ukraine seeks to bolster air defences ahead of winter

Ukraine urgently needs to improve its air defence shield before winter. Much of the country is at the mercy of Russian missiles that have hammered its power grid since 2022, making winters almost unbearable.

President Donald Trump said at the NATO summit last week that the U.S. will give Ukraine a license to make Patriot systems itself. However, they are expensive, in high demand and take a long time to produce, so it will likely be years before any Ukrainian-made systems are ready to deploy.

Ukraine strikes more Russian oil facilities

Ukraine, meanwhile, kept up its long-range onslaught on Russian targets, especially oil facilities.

An attack in southern Russia's Krasnodar region caused a fire at the Afipsky Oil Refinery that was later put out, authorities there said.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine also hit an oil refinery in the city of Salavat in the Bashkortostan region, some 1,400 kilometres from the Ukrainian border. Bashkortostan Governor Radyi Khabirov confirmed an attack on an industrial area in Salavat, but didn't say what was hit.

In addition, the Ukrainian navy struck four Russian tankers operating as part of Moscow's so-called shadow fleet of aging tankers of uncertain ownership and safety practices that are dodging international oil sanctions and a patrol boat, Zelenskyy said. Ukraine claimed Monday it struck 105 Russian vessels in the Sea of Azov next to the Crimean Peninsula between July 6-13.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its air defences overnight intercepted 288 Ukrainian drones.

Subpoenas issued to NY Times reporters seen as
‘unprecedented’ threat to press freedom

● **JOCELYN NOVECK**/AP
JULY 14

Dangerous. Brazen. Unprecedented. Uncharted territory.

Reaction in the media world has been swift and severe to the issue of subpoenas to five New York Times journalists who reported on security questions involving the new Qatari-gifted Air Force One—a legal manoeuvre seen as a troubling escalation of the Trump administration's campaign to control and intimidate independent media outlets.

“The subpoenas are an extraordinary escalation in President Trump's efforts to threaten and intimidate independent news organisations and have a chilling effect on the work of journalists across the country,” said Jodie Ginsberg, CEO of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Media advocates and analysts expressed dismay at the tactic, even after months in which news organisations drawing President Donald Trump's ire have been attacked both in courtrooms and in the court of public opinion; media access to corridors of power has been blocked; and a Washington journalist's home has been searched by federal agents.

“They have used the levers of power to intimidate and demonize professional journalists who report stories that are unfavorable to the administration's desired narrative,” said Frank Sesno, a former CNN White House bureau chief who is now a media and public affairs professor at George Washington University.

He called Friday's subpoenas “dangerous and uncharted territory,

but merely an extension of what we have seen from this administration and president.”

“Don't like a poll? Sue the Des Moines Register,” he said. “Don't like the way an interview is edited? Sue ‘60 Minutes.’ Don't like the coverage of the gifted Air Force One? Order the FBI to investigate and subpoena the journalists for what is, by the way, a story that is in the public interest.”

Some of the subpoenas were delivered to reporters at home

Some of the subpoenas were delivered to reporters at their homes, the Times said. Sought by Jay Clayton, the US attorney in Manhattan, they seek to force the reporters to testify before a federal grand jury in Manhattan this week.

The new jet in question, a present from Qatar that Trump's administration spent \$400 million to retrofit and upgrade, entered service last week. But the Republican president used an older model Air Force One jet to leave a NATO summit in Turkey.

The Times, citing anonymous sources, reported that the switch had come at the urging of the Secret Service and that the newer plane lacked some of the advanced security features of the older aircraft, including antimissile capabilities. On social media, Trump denied security concerns.

The subpoenas were issued after FBI Director Kash Patel and other Justice Department officials met at the White House on Friday to talk about the matter, according to a person familiar with the discussions who was not authorized to discuss the

issue publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The Times said the meeting lasted around eight hours.

The fact that the operation was conducted from the White House itself was particularly egregious to analysts like Sesno, who called the coordination “unprecedented.”

