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### DIRE STRAIT

85% of India's natural gas and 55% of its oil passes through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz. Nepal imports all its petroleum from India.



### FUEL>FERTILISER>FOOD

Diesel price hike drives food inflation, raises cost of farming, natural gas shortage hits fertiliser supply chain, reducing crop yield. Plus, a weak monsoon is forecast.



MONIKA DEUPALA/ NT ARCHIVE

Even though the urgent need is to buy more chemical fertiliser from India, Nepal should reduce its import bill by expediting the planned urea plant in Nawalpur, and reviving the use of organic fertiliser.

Kushal Gurung helped develop the preliminary report for the urea plant and says: "The Energy and Agriculture Ministries should focus proactively to put the Nawalpur plant on a fast track, fix the rate of fertiliser produced, and commit to buying everything."

Nepal is now self-sufficient in meat and egg production and is making progress in dairy. This means manure is available from them for farm use. In urban centres, up to 70% of waste is biodegradable and can be converted into organic fertiliser and biogas.

"Even if we use just 20% of municipal waste, we can generate 3.5 million tons of fertiliser, but this means incentives for investors like tax subsidies, and discounted electricity tariffs," says Gurung.

Before Nepali farmers started using chemicals, they mostly just spread livestock manure to replenish soil nutrients. The soil organic matter (SOM) should ideally be 5%, but in Nepal it is now below 2%. In the Tarai, it is 1% because of excessive agro-chemical use.

Because soil fertility has declined, farmers need more chemical fertilisers which provide fast-acting nutrients for immediate plant growth. But over time, chemicals degrade the soil, which then needs more fertiliser.

Ngamindra Dahal says using a form of charcoal called biochar would revitalise the soil. Restoring indigenous grains like millet and buckwheat which need less fertiliser and are drought-resistant is another option.

There are solutions to the looming fuel, fertiliser and food crisis: since hydrocarbon shortage is affecting the production of carbohydrates, Nepal can harness surplus hydropower to manufacture fertiliser to reduce imports and boost harvests. 🇳🇵

# Hydrocarbons to Carbohydrates

Sonia Awale

Nepal needs petroleum to fuel its economy, Nepalis need food to fuel their bodies. The two are inextricably linked.

The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has led to steep fuel price hikes, increasing the cost of food and farming. A severe shortage of fertiliser and its higher cost will mean lower crop yields this year.

To add to this impending crisis, weather models project a deficient monsoon this year, affecting Nepal's predominantly rain-fed farming. It is a vicious cycle: fossil fuel burning causes climate change, leading to extreme weather, which affects food supply.

While Prime Minister Balendra Shah is preoccupied with ordinances and demolishing squatter settlements, Nepal is

slipping into a food crisis.

Agriculture makes up a quarter of Nepal's GDP, 60% of the people are farmers, but only 35% of holdings are irrigated. Most youth have migrated from rural areas, fields are fallow, and farmers who remain do not get a decent price for their cash crops.

"Nepal needs 12 million tons of cereal every year to feed itself, and imports 2 million tons, but we will need to import more this year because production will be down by 20% if not more," warns Bishow Parajuli, a former World Food Programme (WFP) representative in various countries. "For the last decade or so, Nepal's farm productivity has stagnated because of the neglect of agriculture."

Even at the best of times, mismanagement and corruption led to chronic fertiliser shortage at paddy planting time, but fertiliser prices globally are projected to rise

by 31% in 2026. Natural gas is the feedstock for nitrogen in urea, the price of which has already shot up by 60% since the war began.

Nepal needs 450,000 tons of fertiliser per year just for its rice crop, and India has agreed to sell only 60,000 tons of urea and 20,000 tons of Di-Ammonium Phosphate.

India meets 87% of its own urea requirement, but needs natural gas from the Gulf to produce it. It also imports ammonia, phosphorus and potassium for other fertilisers.

### SUPER DUPER EL NIÑO

To make things worse, this is a 'Super Duper El Niño' year in the Pacific Ocean which is expected to set off intense storms, heat waves and droughts globally. The South Asian Climate Outlook Forum projects below-average rainfall for Nepal this monsoon.

"Even when we had above-average rain, it was not

equally distributed. There were dry spells punctuated by intense cloudbursts," says climate scientist Ngamindra Dahal. "Agriculture in the Tarai was hit by drought last year, severely impacting grain harvests."

Irrigation could cushion the impact especially in arid areas of the country, but most inter-basin diversion projects like Sitka, Bheri-Babai and Sunkosi Marin are either delayed or stalled. Now, diesel and bitumen shortages threaten other infrastructure projects as well.

"We have to move on from obsolete canal irrigation to solar pumps, lower the power tariff to use up surplus electricity so farmers can afford it," says energy entrepreneur Kushal Gurung.

### Media freedom ranking in jeopardy

EDITORIAL PAGE 2

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# Media freedom ranking in jeopardy

An anti-establishment force is now the establishment, and it seems to have developed a thin skin

Kunda Dixit

Nepal advanced in the annual global ranking for press freedom this year compared to last year— not because the country improved, but because other nations did worse.

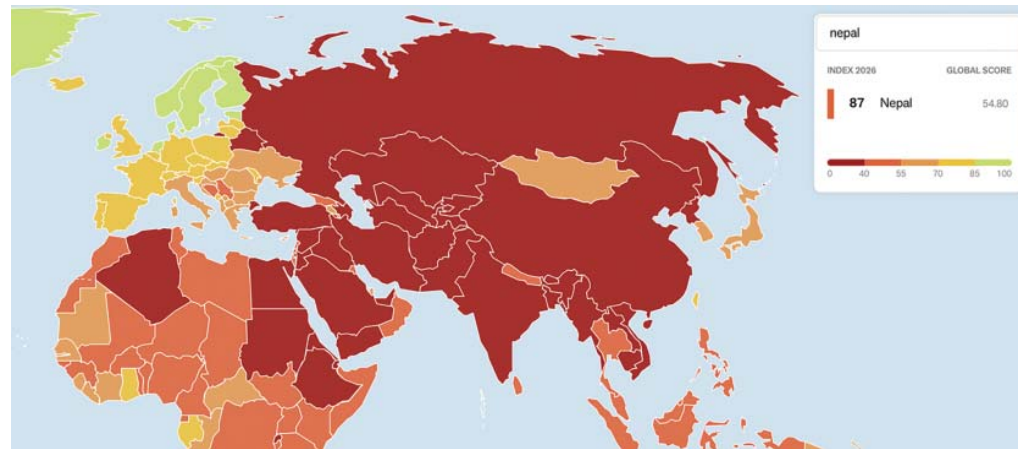
The Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index for 2026 (pictured) places Nepal at an improved #87 rank, compared to #90 the previous year. However, the condition for journalists in the country has deteriorated from 'Problematic' in 2025 to 'Difficult' this year.

This is largely due to the pre-September government's crackdowns, which restricted press freedom with new laws and banned 26 social media platforms that helped spark the GenZ protests and led to regime change. But there are worrying signs that the new government is not doing much better.

Nepal's ranking in the Press Freedom Index had been improving steadily in recent years: from #106 in 2021 to #70 in 2022, but it has since slid in both its global position and the general situation for journalists.

The main concern is Section 47 of the Electronic Transaction Act 2006 which can penalise online publication of content deemed 'against public morality and decency, spreads hatred, enmity or disrupts social harmony'.

We accept the need to regulate hate speech and disinformation, but there is concern that the definition of what constitutes a 'threat to social harmony' is too vague and



can be used to silence critics.

