

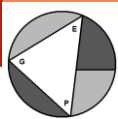
Nepal at a Crossroads: Which road will the Gen-Z Movement move on?

Pawan Kumar Sen, PhD

Background

Thousands of Nepal's youths, popularly known as Gen-Z, demonstrated in the streets of Kathmandu on September 8, 2025 showing their anger against corruption, nepotism, unemployment and economic inequality. Organisers of the demonstration called for a protest saying that young people of the country were frustrated by the government's corruption, a lack of economic opportunities and a recent ban on social media platforms. The protest was very different than other protests that took place in the history of the country. Until then Nepal had been witnessing protests mainly organised by political parties and led by aged political veterans. This time, it was organised and led by Gen-Z without the involvement of any political party and the leadership of any particular politician. Teenagers and young adults flooded the streets demanding accountability and good governance.

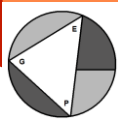
The government had abruptly restricted the access to major social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter on September 4, 2025 after these companies failed to comply with new registration rules. The government's decision to ban these social media platforms triggered the massive protests. The government framed this ban as a move to curb online crime, fraud, hate speech and misinformation. But for Nepal's youths, it was like imposing restrictions on the freedoms of



speech and expression. It was not just about Facebook or YouTube for them, it was a call for accountability and a demand to be heard. They accused the administration the then Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli (his full name) of imposing censorship to distract the general public from deep-rooted corruption. At least 19 people were killed and several hundreds injured in clashes with the police when the protesters, according to authorities, tried to storm the Parliament Building premise. Although the government lifted the ban on social media and the Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak resigned on the same day, there was no let up in the demonstrations the following day.

Aftermath

On September 9, 2025, another protest began in response to the police killings and brutalities of the previous day. Obviously, one cannot remain silent after witnessing such suppression. Defying a curfew, the protesters stormed and ignited the Parliament Building, the Office of the Prime Minister (also called Singh Durbar), other ministries and the Supreme Court. Official residences of the President, the Prime Minister and other ministers were set ablaze. Homes of Ex-Prime Ministers were vandalised and set afire. The country was rocked by this unprecedented unrest. However, Nepali youths were not against the basic characteristics of the country's constitution. No slogans were heard against republicanism, secularism and federalism that underpin the new constitution (see Sen 2021; 2023; 2024). The then Prime Minister Oli resigned on that day, and was rescued by the Nepali Army in a helicopter from his official residence. Meanwhile, Gen-Z leaders claimed that the vandalisms and ignited fires were not carried out by their supporters. According to them,



their protest was hijacked by opportunists. Some infiltrators took opportunities to defame their protest and spread anarchy. Gen-Z leaders also demanded to take legal action against those involved in violence, looting and arson.

Nepal's Parliament Building burnt by protestors

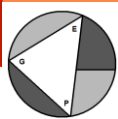


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Nepal's Supreme Court burnt by protestors



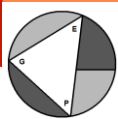
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The Army Chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel emerged as a 'voice of calm'. In an address to the nation in the evening of September 9, 2025, he urged dialogue with the protesters, and appealed to all the sides for peace in the country. He called on all the sides to come to the negotiation table to find a way out of this situation, and the protesting groups to suspend all planned protests. The dialogue continued with the Gen-Z representatives for another couple of days. All the sides emphasised that a solution must be found within the framework of the constitution.

After intensive discussions among the President, the Army Chief, the Gen-Z representatives and constitutional experts, the President Ram Chandra Poudel appointed the new prime minister, Sushila Karki (former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court), on September 12, 2025 on the recommendation of the Gen-Z leaders. The Prime Minister took an oath remaining fully loyal to the Constitution of Nepal, a clear indication that the constitution was still alive.

Immediately after the Prime Minister swearing the oath, the President dissolved the House of Representatives (the lower house of the parliament) on the recommendation of the former. This was the main demand of the Gen-Z representatives. The PM Karki declared the date, March 5, 2026, for new elections. It was a clear sign of the Gen-Z leaders' maturity and generosity to select 73-year-old Sushila Karki as the Prime Minister. They knew that they themselves lacked the necessary experience in running a government and an administration. They thus proved that they were not hungry for power.

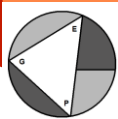


Genesis of the Gen-Z protest

Since the new constitution was introduced in September 2015, only three leaders—Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli of CPN (UML), Pushpa Kamal Dahal of CPN (Maoist Centre) and Sher Bahadur Deuba of Nepali Congress—have taken turns to lead the government. During these ten years of the newly formed democratic republic, government has changed seven times, but always led by these three politicians. Even though their times in office had been short (just a year or two per tenure), the general people were fed up with the endless cycle of these leaders returning to and maintaining power.

Their cyclical (re)accession to power did not bring any meaningful changes in the public's lives. Moreover, it further institutionalised the widespread corruption. Transparency International, according to its Corruption Perception Index 2024, has ranked Nepal as one of the most corrupt countries in the world with the rank 107th out of 180 countries, and with a score 34 out of 100 placing it in a category of highly corrupt countries (Transparency International 2025: 5).

