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**Shristi Karki**

Nepal's GenZ youth are set to meet with President Ram Chandra Poudel on Thursday to discuss the formation of an interim government under the leadership of former Chief Justice Sushila Karki.

Till press time Thursday, there was still sloganeering outside the gates of the Nepal Army headquarters in Kathmandu by activists opposing Karki's nomination. But GenZ groups are largely understood to have formed a consensus about proposing Karki to be the caretaker prime minister.

The GenZ campaign includes Hami Nepal and several other groups that spearheaded the anti-government rally this week against corruption and nepotism. Thirty people died as the protests

in Kathmandu turned violent on Monday and Tuesday.

After Prime Minister K P Oli stepped down on Tuesday, Nepal has existed in a power vacuum, with no one really in charge. The Nepal Army took over security management from Tuesday night, and President Ram Chandra Poudel appealed to Nepali youth to come to the negotiating table.

Thousands of GenZ youth held hours long discussions on Discord and other online fora on Wednesday, and voted to endorse former Chief Justice Sushila Karki to lead the transitional government.

The group informed Chief of Army Staff Ashokraj Sigdel about their choice, but he has also been meeting leaders of at least 12 other groups claiming to be the genuine GenZs. Among them are royalist and other groups that many saw as having infiltrated the GenZ rally on Monday in which 20 people were killed while trying to storm Parliament.

On Tuesday, disparate groups joined the arson and looting that ended up gutting Singha Darbar,

the Parliament and Supreme Court buildings and attacks on party offices, media, schools and private residences across the country. The original GenZ disavowed involvement.

**POLITICAL VACUUM**

'Nepal's 2015 Constitution does not envision any transitional or emergency provisions to address a state of political and constitutional vacuum. For now, the President, per Article 273 of the Constitution, can exercise emergency powers in light of the current situation,' wrote former National Human Rights Commissioner Mohna Ansari on social media on Wednesday evening.

The President can declare a state of emergency per Article 273 of the Constitution, but that must be endorsed by a two-third majority of Parliament within a month, after which it will be in effect for three months.

'Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki is the best option to address the adverse circumstances prevailing in the nation. The President must heed the

Constitution and take the next steps in a manner that is transparent, keeps the public informed, and is in the national interest,' Ansari added.

**FRAGMENTED MOVEMENT**

The GenZ movement itself appears fragmented and without distinct leadership, both before the anti-corruption protests on 8 September and in the aftermath of the two-day protests.

Various groups are said to have met or waited to meet the Gen Sigdel on Wednesday. The Army told others claiming to be GenZ and raising slogans against Karki's candidacy to appear at the army headquarters on Thursday.

Nepalis had floated the names of some of Nepal's more acceptable public figures to lead a caretaker government, including Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah. But Shah told the Army chief he endorsed Sushila Karki's nomination.

The names of former NEA chief Kulman Ghising and ex-education minister Sumana Shrestha of the RSP had also been proposed.

Polls conducted on social media to gauge public sentiment show a significant number are open to Sushila Karki taking charge of a transitional government. Both Shah and Shrestha are not so keen, and are probably waiting to contest elections.

Meanwhile, Nepal's young reform campaigners largely seem to reject the idea of handing leadership to RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane who was retrieved by supporters on Tuesday from Nakhhu jail after eight months of incarceration for embezzling

deposits of cooperatives.

But even as GenZ held discussions with the Army chief to decide on the interim government, other interest groups have continued to engage as well. Erstwhile royalist businessman Durga Prasai, posted a photo of himself with Sigdel on social media and professed that he has 'no interest' in leadership and would accept whomever GenZ youth chose.

**WAY FORWARD**

The job of the caretaker government, whoever leads it, will primarily be to hold free and fair elections for a new leadership which will then face the challenge of reestablishing Nepal's democratic institutions.

"The course of events showed that the movement has gone beyond Constitutional remedy," political analyst Krishna Khanal told BBC Nepali following erstwhile Prime Minister Oli's resignation on Tuesday. "There needs to be a middle-ground solution that will be acceptable to the people who took to the streets while upholding the existing constitutional process."

