BEYOND CLASS

Climate Justice

Nepal's GenZ is taking on the world's polluters over climate disasters.

Hannah Beech and **Sajal Pradhan** report

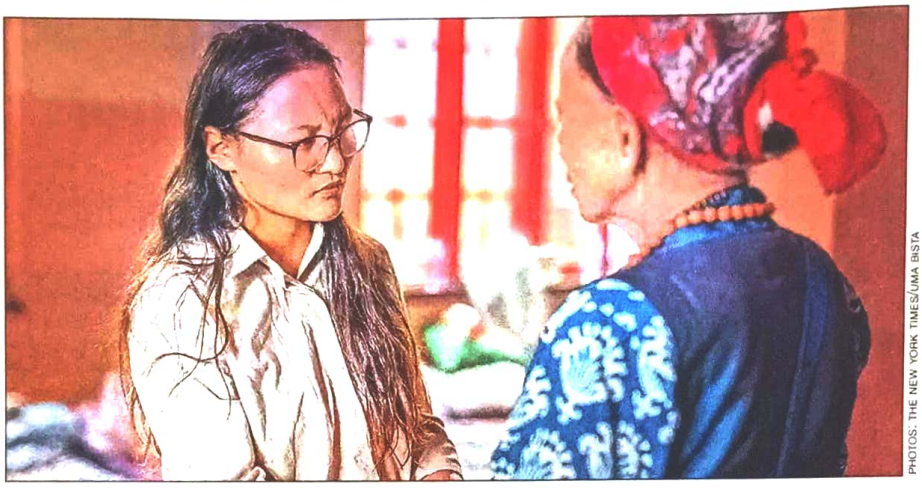
When Tashi Lhazom was 11, a glacial lake overflowed and inundated her home in a high Himalayan valley. Of her family's hundreds of shaggy yaks, only two survived. In 2025, another flash flood cascaded into the village, the result, scientists say, of melting permafrost on a warming planet.

Such natural disasters spurred Lhazom's political awakening. When Nepali young people protested a year ago, she joined other climate activists on the forefront of a GenZ revolution that eventually ushered in a youth-dominated government in March.

Not long ago, when a glacial collapse created an inland tsunami that left more than 8,000 dead or missing in other Himalayan valleys in Nepal and Tibet, Lhazom again raised her voice. Now 26, she demanded that the world's most polluting countries compensate Nepal for what she calls a "climate national emergency".

"It's high time we shift from the language of foreign aid to the language of climate compensation and even reparations," she said. "This is not a crime that we in Nepal committed, but we are the ones who are suffering."

After the August 26 floods, the Nepali government has made climate justice its global calling card. Balendra Shah, Prime Minister of Nepal, addressed the United Nations General Assembly and pushed for industrialised powers to foot the bills faced by lesser-developed countries disproportionately affected by climate-linked disasters.



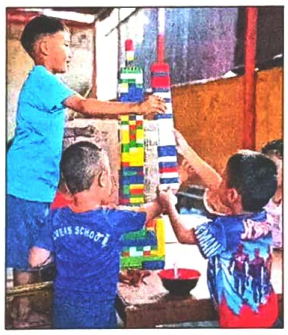
PHOTOS: THE NEW YORK TIMES/UMA BISTA

IN PIECES: Tashi Lhazom, a climate activist, meets a woman displaced by the floods; (below) displaced children at a Buddhist monastery in Nepal

"As a government that came after GenZ, we feel our election victory was prepared by these young people, and climate change is primarily their issue," Shisir Khanal, the foreign minister of Nepal, said in an interview. "We believe that we can be the voice of not just the Nepali young people, but of young people of the world."

Whether Nepal can persuade industrialised powers to make climate reparations is far from certain — and there is no consensus on which nations should pay.

The science, climate experts say, is straightforward. Nepal produces a negligible



wisp of greenhouse gases. Nearly all of its energy comes from hydropower. The country is importing fleets of electric vehicles from China. More than 45 per cent of the country is forested, and that green cover is increasing, courtesy community management programmes.

A week after the flooding, Gita Chaudhary, Nepal's environment minister, represented her country at a meeting of the 44 nations recognised by the United Nations as least developed, where she pushed for climate financing. "Historical emitters need to be held accountable," Chaudhary said in an interview.

This year, Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris climate agreement for the second time. "If the US won't agree to anything, what can I say?" Chaudhary said. "That's why a global movement is necessary, and that's why Nepal is going on the global stage."

In initial reports, Nepali scientists and officials said they were confident that the recent floods were catalysed by industrial emissions causing glaciers to melt. Others, however, caution that they cannot make a definitive link without further study.

Prakriti Bhattarai Basnet, 28, a technology policy researcher for an opposition political party, was not willing to wait. Four days after the torrent of mud, rock and debris wiped out entire communities, she posted a fiery video on social media.

"We the people of Nepal are done getting your sympathy videos," she said in the video. "What we want is for your countries to pay up."

Soniya Ghale, 19, was attending a Kathmandu high school with her sister when the rush of glacial debris swept through her village on August 26. Himalayan students often move to the capital for schooling. She took part in the GenZ rallies a year ago, when 19 young protesters were killed by security forces, provoking a national outrage that brought down the government.

Ghale's parents supported her activism, saying their generation depended on the next to fix the nation's problems. "Climate change is seriously affecting my home," she said, listing the impacts on valleys perched under melting glaciers.

Her father, who worked at a bank on the border of Nepal and Tibet, disappeared during the floods and is among the several thousands in Nepal still missing and feared dead. Waiting for news, Ghale commutes to school. She is studying science.

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