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Dhangaedi Jumla

Only four in 10 students make it from grade 1 to SEE

○ SUDEEP KAINI
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

In 2016, school enrollment campaigns across Nepal celebrated a historic milestone when 1,053,824 children proudly registered for grade 1. Ten years later, during the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) administered in March-April 2026, that group had dwindled to just 430,667 students.

According to data from the Education Ministry, a staggering 623,157 children—amounting to 59.14 percent of the original group—disappeared from the formal school pipeline over the decade. This drastic dropout rate means fewer than 41 percent of primary school entrants managed to complete their secondary education on schedule, exposing critical cracks in the state's multi-billion-rupee educational infrastructure.

To compound the crisis, out of the small minority who reached the examination halls, 146,500 students failed the initial SEE grading, rendering them ineligible to enroll in grade 11. These students are now awaiting make-up examinations scheduled for June.

Sharma takes the helm of judiciary amid seniority row

He must navigate internal rifts and uneasy relations with the legal community.



Manoj Kumar Sharma takes charge as chief justice, in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

○ DURGA DULAL
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

Manoj Kumar Sharma took charge as chief justice of the Supreme Court on Tuesday with unopposed endorsement from the Parliamentary Hearing Committee, even as the judiciary remains divided over the bypassing of seniority in the selection process.

In the evening, he was sworn in by President Ram Chandra Paudel at Sheetal Niwas.

The Prime Minister Balendra Shah-led Constitutional Council, on May 7, recommended Sharma, who was fourth on the seniority list, by a majority vote, despite reservations from two of the six members. Twelve days later, he was unanimously endorsed by the parliamentary hearing committee, although representatives from the Nepali Congress in the House of Representatives abstained.

Not only was the long-standing tradition of seniority bypassed in Sharma's selection, but the parliamentary hearing process was also concluded in an unusually swift manner. The committee, chaired by the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party lawmaker Bodh Narayan Shrestha, held discussions with the complainants on Tuesday morning, during which

only seven of the 16 who had lodged the complaints appeared.

Ignoring the request from the CPN-UML and Nepali Communist Party lawmakers to allow them to review the complaints, Shrestha, with support from his party's lawmakers, pushed through the hearing in the afternoon. Earlier practice allowed a day to review complaints after opening them, but this time, complaints were presented and discussed immediately.

He was endorsed by hearing committee despite Congress' abstention.

In the hours-long question-and-answer sessions, Sharma faced pointed questions about his decisions regarding Ncell, his academic qualifications, and whether he met constitutional eligibility requirements.

Sharma defended his decision regarding tax exemption to the telecom company, saying it was decided through legal process and appeal. Some asked for his answers regarding the differences within the Supreme Court and

the objections from the Nepal Bar Association to his alleged role in blocking in registering a writ petition against his nomination.

While he answered some queries hesitantly, he skipped several others. He presented a 19-point work plan to be implemented during his six-year tenure. Sharma has submitted a 19-page action plan during the parliamentary hearing. It includes proposals ranging from forming committees to study problems within the judiciary to establishing a digital court system.

He pledged to reduce the backlog of cases. Similar promises have been made by previous Chief Justices during hearings.

However, Sharma's commitment to present progress reports to the parliamentary committee every four months suggests he will be under pressure to deliver reforms.

The Supreme Court's workload has been continuously increasing.

Sharma said there is no major dispute with the Bar and that issues related to case registration are administrative matters.

However, the Nepal Bar Association staged symbolic protests with lanterns at its Ramshahpath office while the hearing was underway at Singha Durbar. Sharma proposed forming a high-level study committee within one month, even as a report on judicial reform prepared by former chief justice Hari Krishna Karki has not been fully implemented.

He also stated that judges should only be involved in judicial work as per the constitution and should not be assigned administrative roles.

He proposed transforming the Supreme Court into an IT-friendly court by integrating digital systems into case filing, judgment writing, and enforcement within a year.

He plans to implement digital platforms for case registration, summons delivery, case management, witness examination, hearings, and judgment writing.

He also proposed live broadcasting of court hearings, the development of biometric systems linked to national identity cards, and the remote participation of litigants online.

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Here to assess progress, APG says Nepal's efforts to exit grey list 'not enough'

FATF-linked delegation tells officials to rush reforms as concerns grow over enforcement gaps, legal changes and limited results.

○ YAGYA BANJADE & MATRIKA DAHAL
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

A delegation from the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), the regional body of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), has met Nepali officials in Kathmandu and reminded them of areas where the country has failed to make adequate improvements after being placed on the grey list. The delegation warned that failure to address those shortcomings could put Nepal at risk of being blacklisted, instead of being removed from the grey list.

The two-member delegation, led by APG Deputy Executive Secretary David Shannon, met Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, senior ministry officials, Nepal Rastra Bank governor Bishwo Nath Poudel, senior central bank officials, the police chief and other stakeholders. During the meetings, the delegation reviewed progress in areas where authorities have been working and pointed out shortcomings in implementation.

Based on conversations Kantipur held with more than six officials involved in the meetings, the APG said Nepal had made limited progress on several commitments outlined in the action plan for exiting the grey list and suggested improvements.

"They are dissatisfied not only with implementation but also Nepal's inability to properly report the progress already made," one official who attended the meetings said. "The APG also appears dissatisfied with progress in regulation, investigation and prosecution related to the banking and financial sector, cooperatives regulation, banking offences, real estate transactions, precious metals trading, corruption, tax evasion, human trafficking, environmental and wildlife crimes, and money laundering through shell companies."

The delegation held a series of meetings with various government agencies from early Tuesday morning. Discussions began at around 8:30am with Nepal Police and other security agencies and concluded at around 6pm with Finance Minister Wagle.

Throughout the day, the delegation held eight separate meetings with senior officials of Nepal Rastra Bank, the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority, members of the parliamentary Finance Committee, the law minister, the foreign minister and other stakeholders. Officials said the APG acknowledged Nepal's efforts to exit the grey list but stressed that the measures taken so far were inadequate and had not produced sufficiently effective results.

According to one official present during the meetings, the APG said meaningful progress had been made on only nine of the 15

items outlined in Nepal's FATF action plan, while the remaining six had seen only partial implementation. The assessment was based on a January 2026 review. However, Nepali officials claimed that further improvements had been made on those six partially completed items since January.

Mahesh Acharya, chief of the Financial Sector Management & Corporation Co-ordination Division at the finance ministry, said the APG urged Nepal to intensify efforts to complete the action plan within the two-year timeline. "The Nepali side also expressed commitment to implementing the action plan effectively," Acharya said. "The APG delegation said it was willing to provide facilitation and support if Nepal faces difficulties during implementation."

The APG also raised concerns over recent amendments to Nepal's anti-money laundering laws introduced through an ordinance.

The government amended the Anti-Money Laundering Prevention Act to allow the Department of Money Laundering Investigation to probe financial crimes categorised as predicate offences under FATF standards.

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Poverty, poor learning, child marriage and migration push children out of classrooms.

While successive governments have championed legislation ensuring free and compulsory basic education up to grade 8, statistical realities compiled by the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) paint a contradictory picture. Data reveal that by 2023, only 621,848 of the original million-plus students had reached grade 8.

Ananda Prasad Neupane, Director General of CEHRD, argues that the metrics reflect complex systemic trends rather than outright dropouts alone. "The phenomenon of students repeating grades due to academic failure outweighs the absolute dropout rate," said Neupane. "Furthermore, we track a massive subterranean cycle where children abandon their classrooms for a year or two, only to re-enroll later, which severely scrambles our long-term tracking of student groups."

The historical breakdown shows that the 2016 grade 1 cohort was nearly balanced by gender, comprising 530,176 girls and 523,648 boys.

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Who is Nepal's egg donation ban actually protecting?

Court banned egg extraction to stop the exploitation of young donors. The same order has left some women without option.

○ AARYA CHAND
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

When Padma was 22, she was diagnosed with cancer. What followed were three brutal cycles of chemotherapy—each necessary, each taking something from her. Doctors warned that the radiation would damage her ovaries. But Padma was fighting to stay alive. Freezing her eggs felt like a problem for another time, one she hoped she would have.

She survived. Her ovaries did not.

Now 27, Padma—whose name has been changed to protect her privacy—needs a donor egg to conceive. Under normal circumstances, that option would have been available in Nepal. But last August, Nepal's Supreme Court issued an interim order banning the extraction and storage of women's eggs entirely, directing the government to form regulations before any clinic could resume the services. The order came after Hope Fertility and Diagnostic Pvt Ltd in Babarmahal was found to have been illegally

extracting eggs from teenage girls and selling them commercially.

The court's intent was protection. But for women like Padma, the protection arrived too late, and the wait for what comes next has no clear end.

"I did everything right," she said. "I treated my cancer. And now I am being told to wait for the government to write a law."

Nepal's Supreme Court order, issued on August 19, 2025, by a single bench led by Justice Tek Prasad Dhungana, was the result of a writ petition filed by advocates Nirab Gyawali, Dhruva Bhandari, and Ankita Tripathi.

The petitioners argued that egg extraction should only be permitted under a clear legal framework. The court agreed and, in the absence of a law, banned it altogether.

The ban was not without reason. The Hope Fertility case had exposed what many in the medical community had long known: Nepal's rapidly expanding fertility industry was operating with little or no oversight.