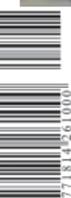
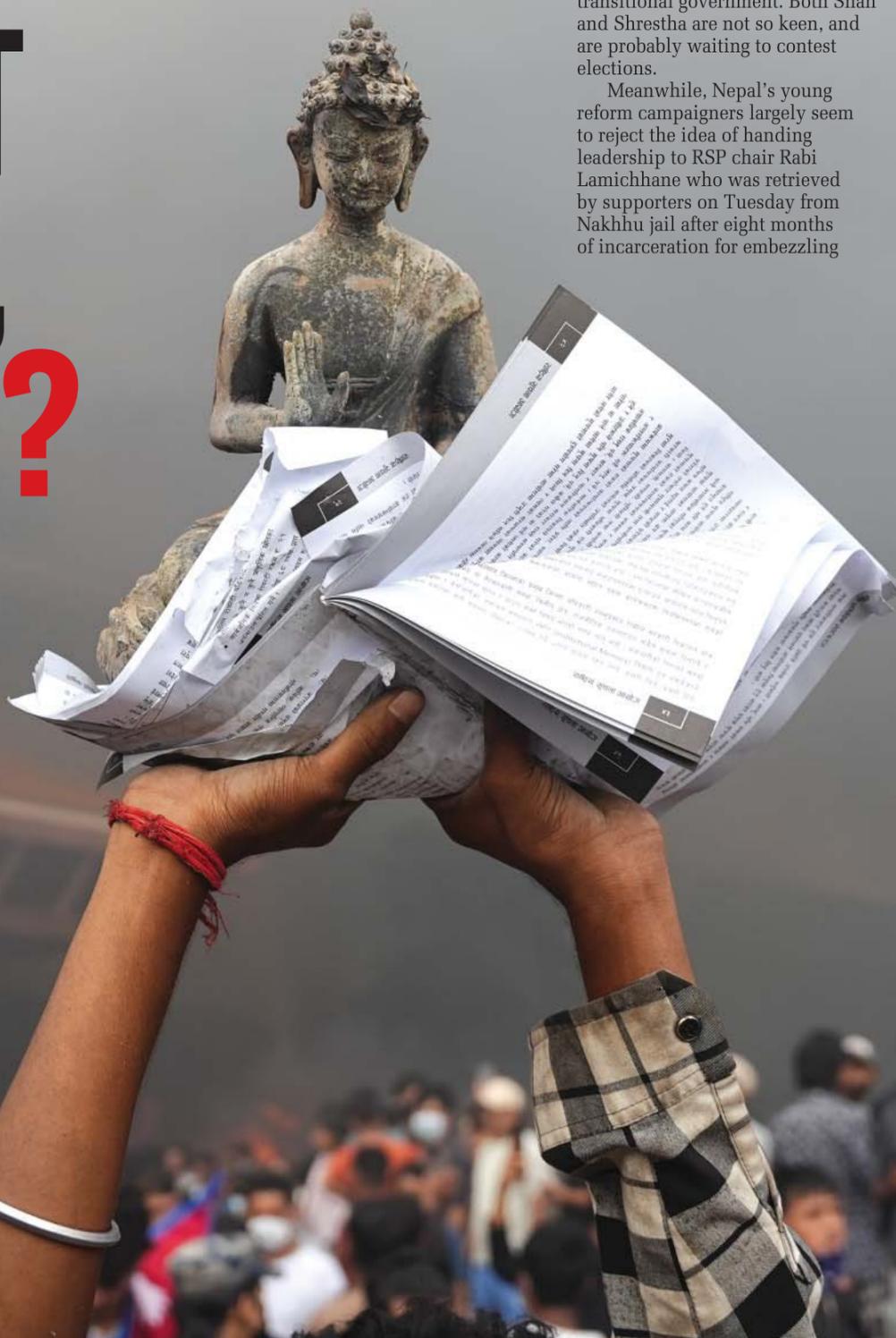
Various GenZ collectives have issued demands that include the dissolution of Parliament and the formation of a new civilian government, which analysts say are antithetical. Constitutional experts have suggested that the youth opt for a solution that allows for new leadership to move forward under the current Constitution.

One option, they say, is for the President to appoint any prime minister from the existing Parliament under Article 76(5) if all other measures fail, who would then have the authority to appoint up to 25 non-elected ministers for six months. This can be a way for that temporary leadership to hold elections within the mandated time frame. The existing Constitution can then be amended to accommodate the aspirations of the Nepali youth after the election.

But any conditions put forward by GenZ youth that requires a new Constitution might set Nepal back years, warn some experts. The 2015 Constitution was the result of nearly 10 years of negotiations and strife, and the formation of another charter will mean that Nepal will head into decades more of rotating governments and political instability.

Now, Nepali youth need to unite to help lead the country into the next phase. 🇳🇵

# WHAT NEXT, NEPAL?





AMIT MACHAMASI

## Trial By Fire

The GenZ movement now has to unite to take the lead in reconstructing the Nepali state

Kunda Dixit

Many young Nepalis at the GenZ rally on 8 September carried banners that read: 'Enough Is Enough'.

But by the end of the day and into 9 September, the arson and mayhem had gone out of control of the idealistic young activists. As Parliament, Singha Darbar, the Supreme Court, public and private property were torched and looted, 'Enough Is Enough' took on a new meaning.

What started out as a hashtag-led campaign exposing the luxurious lifestyle and extravagance of the scions of powerful political figures soon snowballed into a larger movement against corruption and impunity. #Nepokids in Nepal metamorphosed into a political reform campaign, which again transmuted on Tuesday into class rage.

The Oli-led coalition government's ban on social media last week forced what was essentially an online movement into the streets. Hami Nepal and the GenZ platform (page 3) organised the rally at Mandala on Monday despite information that controversial political forces and other elements planned to infiltrate it. Which they did.

By Tuesday afternoon, Kathmandu was being firebombed. The three pillars of state: the legislative, executive, and judiciary were reduced to ashes. Even the fourth estate was not spared, and became the target of unnamed arsonists.

The damage was not just to physical buildings, but to the national psyche.

But just like Hami Nepal emerged from the rubble of the 2015 earthquake, the GenZ movement now has to take the lead in rebuilding from the cinders of 2025. Nepal needs to rise from the ashes, and be reconstructed from the ground up by a new generation with accountable government, equitable and inclusive growth, and an open society.

What this week's upheaval showed, aside from the tragedy of the lives lost and physical destruction, is that Nepalis value freedom of expression and can use it to stand against injustice and keep fighting for reform and progress.

But there are pitfalls ahead. Some of the same forces that piggybacked on the GenZ rally are now outside the gates of Army Headquarters opposing the consensus candidate for interim prime minister. There are scores of imitation GenZs across the internet with familiar cast of characters from the past.

The Army must have learnt from the 1 February 2005 experience that it should remain as a non-political institution of last resort — there cannot be wannabe prime ministers applying loudly for the job at the gates of its headquarters in Tundikhel.

The Army was needed on the streets

on Tuesday night, when the situation spiralled out of control. But it should now be President Ram Chandra Poudel who must take a more proactive role than he has so far in reestablishing stability. He cannot waste time in appointing an interim government led by a caretaker prime minister of unquestioned integrity to oversee elections.