“This graphically illustrates the pressure and influence the White House and president have brought to bear on law enforcement that is supposed to be independent and driven by facts, not politics,” he said.

The Department of Justice has justified the subpoenas by saying that “to be clear, reporters are not the targets, those leaking classified information are.” “We value and appreciate the important role that the press plays in

this country,” the department said in a weekend statement. “But DOJ also plays an important role to make sure that the people entrusted with our nation's secrets do what they're supposed to do with that information, which means not sharing classified information.”

The National Press Club called on the Justice Department to immediately withdraw the subpoenas.

“Every American should understand what is at stake,” Mark Schoeff Jr, the club's president, said in a statement. “When federal agents arrive at the homes of journalists with subpoenas, it is not ordinary law enforcement. It is an extraordinary assault on the freedom of the press that strikes at the heart of the First Amendment.”



Staff lay a carpet on the tarmac before President Donald Trump exits Air Force One upon arriving for the NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, on July 7.

New York to impose
US’s first statewide
moratorium on
data centres

● **ASSOCIATED PRESS**
NEW YORK, JULY 14

New York will block the construction of any new large data centres for up to a year so the state can create rules to protect the environment and energy grid from the power-hungry facilities that fuel artificial intelligence technology.

Governor Kathy Hochul is set to sign an executive order on Tuesday morning imposing the country's first statewide moratorium on hyperscale data centres, which house thousands of computer servers and require massive amounts of energy and a steady supply of water to keep cool.

“As data centre development threatens to hike up utility bills, deplete our natural resources, and create uncertainty for New Yorkers, it's my responsibility to take action and lead,” Hochul, a Democrat, said in a statement.

The order will pause state permitting for new large data centres and direct state regulators to create standards that address environmental impacts, energy demand, water usage and other factors, the governor's office said.

Tech companies and other backers have argued moves to block the construction of data centres hurt job growth for local communities and cede ground to China in a race to lead in the rapidly growing AI industry.

Earlier this year, Maine seemed poised to establish a similar moratorium.

What injured athletes can teach us about recovery and resilience

CHEYANNE MUMPHREY/AP
FLAGSTAFF, JULY 14

Serious injuries and medical conditions disrupt people's daily routines and can impact their confidence and sense of identity. Elite athletes know the challenges from an injury that sidelines them from their sport, requires physical rehabilitation and leaves their ability to return to competition in doubt.

The process that top athletes go through to heal physically, mentally and emotionally highlights what a recovery might demand of athletes at all levels, as well as people experiencing chronic pain, recuperating from surgery or facing other setbacks. Because progress is rarely linear, patience and the ability to reset expectations can be as valuable as perseverance, consistency and motivation, according to experts.

"Sport has always mimicked life," said Ross Flowers, a sports and performance psychologist in Los Angeles. "You're going to face challenges, bumps and bruises. You got to figure out how to work through them and overcome them."

Fans are accustomed to watching athletes compete at the Olympics, World Cups and other sporting events with broken bones, torn ligaments and dislocated joints. Comeback stories like Alpine skier Lindsey Vonn's, after multiple injuries and another serious injury this year at the Winter Olympics, are an enduring element of sports.

While discomfort is expected during intense training and pushing through pain becomes more critical during competition, even seasoned competitors need to know when to listen to their bodies, experts say.

"There's a relationship with pain and understanding how to work with it, if it's possible to work through it, but also knowing how to back off of it so the pain does not persist," Flowers said, adding that training to the point of physical fatigue or in conditions that build endurance is the sweet spot for improvement.

Liv Paxton, 28, learned this lesson firsthand after dealing with shin splints, quadricep strains and a partially torn Achilles tendon. As a runner at Winthrop University and the College of William & Mary, she pushed herself until her body forced her to stop. Since recovering from Achilles surgery, she said she has a better understanding of when to slow down. "I'm so much better about keeping in tune with my body," Paxton said, explaining that she prioritises eating and sleeping well. "That's not something that I focused on in college. I just thought I was bulletproof."