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XTREME ENERGY DRINK

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NATIONAL

Lamjung's traditional honey hunting fascinates the world

In recent years, this centuries-old adventurous practice in villages such as Bhujung, Ghanpokhara, Taghring, Mipra, Taapgaun, Chyamche, Ghermu, Dudhpokhari and Ghalegaun has attracted global media attention.

○ **AASH GURUNG**
LAMJUNG, MAY 19

Towering cliffs in Lamjung stand like they are touching the blue sky. At their base, streams hiss through the terrain, and waterfalls blur the eyes of onlookers.

From the top of these dangerous cliffs, a ladder called pron in the Gurung language (a ladder made of ropes and bamboo) is suspended. People tie ropes around their waists and descend using this ladder. To drive the bees away from hives, they use smouldering bundles of leaves to create thick smoke. Soon the cliff is clouded in smoke as the bees swirl in a storm-like frenzy.

Foreign visitors attending honey hunting festivals are helping promote tourism in rural Lamjung.

A large number of foreign tourists are now drawn to Lamjung's rural identity and the centuries-old Gurung tradition of cliff honey hunting. During the season, when honey is collected from the Himalayan cliff bee (*Apis laboriosa*), tourists from abroad as well as domestic visitors from Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan travel to different sites where the practice takes place.

While hanging from cliffs, honey hunters are surrounded by swarms of bees. They wear protective gear to avoid stings. Below them lies a deep gorge. Using long bamboo poles, they pierce the honeycomb. A basket or container is placed beneath the comb. The honeycomb is then detached from the rock using a sharp tool tied to another bamboo pole. In some places, honey is dropped directly to the ground, while in others it is pulled up using ropes.

In recent years, this traditional and adventurous practice in villages such as Bhujung, Ghanpokhara, Taghring, Mipra, Taapgaun, Chyamche, Ghermu, Dudhpokhari and Ghalegaun

has attracted global media attention. Large crowds of tourists now gather on cliff edges to witness the activity.

A few years ago, when honey was collected at Ghimche cliff and Kanyu waterfall in ward 4 of Kwholasothar Rural Municipality turned festive. A group of around 200 people, including celebrities, doctors, pilots and security officials from Kathmandu, visited to witness the event. According to Tul Bahadur Gurung, chair of the Tourism Management Committee in Bhujung, foreign tourists have shown strong interest in this traditional practice. "Tourists now ask about the season and come specifically to see cliff honey hunting in the villages," he said.

The fascination is not limited to Nepalis. Just a week ago, during honey collection at Chopli cliff in Mipra in ward 4 of Marsyangdi Rural Municipality, 13 tourists from Turkey and five from Italy spent the entire day filming and photographing the activity from the cliff.

"We had only seen it on YouTube. The reality is far more dangerous and extraordinary," said Francesco Santino from Italy.

At Chhonpli cliff, a team including 55-year-old Raj Kumar Gurung, 42-year-old Kum Bahadur Gurung, 34-year-old Jamir Gurung, 52-year-old Tara Kumar Gurung, 40-year-old Baisa Bahadur Gurung and 67-year-old Daan Bahadur Gurung carried out the honey hunting. Local youth Pradip Gurung said foreign visitors were deeply engaged, capturing photos and videos throughout the process.

Cliff honey hunting has also been documented by world-renowned filmmaker Eric Valli. International media outlets such as BBC, CNN, Reuters and AFP have produced documentaries and visual features on the practice. Filmmakers from India, Europe and the US continue to visit Lamjung to document it.

According to Purna Bahadur Gurung, who has long been involved in honey hunting near Gurung settlements in Bhujung, said only villagers used to come to watch earlier. "Now people from cities and even from abroad visit to witness the risky process of extracting honey," he said.

The relationship between the bees and the Gurung community goes



Honey hunters are seen perched on a rope ladder on Chhonplibhir cliff, lined with beehives beneath an overhang in Mipra village of Lamjung, in this recent photo. A waterfall cascades to the right.

POST PHOTO: AASH GURUNG

beyond livelihood or adventure. It also has deep historical and cultural significance. Gurung priests say their ancient scripture describes the historical connection between bees and the Gurung people. Writer Tirtha Gurung has also highlighted this relationship in his book *Aapa Kwharpa*.

Before collecting honey, rituals are performed to worship Sime Bhume

(forest deities), a compulsory tradition in rural areas. Locals believe that climbing the cliff without the ritual can bring misfortune and increase bee aggression. Because of this long-standing practice, villagers say no major accidents involving falls have been recorded so far.

Chandra Singh Gurung, 61, of Tapgaun in ward 8 of Dordi Rural

Municipality, said that climbing cliffs for honey has always been done after proper rituals.

Marsyangdi Rural Municipality chair Arjun Gurung said foreigners' interest in the traditional honey hunting practice has increased in recent years. Visitors film documentaries and capture photographs for international media. "Foreign journalists and

filmmakers continue to come here. Their work has also helped promote tourism," he said.

He added that the practice is being linked with tourism development. "Honey hunting sites like Syange, Naiche, Kapre and Siurung are contributing to the promotion of the Annapurna trekking route," he said.

Dordi Rural Municipality chair Yubaraj Adhikari said foreign visitors arrive every year to observe cliff honey hunting. "International media outlets have lately focused on this tradition. With foreign arrivals, local income has also increased," he said.

According to Adhikari, villagers continue the practice as before, and it is gradually becoming globally recognised. The municipality has also introduced insurance coverage for honey hunters.

According to Umal Bahadur BK, secretary for the Tourism Management Committee in Ghalegaun, special honey hunting events targeting foreign tourists are being organised. Foreign tourists are scheduled to arrive on Wednesday, with a honey hunting event set for Thursday. Ghalegaun lies within the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, where foreign nationals, except SAARC citizens, are required to pay Rs3,000 to ACAP.

A package has been set at Rs10,850 per person, including food and accommodation, along with access to observe the honey hunting process. He said tourists will not only observe honey hunting but also experience Gurung culture, village life and homestay hospitality. A similar event has also been planned at Kapre cliff in ward 7 of Marsyangdi Rural Municipality.

Cliff honey is usually collected during April-May and October-November. Locals say honey collected in October-November is slightly toxic due to mixed plant nectar during the wild flowering season, though it is also believed to have medicinal value. Honey collected in this season is softer in texture. Excess consumption, however, can cause discomfort, according to experienced honey hunters.

Cliff honey is traditionally believed to help with joint pain, cold-related illnesses and insomnia, and is also associated with boosting strength.

CJ promises digital reforms to ease pressure on courts

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He mentioned exploring the use of AI in the judiciary and enforcing strict judicial governance. He proposed a system for the timely resolution of complaints against judges and regular monitoring of code of conduct compliance, with disciplinary action in case of violations.

He emphasised a zero-tolerance policy against corruption and irregularities, and electronic tracking of case files from registration to verdict.

He also proposed a merit-based, transparent, and objective system for judicial appointments under the Judicial Council, based on qualifications, experience, and judicial integrity.

He said appointments would be made within constitutional timelines, with a structured schedule for Judicial Council meetings.

His recommendation was eventually endorsed. Immediately after being endorsed unopposed by the parliamentary hearing committee appointed by President Ramchandra Paudel, Sharma assumed the office. Seeking support from all sides, he claimed that the core objective of his tenure would be to build and protect an independent, impartial, competent, and publicly trusted judiciary.

"No interference of any kind will be accepted in the institutional independence of the judiciary, the professional impartiality of judges, and the dignity of judicial proceedings. There should be no reason for anyone to doubt this. I want to fully assure that no such act that creates doubt will be done by me, nor will it be allowed," he said after assuming the office.

Who is Chief Justice Sharma?

Now 56, Sharma will serve a full six-year term, longer than many recent chief justices who retired early after reaching the constitutional age limit of 65. He is set to retire in May 2032 at the age of 62.

Born in June 1970 in Birgunj, Parsa, Sharma holds a Bachelor of Law from Nepal Law Campus, a master's degree in Commercial and Constitutional Law from Pune University in India, and a PhD in Labour Law from Tribhuvan University.

He began his legal career in 1995 as an advocate. Early in his practice, he worked at Pioneer Law Firm before setting up his own practice. He later co-founded the ShreeMaRa (Sreemara) Law Firm with Ramesh Badal, who later served as attorney general under the KP Sharma Oli government, and lawyer ShreeKanta Baral. The firm's name was formed from the Nepali initials of the three partners.

Alongside litigation work, Sharma was involved in corporate legal consultancy and later engaged in teaching. However, his career remained largely focused on advisory work rather than regular courtroom advocacy before the Supreme Court.

Sharma is the nephew of former chief jus-

tice Damodar Prasad Sharma. During Damodar Sharma's tenure as chief justice and chair of the Judicial Council, Manoj Sharma was appointed as an additional judge of the then Appellate Court in Butwal in June 2013.

Challenges for Sharma—from colleagues to the Bar to controlling intermediaries Sharma's first challenge is maintaining harmonious relations with fellow justices. Immediately after his nomination, dissatisfaction and disagreement emerged within the Supreme Court.

Events such as disputes over case registration and refusal to register petitions indicate early institutional tensions. Though he assumed office on Tuesday, judicial leadership will effectively begin functioning from Wednesday.

He will need to carry along senior justices such as Sapana Pradhan Malla, Kumar Regmi, and Hari Prasad Phuyal, along with other justices, to ensure smooth functioning and deliver reforms promised during the hearing.