This is also the demand of GenZ activists, who want Parliament dissolved and changes in the Constitution to allow wide-ranging reforms. Changing the Constitution now will mean another shaky rigmarole like the 2008-2015 period. The amendments can be made after new elections.

### OUR COMMON GROUND

A transformative transition like this also means a lot of uncertainty with competing interest groups trying to take advantage of the fluid situation. Nepal has gone through these upheavals before (although not on the scale we saw this week) with the 1990 People's Movement or the 2006 Peace and Democracy Movement. Each time, there was hope that finally elected leaders who fought and suffered for liberation and freedom would deliver.

Alas, the Nepali people have been let down every time. It has to be different this time. And who better to lead it than a new generation with hopes, aspirations, energy and resolve to build Nepal anew, led by a caretaker prime minister known for her independence, courage and honesty.

In this edition, we carry two op-eds by Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi writers about similar youth-led movements that toppled governments in their countries in 2022 and 2024. Both have important lessons for Nepal's GenZ.

If former Chief Justice Sushila Karki is appointed to head the interim government, she will be our Mohamad Yunus. But as we saw in Bangladesh (page 6), it did not go as smoothly as everyone had hoped. Similar story in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement (page 7).

There were different triggers in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, but one common strand was a neglected and disempowered citizenry which could not take it anymore. They organised organically through social media to push for change.

The wildcard in all three countries is geopolitics, and the competing strategic interests of the India, China, United States triangle — especially with the Trump-Modi tiff.

Time is now of the essence. The longer this drags on, the more difficult it will be to find common ground and start rebuilding. Ending the violence does not mean keeping things in a political vacuum.

## Letters

### 8 SEPTEMBER

It is unfortunate that there were so many casualties. It seems the rallies may have been infiltrated by agitators, but it is important that protests remain peaceful - the organisers must take stock, as must the police and others responsible for the maintenance of law and order. But the movement is important and should be supported by all those who want better governance and accountability from their elected representatives ('Nepal's 8 September massacre', Shristi Karki, nepalitimes.com).

David Seddon

Our students joined the demonstration but they luckily all made it home safely despite having tear gas in their eyes. But not all students were so lucky. The police lied about using rubber bullets, doctors are taking out metal shells from the protesters. Just cutting off social media will not keep the next generation quiet. Politicians are stealing their futures and trying to silence them. In the past, suppressed people have always found a way to stand up against the corrupt and greedy.

Nicole Wick Thakuri

So sad to see young lives lost simply for speaking up for their legitimate rights. Shame on you, government. This isn't democracy. It's demon-crazy.

Shailendra Thakali

My deepest condolences to those young Nepali students and their families for your loss. I sincerely hope your fight against corruption will succeed and the wonderful Nepali people can finally unite for a new Nepal with a bright future for all of you and your beautiful country.

Iwoami Andersen Andersen

A government that doesn't care for its own people has no right to stay in power.

Michelle Lacson

I'm so very sorry to hear this about my second home. It was to be expected with the government's latest rulings. I wish peace for Nepal's people.

Teri Goldstein

This is so unfair. Nepal deserves justice and peace.

Macha Mochi MáshuCrunchú

What happened today was absolutely abhorrent and heartbreaking.

Diwas Gurung

This is savage and inhuman. It is 2025, these things should never happen.

Rangana Gurung

K P Oli, Ramesh Lekhak, Chhabi Rizal, and others involved in the killing of innocent kids need to be brought to justice.

Suman Thapa

It shouldn't be only GenZ, Nepalis from every generation should come forward now. After all, it was the previous generation's leftover system we are fighting against.

Prabina Rana

Tragic to say the least. The government must step down and call elections asap.

Sujoy Das

### K P OLI

Even the death of 19 youths didn't shake Oli - only when his property started burning did he resign.

Kalpana Parajuli

Now let's hope Oli is not allowed to leave the country and be held accountable in a court of law.

Ben-Erik Ness

Only resigning is not sufficient, we need to get back all the money he got through corruption and put him in jail.

Kshitij Khatri

Heartfelt congratulations to our Nepali brothers and sisters. Your courage, unity, and determination have shown the world the true power of people's voice. This historic victory is not only Nepal's but an inspiration for all nations striving for freedom, justice, and accountability. May this new dawn bring peace, prosperity, and dignity to every Nepali citizen.

Mehedi Hasan Palash

Nepal, your voices should be heard and I support your struggles against governmental corruption, but please approach with great care and peace. Praying for everyone ('Kathmandu burns despite PM resignation', nepalitimes.com).

Shaun Sarvey

### KATHMANDU BURNING

There is no act more foolish than burning down your own home in the pursuit of justice and truth.

Ph RamwunGzan

I have been following the developments in Nepal closely with a sense of grief in my heart.

Deeply saddened to witness the loss of 22 lives and the scale of destruction from arson and other atrocities. I am thinking of all my friends and their loved ones — whether they are in Nepal or somewhere in the global Singapore Gurkha diaspora. Take care and keep safe everyone ('Raising Nepal from the ashes', page 4-5).

Our Gurkhas

The wheel of the privileged few runs on and on while the deep anger of ordinary Nepali occasionally erupts in frustration at governments it knows take bribes at every level to get anything done. Nothing much has changed in Nepal since the massacre at the palace -- same high level grift, just different people with their nose in the trough.

Peter Thomson

So sad that the GenZ movement is hijacked by anarchists so the Army steps in to bring peace. Let's hope sanity returns and tranquility is restored.

Akku Chowdhury

I feel like people should volunteer soon to help rebuild the government buildings, similar to how volunteers are helping with building Gelephu in Bhutan. Clearly, change was needed in the government, but future elected officials have to meet somewhere ('What next, Nepal?', Shristi Karki, page 1).