Injuries can happen suddenly or develop from a nagging but manageable nuisance into a debilitating condition over time.



Aashish Rai, a Nepali footballer who was injured during a match at Dasharath Stadium in February last year, pictured months after a surgery in his left leg in July last year.

tion over time. Whether it's a footballer sidelined after a collision or a worker who can't stand after months of chronic back pain, the outcome is similar: a forced pause and learning to heal once pushing through pain no longer works.

"So how do we know our limits? It is definitely an experimental process," said Lisa Miller, a health and sports sciences professor who teaches at the online American Public University System from her home in Columbus, Ohio. "We have plenty of athletes who still don't know. But we have also had more examples of athletes saying this is too much, I'm burned out, and I'm going to take a break, bringing much more attention to the psychological side of sport."

Honestly assessing whether an injury is affecting daily life and long-term well-being is part of recognising one's physical limits. Miller said she has seen athletes of all levels return to competition thinking they are ready to excel, but not all can or do.

Tennis great Serena Williams made the difficult decision to withdraw from a doubles match this month because of a knee injury.

Even after bones heal and surgeries

succeed, experts say recovery can mean coming to terms with what injuries have changed and giving yourself permission to grieve those losses.

Former Baltimore Ravens cornerback Kyle Arrington, who is now a community activist in Maryland, spent nearly two decades with every hour of his day organised around football. After a severe concussion ended his career, that structure disappeared almost overnight.

"I knew what everything looked like year in and year out for the past almost 20 years," said Arrington, who was a Super Bowl champion during his tenure with the New England Patriots. "To have that stripped away in a blink of an eye was a real upheaval."

Grief and depression are common after season- or career-ending injuries and other life-altering experiences. People making a physical recovery may also mourn lost friendships, missed opportunities, unmet goals and a sense of purpose.

The emotional pain can be especially acute when someone's self-identity rested on excelling in a sport or a profession.

Arrington, 39, said his post-concus-

sion retirement took him to a dark place. He credits family and friends with helping him through the transition; with their encouragement, he committed to healing mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Arrington said he now puts his energy toward the E.V.O.L.V.E. Foundation, which he founded to mentor young people.

Experts say a support system can help people stay grounded when they have to make major medical and career decisions.

"Having a team around you is incredibly important to get good advice, be objective, but also positively push you, not just for your sport and your performance, but for life," Flowers said.

Sports psychologists say recovery often turns a corner when people stop trying to reclaim the past and begin building a new future.

American freestyle skier Jamie McCreary, who at the 2013 Winter X-Games became the first woman to land a double backflip during a slope-style ski run, confronted that reality after a traumatic brain injury left her in a coma at age 22. For her, recovery meant letting go of elite competition and accepting a new future.

"I realised that I didn't want to compete if I wasn't at the level that I had previously been competing," said McCreary, 33, who is now a motivational speaker and lives in Salt Lake City.

She still chased the exhilaration she got from sports. Few things compare to the applause, trophies and recognition, but public speaking gives her a taste of that adrenaline.

"I take some deep breaths and then walk out on stage," she said. "That's the closest of a mimic for me."

Former professional boxer Patricia Alcivar, 46, also had to rethink her next steps after suffering injuries that included a hyperextended elbow, broken toes and multiple stitches above her eye. She now runs marathons and climbs mountains to stay active. She said despite the physical challenges boxing put her through, she wouldn't change the experience.

"I will never regret boxing because it taught me that I am a fighter inside and outside the ring," Alcivar said, adding that climbing Utah's Mount Superior was the first time she felt equally challenged. She recalls smiling during an arduous hike up Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania because "nobody's punching me in the face. Nobody's trying to kill me."

When returning to the life you had before isn't possible, experts recommend exploring goals and sources of meaning that could become the foundation for a new sense of identity.

"There is hope that something else can replace this," Miller said. "And when we can find that daily rejuvenation of hope, we can also find new sources of happiness as well."