An example was the arrest last month of a YouTuber in Panchthar under Section 47 for 'derogatory' posts deemed to defame Prime Minister Balendra Shah. The Ministry of Information and Communication warned that those disseminating 'unverified content' could be charged under cybercrime laws.

Journalists covering the forced evictions of thousands of families from squatter settlements in Kathmandu (pages 6-7, 10-11) were prevented from interviewing families and some were forced to delete photos and videos from cameras. Police said there were "orders from above" to restrict media access.

Earlier, the Nepal Army took the unusual step of issuing a warning against 'baseless and fabricated content against it and its leadership'. More ominously, the military said it was surveilling content: 'The Nepal

Army and concerned agencies are monitoring such disruptive and lawless activities.'

Ironically, the September protests, the formation of the interim government and the RSP victory in the March election were all made possible by social media. An anti-establishment force is now the establishment, and it seems to have developed a thin skin.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah is also the Defence Minister and Home Minister, giving him civilian control over both the Nepal Army and Nepal Police. Both arms of the security forces were present during evictions of squatter settlements. The prime minister himself has not spoken to the media, refuses to meet foreign emissaries.

One of the RSP government's first acts last month was requiring that all government notices and public service announcements be channeled exclusively to state-owned media.

Although there was much hanky-panky in releasing the notices, smaller media in the districts depended on this revenue for public service journalism.

These attempts to stifle press freedom come even as Prime Minister Balendra Shah bypassed Parliament to enact laws by ordinance, despite its near two-thirds majority. The move was to change voting rules in the Constitution Council for the nomination of the next Chief Justice. Is that any different from what previous governments did? We now need to see if the bill passes the opposition-controlled Upper House.

## ELECTED DESPOTS

For the first time since RSF started its World Press Freedom Index in 2001, more than half of the world's countries now fall into the 'Difficult' or 'Very Serious' categories.

Threats come not only from authoritarian regimes, but elected despots. The technique is to exert corporate control over mass media, frame journalists with SLAPP (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation). It is not necessary to kill journalists anymore, killing journalism is more effective.

The situation in the world's two biggest democracies looks dire. The United States, for example, has fallen seven places from #57 to #64, while India dropped from #151 to #157.

Says RSF Editorial Director Anne Bocandé: "The ball is in the court of democracies and their citizens. It is up to them to stand in the way of those who seek to silence the press. The spread of authoritarianism isn't inevitable." 🇺🇸

## Trending Online



### Satellites monitor the Bagmati

by Sumit Mahato  
NASA's Landsat has been operational since 1970s, providing historical imagery that could let us reconstruct how Bagmati's condition has changed over time. Read an environmental engineer's analysis at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Heidelberg returns manuscripts

by Nepali Times  
More than 800 Nepali manuscripts some dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century were formally returned to Nepal last week from Germany. Get details online.

Most popular on X

### Concern on Nepal evictions

by Nepali Times  
Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists sent a letter to PM Balendra Shah about forced slum evictions and ruling by ordinances. Read the report on our website.

Most commented



### Great Digital Leap Forward

Editorial  
Over 35 of the government's 100-point action plan mention tech. While there are gems, digitisation is seen as a panacea that will cure all our ills. In that sense it is not really a strategy but a to-do list. Read the editorial online.

Most visited online page

## Letters

### LANDLESS DISPLACED

While it is understandable that international rights groups are concerned about squatters, they should also consider their living conditions ('International rights groups concern on Nepal evictions', nepalitimes.com). The areas they used to occupy were flooded during the rainy season, risking lives and the spread of diseases.

Annada Rajbhandary

■ These groups need to consider the corruption of the last prime minister that allowed landlords to buy these spaces and rent them out. The landlords of the slums made this happen through corruption.

Shane Williams

■ These 'human rights

organisations' serve the US empire. I hope actual people in need get help to live well and get land to live on, but really, the INGOs could be quiet. I say this as a person who once worked with an INGO in Nepal and regrets it now, seeing it as soft power imperialism.

Sage Radachowsky

### PRESS FREEDOM

Nepal never had freedom in the press ('Nepal's media freedom ranking in jeopardy', Kunda Dixit, Editorial). The press has been manipulated for decades for the benefit of those in power. So, it didn't get worse.

Sagar Karki

### DIGITAL REFORMS

Nepal's 100-point governance plan is a bold and timely step, especially its strong push for digital transformation ('The Great Digital Leap Forward', Editorial, #1309). The focus now should

be on phased execution, realistic timelines, and strong coordination across agencies.

D Bista

■ There can never be technological solutions to social problems. It is not rocket science.

Uendra Sapkota

### FUEL RESERVES

More reserves are a short term must; reduced reliance on imported fuel is a medium term must ('Nepal is a 13-day country', Ashutosh Dev, #1309). EV development and renewable energy are the answer.

David Seddon

### BAGMATI SATELITE MAPPING

If I were the author's PhD supervisor, I would ask him to look at how ADB funded these sewage systems to empty directly into the river ('Satellites are monitoring the Bagmati, why aren't we?', Sumit Mahato, #1309). Then they handed

out \$50 million [which was debt for Nepal and windfall for a Chennai company] to build sewage treatment plants. That is just for one plant, which was pretty expensive for a city that had sustainably managed its waste up until that point.

Sushma Joshi

### DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The present government needs to have a separate task force to deal with unforeseen disasters ('25 April is not over', Ramu Kharel, nepalitimes.com). It is going to happen, the only thing we don't know is when.

Kamal Gaha Magar

### TOURISM

The tourism industry is in a precarious state ('Nepal tourism reels from impact of West Asia conflict', nepalitimes.com). It is time for tax relief, lower interests.

Joes Ktm

## Online Package



### BACK TO SCHOOL

Inspiring grandmothers are breaking barriers and enrolling in school. Meet the women as they achieve their lifelong dreams of getting an education. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



### LOOKING GOOD BY DOING GOOD

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## 1,000 Words



US STATE DEPARTMENT BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

**DJI vs FREEFLY:** After Donald Trump's Special Envoy Sergio Gor visited Mt Everest Base Camp to test an American-made Freefly drone last week, Nepal abruptly banned drone flights. Heavy-lift drones were supposed to make up for the delays to expeditions caused by a huge serac blocking the Khumbu Icefall. Four days later, the ban was lifted. There is speculation that competing pressures from the US and China over drone diplomacy was to blame for the flipflop on the border mountain.

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# Yatri, the Traveller



DIASPORA  
DIARIES 92

This is the 92<sup>nd</sup> episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab.

## Raj Lamsal Yatri

I was born in Jhapa in a simple family. My father was working in Assam and died when I was six months old, and I only have a black and white picture of him.

If there is a god, for me it is my mother. As the youngest, I helped with household chores after school, and was close to her. My brother left for India after his school and disappeared for five years. My sisters were married off.

I enjoyed writing ghazal verses, and my teacher Gurudev Bhandari set aside 15 minutes for poetry practice after economics class.

We had my father's radio in the house, and I was curious about how it worked and opened it up. It stopped working, and I remember my mother was not happy because we there was no money to repair it.

So, I listened to my neighbour's radio. There was a program called Pushpanjali after 4PM which played listeners' requests. I used to write in and felt proud when my name was broadcast over Radio Nepal. Later in Kathmandu, I took part in an episode of Pushpanjali and my hosts recognised my name from the letters I had sent.