Past precedents show that Supreme Court justices have sometimes boycotted benches or refused participation during conflicts, as seen during the tenures of the then chief justices Gopal Parajuli and Cholendra Shumsher Rana.

Another challenge is coordination with the Nepal Bar Association. The coordination mechanism between the Bar and Bench is currently inactive, and the Bar itself appears divided over his appointment.

The Bar signaled that difficult days lie ahead. Cooperation between the Bar and Bench will be essential for reforms such as reducing case backlog, curbing corruption, and ensuring speedy justice.

Reducing case backlog and curbing intermediaries

Court caseloads have been rising steadily. In 2004, when the first strategic plan was introduced, there were 107,641 pending cases. By the end of the previous fiscal year the number had reached 375,284, according to Sharma's own presentation.

Courts now receive more than 700 new cases daily. Public interest litigation often dominates court schedules, while ordinary citizens wait years for justice.

Former Supreme Court judges and legal experts suggest Sharma must address public concerns and improve institutional performance.

Former Chief Justice Om Prakash Mishra noted that Sharma's calm nature could help him manage colleagues and resist executive pressure.

He said Sharma should focus on clearing old cases first and strengthening public trust in the judiciary.

"He is calm by nature. He has time," Mishra said. "He has the opportunity to eliminate existing distortions and lay the foundation for a new judicial system."

Nepal progresses on only 9 of 15 FATF action items: APG

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According to an official present at the meetings, APG Deputy Executive Secretary Shannon questioned whether the amendment had been introduced after sufficient consultation with investigative agencies, regulators and prosecutors, and whether the long-term implications had been properly assessed.

"The law published in the gazette on April 12, 2024 had been introduced following consultations with FATF to strengthen money laundering investigations and prosecutions," the official said.

"Now the APG is asking why the government again changed the law through an ordinance to allow the department itself to investigate predicate offences. The delegation has raised serious questions over whether consultations were held with the Office of the Attorney General, Nepal Police, the anti-graft agency and other regulatory institutions."

APG Deputy Executive Secretary Shannon met Inspector General of Police Dan Bahadur Karki on Tuesday to discuss issues related to money laundering. During the meeting, Karki expressed commitment to fulfilling the stipulated conditions and carrying out the measures required for Nepal to exit the grey list, the police headquarters said.

According to police spokesperson Abi Narayan Kafle, Inspector General Karki informed the APG delegation that police investigations have so far led to 21 money laundering cases being filed in court, while 36 cases remain under investigation. He said a separate division has been established within the Central Investigation Bureau to handle financial crimes, and an anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing action plan formulated and implemented. Karki also told the delegation that parallel money laundering investigations are being conducted alongside investigations into all major crimes.

Officials who attended the discussions said the APG questioned the intent behind the ordinance and raised concerns over what it described as weak enforcement efforts. According to one joint secretary present at the meetings, the delegation criticised authorities for neglecting certain offences during investigations, failing to show urgency in meeting FATF targets, ignoring confiscation and management of criminal assets, weakening investigations through institutional interference, failing to strengthen investigative agencies and neglecting regulation and monitoring in identified high-risk sectors.

Nepal was placed on the FATF's grey list on February 21, 2025. FATF then provided the country with a detailed action plan, giving Nepal two years to implement the reforms required to exit the list. The two years have been divided into five four-month phases because FATF holds review meetings every four months.

According to the annual report of Nepal Rastra Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit for the fiscal year 2024-25, reports related to suspicious financial activities increased by more than 30 percent after Nepal was grey-listed.

The report said authorities received 9,565 suspicious transaction reports and suspicious activity reports during the fiscal year, an increase of 30.34 percent compared to the previous year. Nepal had received 7,338 such reports

in 2023-24 and 5,335 in 2022-23.

Commercial banks accounted for 7,303 reports, or 76 percent of the total. Development banks submitted 708 reports, finance companies 355, securities brokers 491, payment service operators and related entities 252, insurance companies 244, remittance companies 100, cooperatives 36, casinos 20, and microfinance institutions and government agencies one each.

Debate over investigative authority

Parliament had amended the anti-money laundering law in April 2024 to allow agencies investigating predicate offences to also investigate related money laundering crimes.

Under the revised law, 13 offices related to the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority, the Nepal Police, the Revenue Investigation Department, forest authorities and national parks authorities, among others, were authorised to investigate money laundering cases linked to their jurisdiction.

After the law came into effect, the Department of Money Laundering Investigation was no longer allowed to independently register complaints and investigate such cases unless they related to older cases predating the amendment.

However, on May 1 this year, the government again amended the law through an ordinance, allowing the department to investigate money laundering cases linked to smuggling, customs and tax evasion, securities and commodities market manipulation, insider trading, currency offences, banking and financial crimes, foreign exchange violations and insurance-related offences.

Officials said the APG questioned the rationale behind the latest amendment.

Former officials urge stronger commitment

Khumraj Punjali, former secretary and founding director general of the Department of Money Laundering Investigation, said Nepal had failed to achieve the goals envisioned when the department was established.

"Our initial focus after the law was introduced was on building the institution and managing human resources," Punjali said. "We did work on policy, administration and investigations, but despite efforts by successive governments, we have not done enough. The grey listing is the result. Now the entire state machinery must work together to prevent Nepal from slipping into the blacklist."

Punjali said all political parties and state institutions must unite because the issue concerns the country's international reputation.

"If Nepal ends up on the blacklist, the consequences will not affect only one government or one political party. The entire country will suffer," he said. "The concerns raised by the APG must be addressed honestly and seriously."

Former appellate court judge and former anti-graft commissioner Kishor Silwal said Nepal has no alternative but to strictly follow APG directives and FATF guidelines.

According to Silwal, agencies investigating predicate offences must be institutionally strong and free from interference.

"The principle behind allowing agencies investigating predicate offences to also investigate money laundering is that the agency handling the original crime is better positioned to conduct an effective money laundering investi-

gation and prosecution," he said. "FATF supported that approach because separating investigations between agencies had not been effective in the past."

Silwal also warned that weak investigations could allow offenders to escape conviction in court.

Economic consequences of grey listing

Experts say remaining on the grey list could have wide-ranging economic consequences for Nepal.

Imports and exports are likely to become more expensive because banks and financial institutions face heightened scrutiny from international partners.

A Nepal Rastra Bank official said traders opening letters of credit may increasingly be required to obtain guarantees from third-country banks. Banks and companies borrowing from abroad may also face higher interest rates.

"As long as Nepal remains on the grey list, inflationary pressure will rise, and foreign investors will think several times before investing," the official said.

Officials also warned that development partners, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, could reduce financial assistance or impose stricter conditions on lending.

Bankers say international transactions are already becoming slower and more expensive due to additional documentation and compliance procedures.

"Transactions are not being blocked outright, but each transfer now requires more time and cost, and that burden ultimately reaches customers," one banking source said.

Analysts say the grey listing has also increased Nepal's country risk profile, potentially discouraging foreign direct investment.

Experts say the grey listing will not immediately trigger an economic crisis, but could gradually raise costs in banking, trade and investment while weakening Nepal's access to international financial systems.

What happens if Nepal is blacklisted?

Analysts warn that if Nepal fails to exit the grey list within the extended timeline and eventually falls onto FATF's blacklist, the consequences would be far more severe.

While grey listing mainly increases scrutiny and compliance burdens, blacklisting could result in international banks cutting ties with Nepali financial institutions altogether.

Foreign investment could sharply decline, and imports and exports could face major disruptions.

International banks could either impose extremely strict conditions on dealings with Nepali banks or terminate correspondent banking relationships entirely. Access to US dollars and other major foreign currencies could become highly restricted, creating serious obstacles in international payments.

Countries on the blacklist are considered high-risk by international financial institutions, making borrowing difficult and expensive. Risk premiums and interest rates could rise sharply, development financing could slow, and supply chains and international trade could face severe disruption.

Nepal's education crisis is regional. SEE results lowest in Madhesh and Karnali provinces

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However, the education ministry's report from that exact academic cycle indicates that only 927,993 children actually completed the first year. This means 125,831 children walked away from their classrooms within months of their very first enrollment. While CEHRD insists many returned the following year, the structural bleed never truly stopped.

Educational expert Sambedan Koirala, who conducted an extensive field study tracking 27,000 out-of-school children across all 77 districts of Nepal, notes that the catalysts for abandonment shift dramatically depending on the age of the child. "The reasons for school dropouts are highly stratified by educational tiers, driven by distinct economic, individual, and social pressures," said Koirala.

According to his research, dropout rates in grades 1 to 5 are primarily dictated by acute financial distress. Impoverished families frequently pull young children out of classrooms, a problem intensified if the local school requires long, hazardous walks. In contrast, in grades 6 to 8, individual and institutional frustrations take over. "At this intermediate stage, we observe children quitting due to chronic academic failure, a profound lack of interest, unresponsive teacher behaviour, language barriers, and a fundamental breakdown in comprehension," said Koirala.

By the time students reach the high school tier grades 9 to 12, deep-seated social traditions dictate their exit. "In the secondary tier, structural dropouts skyrocket due to child marriages, domestic responsibilities, and the overwhelming allure of foreign labor markets among teenage boys," Koirala added.