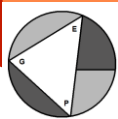
Unemployment is heavily concentrated among the younger generations. The youth unemployment rate in Nepal was 21 percent in 2024 i.e. one in every five young people (aged 15-24) were unemployed (Global Economy 2024). Since very few new jobs are being created, people have to migrate to other countries to find jobs. As found in the 2021 Census, 7.5 percent of the country's total population of about 2.2 million people were recorded as absentees living abroad i.e. persons who have been living abroad for more than six months for study, employment or (other) business purposes prior to the census (National Statistics Office 2024: 43). Gulf countries and India have been the most prominent destinations for



absentees living outside the country (Sharma & Subedi 2025: 35). Nepali media says that over 2,000 youths leave for foreign employment from the Kathmandu airport every day due to lack of employment opportunities in the country. The situation is so bad that thousands of Nepali youths have joined the Russian Army to fight against Ukraine to earn some money. According to CNN, about 15,000 Nepali people had joined the Russian Army by February 2024 (Pokharel et al 2024).

On the other hand, sons and daughters of powerful politicians, commonly called nepo-kids, were showing off their lavish lifestyles, luxury cars, expensive foreign trips and collections of expensive goods in social media, while most of other people in the country were struggling to survive. This sharp contrast created the anger and willingness to rise up among youths. The final spark came on September 4, 2025 when the government decided to ban social media.

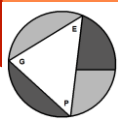
The general public actually used to express their views on alleged, apparent and proven instances of political corruption through social media. Many videos were going viral on social media exposing such corruption and nepotism in the Oli government. Therefore, they thought that the government banned social media to suppress dissent in general and discussions of corruption, inequality and other injustices among the people. They felt that their voice had particularly been silenced to cover up the government's misdeeds. More generally, social media was more than a means of entertainment for them. It was above all a platform for them to connect themselves, share ideas and organise their activities with others. Many of them even used to depend on social media to run their businesses.



Many Gen-Z youngsters used to rely on social media for content creation such as YouTube videos, blog posts and podcasts as means of income. So, social media was deeply embedded in their daily lives. Apart from these reasons, millions of Nepali people were badly affected who were working or otherwise involved in the tourism and hotel sectors. Tourism especially has a significant place in Nepal's economy. It heavily depends on social media for outreach and bookings. The ban on social media completely predictably disrupted the tourism and hotel industry. In this way, the few remaining sources of income were in danger. In that sense the government's social-media ban was short-sighted, even dim-witted.

But, was the ban on social media the only or primary reason for the protest? This is a big question. The youths, of course, opposed the ban on social media. However, it was only the last straw to break a camel's back. The protest was actually due to long-standing frustrations brought about by corruption, nepotism and lack of accountability on the part of politicians. The Nepali youths were fed up with the same faces of seventy-year-plus old politicians taking turns in power like an endless merry-go-round. But these politicians never took the frustrations of especially the young people seriously.

Let us take an example. On September 7, 2025, just a day before the Gen-Z protest, the statute convention of CPN (UML) endorsed the proposal to remove the 70-year age bar and two-term limit to hold top executive positions in the leadership. This provision made 74-year-old Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli possible to continue in his executive role, and pave the way for him to become prime minister again. The public's frustration further grew as leaders failed to control corruption, unemployment, nepotism and inequality. At last, the public anger and frustration reached

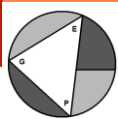


the tipping point, and exploded when the government imposed the ban on social media.

Was the protest due to internal reasons only?

Many political commentators said that the Gen-Z protest was not just internal. They claimed that the protest was nudged by external forces who wanted to reshape Nepal's geopolitics. When Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli was the prime minister for second time, his government unveiled a new political map of Nepal in May 2020 that included disputed territories with India—Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura—inside Nepal borders, at least theoretically adding 335 square kilometres of land. The Indian establishment took umbrage, interpreting this move as Nepal's attempt to deliberately escalate this border dispute and deteriorate its relation with her.

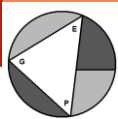
Consequently, Sharma Oli was seen as pro-China. When he became prime minister for third time in July 2024, he was not invited by India for an official visit. Generally, when Indian prime ministers congratulated their newly appointed Nepali counterparts, they would also invite the latter for an official visit to India; actually, a Nepali prime ministers' first official foreign visit has been used to be always to Delhi. But, Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli's first official foreign visit was circumstantially Beijing. There, he signed into the Belt and Road Initiative in December 2024, China's global infrastructure development strategy launched in 2013 to enhance connectivity and cooperation across Asia and beyond, thereby deepening ties with China.



Moreover, Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli attended a special military parade in Beijing in September 2025 organised to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance during World War II. Many political commentators raised questions about his participation regarding Nepal's ability to uphold its policy of neutrality and non-alignment; and thus to maintain balanced relations with all major powers, particularly with Western countries and India. Western countries further suspected the Nepal government when then Prime Minister Oli invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Nepal during one of the sideline meetings of the latest Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit on 31 August - 1 September 2025 in Tianjin, China.