Alexandra White

Home News Multimedia Features Editoria >



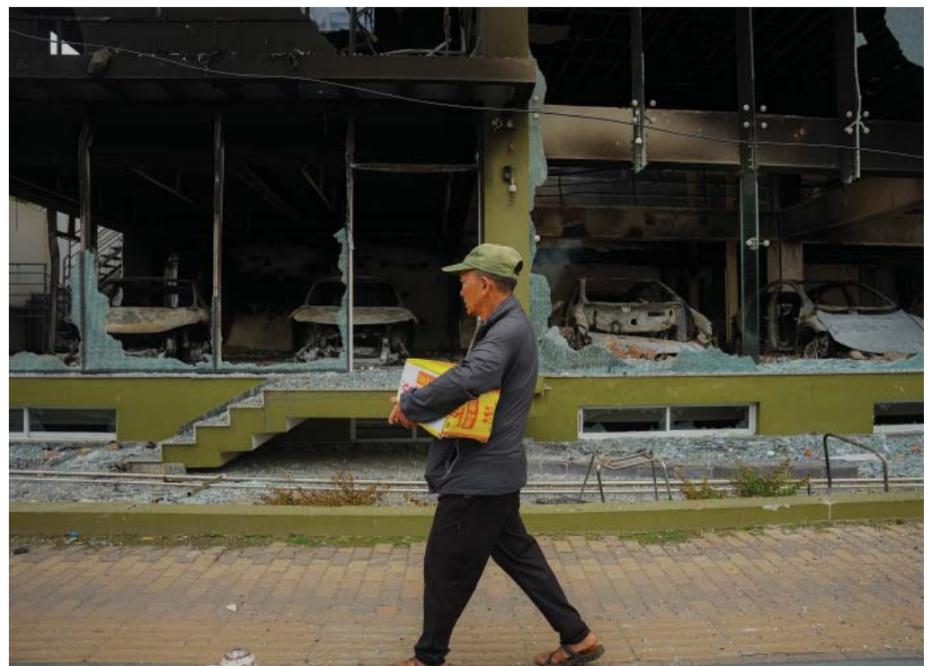
**Nepal's 8 September massacre**  
The government has stirred a hornet's nest of anger among youth with Monday's killings  
Shristi Karki



**Nepal's Gen-Z protest turns deadly**  
At least 15 killed as police fire on protest against corruption and impunity

For continuous coverage, go to nepalitimes.com

## 1,000 Words



AMIT MACHAMASI / NEPALI TIMES

**CAR FEW:** A man carrying a carton of instant noodles walks past a row of electric vehicle showrooms in Thapathali which were torched with the cars inside just before the Army-imposed nationwide curfew on Wednesday morning.

**Times**

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# Who, or what, is Hami Nepal?

The earthquake relief group that rose to prominence with the GenZ protests that toppled the government

Sangya Lamsal and Sudiksha Tuladhar

Many had never heard of Hami Nepal, the organisation that is part of the GenZ movement that did not just topple the government this week, but pushed Nepal's political system into new, uncharted territory.

It was part of an organic coming together of various youth groups fed up with Nepal's corruption, mismanagement and lack of accountability. Hami Nepal and its GenZ comrades are now part of the negotiations with the Army to form an interim government.

Hami Nepal is a non-profit dedicated to supporting communities and individuals in need, guided by its motto 'For the People, By the People'. Its core mission is to assist individuals and communities in need, particularly during emergencies and crises, with a focus on directly connecting donors with recipients, and delivering aid efficiently and transparently.

It was set up after the 2015 earthquake, but was formally registered and gained recognition in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Hami Nepal is led by 36-year-old civic activist Sudan Gurung, and mentored by renowned ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit. Gurung started the organisation after he lost his own son in the 2015 earthquake.

Leading up to the events this week, it played a central role in guiding the demonstrations, using its Instagram and Discord platforms to circulate protest information and share guidelines. Other GenZ groups used their own WhatsApp groups and other fora.

Among the 20 or so volunteers is Ronesh Pradhan, who spoke to Nepali Times on 8 September morning during the GenZ rally, before the violence escalated.

"The voices of young people matter. We can't keep being ruled by the same old men," Pradhan said. "Our generation is the future and if there are older leaders in government, they need to be competent and accountable. We are ready to lead this country forward."

Hami Nepal's earliest visible campaigns include donating more than 400 blankets to Bir Hospital's Covid unit in 2022, creating a plasma and oxygen bank during the pandemic, and distributing school jackets to children in rural districts. More recently, it mounted a relief effort in response to the 2023 Jajarkot earthquake, reaching over 13,000 families with shelter, food, and medical support.

The organisation was also associated with the two-month 'Save Ghopa' campaign, demanding effective and smooth administration of the BPKIHS (B P Koirala Institute of Health Sciences) in Dharan.

The group was also actively engaged in providing rescue and relief during the Kagbeni and Sindhupalchok floods this year. It even sent aid to Turkey after its 2023 earthquake. After the Kavre floods last year, Hami Nepal donated solar lights.

Funding for Hami Nepal comes directly from public donations, with a policy of channeling 100% of received funds for aid distribution. Volunteers self-finance administrative costs, and the group publishes detailed expenditure figures, regularly sharing updates and transparency reports through their social media and website which it launched at its Annual General Meeting in Bhaktapur last year.



OUR NEPAL: Hami Nepal team during their 'Save Ghopa' campaign demanding effective and smooth administration of the BPKIHS in Dharan.



The team during a planning meeting.

PHOTOS: HAMI NEPAL



Civic activist Sudan Gurung who started Hami Nepal with ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit.