Messi meets England at last with World Cup final place on the line

ANDY SCOTT/AFP
ATLANTA, JULY 14

Lionel Messi has done just about everything possible in a glorious career, but the 39-year-old Argentinian great has never taken on England—he will finally get the chance in Wednesday's World Cup semi-final.

Messi won his 200th cap for the Albiceleste in the group-stage victory against Algeria and dreams of leading his country to the final once again.

The diminutive playmaker is surely in the final days of a remarkable international career, which began when he was a fresh-faced 18-year-old in 2005.

Having broken into the Barcelona team late the previous year, Messi had just starred for Argentina as they won the Under-20 World Cup in the Netherlands.

He was handed his Argentina bow by Jose Pekerman in a friendly against Hungary in Budapest that August, replacing Lisandro Lopez in the 64th minute and joining Hernan Crespo up front.

Ninety seconds later, he was sent off for what the referee saw as an elbow. It was quite an ignominious way for his Argentina career to begin.

"An 18-year-old kid who is making his debut for the national team and has so much hope—he can't be punished like that. The referee needed to be more understanding," said Crespo. Messi might look back now and laugh at that incident, which led to him being suspended for a friendly against England in Geneva three months later.

The nations have not met since, and so Messi will play against the Three Lions for the very first time under the roof of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

"I have played against everyone except England, and it is special because they are a major nation, a powerhouse, and it is always nice to play against a side like that, especially in a World Cup semi-final," said Messi after Argentina beat Switzerland in Kansas City in the last eight.

Emulating Maradona

The man who emulated Diego Maradona by inspiring Argentina to World Cup glory in Qatar four years ago will now hope to leave a similar mark on England as his legendary predecessor.

Any meeting of these countries evokes memories of the 1986 quarter-final at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, when Maradona punched in to score the 'Hand of God' opener and then ran past half the England defence for his team's second goal—perhaps the greatest World Cup goal of all time.

Messi has not scored one quite like that, but ahead of the semi-finals of the current tournament, he had scored more World Cup goals than any other player.

With 21 goals from a tournament-record 32 appearances, he led France skipper Kylian Mbappé by one after the quarter-finals.

The Inter Miami player had found the net in nine consecutive World Cup matches before the Switzerland game, when he let others—notably Julian Alvarez—take over the goalscoring duties. Argentina are now one game away from reaching another World Cup final, as they aim to become the first team to retain the trophy since Brazil in 1962.

It would be a third final in four World Cups, and Messi could follow in the footsteps of Brazil great Cafu. The full-back played in three in a row from 1994 to 2002—even Maradona only played in two.

"Getting to another semi-final is not a normal, mundane thing, so this is something we should really enjoy because we don't know if it will happen again," Messi said.

The England players will hope to enjoy it as well.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Nico O'Reilly, who is likely to come up against Messi if he starts at left-back, told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"He's coming towards the end of his career. For me personally, he's the best player to ever touch a football pitch. And yeah, I can't wait for the challenge."



HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
You're a magical creature with brilliant visions that merit further exploration, dearest Aries. Today, this aspect reaches its peak, urging you to take swift action in service of any new goals you've recently cooked up.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Strange experiences follow you today, dearest Taurus. Manifestations will emerge in bizarre ways, ranging from small coincidences to major breakthroughs.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Dreamlike scenarios can emerge at any moment, dearest Gemini. Chance encounters may have significant impacts, changing the trajectory of your life in exciting ways.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Your next big break is on the horizon, dearest Cancer. Reflect on any signs you've picked up on over the last week to determine where opportunities are most likely to stem from.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
You'll sense the universe looking out for you today, dearest Leo. This aspect has been building for more than a week, laying down the groundwork for magical moments and fated encounters.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
You deserve success and status, dearest Virgo, and today could be the moment you secure both. It marks a rare occasion in which you can fully trust that the blessings you receive are, in fact, real and well-deserved.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Fairytale romances are real, even if they're fleeting. The universe will take you on a journey of the heart, dearest Libra, but you'll need to suspend the disbeliefs you harbor around magic or soulmates.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Stop doubting your abilities and step into the life you've been fantasising about, darling Scorpio. Though you'll need to work for these desires, challenges you've anticipated will resolve more easily than you'd imagined.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Quiet down to find balance so the heart may reveal what it wants. Project these desires into the universe, and the stars will align to help make them a reality. Be open to blessings from multiple sources.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Listen to your body and the voice within, noticing how thoughts and emotions influence your physical state. When you are in tune with the very aspects of your unique human experience, it will be easier to pick up on signs and manifest your best life.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Goals you've been working on throughout the past week come together like magic, dear Aquarius. Maintain a sharp, creative mind in case these developments require adjustments on your end.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Reflect on what abundance means to you, dearest Pisces. Though it's certainly possible to have both, the emotional well-being of yourself and family members should be a top priority.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Fall behind
 - Fossil fuel
 - Reveal
 - Acidic
 - Black-and-white animal
 - Fever
 - Eight (Prefix)
 - Rock singer — John
 - Loathe
 - "The — the better"
 - Engineless aircraft
 - Platform in a hall
 - Befit
 - Hospital worker
 - Restricted
 - Familiar TV offering
 - Hoist
 - Lend an —
 - Grizzily
 - Merriment
 - "God — the King"
 - Doctrine
 - Small songbird
 - Gets less severe
 - Trying
 - Eternal
 - Succulent plant
 - Wild monologue
- DOWN**
- Crazy
 - Car, for short
 - Magnificence
 - Ripken of baseball
 - Prov. in Canada
 - Fuss
 - Lose strength
 - Pacific island
 - "Yikes!"
 - Old instrument
 - Wanton look
 - Distress signal
 - Danger
 - Merit
 - Juicy fruit
 - Hypodermic needle
 - Move like a serpent

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

C	A	L	F		B	A	I	L				R	A	T
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T	H	I	E	V	E	S		E	N	C	H	A	N	T
					D	E	L	E		T	U	E		
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C	L	I	M	B	S		E	A	R		T	I	N	E
O	D	E				H	A	L	L			V	A	N
R	I	T	E		A	I	L		D	E	C	A	N	T
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S	P	A	T		S	T	A	V	E		A	L	A	N
N	O	M			E	Y	E	D		L	O	U	T	

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- Satellite's path
- Actress —
- Witherspoon
- Little bits to drink
- Tantalize
- Roof parts
- Gown
- Curve
- Labyrinth monster
- — City, Utah
- Rasp
- Dame —
- Everage
- Hard fat
- Like a dandy
- Fur babies
- Corpuscule
- Tardy
- At any time
- Playing card
- Make lace
- Employ
- About to happen
- Bother

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

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		4			2			8

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

‘Bhagdaud’ runs in circles

Himal Upreti’s social drama mistakes harassment for romance, crime for comedy and sudden remorse for redemption.

○ **SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI**
KATHMANDU

Some films are confusing because they are ambitious. ‘Bhagdaud’ is confusing because it barely understands its own story.

Written and directed by Himal Upreti, the film gestures towards financial hardship, fraud, trafficking, police corruption and caste prejudice, but develops none of them convincingly. Scenes jump without context, characters appear without introduction, and serious issues are abandoned before they can acquire any meaning.

At the centre of this confusion is Tirtha, played by Ghanshyam Joshi. He is apparently intended to be the film’s hero, although almost everything he does suggests otherwise.

Tirtha is a professional con man. At the beginning of the film, he is kidnapped, possibly for cheating someone out of money. The film never explains the situation clearly enough for the audience to be certain. This becomes a recurring problem: information is not revealed through storytelling but left scattered across disconnected scenes, leaving viewers to form theories about the most basic parts of the plot.

Tirtha is introduced as a con man who is kidnapped, apparently for cheating someone. Even this basic plot point is left unclear, establishing the film’s habit of replacing storytelling with guesswork.