The chronic depletion of classrooms persists despite decades of highly publicised student enrollment campaigns led by federal, provincial, and local authorities. Critics point out that while the state infuses billions of rupees into educational subsidies, questions and complaints persist over students' learning outcomes and examination results.

The national educational crisis is also highly regional. During the last academic cycle, the national SEE pass rate hovered at a mediocre 66 percent. However, peripheral regions like Sudurpashchim, Karnali, and Madhesh provinces consistently fall far below the national average. In the most recent evaluation, Sudurpashchim registered a dismal 51 percent pass rate.

This data aligns with a comprehensive report published by the National Statistics Office under the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The audit revealed that an estimated 770,000 children across the country remain completely outside the formal school network. The report indicated that roughly 350,000 of these children have never stepped inside a classroom, while the remainder dropped out prematurely. In total, nearly 10 percent of all school-age children in Nepal are completely alienated from the country's 7 million children in the public education framework.

The ministry's Educational Indicators 2025-26 report states that the grade 8 completion rate stands at 82 percent, with a retention rate of 86.5 percent. These figures pose a direct challenge to the statutory mandate established under the landmark Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2018.

The law dictates that every Nepali citizen must complete basic education (up to grade 8) by May 2028. Under Section 19 of the act, any individual who fails to meet this minimum academic threshold will be legally barred from public, private, or non-governmental employment. Furthermore, non-compliant individuals will be disqualified from contesting elections, receiving political appointments, or holding organisational memberships. With the legal deadline less than two years away, hundreds of thousands of youth are on track to be functionally disenfranchised from the formal economy.

The situation becomes even more alarming beyond the basic tier. The enrollment rate for grades 9 to 12 plummets to 56 percent, while retention rates for grade 10 and grade 12 sit at a bleak 67 percent and 41 percent, respectively.

The National Statistics Office report shows that Madhesh Province suffers from the highest concentration of out-of-school children, with an illiteracy rate of 14 percent among minors. The document explicitly links school abandonment to marginalization. "In terms of demographics, children from Madhesi, Madhesi Dalit, and religious or linguistic minority communities exhibit the highest rates of zero-schooling. Conversely, hill-origin castes and hill indigenous groups show remarkably low dropout rates."

Economic disparity remains the ultimate divider. Statistics prove that only 11 percent of children from low-income families complete their secondary education, compared to 22 percent from affluent households. Domestic environments also dictate academic survival. Only 42 percent of children working as domestic laborers for external employers attend school, whereas enrollment rises to 89 percent for children living with both parents, and tops 92 percent for those raised by single mothers.

To counter these systemic leaks, the government offers incentives including free textbooks, midday meals up to grade 5, targeted scholarships, and free sanitary pads for female students.

However, the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2024, which evaluated approximately 10,000 households, determined that structural incentives fail when academic quality collapses. The national survey identified nine primary reasons for dropping out, with poor learning outcomes topping the list at 28.1 percent.

Education ministry officials admit that public school students routinely abandon their studies out of sheer frustration after failing examinations. The survey also revealed that 21.4 percent of dropouts left to support household survival through manual labour, while 19.2 percent abandoned their education due to early marriage. Other prominent factors included high hidden costs of 'free' schooling, the immediate necessity to seek low-wage employment, parental discouragement, and the complete absence of higher-secondary institutions in remote rural municipalities.

Dilemma in foreign ministry over slashing the number of Nepal's diplomatic missions abroad

Minister Khanal is under pressure from the finance minister to reduce the number of Nepali missions abroad to cut costs.

○ ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

One of the primary agendas of the current Balendra Shah government is to restructure the oversized bureaucracy to ensure more effective service delivery and reduce public expenditure. In line with this effort, the government has slashed the number of ministries to 18 from 21.

Additionally, a committee is now working on streamlining the civil service, which could potentially cut over 25,000 positions, according to officials at the Ministry of General Administration.

Coinciding with this new initiative, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has begun preparatory work to trim the number of embassies and consulates general.

However, sharp differences between Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal and ministry officials have created a deadlock, leaving it uncertain whether the number of missions will be reduced or will remain unchanged.

The number of Nepal's diplomatic missions has reached 44—34 embassies and permanent missions and 10 consulates general.

Foreign Minister Khanal entrusted the responsibility to a panel led by Krishna Prasad Dhakal, a senior joint secretary at the ministry, and asked him to submit a report.

Two other joint secretaries at the foreign ministry are also helping Dhakal in the task.

But Dhakal's report did not meet Minister Khanal's expectations, said two joint secretaries and one under secretary at the ministry. Dhakal has yet to formally hand over the report to the ministry but has briefed Khanal on the findings.

Why this issue grabbed attention and landed in controversy has some past linkages. The creation of more than 100 new posts from joint secretaries to the section officer level by the KP Sharma Oli government, adding to public expenditures, is the crux of the discord, according to officials.

That is why the foreign minister is under

pressure from Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle to drastically cut down the number of diplomatic missions so that the government can save some millions of rupees.

Creating new posts, the Oli government established consulates general in San Francisco, Dallas (US) and Dubai, added new divisions at the foreign ministry led by joint secretaries and deployed new officials in all seven provinces and added new posts in some foreign missions.

In his preliminary presentation, Dhakal proposed shutting down the Nepali Embassy in Brazil and shifting the mandate of the Nepali Embassy in South Africa to Nairobi (Kenya) by opening a new diplomatic mission. Kenya is hosting several international agencies and emerging as a new hub for international diplomacy and global governance.

The panel also proposed shutting down the consulates general in Chengdu and Guangzhou. Officials serving in these offices would be relocated to Japan, the UAE and other missions that required additional staff. As the population of Nepali Diaspora is growing, the Dhakal-led panel has proposed opening a new embassy in Romania. The staff serving at the Consulate General of Nepal in San Francisco, USA, is proposed to be set up in Croatia by opening a new consulate general in the European Union member country.

The opposition within the ministry, from top officials to local staff, stems from the creation of over 100 new positions—from joint secretary to officer level—by the Oli government between July 15, 2024, and September 9, 2025. The officers who hold the positions fear obstruction of their personal career growth.

Officials fear that reducing the number of missions would seriously limit their opportunities for overseas postings, make promotions more difficult, and restrict career civil servants' chances of becoming ambassadors.

In the meeting with Minister Khanal, almost all under secretaries and section officers had objected to the idea of reducing the numbers

of posts and embassies, an under secretary and an official told the Post.

But there is another lobby inside the ministry that favours the reduction in Nepal's diplomatic presence, arguing that personal career growths of the newly inducted officials will not be obstructed if the government appoints consulates general from the Foreign Service in some cities like Lhasa, Kolkata, Hong Kong and sends the labour attaché from the service instead of the labour ministry.

"If we make these changes, then the personal career growth of the officials will not be obstructed. We can send more labour attachés to labour sending countries too. If the ministry stops opening vacancies for some years, then the newly inducted officials will be adjusted automatically. "Over time and once a country's economy has grown, we can open new missions in several countries," one under secretary told the Post on condition of anonymity.

Besides rift within the foreign ministry, there are calls from other ministries such as the general administration and finance that the number of Nepali missions abroad should be brought down to reduce public expenditure.

This time too, Khanal has been receiving a similar kind of pressure from Finance Minister Wagle to trim down the number of missions drastically, an aide to Minister Khanal said.

Finance Minister Wagle wants to announce a downsizing of diplomatic missions in his budget speech, due next week, another reason why Foreign Minister Khanal is pushing his senior officials for some concrete decision. However, due to growing pressure, the ministry is in a state of confusion, officials familiar with the issue said.

Minister Khanal wants to drastically downsize Nepal's embassies and consulates general and open some new ones in Romania and Croatia, where the number of Nepalis is growing, two officials familiar with the development said.

Since assuming office on April 27, Khanal has been consulting former ambassadors, diplomats, and experts on the rationale for reducing the number of embassies and consulates general deemed unnecessary—missions whose work can be handled remotely or accredited to the nearest mission. Many experts and diplomats advised him to trim the number of missions while opening new ones in areas where the Nepali Diaspora is growing.

However, the proposals faced internal resistance from the ministry. When he consulted with joint secretaries, opinions were divided. Khanal listened to secretaries, new and old section officers and even non-gazetted officials, most of whom opposed the idea of a drastic downsizing. During his consultation with section officers, Khanal reportedly said that if he had his way, he would cut the number of missions by half.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lok Bahadur Poudel Chettri said that the matter is under discussion, promising to share more details once the panel submits its recommendations.

Several attempts were made in the past to redraw Nepal's diplomatic map. In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs formed a task force headed by former ambassador Rudra Nepal with representatives from the finance, foreign affairs, and general affairs ministries, and a member from the Institute of Foreign Affairs.

Some eight years ago, there was a recommendation to either draw down or relocate Nepal's missions in Spain, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Austria, and Denmark by assessing the scope of work. Apart from Brazil, none of these host nations has set up their missions in Kathmandu on a reciprocal basis.

Even a high-level task force report, submitted by Prof Sridhar Khatri, the current Nepali ambassador to the US, in February 2018, had recommended a review of the number of Nepali missions abroad based on their performance.

Egg donation ban was urgent, but regulation still appears distant

>> Continued from page 1

Agents recruited donors, many of them young women who needed money and had little understanding of the procedure. Clinics multiplied. And behind those clinics was a system built on concealment.