#youthsagainstcorruption campaign on social media platforms gained rapid momentum, and that led to the rally on 8 September.

The international #Nepobaby trend on TikTok propelled the rally even more, and young Nepalis used it to expose the scions of powerful politicians and politically-connected influencers who were exhibiting their flashy lifestyles on social media while citizens struggled with joblessness, corruption and poor service delivery.

### TIPPING POINT

Public anger reached a tipping point when the UML-NC coalition led by Prime Minister K P Oli announced a sweeping ban on major social media platforms citing tax revenue, cyber security, and lack of content moderation.

Netizens, civil society and media, however, saw it as the latest authoritarian attempt by the government to clamp down on free speech, increase surveillance of citizens and constrict Nepal's open society.

Susmita Khadka, 22, told us at the rally: "Politics is everywhere. Gen Z has the most platforms, and we want a revolution."

Leading up to 8 September, the GenZ movement disseminated information and reassured participants with volunteers readily available for help, medical support, and assistance. It put up a protest support helpline so that students needing assistance could get help.

As the protests intensified, leaving at least 20 dead outside Parliament, and forcing Prime Minister K P Oli to resign, Hami Nepal shifted into a mediator role, engaging in talks with officials and seeking GenZ's views on future leadership.

Influencers like TikToker Nimesh Shrestha publicly backed the group, amplifying their voice in ongoing negotiations with the Nepal Army alongside other GenZ representatives.

However, as the protests escalated on 9 September, resulting in massive arson and vandalism of public and private property, many GenZ activists disavowed association with the attackers, saying their movement had been infiltrated. The group backtracked, with Gurung saying he was not the leader of the protests.

Meanwhile, others accused Hami Nepal for singlehandedly speaking with the Army chief, and said that they did not represent GenZ's collective voice.

Most GenZ supporters backed Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as their candidate for interim prime minister in an online group. Not everyone in the GenZ movement agrees with that choice, with support for Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah, even though he has endorsed Karki's appointment. Dharan Mayor Harka Sampang rushed to Kathmandu on Wednesday to push his own candidacy.

Hami Nepal has supported Balen Shah to lead the country for the next five years, not just during the interim period, and have called on the public to share their posts supporting Shah to amplify the message.

With the old guard gone, there is a power vacuum with multiple actors with competing interests to fill it. GenZ's youth-led activism has brought new energy for political reform, but its real test begins now — whether it can unite Hami Nepal and other sections to negotiate with the Nepal Army. 🇳🇵

Following the death of Nepali student Prakriti Lamsal at KIIT University in India earlier this year, Hami Nepal advocated for justice using its Instagram account, raising concern about the safety of Nepali students.

Its advocacy platform started with rescue and relief, and Hami Nepal managed to develop a track record for efficient campaigns and transparency in Nepal's humanitarian landscape.

But its work pushed the group to realise that there was a deeper malaise in Nepali society. Its



# RAISING NEPAL FROM THE ASHES

Kathmandu is picking up the pieces after this week's arson and rampage

Singha Darbar's imposing west facade built by Chandra Shumsher Rana 117 years ago and the hall where he met visiting foreign envoys was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

It was restored last year to its original splendour with stained glass windows and an ornate ceiling. After demonstrators entered the central government secretariat on 9 September they set the entire complex on fire.

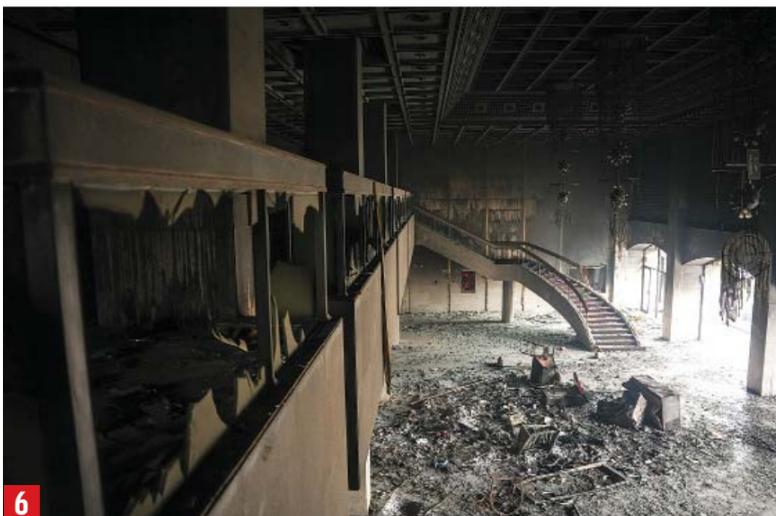
Most of the ministries inside Singha Darbar, including the Prime Minister's Office, are charred hulks. Dozens of SUVs and cars that were smashed and burnt litter the parking lot.

Across to the south at the Supreme Court, hundreds of case files have gone



5

KAMAL PRASAI



6

AMIT MACHAMASI



7



HEMANTA SHRESTHA

up in flames with the building that preceded over some of the biggest legal battles in the history of Nepal.

Interestingly, the under construction Supreme Court, and the newly-built Parliament Complex are untouched. The current Parliament is housed in the Birendra International Convention Centre (BICC) built by the Chinese in 1993, and was the first target of protesters on 8 September.

Outside its gates was where 20 students were shot and killed as they tried to storm the gates. Tuesday and Wednesday saw additional 10 casualties, including policemen who were lynched in Tinkune and Budhanilkantha.

Kathmandu's streets are now under control of the Nepal Army which has imposed a nationwide curfew since Wednesday.