TV was a luxury, and only



the well-off families had it. The sets ran on batteries which had to be charged in Damak, so they rationed viewing only for important programs like the news.

My friend's father worked in India, and brought him new clothes and sweets when he came home for Dasain. I was jealous and told my mother that if I had a father I too would get gifts. She slapped me and went to cut grass. I followed her, and found her weeping bitterly. I had made my mother cry, and I still feel so guilty about it.

We had not heard from my brother in India for five years except for occasional letters. But my uncle finally tracked him down. The reunion was magical when he walked in through the door at night, all smiles. I looked up to my brother and I was thrilled to have him back. I had been on my own for

far too long.

I went to Kathmandu and stayed with him while doing Grade 10. I would cycle from Swayambhu where I lived to Pulchok where I worked in a garage, then to Lainchaur for my college, and to Bagh Bazar for computer classes before cycling back to Swayambhu.

I borrowed Rs50,000 to start a clothing store, but it did not work out. My studies were also suffering, so I decided to migrate to Malaysia just like my friends. There, I learnt the real meaning of dukkha.

### BACK TO POETRY

I worked in a factory making rubber products, and it was unbearably hot. Outside work hours, I would write poetry. But even after five years, my salary did not increase so I returned home in 2007. With my earnings, I bought land in Morang,

and two years later migrated again to the UAE.

Once I settled down in my new job, I got involved with Nepali literary circles in the UAE. Writing is like therapy, putting my feelings into words makes my heart lighter. Sometimes it could be the simplest scene inspiring me to write.

For example, when I watched an elderly couple at an airport looking at a plane taking off, the image stayed with me and I wrote a poem about it (box, right).

I drive limousines by day, and write poetry by night. Sometimes, while driving I am hit with these concepts for ghazals which I transcribe after work

hours.

For up to four years after coming to the UAE, I exchanged SMSs with a girl that I had once met in Itahari who was my aunt's daughter's friend. We decided to get married, and now my son is in Grade 10 and daughter in Grade 4.

Staying overseas has improved my financial condition. My children are doing well. I get to spend a month or two with my family in Nepal every six months. Other than the financial security, I am especially happy with my ghazal work. Social media has helped me gain visibility.

I am soon releasing my ghazal collection, Yatri. After all, life is a journey and I have been a traveller. I have been in the UAE now for 17 years, and do not know when I will return to Nepal for good.

My dreams are not big. I want to care for my family and friends.



मुट्टमा देश आँखाभरी पानी बोकेर,  
हिँड्नु छ भोलि परदेश राहदानी बोकेर ।

Tomorrow he will fly away  
with watery eyes,  
With a homeland in his heart,  
carrying a passport.

बा विरामी छन्, आमा बोल्न सकिदैनन्,  
विदा गर्छिन् श्रीमती छोरी सानी बोकेर ।  
Dad is sick, Mother cannot  
speak,  
The wife bids goodbye,  
daughter in her arms.

यी परदेशीहरू मात्र हाँसे जस्तो गर्छन्,  
छातीभित्र छुट्टा छुट्टै कहानी बोकेर।  
They all pretend to smile here  
But they must have their own  
stories inside.

बगाउनु छ खाडीमा जवानी र पसिना,  
आइपुगेँ म पनि एउटा जिन्दगानी बोकेर ।  
I shed my sweat and my youth  
I too am here in the Gulf  
carrying my life.

उता के आशा राखौं, देश हाँकेनेहरूसँग,  
मोलमोलाइ छ हत्केलामा राजधानी बोकेर ।  
What hope is there from rulers  
back there  
They bargain, holding the  
capital in their palms.

I want to contribute to Nepal's literature, art and culture from overseas. Even adding just one more brick to the edifice of Nepali literature will make me happy. 🇳🇵

HBL

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# Flow of history, GenZ and populism

Nepal's youth should be able to respond to rapidly changing global and local politics better than the older generation

Chaitanya Mishra

The events of 8-9 September 2025 will be remembered in Nepal for a long time for its consequential historical ramifications.

The House of Representatives was disbanded. The Prime Minister K P Oli decided not to resign, and in another huge lapse of statecraft, he was apparently told by the Army Chief that security would be enforced only after his resignation, which he then did.

Not a single firetruck went out to control as Singha Darbar, the Supreme Court, Parliament, supermarkets and private homes burnt to the ground. The investigation commission report focused only on the 8 September violence, and was conspicuously silent on the 9 September arson.

Quickly, a new non-party interim government was sworn in to conduct a general election within six months. The RSP with its charismatic former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah won the poll.

The GenZ in Nepal, as elsewhere, is not a singular entity. The youth groups that publicly crystallised on 8-9 September do not represent all youth or individuals, and those at the 8 September rally may be the first to acknowledge it.

It is also likely that the GenZ garb was intended, in part, for its popular appeal. It is also likely that the violence that shook Nepal on 9 September was partially a false flag operation under the GenZ banner.

The old parties and the ruling government dug their own grave, as generally happens when existing political frameworks crumble. But who pushed the body into the pit is not as clear. A host of agents, who may not even be aware of one

another, stepped in, and it may never really be clear who finally pushed the body down.

A key organiser of the initial short march on the morning of 8 September has repeatedly said that the initiative was hijacked and rendered violent by intruders. Forces other than GenZ may have been engaged in violence.

The rally may have served as both an actor and a smokescreen for those two days. Agency for what happened therefore cannot be placed solely upon the GenZ, even though its birth and rise in Nepal is real and consequential, and in line with the historical rise of youth around the world.

Five decades ago, agriculture was the dominant sector of Nepal's economy. More than 90% of the population was dependent on it, and it made up 45% of the country's GDP. By 2025 it was 25%.

The birth rate plummeted from 6.2 in 1976 to less than two in 2024 even as infant and maternal mortality rates came down sharply.

There is now a marked demographic bulge in the 15-24 age group, the classic GenZ. The average household size came down from more than 6 in the 1980s to 4.4 in 2023. Literacy rates are approaching 80%. The share of Nepal's population in the Tarai has risen from 38% 45 years ago to 54% today, while the mountain population fell from 10% to 6%.

It is the youth who migrate to towns, cities, and other countries and they adapt to urban life, values and aspirations. There are new modes of acquiring information, education, livelihoods, jobs.

But employment is scarce in the cities and the cost of living higher. Half of all international migrants are between 25-34, and three-fourths of all Nepali households rely on remittances. For some years

to come, the youth will not be looking to return to farms, homes and communities they grew up in.

An overarching theme of the last few decades is of the incessant movement of peoples and cultures, and diversification of livelihoods and, inevitably, shifts from primary belonging. The relations are often transient, as the new life is a move away from a community to one that is much less intimate, relatively anonymous and individualised.

## SEMI-PROLETARIAT

This does not allow a large proportion of the young, in particular, to get rooted to a job, a locality, an income-level. It requires a floating status and identity of a de-anchored semi-proletariat from which both political activism and flammable violence can ignite.

This has resulted in a massive rise in youth power. Rural areas are hollowed out, farms are fallow with only the elderly who have lost economic, political and cultural clout remaining.

Compared to rural areas, there is a much greater chance of getting work in the cities. Even if urban jobs are intermittent and pays low, it allows many to network and find better jobs, possibly overseas.

Cities, towns and migration destinations for Nepali youth to work and live carry on intense interactions about the country. This is the new public sphere, and the new sites of power, and harbingers of the future.

The young worker who goes overseas remits not only cash, but also knowhow and exposure. This information is recycled back home in video calls. They may be away, but the youth are very much present in families, society and country.