Tirtha urgently needs money from his father, who will apparently give it to him only after he gets married. His solution is to pressure his girlfriend, Sapana, played by Sharda Rai, into marrying him almost immediately. Their wedding is completed in what feels like a minute, without emotional preparation or any meaningful sense of commitment.

By the following day, Tirtha is already communicating with Luniva Shakya, played by Anisha Shrestha. Luniva comes from a struggling Newa family and dreams of becoming an engineer, but lacks the financial means to continue her education.

Luniva’s father is one of the people Tirtha has allegedly scammed. Hoping to recover the family’s money, she contacts Tirtha under a false identity and attempts to lure him into admitting what he has done.

On paper, this is not an entirely hopeless premise. Luniva could have been an intelligent young woman strategically confronting the man who exploited her family. Her conflict with Tirtha could have explored class, education, financial desperation and the vulnerability of rural families to fraud.

Instead, the film quickly strips her of the intelligence it initially gives her.

Once Luniva reveals the truth, Tirtha threatens and manipulates her. She then follows him away from her family, without ensuring that they know where she is or how to reach her. What begins as an attempt to outsmart a criminal becomes



SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUBE

another opportunity for the film to place a young woman under a man’s control.

The relationship is especially uncomfortable because Luniva is presented as extremely young, while Tirtha appears considerably older. Yet the film treats their interactions as material for romance. A situation that resembles abduction and coercion is accompanied by a song, as though music alone can transform fear into affection.

Tirtha later manipulates Luniva into sharing a bed with him and makes sexual innuendos. These moments are not examined as violations of her trust. Instead, they are packaged as playful encounters.

This is not the film’s only troubling portrayal of romance.

Officer Bikram repeatedly follows Sapana despite her asking him to stop. He touches her without consent, follows her into her home and continues pursuing her even after she marries Tirtha. None of this is treated as an abuse of authority or a violation of boundaries. Instead, the film frames it as humorous persistence, repeating the dangerous idea that a woman’s rejection is merely an obstacle a man must overcome.

‘Bhagdaud’ is far too comfortable romanticising women’s discomfort.

The film’s moral confusion is clearest in its treatment of Tirtha. He lies, cheats, threatens, impersonates a police officer, becomes involved in trafficking and even considers selling Sapana to save himself. Yet the screenplay repeatedly asks the audience to admire him for reciting religious verses and claiming that Luniva’s caste does not matter.

Rejecting caste discrimination does not absolve him of every other form of exploitation. These moral declarations do not deepen his character; they

merely allow the film to avoid confronting his actions.

Much of the dialogue consists of misplaced shayari, moral declarations and jokes inserted wherever a scene feels empty. Conversations rarely sound natural, and the performers are left delivering lines without believable rhythm or emotion. Joshi’s portrayal of Tirtha is particularly one-note: the character moves through fraud, marriage, infidelity and supposed redemption without displaying convincing fear, guilt or emotional depth.



The other performances are similarly uneven, although the actors are not helped by the screenplay. Good acting can sometimes elevate weak writing, just as strong writing can support inexperienced actors. Here, the writing and performances repeatedly expose each other’s limitations.

The performer playing Tirtha’s father brings some much-needed sincerity to the film. His scenes feel more grounded because his reactions resemble those of a real person rather than of a device moving the plot forward. Laxmi Giri, who plays Luniva’s grandmother, also brings a sense of warmth, but parts of her performance are inaccessible to viewers who do not understand Nepal Bhasa.

The film deserves some credit for attempting to represent Newa culture. Luniva wears a haku patasi, while the use of Nepal Bhasa gives her family a distinct cultural identity. However, the absence of

scious wife, later fakes his own death and is eventually caught.

Then comes the inevitable apology. Tirtha begs for forgiveness, suddenly discovers a conscience and is accepted with astonishing ease. Sapana forgives him too, despite the film having done almost nothing to earn that reconciliation. There is no sustained remorse, no legal accountability and no emotional rebuilding. Redemption is treated as something a man can claim by delivering the correct speech, while forgiveness becomes another sacrifice expected from women.