A young woman—referred to here as Sita, a pseudonym—was 17 when an agent named Justina Pradhan first approached her. The pitch was simple: donate your eggs, get paid. "She said this is how it works and this is how you get money," Sita recalled. "She told me many people had done it, even girls younger than me." The money promised was Rs15,000. What Pradhan collected from the clinic on her behalf was between Rs70,000 and Rs80,000.

No one told Sita she would be put under anesthesia. No one explained what the injections were for. When she was asked to sign documents, the agent signed them herself, listing herself as a guardian. Sita does not know what those documents said. She was never given a copy.

"They said there were no risks," she said. "They didn't mention injections or being unconscious. They just called it egg donation."

Sita donated once, though she knew girls who had donated twice within two months, far shorter than the four-to-five-month gap that medical standards require between donations. Her periods have been irregular ever since—sometimes late, sometimes early. That had never happened before.

The clinic did not follow up. Her parents only found out when they saw messages on her phone. She was, by then, already gone from the clinic's records—replaced by a false name and a false age. When her father—identified here by his last name, Tamang—later obtained the files, his daughter's age had been changed to 25. The names listed were not hers.

"All the documents were totally fake," Tamang said. When he tried to fight the case, a clinic-linked official warned him: "I am a judge-like person, you cannot fight against us." Tamang pushed back regardless, eventually approaching the Central Investigation Bureau. Even after the CIB arrested the doctors and agents involved, they were released quickly. Political pressure, Tamang said, ran through the entire process. "Because of high-level connections, the legal process was constantly obstructed."

Today, Sita is clear about what happened to her. "Yes, I was exploited," she said. "I was just as clear on bodily autonomy. "I think doing this under the age of 25 is very risky. If I had been more mature and had more information, I wouldn't have done it. If a younger girl asked me today if she should donate, I would say: "A definite 'No!'"

Nutan Sharma, an IVF specialist at Norvic Hospital, does not dispute what Sita experienced.

"A 17-year-old girl has hardly any knowledge and can be easily swayed for a little bit of money," she said. "The reason we have this problem is that the system was being misused."

But Sharma's concern now is what the ban means for the other side of that same system—the women who are not donors, but who cannot conceive without one.



The infertility OPD of the Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital in Kathmandu.

POST PHOTO: ANGAD DHAKAL

Sharma supports the ban—conditionally. "I obey and support the recent suspension because our government should come up with clear regulations that are good for everyone," she said. But she is also clear about what is at stake in the interim. "Forty to fifty percent of IVF patients cannot become mothers without donor eggs. They have a right to achieve motherhood."

Lawyer Shreena Nepal, who has been involved in legal advocacy around Nepal's Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) framework, explains that the court's order exposed a fundamental problem: there is no statute in Nepal that specifically defines or regulates egg donation.

The Civil Code addresses the paternity of children born through artificial insemination but says nothing about ova. The Criminal Code is similarly silent. "As there is no law, there is no crime—but that also means there is no protection," she said.

The classification of what the clinics involved in the Hope Fertility case actually did has proven legally difficult. Nepal's Human Trafficking Act focuses largely on sexual exploitation, and it is unclear whether extracting and selling eggs from a minor fits that definition. "These are new and developing concepts in Nepal," the lawyer said. "The law has not caught up."

She is among those pushing for a comprehensive ART law—one that would set age limits for donors, require that donors have at least one child of their own, cap the number of times a person can donate, mandate citizenship verification to confirm age, standardise compensation across both public and private hospitals, and require mandatory health screening for donors. India passed its own ART Act in 2021, and Nepal's fertility advocates have pointed to it as a model, however imperfect.

Lawyer Nepal is not optimistic that such a law will come anytime

soon. "It can take decades," she said. She points to surrogacy—the Supreme Court ordered its regulation in 2016, and Nepal is yet to enact a law governing it. Egg donation, she fears, risks the same fate.

In government hospitals, the queues say what the policy documents do not. Since the ban, the demand for fertility services has not disappeared, but it has simply backed up. Geeta, a doctor at one such hospital who asked to be identified by a pseudonym, has watched it happen.

"Egg donation is needed when women have low ovarian reserves. Any woman of any age can have low ovarian reserve—I have seen it in women who are 20, 25, 30, and 40," she said. "If a woman is 40, she may need a younger woman's eggs. As a doctor, what should I do now that it has been banned?"

She is not opposed to the ban itself. "The government acted as minors were being used as donors, and the same persons were donating multiple times." But she wants the government to move quickly. The age criteria, the health checks, the limits on repeat donations, the standardised pricing—all of it, she said, needs to be codified. "They should check citizenship cards to confirm age. India has already started doing this. Our government can do the same."

She has also seen the cross-border effect. "Many people are going to India, especially to Delhi, because egg donation is allowed there. But many of them are not financially stable or fully aware of how the process works. IVF is not a guarantee. I have seen people return after three cycles, three months, three attempts—unable to conceive. It is a waste of money for them."

Preeti Bista, a clinical embryologist at Angel Fertility Clinic and Maya IVF, says that before the ban, her clinic would see an average of 15 to 20 patients seeking fertility services. That figure has since then

dropped to 7 to 8 cases, and that too only self-implantation. "This has affected all the clinics," she said. Those who genuinely need donor eggs are left with two options: either to join the waitlist or to cross the border for the service.

Sharma's view on cross-border care is less about cost than quality. "I would always recommend against going abroad," she said. "We provide very good quality service here. We have patients coming to us from Bangladesh, China, the US, the UK, and Australia."

The cross-border movement for fertility services was already underway before the Supreme Court order and Nepal's regulatory crackdown has accelerated it. Several IVF clinics in Delhi and other Indian cities openly market themselves to patients from Nepal, offering packages that include flights, medical visa assistance, and accommodation. After the ban, some clinics in Nepal that had offered donor-egg services scaled back or paused entirely, pushing more couples across the border.

In April this year, Nepal Medical Council Registrar Satis Kumar Deo moved to stop an unauthorised IVF consultation camp run by Indian doctors at a Kathmandu hotel, underscoring both the existing demand and the vacuum that has formed to fill it.

The Supreme Court's intervention was framed as a form of protection. But who was consulted before that protection was put in place?

Sumitra Poudel, Program and Research Coordinator at WOREC Nepal—an organisation that has conducted sustained field research on infertility through an Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights lens—says the absence of consultation with women's rights groups and civil society before the ban reflects a familiar pattern.

"Policies affecting women's bodies and reproductive choices are often shaped through moral, legal,

or institutional perspectives without adequately hearing from those most impacted," she said. "This is especially concerning in areas like infertility, where stigma already prevents open discussion and where women frequently suffer in silence."

Infertility, WOREC research found, becomes a trigger for domestic violence, social exclusion, and mental health distress, not because of medicine but because of social meaning attached to a woman's inability to conceive.

The problem, Poudel argues, was never the transaction itself, it was the absence of any framework that would make it safe and ethical. "If women voluntarily choose to support intended parents through egg donation, the government should not criminalise or silence those decisions," Poudel said. "It should ensure dignity, informed consent, fair compensation, medical safety, and protection from exploitation."

A blanket ban, she warned, risks pushing practices underground—reducing accountability rather than eliminating harm. "Bans alone rarely eliminate exploitation. They often increase risk."

The women WOREC works with, Poudel said, are not asking only for access to technology. "A recurring message was that women should not be forced to suffer silently because of policy gaps, stigma, or the absence of state responsibility." She was as direct on what the state owes all women involved. "Women should not have to choose between exploitation and complete denial of reproductive options. The state's responsibility is to create rights-based regulation that protects all women involved—donors, recipients, and intended parents—rather than relying solely on prohibition."

The egg donation ban sits at the centre of a broader tension in how Nepal and many countries legislate around women's reproduction. For Shreena Nepal, who was part of the legal team behind the writ petition that right was never in question. Article 38 of Nepal's Constitution guarantees women a fundamental right to bodily autonomy—one she says the ban does not negate.

"The right exists," she said. "The issue is the lack of regulation around how those rights are exercised." The ban, while it is permanent for the minors, she said, is a temporary measure for others—as a way to prevent exploitation until proper rules are in place. But temporary, in Nepal's legislative history, can mean a very long time.

For Sita, there is at least a partial reckoning. The CIB acted. The case reached court. The agent and the clinic have been named. The system that failed her has been, however imperfectly, interrupted.

For Padma, the wait continues. She is not the person the Supreme Court was trying to protect. She is someone who needed the system to function ethically so that she could use it, and the ban that came to stop Sita's exploitation is the same ban that now stands between Padma and the only medical option she has left.

"I understand why they stopped it," she said. "But I wish they had a plan for people like me."

OPINION



OUR VIEW

After the cheese post

The state-owned enterprise has long been in the red. Turning it around won't be easy.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Balendra Shah posted a photo of himself eating a cube of cheese, alongside a plate of cheese cubes and a packet of yak cheese, on his social media accounts, captioned "Say Cheese. DDC ko Cheese". He was promoting the cheese produced by the state-owned Dairy Development Corporation. The premier's post alone did more to promote yak cheese than years of successive governments' efforts. The demand for the cheese had been boosted by 30 percent the following day, as the public rushed to buy yak cheese to imitate Shah on social media. The product went out of stock at major supermarkets in the Kathmandu Valley, and the corporation even supplied additional quantities of the stuff. A single post from the country's popular prime minister drove a cheese craze, offering hopes (if faint) of reform in Nepal's dairy sector, which has long been under strain.