The migrant, whether internal or international, is an active shaper of the politics of people and

society at home. Mobile phones and social media connect everyone, wherever they may be.

Cell phones not only facilitate communication with family and friends back home, but also among the migrants themselves, building a belonging with a much wider world. The social web is also an eco-chamber among the in-group, who then narrow themselves by progressively shutting off others, while algorithms dominate the feed.

The diaspora and locals took part in Discord conversations that preceded 8-9 September. The platform allowed the youth to erode the autonomy and influence parents, siblings, wives, husbands, relatives, friends back home.

The pocket phone is a useful tool as well as weapon. It has both the best and the worst embedded in it and can connect people, places, information, knowledge, but also amplify the worst human instincts of greed, envy, anger. It can empower for good or turn into a lynch mob. Both were in evidence in Nepal's September Storm.

The internet is hailed as a democratising force, but it can also severely corrode upright citizenship. Anonymity is fundamentally inimical to democracy, and becomes a caricature of free expression. Even so, there are times and places in despotic and authoritarian regimes where anonymity provides refuge.

A secretive and clique-based silo then pronounces judgement rather than democratically arrive at decisions. One-third of all online posts of 8-9 September were reportedly fake.

The GenZ phenomenon was an outcome of popular resentment against the overbearing presence of political parties widely seen as non-performing, corrupt and shielded by impunity.

Party fronts worked as organisational pillars functioning in the shadows as influence-peddlers, middlemen and agents who increasingly sought a mediatory role between the citizen and the government.

Mediation diminishes citizenship, and also often comes with a fee. In addition, political fronts become contractors, traders, etc, cutting the line for government projects and access. These fronts often unionise and, supported by the mainframe party, exert illegitimate control over government or civil society, often feeding off public resources.

Such fronts erected by the old parties now span nearly all domains of public, civil, professional and even business life among farmers, squatters, civil service workers, labourers, students, teachers, school boards, physicians, veterinarians, engineers, scientists, professors,



8 SEPTEMBER 2025



9 SEPTEMBER 2025

# The landless become homeless

The RSP puts reverse gear on bulldozers as opposition mounts to inhumane eviction of squatters

Vishad Raj Onta

Barely a month into office, Prime Minister Balendra Shah sent in bulldozers to flatten informal settlements in Kathmandu, sharply dividing Nepal's cybersphere, the media, GenZ activists, and even his own ruling RSP.

The polarisation is most visible in the media. The mainstream press has relentlessly exposed the humanitarian tragedy of thousands of families losing their homes, schools and shrines being demolished, babies out on rain-soaked streets.

Meanwhile, in the parallel universe of the social web there is only applause, and glee, at the prime minister's decisive action to solve the squatter problem, and make Nepal great again.

But fearing an electoral

backlash from negative news reports, the RSP secretariat this week asked the government in a mildly-worded statement not to bulldoze homes without first setting up a high-powered authority to identify the real landless.

The RSP is more worried about how the visuals of the landless being made homeless will play out in local elections next year.

The decision to remove informal settlements is laid out in the new government's 100-point plan in Clauses 91 and 92 with a 100-day timeline for implementation. This has been a pet peeve of Balendra Shah even while he was mayor of Kathmandu, when his attempt to bulldoze squatters was thwarted by the coalition of old parties.

There are an estimated 4 million landless and internal migrants without property titles across the country who have settled on public land along river banks, highways

and government forests, many were brought there by political parties to buttress vote banks, while the land mafia with political affiliation extracted rent from squatters.

Whatever the case, most families have lived in these informal settlements for generations in financially fragile situations, mostly doing day jobs in the city. Many children were born in the very homes that were bulldozed.

The clauses say the process will be fully transparent, and that a relevant ministry will directly monitor the coordination, follow-up, and implement.

It all sounded good on paper. But the government gave little notice before sending in police with megaphones and batons, and even Nepal Army soldiers, before the bulldozers got there.

The Prime Minister finally took to social media this week justifying the evictions: 'Have you forgotten,

or do you still remember, the scenes every year where thousands of people living along Kathmandu's riverbanks are forced to flee for their lives during floods...' He added that the settlements were making the river filthy.

In a further post, the Prime Minister stressed that squatters were being transferred voluntarily without using force, that the intention is not to displace citizens, and that adequate measures were taken to accommodate the families. He posted: 'Don't panic unnecessarily, and don't spread unverified information.'

All this is little comfort to the 25,000 or so who were abruptly made homeless. Even critics of the evictions say those who were brought in by political parties with promises of land titles should be identified and removed, but there was a correct way to do this.

The prime minister and his



27 APRIL 2026



AJAY HAKAJU



HEMANTA SHRESTHA



ADITYA KHARE

street sweepers, tailors, barbers, rural health workers and mothers' groups, community forestry groups, chambers of commerce, and even non-resident Nepali associations abroad.

Elections in these organisations are fought along party lines, and from this base the political parties raise their cadres by the hundreds of thousands, competing to enrol even more members. They can then boast about how many supporters they can 'bring out' into streets if it came to it.

All government appointments, including in the Supreme Court, statutory anti-corruption agencies bore distinct imprints of political parties. The political system had overreached, its performance seriously compromised across most domains because the parties sapped the agency and autonomy of citizens.

As elsewhere within such a system, sycophants rode over lay workers and citizens. Corruption was rife. While personal malfeasance was widespread, corruption for party purposes to enlarge the election war chest, was possibly larger in scale. The level of public trust had rapidly eroded. Impunity was reported by newspapers to be widespread, possibly making it the leading cause of erosion of public trust.

Public disaffection spilled out in the election. The oligarchy had grown impervious to criticism from citizens. Indeed, top leaders were not even listening to their own colleagues within their own party.

The disaffection of citizens owed much also to the way the legislature and the judiciary functioned. Citizens expect integrity of their lawmakers, but many were not serious about their positions. Committee meetings often lacked quorum. Many MPs marked themselves present, but left immediately. The Committees were often rubber stamps for party whips, and the chair.

The judiciary, in turn, has also for long been regarded as a bastion of corruption. Judges and justices nominated by committees of politicians, eroding its legitimacy. All in all, key institutions of the state lost much public trust in the last several years. The higher echelons of government were mired in indiscipline and rot.

This does not imply that all the leaders of the old parties did everything wrong and that was why they bit the dust. But growing public distrust was the substrate on which the GenZ movement planted itself. Ultimately this led to a party system that pretended to rely upon grand old ideological narratives, cadre strength and hierarchy was bound to collapse.

It is likely that the new parties,

advisers are convinced they are doing the right thing, reassured by the massive support they have on social media for removing urban blight and beautifying Kathmandu.

Just as in the election campaign, the prime minister's loyalists in Nepal and the diaspora have sprung into action accusing critics of being supporters of former regimes engaging in 'poverty porn'.

As mayor, Balendra Shah imposed his own vision to create a more liveable Kathmandu, one with no street vendors and squatters. Pushcart vegetable sellers mainly from the Tarai, and street merchants were beaten with batons and expelled. Now prime minister, he is continuing the crusade.

#### WAR ZONE

His supporters say only decisive and drastic action can bring change in Nepal. These comment appear alongside critics posting drone images of razed neighbourhoods comparing them to war zones.

'Balen' supporters on social media also pounced on Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Committee of Jurists last week for their open letter to the prime

minister that raised the alarm at the evictions, calling them a violation of human rights. Cyber lynch mobs were unleashed on Nepali human rights activists, its signatories accused of being 'dollar-funded'.