This is where ‘Bhagdaud’ is at its most preachy and least convincing. Its conclusion reaches for a positive moral message, but a message has little value when the story repeatedly contradicts it.

A character cannot spend an entire film exploiting people and then become virtuous simply because the background music changes.

‘Bhagdaud’ could have been a story about fraud, poverty and a young woman fighting for her family’s future. It could have explored corruption, cultural identity or the ease with which charming men escape accountability. Instead, it becomes a collection of unfinished ideas held together by weak jokes, random songs and a protagonist the film fundamentally misunderstands.

The title suggests movement, but the film goes nowhere.

If ‘Bhagdaud’ succeeds at anything, it is unintentionally demonstrating what love is not. Love is not stalking. It is not coercion, deception or endurance without limits. And redemption is not forgiveness demanded without accountability.

Unfortunately, the film appears unaware that it has made this argument.



Bhagdaud
Language: Nepali
Release Date: July 10, 2026
Available on: One Cinemas

Greece awaits Nolan’s ‘The Odyssey’ with anticipation despite casting controversy

The film, starring Matt Damon as King Odysseus and a number of Hollywood stars, follows Homer’s outline.

○ **THEODORA TONGAS & DEREK GATOPOULOS**
ATHENS

Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey” opens Friday to global anticipation and some controversy over his casting choices—but what do Greeks think?

Conversation about adaptations often revolves around how closely they follow a source text. But in a country where Homer’s story is taught and retold at all schools, many point to how the epic has been kept alive for nearly 3,000 years: not despite reinvention, but because of it.

“What we want children to understand is that every new creation is exactly that—a new creation,” Filippos Mantzaris, who teaches “The Odyssey” to seventh graders, told The Associated Press.

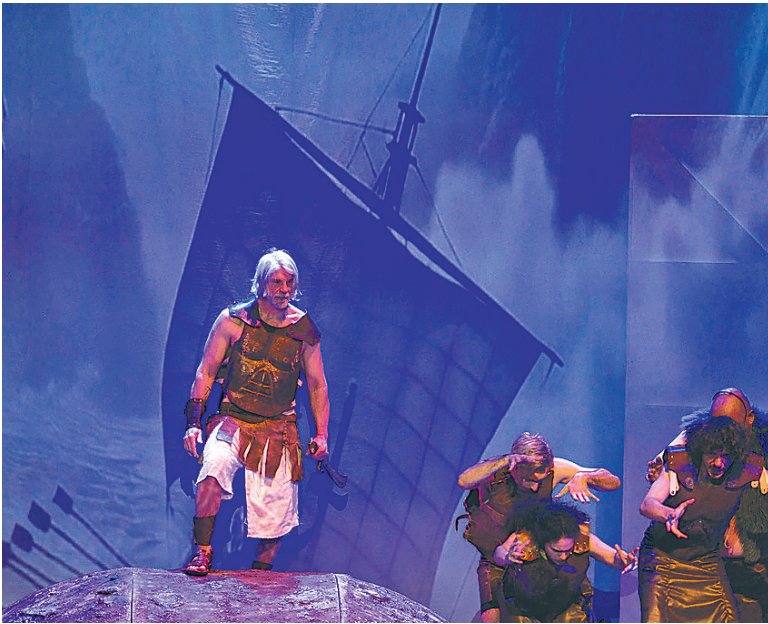
The film, starring Matt Damon as King Odysseus and a number of Hollywood stars, follows Homer’s outline: the king’s 10-year journey home from war during which he battles gods and monsters to find a palace overrun by rivals.

Students grow up interpreting Homer

In seventh grade, “The Odyssey” is taught in all Greek classrooms.

In Mantzaris’ class, students eagerly debate Odysseus’ encounters with monsters and other adventures. They are taught to compare the hero’s intelligence with his strength, ask whether revenge is moral, whether the battle-hardened king is truly a role model, and whether his killing of his wife’s suitors is justified. Role-playing exercises encourage children to imagine what they would do in Odysseus’ place.