On the other hand, Dalai Lama (the highest spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhism, now in exile in India since 1959) extended congratulations to Sushila Karki on her appointment as Nepal's prime minister on September 13, 2025. This happened for the first time in Nepal. Since Nepal always adheres to the One-China policy, it considers Tibet as an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China and does not recognise it as an independent and a sovereign state. So, Dalai Lama's congratulatory message was widely reported as an "unprecedented gesture" in the context of international relations in the Nepali media.

Apart from this, a group of youths riding motorcycles and wearing distinctive T-shirts printed 'Tibetan Original Blood' was also seen in the September 8 Gen-Z protest. They were even addressing crowds. Some journalists reported that Tibetan refugees took the advantage of the tense situation, and allegedly tried to incite anti-China 'Free Tibet' activities. But the latter countered that they were just a group of motorcycle riders, and denied any connections to the Free Tibet movement or any other



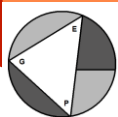
political or separatist movements. Even though there were some speculations, there were no strong indications that any foreign powers were involved in the Gen-Z protest as known yet.

The path to move on

The CPN (UML) filed a writ petition at the Supreme Court against the dissolution of the House of Representatives on September 25, 2025. Over a dozen petitions have already been filed in the court seeking to reinstate the House. Leaders of the CPN (UML) have argued that the dissolution of the House is against the spirit of the constitution and the principle of democracy. If the House is reinstated by the verdict of the Supreme Court, it will bring a complete disaster to the Gen-Z movement. A new government would then be formed out of the reinstated House in which same old faces are very likely to reappear in the government. Such a scenario would sow the seeds of another and perhaps even more radical Gen-Z movement in the more distant or even immediate future.

If the House is not reinstated, the Karki government gets the continuity it would need, though it will be obliged to hold fresh elections of the House on March 5, 2026. If the same major political parties and same old faces win the elections again, and form a new government of their own once more, the aspirations of Nepali youths will not be fulfilled. In this situation, Nepal may have to face prolonged political turmoil.

At the moment, Nepal is standing at a crossroads. It is too early to say which road Nepal will choose and move on. Whether this will involve the Gen-Z movement that will be able to bring genuine political and socio-economic changes that most people have wanted and yearned for such a



long time now, or fade away into oblivion like many other such movements in the past, remains to be seen.

Dr. Pawan Kumar Sen, a frequent contributor and associate editor to this journal, is Chair and Managing Director of Himalaya Comprehensive Research Pvt. Limited (Lalitpur, Nepal). He has a keen interest in identity issues, and other contemporary political and state-restructuring issues of Nepal, especially republicanism, federalism, secularism and multilingualism. He received his PhD in 2025 from Leiden University, the Netherlands, for his work Transforming Nepal's Political System: Party Positions and Public Opinion (2004-2012). himalaya.cr@gmail.com pawansen.hcr@gmail.com

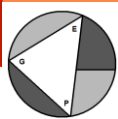
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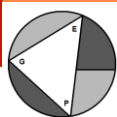
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Lage Rijndijk 85, 2315 JR Leiden, the Netherlands

Dutch Chamber of Commerce Nr. 93569432

contact@nsdefoundation.org

www.nsdefoundation.org

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Our mission and vision

Our main goal is to advocate and help realise sustainable development and education as basic human rights for all, by working on projects that provide access to education for marginalised communities. Every individual, regardless of gender, background or circumstances, should have access to educational opportunities that enable personal growth and contribute to positive social change. We strive to create a global network dedicated to sustainable development and education, where diversity is embraced and opportunities for growth are accessible to all. Our core values are equality, inclusivity, sustainability and empowerment.

Key Goals

- Actively contribute to the global effort of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (education), beyond the target year of 2030 – especially by establishing partnerships with likeminded organisations and (marginal) communities.
- Become a leading advocate for education as a fundamental human right, with a focus on gender equality and inclusivity – especially by advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the need for quality education and development across the globe.
- Nurturing responsible citizens in marginalised communities, enabling them to become agents of positive change through various possible means.

Key current projects – extra donations and fundings are welcome!

Online Schooling for Afghan Girls Providing access to quality education through an (encrypted) online schooling program on esp. English language skills for girls in Afghanistan unable to attend traditional schools due to cultural or safety reasons.

Claim Your Future – Sponsored Student Cohort Through an MoU with the Alekain Foundation based in the US, NSDE sponsors dozens of marginalised Afghan students to complete the Claim Your Future online high-school program with Smart Schools International, leading to an accredited American diploma.

Clean Water & Drainage Infrastructure Project This project supports the construction of clean water and drainage systems in Ouw Village, East Saparua District, Central Maluku in Indonesia. This project addresses limited access to safe water, inadequate drainage systems and vulnerability to climate-related flooding. The initiative strengthens public health, enhances local economic opportunities and empowers the community through participatory development.