Besides individual 'Balen' supporters on social media, popular portals like Routine of Nepal Banda and 24 Ghanta Nepal either sidestepped the unfolding humanitarian issues, or defended the evictions.

There is almost no mention of the two people who died by suicide after their homes were destroyed, or of mothers breast-feeding babies amidst the ruins. In stark contrast, such heart-breaking stories of loss and sorrow appear daily in the mainstream press.

#### NEPAL-IN-THE-WORLD

The young GenZ should be able to respond to rapidly changing global and local politics better than the older generation. They would certainly not be wedded to the obsolete political-historical narratives of the legacy parties and older citizens. For them, short termism and populism is a more practical alternative because the longterm future is so uncertain.

Many of the young are aware that they have to think in terms of Nepal-in-the-world rather than Nepal-and-the-world. The young possess a thicker, sharper and personal sense of their potential futures in Nepal and across the world. The young leaders may not comprehend the challenge of Nepal being a state within an interstate world, but at least they will see it with fresher eyes.

It may also be time to question and perhaps put to rest the criticism commonly made against the leaders of old parties. It is not merely that the leaders have aged and have played musical chairs for far too long. It is rather that the political parties themselves are outdated and unable to grasp the nature of a rapidly changing world.

The political ground that the old parties occupied shifted when the initial GenZ groups hit the streets. The obese and obsolete parties fell because they could not support their own weight in this period of history. The election showed that party emperors were in fact naked.

#### DE-RISKING

It is not a given that the new young leaders will be capable of navigating the political waters and prove worthy of the public trust they have been bestowed with.

We live in an increasingly dangerous world, and need to take steps to identify and minimise risks.

There are a number of strategies

for this. Revitalising agriculture and local communities must top the list of options. Farming puts food on the table, gives work and income to a majority of citizens – including women, Dalits and senior citizens in particular and lifts up the poorest.

With global instability threatening migration, agriculture provides an option for returnees in the rural communities. Legal, institutional and technological strategies to revive farming can be a key de-risk strategy.

The old parties have lost much public trust and it will be some time, if ever, that they regain their old glory. Yet, it is important to be thankful to the old parties and leaders for the gains they have made. Grace is a winning formula, including in politics.

Three hard-won gains that Prime Minister Balendra Shah may want to honour would be:

**1 Republican democracy.** It is important to build a political, economic and cultural order where no birth right or birth privilege exists.

**2 Secularism.** Politics and public life must not be left to the magic, superstition, demons and gods. It should be about Constitution, laws and citizenship.

A polity must not restrict citizens in their private lives from imagining, hoping, dreaming, or worshipping. But the state should maintain its separation from religion.

Regardless of what Balendra Shah accomplishes during his tenure, this huge gain must not be squandered but pushed further to delegitimise sectarian identities and ideologies,

**3 Social democracy.** This mode of governance remains enshrined in the Constitution in at least five chapters. However, despite successive left-of-centre Parliaments, this principle has remained nearly unimplemented.

Nepal now lives within a world-capitalist order and it can thrive in this particular period of world history, only by becoming a better, more reliable player.

Yet, hunger and severe poverty, low-quality public education and public health, unproductive farms must not be allowed to burden families and hurt the future of Nepali children.

Only a part of the investment required for a social-democratic realignment is financial -- the rest is political, cultural, legal, managerial.

The state is a collective enterprise owned and run by all citizens, and all of them must be enabled to function at an optimum level. 🇳🇵

Chaitanya Mishra is a professor of Sociology at Tribhuvan University.

perception that journalists in the mass media are puppets of the old parties parroting their propaganda.

Some on-site videos are full of praise, ridiculing the stucco houses with Corinthian columns built by the landless on public land. Others want politicians and bureaucrats who gave out land titles and building permits to squatters arrested.

Many more videos are of distraught families weeping over lost homes, and cursing the prime minister they voted for.

Journalist and activist Narayan Wagle has been a vocal critic. He wrote in Setopati: 'In such a short time since the election, we are falling so rapidly from the path of democracy that we have not even been able to find a handhold on this dangerous cliff.'

With disapproval of the RSP's methods on evictions and ruling by ordinance becoming louder, the prime minister called to reconvene Parliament on 11 May.

The RSP may have support in the digital sphere and the virtual diaspora, but most Nepalis in Nepal have sent the message that they do not approve of such high-handed behaviour. 🇳🇵



## Events



### Overnight Hike

Join the overnight hike this weekend to Ama Yangri, one of the most scenic peaks in the Helambu region. Enjoy majestic views of the Himalayas along the trail.  
**9-10 May, Rs6,500, 6:15am, Brikutimandap**

### Chaat and Chatter

Take the chance to meet and have stimulating conversations with new people at Chaat and Chatter. Also enjoy some fun games and a five-course meal. DM @thesocialspoon\_nepal on Instagram for details.  
**9 May, Rs2,200, 7pm onwards**

### Resonance Exhibition

Witness the intersection of AI technology, spirituality, art, and the human connection to nature through this innovative exhibition. The event includes talks, performances and a guided meditation session.  
**7-9 May, Artudio Patan, Nakabahil**



### Architecture Exhibition

The Materia Awards Mountain Architecture Exhibition is for architects, engineers, environmentalists, students, and anyone interested in mountain landscapes. Connect with like-minded folks at this cross-continental exchange and know more about the Andes and the Himalayas.  
**9-15 May, Alliance Française de Kathmandu, Pulchok**

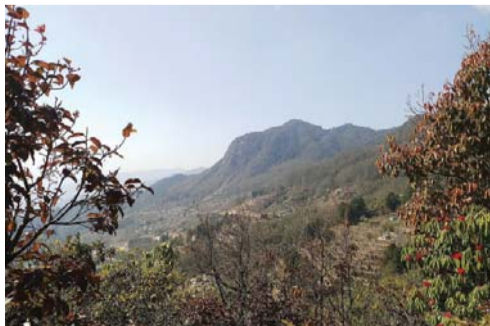


### Patan Heritage Walk

In continuation of the Bungdah Sketch event, this heritage walk will provide insights on the Rato Machhindranath Jatra and culture from Ashish Mishra, followed by an urban sketch session at Te: Bahal. Follow @usk.kathmandu for more information.  
**9 May, 7am, Lagankhel**

### Aqua Zumba

Get your exercise in and burn some calories in the pool to some great tunes with friends this summer.  
**9 May, 7 am, Moxy Kathmandu, Darbar Marg**



### Tarebhir Run

Join the Tarebhir Shivapuri Trail Run. Participants can choose to run either the 5km or the 15km course, and fresh views of the Himalayas will take runners to elevations of up to 2,720m. Call for details.  
**9 May, 8am, Rs500-Rs1,500, 9851428877**



## Music

### Influencer Night

Dive into a musical weekend and get a chance to meet with leading influencers, trendsetters and content creators of Kathmandu.  
**9 May, Rs800-Rs1,500, 9pm, XO Club, Thamel**

### Grasslands Festival

Grasslands Music Festival has returned with a scenic outdoor setting. Get tickets at Khalti.  
**16 May, Rs1,000-Rs30,000, 12pm onwards, Grand Norling's Hotel Resort, Gokarna**



### Mark Band Live

Enjoy live music by the Mark Band with good food, drinks and ambience at the Hard Rock Cafe.  
**8 May, 6:30pm, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg**