PM Shah's move to promote domestic products is both welcome and refreshing. Yak cheese, with a slightly nutty and tangy taste, is an indigenous delicacy made from the milk of yaks in Nepal's Himalayan region. But such delicacies are not popular among the wider public and are limited to Himalayan communities as a source of income. At a time when Nepal desperately needs stronger support for products like yak cheese, Shah's endorsement of the product shouldn't be dismissed as a publicity stunt. Still, a social media post is no magic wand to remove all the problems faced by the dairy sector; farmers and even the DDC.

The severity of the problems in the DDC warrants long-term solutions. The corporation has long been in the red. Demand for milk, butter, powdered milk and ghee plummeted as people's purchasing power decreased. As a result, unsold dairy products remained unused in warehouses. Separately, only this year, the DDC cleared long-pending dues to farmers, covering all payments up to mid-January. As dairy farmers endured months-long payment delays, they struggled to earn a living, and often flooded roads with milk in protest. Even though demand for yak cheese is high in international markets, the lack of proper preservation systems hinders large-scale exports.

To boost exports of cheese and other dairy products from the DDC, investment in technology is vital. Then there are problems specific to yak cheese, such as declining numbers of yak farmers, limited pasture access, disease outbreaks, poor infrastructure and lack of veterinary services, among others. Nepal often faces an oversupply of milk during the flush period and a dip in production during lean months. So farmers could go unpaid yet again. Given this, the Shah-led government must devise plans to diversify surplus milk during flush periods to meet demand during lean periods, while also paying farmers on time. Most crucially, measures should be taken to boost dairy exports, including of yak cheese, to encourage farmers, industrialists and young entrepreneurs to enter the sector, and to sustain those already in it.

When Shah said, "Say cheese", it helped to restore confidence in the struggling DDC to an extent. Whether his gesture will remain largely symbolic or if he and his government have broader reform measures in mind remains to be seen.

Democracy dies with dashboard populism

|| SOUTH SIDE ||

Digital culture worships immediacy, creating fertile ground for demagogues.

CK LAL



The performative pomposity of Prime Minister Balendra Shah is irritatingly perplexing. For reasons not difficult to infer, he prefers digital monologues over institutional dialogue. Since being elected, how many times has he addressed the Parliament? Nada. How many press conferences has he held? Zilch. He refused to address the inaugural session of the *Pratinidhi Sabha* and walked out mid-way through President Ramchandra Paudel's address on policy and programme. Rather than answering lawmakers' questions, he deputed a cabinet colleague to face the House.

The freshly painted ceilings of the Parliament hall apparently give Shah claustrophobia. He prefers the adulation of the digital fiefdom that he has built as a rapper. His unceremonious departure from Pratinidhi Sabha during the President's ceremonial address was more than a breach of protocol—it was a performance of calculated indifference. In Shah's 'dashboard democracy', the legislative chamber is treated as a vestigial organ and an archaic site of political friction.

A government formed from the political ashes of executive, legislature and judiciary buildings put aflame during the Fall Protest doesn't feel it necessary to value parliamentary traditions. The past was a different realm of dealmakers; the present belongs to a strongman at the helm who believes in making history rather than reading it.

In the digitised political landscape, the locus of authority has shifted from the legislature to the servers of Silicon Valley. Public messaging arrives not through the messy crucible of parliamentary debate or the scrutiny of a sceptical press, but as instantaneous edicts calculated to algorithmically weaponise the fervour of a digital constituency. By shunning republican institutions, Shah isn't modernising communication; he is signalling a retreat into a high-tech autocracy.

Algorithms have become toxic to democracy globally. Even former US President Joe Biden had lamented that the truth was being smothered by lies told for power and for profit. Indeed, the shared facts of the public square have



SHUTTERSTOCK

been traded for the partisan frenzies of the feed. Conscientious citizens are being reduced to fervid followers, and parliamentary debates are being treated as mere formality. Governance now competes with the ephemeral alchemy of viral optics. In the digital *darbar*, 'likes and shares' render legitimacy.

Conversations outside of formal institutions have also begun to degenerate. The aroma of over-boiled sugary milk tea still lingers in the roadside stalls of Prithvi Rajmarg. The whispering of party cadres continues in the dim corridors of Sanepa, Chyasal, Koteswar and even Banasthali. The old guard's struggle for the republic had a distinct texture: Nicotine-stained fingers wrapped around chipped glasses discussing Rosa Luxemburg, the theatrical seriousness of district secretaries talking about Gandhi and Mao in the same breath, and revolutionary songs blaring from makeshift stages—*Ek jugma ek din ekchoti auncha ulatpatal, uhalputhal, herpher lyauncha*. But the day of upheaval didn't come through political accord; it came from the Discord chatroom and military initiative. Nepali politics was once tactile. It smelled of sweat, dust and body odour. It required physical attendance.

Touchscreen republic

The traditional hubs of political gravity have been quietly upstaged. The physical public sphere has been compressed into the glowing rectangle of the smartphone. A newly empowered republican generation has asserted itself through digital systems. TikTok clips, the livestream platforms of Meta and YouTube Shorts are their arenas of activism. The chatroom has acquired a legitimacy once reserved for the people's mandate itself—it helped choose an extra-constitutional prime minister.

Anyone with an affordable smartphone and enough rage can become a commentator. Every scandal receives instant scrutiny, every ministerial gaffe becomes a meme. A generation exhausted by the old guard's entitle-

ment finds liberation in the digital immediacy. The seduction is powerful because it flatters the citizen, offering the illusion of direct participation without demanding the discipline of organisation. One can denounce corruption while lying in bed or 'overthrow' a government between two Reels. In the republic of touchscreens, outrage has become the cheapest political currency that knows no boundary. Some of the shrillest supporters of Shah pay their taxes in Australia, Canada, Europe and the US.

Premier Shah's inspiration is the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hasn't held a single press conference in 12 years of ruling the supposedly largest democracy. When the trending topic of the afternoon is treated as the authentic voice of the *janata*, why face the press? This is democratic legitimacy reduced to analytics and the mutation of politics into data manipulation.

Where old parties measured influence through ward committees and trade unions, the new political class measures relevance through impressions and follower counts. Digital populism thrives on simplification because platforms reward emotional compression. TikTok and Reels are engineered for stimulation, requiring a villain, a betrayal and a punchline every 15 seconds. Complex structural questions—federalism, fiscal transfers, judicial reform—cannot survive this economy of attention. Nuance dies first in the battle for virality.

Politics then becomes theatrical rather than programmatic, let alone idealistic. The competition of policies is displaced by the competition of affect. Leaders are rewarded less for competence than for performance. A sharp insult on a livestream carries greater political value than a negotiated policy compromise. The loudest participant dominates regardless of merit.

This creates a dangerous asymmetry between spectacle and organisation. Traditional political parties, despite their cynicism, possessed territorial

depth. Their structures penetrated villages and municipalities; they could mobilise bodies, not merely bandwidth. Conversely, new digital formations possess visibility without infrastructure. An influencer can marshal millions of views but will struggle to gather fifty disciplined volunteers to stand defiantly at Bhadrakali if something akin to the Burmese regime were to assume control. The federal republic cannot be defended by hashtags alone.

Algorithmic legitimacy

The dashboard lies equally effectively through omission. It over-represents the urban, the connected and the performative, while rendering invisible the quiet, the poor and the remote. The algorithm rewards expression, not suffering. Public life becomes a continuous performance calibrated for engagement metrics. The narcissistic politician no longer asks, "What does the country require?" but rather, "How will this trend?"

Nepal figures in the list of five most narcissistic countries in the world, where the cult of personality has now acquired technological acceleration. When a leader surrounded by influencers confuses online adoration with acceptability, authoritarianism doesn't need guns and censorship: It can arrive through livestreams, fan armies and influencer networks.

Institutions require slowness. Courts, parliaments and bureaucracies move slowly because compromise is democracy's operating principle. Digital culture, by contrast, worships immediacy, creating fertile ground for demagogues. The narcissistic leader presents himself as the embodiment of the popular will precisely because institutions appear cumbersome. Why negotiate when one can livestream? Why deliberate when one can trend?

There is no return to the slower republic of tea shops and pamphlets. The smartphone is in the democratic bloodstream. But digital signals are symptoms, not diagnoses. A viral video is an alarm, not a verdict. To preserve democratic seriousness, politicians must relearn the difference between attention and representation. The people are always wider, slower and more contradictory than any cellphone can capture. The challenge before the republic is civilisational as much as technological: Listen to the screen without surrendering to it.

Older politicians promised 'welfare state' but delivered 'farewell state' driving the desperate to near-slavery in West Asia. The new breed that has ousted them doesn't even pretend: They are telling you that they don't care. If that doesn't make you angry, you too have fallen prey to the allure of the flickering blue screen. To paraphrase Bertolt Brecht slightly: He who *still hopes* "... has not yet heard the bad news".

Lal is a writer and political analyst.

THEIR VIEW

Where can women find safety?

Violence within families cannot continue to be treated as a private matter.