The Army is negotiating with the president and representatives of the GenZ campaign that includes Hami Nepal group that organised the protests to form a new government. Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Sushila Karki has been proposed as the candidate to lead the new government.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal has now opened Kathmandu airport for all domestic and international flights. 🇳🇵



2

KAMAL PRASAI



3

HEMANTA SHRESTHA



4

AMIT MACHAMASI



AMIT MACHAMASI



8

SETOPATI

**1 and 2** Singha Darbar, once the grandest palace in all of Asia, built by Chandra Shumsher in 1908, was torched and reduced to rubble on 9 September 2025.

**3** Hundreds of case files have gone up in flames with Supreme Court also in ruins after the fire.

**4** A police vehicle set on fire by demonstrators at Patan Darbar Square on Tuesday.

**5** A drone view of Parliament building with smoke billowing out from every corner. Outside its gates was where 20 students were shot dead.

**6** The grand staircase leading to the upper balcony of the Parliament building.

**7** Nepal Army armoured car guarding the Baneswor intersection outside Parliament.

**8** Destruction of the Kantipur Media Group's office on Tuesday. Despite this, Kathmandu Post and Kantipur are still being printed and posting online.

# Bangladesh's Youthquake

Lessons of the promise and perils of what happened in Bangladesh may be pertinent for Nepal



People cheering in front of the prime minister's office after Sheikh Hasina's resignation in August 2024 following pro-democratic movement led by students.

WIKIPEDIA

## M Niaz Asadullah

The past year has been marked by a series of revolutions and political shocks as young people across Asia have taken to the streets, demanding accountable governments, fairer societies, and economic opportunities.

Binaifer Nowrojee has aptly termed this wave of upheavals 'youthquakes'.

The most dramatic upheaval took place a year ago in Bangladesh, where anger over politicised public-sector job quotas escalated into a nationwide movement to topple Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian government, leading to the fall of Asia's 'Iron Lady'.

While some celebrated Hasina's ouster as a brave stand against authoritarianism, many viewed it as the beginning of a turbulent and uncertain period.

Some raised concerns about the threat of Islamist violence and heightened geopolitical tensions. Others attributed the uprising to public frustration with neoliberal reforms promoted by the IMF. Economist Jeffrey Sachs went further, dismissing the revolution as a US-backed regime change.

But these interpretations overlook the enormous potential of a bottom-up, youth-led revolution. Despite facing powerful global headwinds, Bangladesh's youth movement has continued to gain strength in the year since Hasina's fall.

What began as street protests against corrupt and anti-democratic practices has evolved into a broader campaign for structural reform.

In the year since the revolution, youth activists have not only helped sustain the interim administration but have also laid the groundwork for a transition to electoral democracy. While the road ahead remains fraught with challenges, five key developments offer grounds for hope.

First, youth activism has catalysed the emergence of new civil-society platforms that have encouraged non-political elites to participate in critical public dialogues.

Since August 2024, new grassroots initiatives and professionalised NGOs have triggered a surge in civic engagement, fueling community-led conversations on how to confront discrimination, address systemic inequities, and advance essential pre-election reforms.

Second, the youth movement has made significant institutional gains. Young organisers have mobilised support for Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus's interim government, helping to extend his mandate and secure domestic and international support for his election roadmap.

They have also pushed major parties to support the formation of a National Consensus Commission tasked with advancing reform discussions in five areas: the constitution, the judiciary, the electoral system, public administration, and anti-corruption.

Third, in addition to fuelling demand for institutional reform, young activists have taken a bold step into formal politics by launching the National Citizen Party (NCP) – Bangladesh's first student-led political party. Once officially

registered, the NCP aims to provide young voters with a viable alternative to traditional parties ahead of the anticipated election in early 2026.

Fourth, Bangladeshi youth are harnessing the energy of street protests to reshape the country's political culture. For example, they are calling for lowering the voting age to 16 and promoting transparent, crowd-funded election financing instead of opaque or illicit political donations.

Lastly, strategic engagement with political elites has already delivered tangible results. Relentless campaigns by emerging youth and civic groups have brought together all major political parties to deliberate on a sweeping set of 166 reforms.

Following months-long negotiations, the National Consensus Commission is expected to release a manifesto – the much anticipated July Charter – a formal document listing agreed-upon fundamental constitutional and governance reforms and commitments on future implementation.

These include term limits for the prime minister, the establishment of a bicameral parliament with proportional representation, judicial and police independence, stronger opposition rights, mandatory legislative review of international treaties, and new mechanisms for public accountability, such as referenda and anti-corruption oversight.

Still, while the past year has shown that tech-savvy, cross-class youth coalitions can outmaneuver entrenched patron-client politics, the initial optimism may prove

short-lived. Crucially, major fault lines could cause the Bangladesh revolution to end like the short-lived Arab Spring of the early 2010s.

### A WARNING SIGN

The NCP's growing credibility issues are a warning sign. With two members in government, it is considered a king's party. Although it is still awaiting registration, the party is already facing corruption allegations, including accusations of institutionalising mob justice and exploiting privileged access to public institutions for political gain. Violent clashes with political opponents have further damaged its reputation.

At the same time, growing dissatisfaction could undermine the interim government's efforts to extend its tenure. In July, the government's mishandling of a fighter-jet crash exposed persistent coordination failures within Yunus's cabinet.

And while the long-delayed trial of Hasina began this month – in absentia – human-rights organisations have raised concerns about the government's use of arbitrary detention to target perceived political opponents.

Ultimately, Bangladesh's political future hinges on the interim government's ability to deliver a fair, clean, and violence-free national election in early 2026. The problem is that the once-united youth-led coalition that toppled Hasina's regime appears increasingly fragile and divided.

The NCP's youth leadership must recognise that meaningful policy change is a long-term process that will extend well

beyond the next election. With the NCP and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party locked in a standoff over the pace of reforms, the country risks falling into its own version of the prisoner's dilemma: unless they cooperate, both stand to lose.