### John & the Locals

John and the Locals will be performing live for the Hami Ek Hau session. Don't miss the chance to listen and groove to your favourite tunes.  
**16 May, Rs800-Rs900, Sasa: Twa, Kirtipur**



### Rajesh Nepali Live

Rajesh Nepali brings audiences blues and gospel music from the mountains, hills and plains. Watch the multi-instrumentalist blend traditions with moods and music.  
**8 May, Rs599-Rs1,000, 6pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel**



## Getaway



### Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a glimpse of the panoramic scene of the Annapurnas in the dining area.  
**Sarangkot, Pokhara (061) 506000**

### Club Himalaya

The hotel is a blend of natural and modern services. The accommodation is comfortable, cosy and the food is delicious. The famous sunrise and sunset can be viewed from the private balcony of each room.  
**Nagarkot (01) 6680080 / 6680083**



### Pataleban Vineyard

Take a stroll through the vineyards of Pataleban, watch the panoramic view of Kathmandu Valley and sip aromatic wines during your getaway to Pataleban Vineyard Resort.  
**Chisapani (01) 4316377**

### Gorkha Gaun Resort

Enjoy nature in Gorkha Gaun's comfortable cottages. This sustainable resort, which generates 80% of its electricity from solar panels, offers authentic local and continental food, short treks and guided tours of the nearby villages.  
**Gorkha, 9801001166 / 9702626753**

### Namo Buddha Resort

Constructed in traditional Newari style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear days.  
**Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802**

## Weekend Weather



### More Rain

Comparing Thursday's NASA satellite IR image of Nepal with the one last week shows how the heavy rains doused most of the wildfires. But wait, there is more rain coming. Moisture-carrying westerlies pushed by the jetstream will rise along the foothills bringing heavy rainfall, mainly in the afternoons. The weekend and after will see a continuation of stormy evenings with thunder and lightning. In the mountains this will add to the unseasonably heavy snow cover. Maximum temperature in the next few days will remain up to 6°C below seasonal normal.



## Our Pick



In the 20 years since the events of the celebrated 2006 pop-culture phenomenon, Andy Sachs has realised her dreams and become a respected journalist in New York in *The Devil Wears Prada 2*. But when her newsroom is laid off abruptly via text, Andy returns to her old workplace at *Runway Magazine* as its new features editor. Andy's hiring is unbeknownst to her formidable former boss Miranda Priestly, who has struggled to helm the magazine amid the modern fashion media landscape. Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt, and Stanley Tucci reprise their roles, and are joined by Justin Theroux, Lucy Liu, and Kenneth Branagh. Catch it in nearby theatres.



## Dining

### Kunga

Kunga Hotel Restaurant & Bar is one of the best Chinese restaurants in Kathmandu. Grab some hot pot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes in Kunga's cosy and casual setting.  
**Boudha (01) 4915117**

### Sam Ye Garden

Looking for an ideal spot for a dinner gathering? Sam Ye is your go-to, a hidden garden gem that serves a delicious menu. Try their dry wonton momo or eat your fill with their vegetarian and meat-lover platters.  
**Swayambhu, 9820150840**



### Lhakpa's Chulo

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry. Lhakpa's Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. Garlic chilli prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for.  
**Jhamsikhel (01) 5442986**

### JAR

JAR whips up a fascinating mix of global and local favorites from your hearty Nepali sets to creamy pastas and sizzling steaks. Head to their premises for an exclusive dining experience.  
**Baneswor, 9802325777**



### Zen Bistro & Cafe Restaurant

Zen Bistro offers some of the best Red Curries and Pork BBQ for those venturing into the palatable world of Thai food. Try the refreshing Papaya Salads during the hot summer day and warm bowls of Tom Yam during the cool pre-monsoon evenings.  
**Bansbari (01) 4017654**

## सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरों ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

# Putting the cart before the digital horse

The new tech savvy Parliament has to ask: is it wise to go for full digitalisation before ensuring cybersecurity safeguards?



**Cyberia**  
Ayusha Chalise

In Uganda, a national digital identity system funded by the World Bank was supposed to bring millions of citizens into the formal economy. Huawei built the infrastructure. Today, that system is the backbone of a surveillance state, used to track political opponents, silence journalists, and target critics.

On 5 April, Prime Minister Balendra Shah's Cabinet approved \$185 million in loans: \$90 million was earmarked for the Digital Nepal Transformation Project. The World Bank loaned \$50 million and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) chipped in \$40 million.

The stated goals: an integrated citizen services portal, a national social registry, a government-wide data exchange, a digital locker for verifiable credentials, the digitisation of land administration.

Efficiency, inclusion, modernisation, in short.

Computer scientist Dovan Rai, is a strong critic of what she sees as a drift towards a surveillance state: "I support digitalisation on a technological level, but we must understand the negatives and positives of it first."

She speaks of The Digital Nepal Framework 2019 as a good document for including economy, agriculture, health, education.

But what it lacks is consultation over it, and the prerequisite question: how are we going to keep the data safe? Data protection laws must come before the drive for

digitalisation in Nepal.

Nepal's total public debt stood at Rs2.878 trillion by mid-March, 47.13% of GDP. Members of Parliament raised concerns about the borrowing. The RSP government inherited a fiscal situation under strain, and its first major borrowing decision was to go deeper in debt.

The \$185 million digital transformation loan is co-financed by the World Bank and ADB under a new joint lending mechanism called the Full Mutual Reliance Framework, supposedly designed to reduce duplication and move faster.

The World Bank approved its portion in February, the ADB followed in March. What the 5 April Cabinet meeting did was formally accept what had already been agreed in Washington and Manila. The RSP government did not negotiate this deal, it signed on the dotted line.

The remaining \$95 million from the World Bank is designated for a Sustainable and Inclusive Development Project covering social protection and environmental goals. The SDG framing is broad enough to resist easy scrutiny – precisely the kind of mandate civil society organisations have criticised the World Bank for. The 'inclusion' rhetoric creates political cover for moving quickly before countries have built the capacity to govern what gets built.

## THE CASE OF NID

Nepal has been trying to issue national digital identity cards since 2009. The program was funded in its earlier phases by the ADB and has moved slowly. By mid-2025 nearly 66% percent of applicants had not collected their ID cards even though biometric data, fingerprints, facial images, of 9 million Nepalis had already been



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collected. But no card.

The new project would consolidate biometric records into an integrated national registry, link them to land records, social protection access, and government services, and create a single data exchange through which ministries can share citizen information.

However, Dovan Rai urges us to ask a critical question: what are we willing to compromise for convenience?

Nepal's digital capacity in both software and hardware is limited. Although the government claims that ownership of the data rests in its own hands, dependency on foreign entities is inevitable, and the country's procurement history bears this out.

From Oberthur Technologies to IDEMIA, from the ADB-funded identity program to the World Bank-backed digital transformation project, foreign firms and multilateral lenders have shaped the architecture of Nepal's identity infrastructure at nearly every turn.

Nepal has not yet disclosed which vendors it intends to use for the new digital transformation project, but its established relationship with IDEMIA, cemented through repeated, and at times non-competitive contracts, makes the question of continuity worth pressing.

A Bloomberg and Lighthouse Reports investigation spent nine

months examining digital ID programs in Uganda, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, all funded in part by the World Bank. They were justified in the language of inclusion and development, producing outcomes their architects did not advertise.

In all three countries, the investigation found that the systems had disproportionately enriched technology vendors rather than served the public.