It is deeply concerning that Bangladesh's women continue to remain among those worst affected by intimate partner violence. According to an analysis of global and national data, Bangladesh ranks 11th globally in the prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence against women by intimate partners, and second only to Afghanistan in South Asia. Nearly one in two women in the country has experienced such violence, according to recent World Health Organization data. Findings from the latest Violence Against Women Survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) present an equally disturbing picture: 70 percent of women and girls aged 15 and above reported experiencing at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. These findings point to a widespread crisis that requires urgent state action.

Despite increasing public discussion on women's rights and preventing violence against women, the situation on the ground has remained largely unchanged. According to a recent report by Prothom Alo, survivors reporting abuse by their husbands made an average of 51 calls a day, the highest in the past eight years. Also, a comparison of three national surveys by BBS conducted in 2011, 2015 and 2024 shows that violence by intimate partners remains far more common than violence by non-partners, pointing to deeply rooted problems within families and our social structure. According to experts, intimate partner violence not only inflicts physical and psychological harm on women but also affects children's well-being, perpetuating cycles of trauma and inequality across generations. Children growing up in violent households often carry emotional scars that shape their future relationships and behaviour.

The silence surrounding such abuse is also alarming. According to the latest BBS survey, 64 percent of survivors did not tell anyone about their experience, while only 7.4 percent sought legal action. The survey also found that domestic violence is more common in disaster-prone areas, which require particular attention from policymakers. Fear of social stigma, financial dependence, family pressure and a lack of confidence in support systems continue to prevent many women from seeking help. Discriminatory family laws, unequal access to resources, deeply rooted gender norms, and controlling behaviour continue to create conditions in which such violence persists. This situation must change once and for all.

We urge the government to strengthen the enforcement of existing laws and address legal and institutional gaps that leave women vulnerable within their own families. Deeply rooted social attitudes and gender norms that normalise or justify abuse in relationships must be challenged through education and community engagement. Support services for survivors, including legal aid, shelters, counselling and reporting mechanisms, must become more accessible and effective. Violence within families cannot continue to be treated as a private matter. The state must ensure that women can live safely and with dignity in public and in their own homes.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

High-utility governance could be achieved by reducing administrative burden on daily life.

NANCY SHRESTHA



The political atmosphere in Kathmandu feels surreal and fundamentally different in 2026 with a new government, new political actors and hope for positive change. For decades, the Nepalese electorate has moved through the shifting phases of socialism, communism and democracy, and the hollow promises used by the old guards to extract loyalty. But today, the tables have turned. A new generation is doing a different kind of math, replacing ideological devotion with a pragmatic demand: a quantifiable return on their civic participation, a hope to improve their own quality of life.

This shift is not merely a change in mood; it is a mass application of the 'Utility Principle'. In political philosophy, Utilitarianism holds that a government's moral duty is to maximise the 'greatest good for the greatest number'. Yet, for decades, Nepal has operated under a system of factionalism and decentralisation of corruption and power, prioritising internal power struggles over the public interest. Our institutions were designed not to maximise public happiness, but to fuel the utility of the party elite. In this lopsided equation, the joy of parties outweighs public suffering, and it demonstrates simple math. As long as the authorities lack accountability, citizens are bound to carry the debt. A 2016 research, Decentralisation of Corruption by Krishna Raj Panta, found that several local bodies in Nepal lacked basic transparency and accountability standards, including timely audits and public disclosure of budgets and expenditures. The study further revealed that weak social auditing and secretive budgetary practices created a fertile environment for corruption at

the local level, ultimately undermining public service delivery.

As a woman volunteer from Chilime VDC described in the study, "They meet in secret. We don't know about budgeting, and it's not transparent." This single sentence carries the dark reality of so-called trusted authorities and the crisis of local governance, which has compelled today's citizens to think more critically and stand for themselves as a collective rational agent rather than emotional consumers of political propaganda.

Today, the discussion on political governance is no longer an abstract

serve the people actually reduces their efficiency and happiness. This inefficiency is not limited to mundane administrations. Citizens have experienced system failure across daily life and national crises. Even during moments of state crisis, such as the 2015 earthquake, citizens experienced massive delays in relief distribution, weak coordination of authorities and delays in public funding. The crisis is further highlighted in the research article by Nepal Administrative Staff College, which shows that the government was not only underprepared to handle a massive disaster but also



POST FILE PHOTO

debate; it is a daily calculation of cost and inconvenience. The most crucial of these costs is time. Chronic queues for passports, licenses and basic documentation, compounded by system delays and lost workdays, transform into a massive economic setback for a nation striving for recovery. These 'time costs' accumulate perniciously, shaping a reality where the system meant to

struggled to demonstrate effective leadership in public funding and coordination. The study points to weak institutional mechanisms for responding to victims' needs, as local government structures were largely dysfunctional and lacked the capacity to effectively represent or respond to affected communities.

The current administration is

attempting to address this instability through high-stakes accountability. The recent decision by Prime Minister Balendra Shah to personally assume the Home Ministry portfolio following Home Minister Gurung's resignation is a strategic attempt to hedge against a 'Utility Deficit'. By taking direct responsibility, the Prime Minister is signalling that political morality must not be sacrificed at the cost of administrative delay and is preventing a legal vacuum, as the onus lies solely on PM Shah to carry both the duties of the PM and the Home Minister until further notice. This move is predicated on the belief that direct accountability can finally bridge the gap between state capacity and citizen benefit.

The Nepali voter has realised that the cost of pain and suffering under the old establishment was too high and the loyalty was too low. They didn't switch their votes because they fell in love with new faces or parties, but because, as citizens, they were the victims of corruption and had to bear its cost. Panta's research also highlights how local political actors and officials frequently exercised monopolistic control over budgets and project selection, transforming public institutions into institutions of selfishness and corruption. Now, citizens have represented themselves as rational agents seeking a better service provider. They want their time, their money and their dignity back.

The mandate given to the new political actors is not mere impulsive action, but citizens' trust who see them as a persona with a vision, fuelled with optimism, entrusting them with their votes. We are seeing the first signs of success in initiatives like doorstep delivery for essential documents, bypassing the limitations of bureaucratic delays. If these leaders succeed in reducing the 'administrative burden' of daily life, they will solidify an era of high-utility governance. However, if they fail to meet the high utility expectations of a hopeful public, they will find that the same rational calculus that brought them to power might lead to their obsolescence.

The math of the past definitely failed us; the math of the future depends on the new government's ability to balance utility and justice.

Shrestha is a graduate of St Xavier's College.

FOREX

US Dollar	154.76
Euro	179.82
Pound Sterling	207.46
Swiss Franc	196.58
Australian Dollar	110.17
Canadian Dollar	112.57
Singapore Dollar	120.8
Japanese Yen (10)	9.73
Chinese Yuan	22.74
Saudi Arab Riyal	41.24
Qatari Riyal	42.46
Thai Bhat	4.74
UAE Dhiram	42.14
Malaysian Ringgit	38.91
Korean Won (100)	10.25

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

 Fine Gold	Rs 295,300
 Silver	Rs 5,085

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

CG Net launches next-generation high-speed internet

KATHMANDU: CG Net has officially launched its next-generation Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax)-based 400 Mbps high-speed internet service in Nepal. Designed for modern digital lifestyles, the new service offers faster speeds, lower latency, and a more stable and reliable internet experience for households across the country. The company said the service is tailored to meet rising demand driven by streaming, online gaming, remote work, online education, and smart home usage, ensuring seamless connectivity for multiple devices. The Wi-Fi 6 service incorporates advanced technologies such as OFDMA and 1024-QAM for efficient data transmission, 8x8 MU-MIMO for higher device capacity, and enhanced network security protocols. CG Net said pricing varies according to package plans.

TBC students launch 'Trailmapper' to address Nepal's trail challenges

KATHMANDU: Students at The British College have launched Trailmapper, a student-led platform aimed at helping



trekkers and travellers navigate Nepal's trails more safely and confidently. Developed through the college's incubation centre, Trailmapper was inspired by the students' own experiences of getting lost on poorly mapped or changing routes. Unlike conventional map services that often overlook smaller trails, the platform combines real-time user updates with smart route suggestions. According to the developers, the app is designed to better reflect Nepal's evolving trail conditions, including hidden routes and local pathways commonly used by trekkers and residents. The start-up recently represented the college at the Hult Prize National Competition, one of the world's leading student entrepreneurship platforms. "We've seen plenty of great ideas, but Trailmapper is different because it solves a problem our students live with every day," said Ganesh Paudyal, head of the TBC Incubation Centre. "This isn't just a school project; it's a venture built on grit and local insight." Trailmapper is among several student-led startups currently being supported by the incubation centre as the college seeks to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in Nepal.

Bajaj Chetak EV opens experience zone in Pokhara

KATHMANDU: Bajaj Chetak EV has launched a new exclusive Experience Zone in Nayabazar, Pokhara, expanding its presence in Nepal's growing electric mobility market. According to the company, the new showroom is aimed at bringing premium electric two-wheeler services closer to customers outside Kathmandu. The facility offers vehicle displays, test rides, purchase assistance, and a dedicated service area exclusively for Chetak EV owners. Customers can also explore digital product displays, interact with smart EV features, and receive consultations from trained advisors on electric mobility and charging solutions. Inspired by the design identity of the Bajaj Chetak brand, the showroom features modern interiors, ambient lighting, and interactive touchpoints intended to enhance the customer experience.

Nepal moves closer to fertiliser import deal with India

Government pushes for faster shipment of 80,000 tonnes under G2G arrangement as Gulf conflict threatens fertiliser supply chains and food security.