To ensure that reform efforts yield more than a symbolic "one-day democracy," Bangladesh's youth leaders must prioritise dialogue over confrontation and work to resolve disagreements over timing and implementation.

Continued insistence on an all-at-once approach risks derailing progress and pulling the country back into a cycle of instability and repression, jeopardising Bangladesh's future after its upcoming graduation from 'least developed country' status.

It could also allow Hasina's Awami League to remobilise and reenter the electoral arena – an outcome that may align with the unspoken interests of a section of the military elite.

Regardless of the next election's outcome, the fall of Hasina has irreversibly transformed Bangladesh's political landscape. Having sparked a nationwide movement for structural reform, the country's youth are now firmly rooted in the political transition they initiated. But as they are discovering, toppling a repressive regime is far easier than building a better one. 

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M Niaz Asadullah, Head of the Southeast Asia cluster of the Global Labor Organization, is a visiting professor of economics at the University of Reading.



Anti-government protest in Sri Lanka on 13 April 2022 in front of the Presidential Secretariat.

WIKIPEDIA

# GenZ and Aragalaya

There are parallels between the struggles in Nepal and Sri Lanka in youth, politics, and social media

**Ajith Perakum Jayasinghe**

In the heart of Nepal, amidst the breathtaking beauty of the Himalaya, a very different story is unfolding. It is not one of towering peaks and serene landscapes, but of a young generation that dreams of a brighter future while being trapped by decades of political instability and entrenched corruption.

For many young Nepalis, life is a constant struggle with poverty and unemployment. In a country where the per capita income is only about \$1,400, a youth unemployment rate of 20% has forced more than 800,000 people each year to leave their homeland in search of work abroad.

This exodus is not just an economic decision — it is a profound disillusionment with the government, a 'silent referendum' on its ability to lead the country toward prosperity.

In the months leading up to the recent uprising, social media platforms were filled with posts exposing the extravagant lifestyles of the so-called #Nepokids, the privileged children of politicians. These images revealed the stark gulf between the political elite and ordinary citizens, deepening the frustration of Nepal's youth.

That anger finally exploded after 5 September, when the government banned 26 social media platforms — including Facebook, YouTube, X, and WhatsApp — claiming it was a necessary move to curb hate speech and fake news. For nearly half of Nepal's population who are active on social media, the

ban felt like nothing less than an attempt to silence their voices.

Massive street protests followed. What began as peaceful demonstrations on 8 September quickly escalated into violent clashes with police, leaving more than 20 people dead. Protesters stormed the Parliament and Supreme Court buildings, Singha Darbar, and attacked the residences of the president and prime minister. It became one of the largest uprisings in Nepal's history.

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli resigned, the GenZ is negotiating with the Nepal Army and President Ram Chandra Paudel. It remained unclear till Thursday press time if the unrest will subside as rival GenZ groups put forward their own candidates for interim prime minister.

## SRI LANKAN PARALLELS

Young Nepalis no longer want the same leaders who they see as having deceived them for decades. They demand renewal and a brighter horizon. Still, how realistic is such a demand? As history reminds us, every polity gets what it deserves.

Most of the Communist parties that claim to represent the oppressed have themselves been central players in fragile coalition governments by partisan clannishness, personal selfishness, and unaccountable leaders, locking the country into cycles of weak and unstable rule.

As a Sri Lankan political activist, I cannot help but notice the striking parallels between Nepal's trajectory and ours. Nepal had left-wing governments well before Sri Lanka, where the Janatha Vimukthi

Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) only came to power in 2025. Nepal has been under left-leaning governments since 2008.

Yet, despite the rhetoric of Marxism, both our countries face very limited economic and political options. In Sri Lanka, the economic policies pursued by capitalist President Ranil Wickremesinghe were almost identical to those later followed by Marxist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

In our case, the 2022 'Aragalaya' movement was much like Nepal's GenZ struggle. It ended after President Ranil Wickremesinghe assumed power. In the aftermath, the JVP gradually brought the Aragalaya forces under its control.

Their sweeping electoral victory in late 2024 was powered by the hopes of these protest forces. But today, the same question hangs over Colombo as it does over Kathmandu: can a new government really meet the impatient and ambitious expectations of young people?

Already in Sri Lanka, doubts abound — about broken promises, lack of real progress, one-party dominance, and even the risk of yet another national bankruptcy.

Traditionally, governments in South Asia have changed through elections. But recent years show another pattern: pre-electoral uprisings, sudden eruptions triggered not by slow build-up but by specific events.

In Sri Lanka, it was the energy crisis during bankruptcy. In Bangladesh, it was a law granting privileges to war veterans. In Nepal, the crackdown on social media was the trigger.

Social media has become central to all these movements. Those who manage the platforms at the country level hold immense power. Their ability to manipulate algorithms, combined with the small size of their teams, makes their influence even greater.

I personally witnessed Sri Lanka's Aragalaya closely. From the creation of the #GoHomeGota hashtag to the dramatic ouster of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on 9 July, 2022, social media shaped the very reality of our political struggle.

Certain moments in crisis politics prove decisive. In Sri Lanka, the events of 9 May 2022 was one of the most destructive days in the country's recent history, with the greatest property damage in a short span of time. Mobilisation, arson, violence, and killings were coordinated primarily through social media.

Ordinary people, not usually powerful, became decisive actors thanks to social media. By midday, the momentum of the Aragalaya was fading whereas Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had agreed to resign. The turning point came when a pro-government rally held at Temple Trees, the Prime Minister's official residence to bid him farewell turned into a march toward Galle Face.