“It’s an amazing literary text, with which children can identify, perhaps see Odysseus in themselves,



AP/RSS

Actor Manos Pintzis, portraying Odysseus, performs a theatrical production of The Odyssey in Athens, Sunday, March 29, 2026.

but also see their own homeland,” Mantzaris said.

Greeks are used to foreigners playing their heroes

In conservative circles in the US, much of the attention has focused on Nolan’s casting choices rather than his adaptation of Homer’s story.

Elon Musk claimed Nolan had desecrated “The Odyssey” after Black actor Lupita Nyong’o was picked as Helen of Troy—despite not having seen the movie. Conservative commentators including Matt Walsh argued the film prioritized identity politics, echoing past fan criticisms of sci-fi and fantasy reboots that cast Black and Latino actors as beloved characters of a different race or ethnicity. In an interview with The Telegraph, Nolan said backlash

“comes with the territory,” adding “these conversations that happen before people see the film—they’re always irrelevant, because no one having them knows what the film actually is yet.”

Nolan told the AP he wanted to make the film accessible and relatable, and “not look back to sort of past Hollywood versions of how to take on the ancient world.”

“You want to question people’s assumptions about how things should be portrayed in movies and what those are based on,” he said of his overall approach to the film. “There’s a challenge to that and a risk to that. But my hope is that by creating a cohesive world, people understand the world as they watch the movie and they feel they understand it.”

The controversy hasn’t found

much purchase in Greece, where people are used to foreigners playing ancient Greeks.

Nolan’s version continues the tradition with a star-filled cast including Nyong’o, Damon, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway, Robert Pattinson, Zendaya and Charlize Theron, with narration from rapper Travis Scott.

In Greece, the small nationalist party Niki objected to the casting and a Greek government decision to provide roughly 6 million euros (\$6.9 million) in subsidies to support local production. The party said Greek taxpayers were funding an imposition of “woke-type ideology” on Greek history and cultural identity, citing Musk.

Culture Minister Lina Mendoni offered a blunt rebuttal.

“It is not the state’s role to dictate to a creator how they should artistically interpret a work or a myth,” she told the Greek popular culture magazine, Lifo. “Can we seriously be having a conversation about whether the state should censor Christopher Nolan?”

History’s great stories survive through retelling

Christos Tsagalis, professor of ancient Greek literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, said it’s ultimately up to moviegoers to judge whether the latest interpretation of “The Odyssey” works. What matters, he said, is whether it captures something fundamental about one of history’s great stories.

Homer’s works—retold and reinterpreted across generations—have endured by becoming universal, he said. “I think it’s wonderful that something that is created at a specific point in time by a given people is shared by so many people across the globe. It’s shared culture,” Tsagalis said.

“It’s a fascinating story,” he said. “It is like a movie.”

—Associated Press

WHAT I WATCH ONLINE



Sworniem Vaidya

Vaidya is a producer, composer, and writer. Her new song ‘Geru’ was released on July 3, 2026.

▶ OTYKEN

Recently, I’ve been obsessing over OTYKEN’s music. They are a Russian Siberian indigenous music group that blends local folk music with modern stuff. I love how folk instruments meet modern production.



▶ Your Piano Bestie

My FYP is flooded with piano exercises right now, and my favourite creator is Your Piano Bestie. I’m actively saving every video of hers to a folder for future practice. I’d say she’s the sweetest teacher on the internet.

▶ Snoopslimes

This is my guilty pleasure. After hours of mixing tracks and stressing over promotion, I have to watch slime-making videos. The squish, the stretch, the popping sounds—it’s pure comfort. And yes, I love making slime too.



▶ TAETRO

Honestly, I’m just a girl trying to make better music, so ‘TAETRO’ is my go-to mentor. I’m still figuring things out, which is why I also watch a lot of mixing tips and sound design videos.