Foreign technology firms dominate Africa's biometric ecosystems, IDEMIA and Thales from France, Semlex from Belgium, Huawei from China. African governments typically financed these projects through World Bank loans, creating procurement dependencies that shaped which companies won contracts and on whose terms. Nepal has not been immune to this pattern.

The question of who builds the system, under what contractual terms, and with what access to the data is one that Nepal's new, technology savvy Parliament has not yet asked loudly enough.

Perhaps digitalisation drive should not be the priority at all for Nepal. Asks Rai: "Without undermining the required efficiency in governance ... if we do not have the capacity to digitalise on our own, if we are not going to be transparent about our process of acquiring vendors and even then if

it is taking years to procure them, for people to get their IDs, then why are we doing it?"

Dovan Rai's group Body and Data researched the National ID, where bureaucrats have expressed problems over retaining IT staff and skilled workers for maintenance of the infrastructure.

Without procuring them, government services actively use Big Tech platforms like Facebook to publish their notices, with critical identifying information such as citizenship or license numbers.

The Nagarik App already exists, so why is the government allowing its agencies to publicly disclose citizens' information through social media platforms?

For the RSP government, digital governance is not the test of whether the portals get built or the cards get issued in a single day. It is whether the government that champions digitalisation and efficiency also builds enough safeguarding mechanisms for our digital identities.

Loans have been approved, the project is moving. Nepal has 9 million people's biometric data in government servers, under no legal framework that governs its use. It is about to add 10 million more. 🇳🇵

Ayusha Chalise is a communication and development scholar specialising in how politics is experienced in the digital space. She contributes the Cyberia column for Nepali Times.

Experience Luxury

# SILK Finish





# Education for all, all for education

Structural reform in education will take much more than ad hoc decisions

Sudiksha Tuladhar

The government of Prime Minister Balendra Shah hit the ground running by announcing a slew of measures to improve schools. A month later this week, it sent bulldozers out to raze entire riverbank neighbourhoods including at least four community-run schools.

Entire blocks along the banks of Manohara and Bagmati looked like a war zone, with ruins of school buildings whose floors were tilted at crazy angles. In one school, the local ward office was using ICRC tents from the 2015 earthquake to conduct classes in salvaged desks and chairs.

Young students from Grades 1-8 looked traumatised, and could not understand why their school was torn down. The teachers had no answers. The government said it would resettle those made homeless, and asked private schools to take in displaced children.

Away from the bulldozed neighbours, schools throughout the country are in confusion after Education Minister Sasmit Pokharel

(pictured in Parliament, far right) took a series of decisions soon after assuming office last month.

He banned entrance preparation courses for students after the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), then ruled that students till Grade 5 would no longer have to take annual exams to advance to higher classes. He also decreed that students spend less time in classrooms and more outdoors.

## BOOK-FREE FRIDAYS

Minister Pokharel was an adviser to Balendra Shah when he was mayor of Kathmandu, and the architect of the 'Book-free Fridays' initiative to encourage students in Kathmandu to learn hands-on skills and creative pursuits like art, music and farming.

To be sure, there is a logic behind his decisions. The 'bridge' courses for colleges were over-commercialised with students having to pay hefty fees to prepare for entrance exams. Parents had complained that their primary school children were stressed about annual exams. And mandating outdoor activities is designed as an alternative to rote learning.

The plan to dismantle all



party-affiliated teacher and student unions in universities has been widely welcomed because they were political party fronts blamed for disrupting college calendars.

The Education Ministry's move to publish SEE results within one month (instead of the usual three months), removing the mandatory provision of citizenship for admission until the Bachelor's level, and stipulating a 10% student scholarship in private schools have also got much applause.

But Minister Pokharel, who is also the RSP government's spokesperson, has since withdrawn or partially revoked some decisions, leaving faculties confused. Adding to this is the refusal by municipality councils, which are controlled by old parties, to follow the federal ministry's new instructions because they see local schools as being in their jurisdiction.

"Despite good intentions, the decisions are ad hoc, piecemeal and hard to implement," says Kiran

Nepal, former chair of Teach for Nepal. "If there is no examination anymore, what is the basis or mechanism to evaluate children?" (See op-ed, below)

Others say that the new government's fiats were too hurried and half-baked. Teachers need more training to evaluate children without exams, or make them learn outside the classroom.

There was fierce opposition to Minister Pokharel's decision to ban bridge courses because public

## A difficult test



PHOTOS COURTESY: SHALAV RANA



Shalav Rana

Removing exams was the easy part, but nobody told Nepal's teachers what to do next

On a freezing recent morning in Kalikot district, the classroom is too cold to be in. So the teacher moves the lesson outside, into a small patch of sunlight against the school wall (pictured, left).

Twenty children huddle close together



KUNDA DIXIT



PMO NEPAL

teachers are formally trained, they require periodic retraining through refresher courses to keep their skills current and effective," says Kedar Mathema, former Vice-Chancellor of Tribhuvan University.

Nearly 75% of Nepali children go to government schools, which tend to be underfunded and understaffed, and teachers rely on rote memorisation. Because the facilities and quality of state-run schools are not up to mark, most parents seek more expensive private schools. However, in districts with better government schools, there is less enrolment in private ones.

"Public schools play a vital role in building a cohesive and tolerant society," adds Mathema. "They bring together children from diverse economic, ethnic, and caste backgrounds and educate them side by side."

Many students in rural Nepal have difficulty completing their education, and the dropout rate among girl students is still high due to child marriage and menstruation taboos. Many parents send their daughters to government schools, and sons to private ones.

At the same time, rural schools are emptying out as more and more families opt to send children to better schools in the cities. Experts estimate that Nepali households spend 6.8% of their monthly expenses on school fees, compared to 1.3% in developed nations.

"In our country, many families feel compelled to send their children to private schools in search of quality education, often at considerable financial strain," says Mathema. "Improving the quality of public schools would reduce this burden, allowing

families to rely less on fee-paying private institutions and save a significant portion of their income."

**IMPLEMENTATION GAPS**

The literacy rate in Nepal has risen to 80%, and there is nearly full enrolment of all children in many districts. However, the quality of instruction has not kept pace. Every new government in the past 50 years has come up with well-intentioned plans to improve quality and ensure equality by upgrading curricula and training teachers. But these were either abandoned half-way, or not properly implemented.

It seems that successive governments identified the problems in the education sector, and even set aside budget lines for reform, but somewhere along the way, implementation failed.

Challenges lie in political inadequacies, absence of follow through on plans, scanty monitoring and evaluation of what has worked and what has not. In the past, political instability and frequent changes in government affected school instruction.

"The gap between the government and schools creates a gap in implementation of any decision," says Kiran Nepal.

The hope is that the RSP's two-thirds majority will mean better implementation. Minister Pokhrel also announced a two-day holiday for schools and decided to cut the winter vacation and other public holidays to complete the course load. This was a correct decision, but educators said the decision came after the annual school calendar had already gone out.

Last week, PM Shah's ordinance removed 1,500 politically appointed functionaries in government -- among them faculty and boards of universities and education agencies.

The big challenge now is to fill the vacancies with qualified appointees, and to ensure that one set of officials appointed by the previous dispensation will not be replaced by RSP-affiliated ones.

The new government is a big proponent of digitisation, and it could use technology to leapfrog in improving the quality of classroom lessons. It should also collaborate with national and international partners with experience in the field to improve quality.

The School Sector Reform Plan and the School Sector Development Plan which made primary education free could be a good place to start, but by reducing over-reliance on foreign aid.