This procession, which could have been stopped by then-Deputy Inspector General Deshabandu Tennakoon, instead broke into the protest site, attacking Aragalaya activists. The violent attack as well as the counterattacks that followed were all broadcast live on social media and television, electrifying public opinion, which had been

lukewarm until then, redirecting anger toward counter-violence.

The role of media in this transformation demands deeper analysis. There were clear patterns in social media content in those critical hours, much of which has since been removed by service providers. Even those who originally streamed Facebook Live videos cannot retrieve them today.

One peculiar detail stays with me. A military-experienced friend pointed out that in many of the burned houses, toilets had been deliberately smashed. He explained the symbolic nature: destroying sewage systems could render entire cities uninhabitable. How such symbolism wove itself into the protests remains an unresolved mystery, like many other secrets.

At times, literature steps in to fill the gaps history leaves behind. Fiction can serve as a symbolic mirror of reality. With my novel *Arunodakaruwo* (Dawnbreakers), I attempted to imagine the political undercurrents of such decisive moments.

*Arunodakaruwo* has since been published in Sinhala. Its English translation, #Dawnbreakers, was recently long-listed for the Vidarshana Literary Awards. I believe this form of literature — blending political memory with imagination — is an essential intervention. 🇨🇵

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**BEFORE AND AFTER:** Hilton Hotel in Naxal which was set ablaze on 9 September by protesters is still burning two days later.

HILTON KATHMANDU



NEPAL PICTURE LIBRARY, HILTON KATHMANDU

# Nepal turmoil will hit tourism

But the industry thinks visitor arrivals will bounce back as it has after past crises

steadily resolve itself as the backlog of passengers are handled in the coming week.

NTB has organised shuttle services between the airport and hotels for tourists, and these buses had passes to ply even during the 10AM-5PM and 7PM-6AM curfew hours on Thursday.

Once a more normal state has been reached, NTB plans to work with the private sector to put out the message that Nepal is back in business and has always been safe for tourists. Indeed, no tourists have been harmed during the protests, and they have not been targeted in past conflicts either.

At a hotel in Pokhara protesters backed off when they were told that there were foreign guests, and any disturbance would hurt Nepal internationally. The mob left after breaking a few glasses and some vases and torching swimming pool towels.

## FOREIGN INVESTMENT

However, the negative impact of the protests in the short and long term are undeniable. Visuals of a burning Hilton Hotel has been a powerful deterrent, not just for tourism but also for foreign investors thinking of setting up in a country already infamous for corruption and an unfriendly investment climate.

"This will likely deter investors who are interested in building an environment for high-end tourists," cautions Joshi.

The last available Doing Business report by the World Bank that included Nepal was in 2020 where Nepal ranked 94<sup>th</sup> out of 190

countries, a significant jump from its previous position.

Pokhara also saw several governmental buildings including a ward office being vandalised and set on fire. Four hotels and establishments linked to politicians -- Mantra Thakali, Hotel Sarowar, Hotel Pokhara Goodwill, and the recently opened Bagaincha Resort were all attacked.

According to Mani Raj Lamichhane, NTB's Gandaki Province head, most of the violence happened around Pokhara's New Road area, with a few incidents in Lakeside popular with tourists.

"Tourists had already been evacuated when the hotels were attacked, and they are now at Lakeside, waiting for buses to ferry them to the airport," he adds.

A Himalaya Airlines flight from Lhasa that could not land in Kathmandu after the airport was closed on Tuesday afternoon was diverted to Pokhara with 65 passengers. The plane flew back to Kathmandu last night.

Lamichhane is not so pessimistic about the future. He says, "Nepal has these situations periodically. We lost the tourists that would have come yesterday, and as we were just going into the season we might lose 10-15% of our business. But we are telling tourists to keep their bookings on hold instead of cancelling them."

He adds: "We really have to put the message out there that despite the violence, tourists are safe and they are left alone to enjoy Nepal's sights." 🇳🇵

## Vishad Raj Onta

**V**iolent protests on Monday and Tuesday in Nepal got unprecedented worldwide publicity for Nepal — but not of the kind it would have wanted at the peak of the autumn tourism season which sees more than a third of annual arrivals.

Videos on tv and online about the death, destruction and mayhem in Kathmandu have led to some cancellations, especially with scenes of burning internationally branded hotel chains.

Thousands of passengers have been stranded in Kathmandu and in destination cities with the 24 hour closure of Nepal's only international airport. The Nepali diaspora coming home early for the Dasain-Tihar holidays were also impacted.

However, despite the unprecedented nature of events this week and the continuing political uncertainty, tourism officials are confident that Nepal will make it through like it did after past crises. Even during the height of the Maoist war, tourists and trekkers were not harmed.

"The tourism industry has been through a lot in recent years, such as conflict, pandemic and earthquake. We have always managed to recover, and have learned a lot about how to bounce back," says Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO of the Nepal Tourism Board. "However, having such situations again and again really hurts our credibility as a destination."

Nepal was just bouncing back from the slump brought on by a series of upheavals starting with the earthquake and the Covid-19 lockdowns. The number of international visitors had finally

reached pre-pandemic levels, recording 736,562 arrivals from January to August 2025. A series of new hotels including international brands such as Hilton, Marriott and Holiday Inns came up across the country.

With the Nepal Army stepping in to stabilise the situation starting Tuesday night and through Wednesday and Thursday, the streets are calmer. Kathmandu airport is back in operation, but arriving passengers have to drive past the charred hulks of government buildings and torched cars.

At present there are up to 35,000 foreign tourists in Nepal, many already trekking in the Everest and Annapurna regions. Some of them are in Pokhara, Chitwan and Lumbini.

"Many are carrying on with what they came to Nepal to do," says Joshi, adding that since the airport is open their current situation will