Says Kedar Mathema: "The priority should be to invest in enhancing the quality of government schools. It is equally important for the new government to strengthen the capacity of local governments to effectively manage and supervise the schools under their jurisdiction." 🇳🇵

# for education



So, when the new RSP government's Education Minister announced last month that written exams from Grades 1-5 would be done away with, I felt both relief and caution.

Relief, because those exams never measured what mattered. Caution, because the teachers are just not prepared.

The old system was broken, it had to go. Exams that reward rote memorisation do not measure retention. Nepal's students deserve better than that.

However, the question is not whether we should move away from exams, but if we have built anything reliable to replace them with.

In 2024, we conducted diagnostic assessments in four schools in Kalikot. This was a low-pressure exercise so children would not be frightened.

The results were stark. Around 80% of students from Grades 2-6 in these remote mountains could not demonstrate basic literacy in either Nepali or English.

About 85% could not complete basic numeracy exercises. Dalit students failed at the highest rates. The children had not been idle in class, they had attended school, sat through lessons, and been marked present.

The system had recorded them as students. But they had not learnt much.

**INVISIBLE FAILURE**

This is what invisible failure looks like. The parents are mostly illiterate, and have no tools to question what their children are, or are not, learning. Teachers may be committed, but lack the training to assess anything beyond rote recall.

Some do not want their own shortcomings exposed, so assessments are

soft, marks are generous, and sometimes teachers quietly help students through the very exams meant to assess them.

The result is a system that produces passes on paper and learning gaps in life. But removing the exam does not solve this problem. Without even the weak signal of a written test, the gaps become harder to see. Continuous assessment by teachers sounds wise in theory, but try to visualise that in a bare classroom in Kalikot with 20 children, and teachers with no regular training, no external oversight.

On paper, there is assessment. In the child's mind, the foundations of reading and arithmetic may be missing, and no one will know until it is too late to fix.

I grew up in Kathmandu where the school calendar revolved entirely around exams: quarterly, monthly, weekly. I memorised, cheated, and chased marks, never once pausing to ask what I was actually supposed to be learning.

That system failed me in its own way, but it produced a visible number, however hollow, that at least told someone, somewhere, whether a child had passed or not. The reform must replace that indicator with something more honest, not simply remove it and move on.

What should concern us most is inequality. Nepal's better-resourced schools, urban, private, better-staffed, will find ways to adapt. In Kalikot, Rukum, or the Tarai, reform lands differently. Teachers there have themselves started from a disadvantaged position.

Many schools do not even open the government-mandated minimum of 180

school days. When someone in the village dies, the classes are off. No exam reform, and no replacement assessment, changes any of that on its own.

A child I met in one of these schools told me she wanted to become a nurse. I asked her why. She said a nurse had once saved her mother's life, and she wanted to do that for others. That child's dream does not need an exam, it needs a system that takes her learning seriously enough to actually measure it, honestly, regularly, in ways her teacher can act on and her community can understand.

Nepal does not need to go back to 100-mark final exams. But it cannot afford to replace them with nothing but good intentions. The government's no-exam reform needs to arrive in Kalikot with simple, standard tools that teachers can use to check whether a child can read a paragraph or solve a basic sum.

It needs training that builds teacher capacity from the ground up, not one-off workshops, but sustained support. It needs a monitoring system that lets municipalities and provinces see what is actually happening in classrooms so that when a student cannot read, someone is accountable.

And it needs parents, even illiterate ones, brought into the conversation so that what happens inside the school gate is no longer invisible to the families it is supposed to serve. The exams may be gone, but the harder work has just begun. 🇳🇵

Shalav Rana has worked in community development and education support across Nepal for over two decades, including in Karnali Province.

on the dirt. There are no materials to pass around, no charts on the walls inside, no books. The teacher recites, the children repeat. The teacher writes on the board, the children copy.

This is what learning looks like in some of Nepal's most underserved communities. It is not cruelty, it is just the only instruction method anyone has ever shown the teachers in the remote mountains.



# Codes of honour, shame and silence

Jaar confronts the age old debate of love vs norms through an unapologetic female character in 19<sup>th</sup> century Nepal

Alexandra Coltman

A 2025 historical that won Best Feature Film in the South Asian Panorama section at the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Nepal International Film Festival (NIFF) last month, Jaar is an adaptation of a classic short story of the same name by award-winning author Indra Bahadur Rai.

This was its first ever on-screen adaptation after years of reinterpretation in stage productions. Set in 19<sup>th</sup> century Nepal during the Rana regime, Jaar revolves around Thuli, a young married Magar woman living in eastern Nepal (played by Sikkimese actress Geetanjali Thapa), and her affair with a Gurung man (portrayed by Saugat Malla).

Jaar follows the challenges of this extramarital interethnic relationship, which is condemned by rigid contemporary social structures and legal codes. The consequences are that Thuli is shunned, and her love is branded a 'Jaar', fated to be put to death.

The film features exceptional cinematography, using expansive shots of the Eastern Himalaya not just as a setting but as a tool to convey emotion. The original soundtrack accompanies these shots, relying on simple, antiquated-sounding music to convey the emotions of the main characters. From love to heartbreak to fear, the colour, natural imagery, and sound work flawlessly to depict the story from chapter to chapter on screen.



Jaar is not your average Kollywood film, it is the latest in the list that is spearheading a movement in Nepali media towards a more modern style with deep social critique embedded in the storyline. It reflects the growing popularity of films that curate a balance of cultural representation and modern thought.

For director Phurba Tshering Lama, an Indian man of Nepali origin, Jaar aims to provide a fresh perspective on Himalayan identity: "I was born in Darjeeling, a place that complicates identity. Within the Nepali diaspora, belonging is never simple. You're sometimes Nepali enough, sometimes not. Borders turn kin into competitors. Jaar is my small attempt to bridge

that distance, to remind us that we come from the same soil, even if divided by maps."

## BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Jaar also redefines the role of women in South Asian films, where female characters are often depicted in a narrow range of archetypes defined by passivity.

Despite engaging directly with the traditional values of Nepali culture and the limitations imposed upon women in these structures, Jaar's Thuli is not a complacent victim. Rather she is painted as a woman subjected to unfortunate punishment due to societal customs and the indecency of men.

Thuli is not just left to suffer. Jaar portrays her as a rebellious woman who learns to control her

own narrative. Despite repression, she chooses to shape her own ending, choosing who she loves, resisting the structures around her, and confronting the male authority that stands in her way.

This is powerfully represented at the end where she holds a bloody knife to her husband (played by Anoop Bikram Shahi), who threatens the life of her lover, the 'Jaar'.

While their manifestation may differ, the societal pressures surrounding marriage, honour, and social status still remain present in modern-day society. The film draws stark attention to the persistence of these systems.

"What drew me to Jaar wasn't just its time

period or the forbidden love at its centre. Although set in the past, its world still clings to us. Maybe village councils no longer hand down death sentences, but the codes of honour, shame, and silence continue to govern lives, in whispers, in glances, in all that remains unsaid," says Lama.

By positioning its audiences to root for a relationship that exists outside of societal expectations, Jaar juxtaposes the empathy individuals can show in fiction and the judgement they pass in reality.

It showcases the tension between man-made rules and the human capacity to love, confronting audiences with the question of why social constructs are allowed to prevail over the natural.

Adds director Lama: "What truly sustained us [the film team] was one question: what do we owe to tradition?"

The director's cut of the film will soon be re-released in select countries, including Nepal. 🇳🇵



Jaar  
Directed by Phurba Tshering Lama  
2025  
115 minutes




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