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

Nepal has moved a step closer to procuring chemical fertiliser from India under a government-to-government (G2G) arrangement as fears grow over global supply disruptions triggered by the West Asia conflict.

Nepal has formally requested Indian state-owned supplier Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers Limited to provide pricing details after the Cabinet on May 4 approved the procurement plan.

"We are expecting the price list this week," said Ram Krishna Shrestha, joint secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. "After receiving the price, we will review the rates and formally place the order."

According to Shrestha, the Indian company has assured delivery within 120 days after the payments. "But since it's an emergency, we have requested a shorter delivery period," he said.

The government earlier this month granted in-principle approval to the Agriculture Inputs Company to procure 80,000 tonnes of chemical fertiliser from India under the G2G mechanism as soaring global prices and supply uncertainties strain Nepal's farm input system.

The one-time purchase, to be carried out under the 2022 bilateral agreement, includes 60,000 tonnes of urea and 20,000 tonnes of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP). Nepal had initially sought 150,000 tonnes, but the volume was reduced because of budget constraints.

Shrestha said the shipment would help meet demand during the top-dressing phase of paddy cultivation, when fertiliser is applied around 25 to 30 days after transplantation.

The government has allocated Rs28.82 billion in subsidies for fertiliser imports in the current fiscal year, initially targeting procurement of 550,000 tonnes. However, rising global prices driven largely by geopolitical tensions have reduced Nepal's purchasing capacity to around 440,000 tonnes.

The Agriculture Inputs Company



A farmer in Musarniya, Dhanusha top-dresses his paddy with urea, in this undated photo

POST PHOTO: SANTOSH SINGH

currently holds around 171,000 tonnes of fertiliser in stock, while contracts for 94,450 tonnes are likely to be cancelled because suppliers have failed to deliver.

Nepal requires around 250,000 tonnes of fertiliser during the paddy plantation season alone, raising fears of a potential supply gap that could hit crop yields and farm incomes.

Officials say issuing fresh global tenders could take at least 225 days. This has prompted the government to seek urgent supply from India ahead of the paddy transplantation season beginning in June.

Because Nepal relies heavily on fer-

tiliser imports from countries in the Persian Gulf, it is vulnerable to disruptions in global shipping and energy markets.

Rice remains Nepal's staple food, accounting for around 67 percent of cereal consumption and more than half of calorie intake. Average annual per capita rice consumption stands at 137.5 kg. Combined with legumes, rice provides nearly 23 percent of total protein intake.

A fertiliser shortage directly affects crop yields, raises food prices, lowers farm incomes and increases dependence on imports.

Currently, subsidised urea is sold at

Rs18 per kg and DAP at Rs46 per kg through government-designated cooperatives. The subsidies cover around 92 percent of the urea price and 80 percent of the DAP price, with market rates hovering at approximately Rs160 and Rs162 per kg, respectively.

Nepal's chronic fertiliser shortages have long been linked to weak distribution systems, low buffer stocks, policy gaps and exposure to global price shocks. The recurring shortages continue to affect thousands of farmers already struggling with climate risks such as droughts and floods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Japan economy grows faster than expected in first quarter

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO, MAY 19

Japanese economic growth surpassed expectations at the start of 2026, official data showed on Tuesday, but Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is mulling an extra budget as concerns grow over inflation due to the Middle East war.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the world's fourth-biggest economy expanded 0.5 percent in the first quarter, exceeding market forecasts of 0.4 percent. Growth in private consumption and corporate investment contributed to the expansion, according to the cabinet office data.

It follows growth of 0.2 percent - revised downwards from an earlier reading of 0.3 percent - in the last quarter of 2025.

The data came as Takaichi plans to draft a supplementary budget in a bid to safeguard growth, as consumers face soaring prices of everything from energy to rice due to the Middle East conflict.

"Given the continuing uncertainty surrounding the situation in the Middle East,

it is important to closely monitor the trend of prices and the impact on the economy," the government's top spokesman Minoru Kihara told reporters Tuesday, adding that Takaichi had instructed the minister of finance to consider arrangements to minimise risk.

Marcel Thieliant of Capital Economics warned the Middle East conflict was likely to impact data going forward.

"Japan's economy approached the Iran war with solid momentum but we think that GDP growth will grind to a halt this quarter and next," he wrote in a note.

Japan has been trying to stem rising oil prices with government subsidies, but the nation is likely to feel the full impact of soaring energy prices in months ahead, Thieliant said. The country depends on the Middle East for around 95 percent of its oil imports. Already consumer confidence has begun to slump, Thieliant added.

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) said it expected consumer prices to rise 2.8 percent in the current fiscal year, compared with the 1.9 percent previously forecast, due to the

impact of the conflict. It lifted next year's outlook to 2.3 percent from 2.0 percent.

This could prompt it to raise interest rates as early as June.

It also slashed its fiscal 2026 growth forecast to 0.5 percent from 1.0 percent, and for next year trimmed its projection to 0.7 percent from 0.8 percent. Tarō Saito of the NLI Research Institute said that "disruptions in logistics will trigger production adjustments, while the deterioration of terms of trade due to soaring crude oil prices will put downward pressure on corporate profits and the real purchasing power of households".

Expectations of monetary tightening, along with concerns over Takaichi's fiscal policy, have helped drive a sharp rise in Japanese government bond yields in recent days. Japan is also believed to have spent tens of billions of dollars in the market to boost the value of the yen, which has weakened in recent months due to the global uncertainty, as well as the gap between US and Japanese interest rates.

Australia secures jet fuel from China amid energy squeeze

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY, MAY 19

Australia has secured three shipments of jet fuel from China totalling 600,000 barrels, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Tuesday, doubling the national supply.

The Middle East conflict and closure of the Strait of Hormuz have caused fuel prices to soar and left many Asia-Pacific nations facing an energy crisis.

Tourism and freight exports in the island continent are reliant on air travel, a sector heavily impacted by the climbing prices.

The jet fuel shipments are expected to arrive in June and follow talks between Albanese and Chinese Premier Li Qiang on energy security last month.

China supplied a third of Australia's aviation fuel last year and is a major importer of Australian iron ore, coal and liq-

uefied natural gas (LNG).

Canberra has highlighted to Beijing that jet fuel supports the Australian resources sector, officials said.

Australia's Trade Minister Don Farrell is expected to meet his Chinese counterpart Wang Wentao in Suzhou this week on the sidelines of an APEC trade ministers meeting in the Chinese city.

Trade between Australia and China reached Au\$26 billion (\$23.3 billion) last year, dominated by Australian commodities exports.

Farrell is expected to arrive in Tokyo on Tuesday, to discuss energy security and trade.

Japan is another major buyer of Australian LNG and coal.

Australia said this month it will reserve the equivalent of 20 percent of gas exports for the domestic market to avoid supply shortfalls.

What do China's new US farm purchases mean for global trade?

REUTERS
BEIJING/SINGAPORE, MAY 19

China has committed to buying at least \$17 billion of US agricultural products annually in addition to soybeans for three years, the White House said on Sunday, after a summit of the two countries' leaders in Beijing last week.

The world's largest importer of agricultural goods, China sharply reduced US purchases after last year's trade war between the world's two biggest economies. But both have agreed to expand agricultural trade and tackle non-tariff barriers for beef and poultry, China's commerce ministry said on Saturday. Here are details of their agricultural trade and how purchases could unfold:

What the deal means

The \$17-billion pledge, in addition to existing commitments on soybeans, would take China's total US farm imports close to \$28 billion to \$30 billion a year, traders and analysts said, below a peak of \$38 billion in 2022 but sharply above last year's figure of \$8 billion and \$24 billion in 2024.

To meet that target, Beijing would have to sharply increase purchases of wheat, feed grains, meat and non-food agricultural goods such as cotton and timber, traders and analysts said.

Beijing has fulfilled a commitment to buy 12 million tons of soybeans, taking some wheat and a large volume of sorghum, after a deal last October between US President Donald Trump and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. As part of that deal, the White House

said China would buy at least 25 million metric tons of soybeans a year.

Redirecting imports

Higher purchases of US farm goods are likely to come at the expense of exports from rival suppliers such as Brazil, Australia and Canada.

"Achieving \$17 billion annually excluding soybeans would likely require China to intentionally redirect purchasing away from existing suppliers toward the United States for political and strategic reasons rather than purely commercial reasons," said Cheang Kang Wei, vice president at StoneX in Singapore.

Brazil, China's dominant soybean supplier with 73.6 percent market share in 2025, has also emerged as its top supplier of corn. Last year, China approved imports of Brazilian distillers' dried grains (DDGS), a high-protein animal feed byproduct of ethanol manufacture.

Australia, China's top wheat supplier in 2023 and leading sorghum supplier in 2025, could face reduced demand if US wheat and sorghum gain ground. Barley imports may also come under pressure, while higher US beef purchases could curb demand for Australia's premium beef in China.

Other major suppliers, including Canada and France for wheat, and Argentina for sorghum, could also see lower demand.

Soybeans

China is expected to start buying new-crop US soybeans for shipments from October, with North American sup-



Soybeans are irrigated in Platte County, Nebraska, US in August, 2022.

REUTERS

plies priced competitively against Brazilian cargoes, traders said.

"Buying 25 million tons of US soybeans should not be an issue as US prices are pretty attractive now," said an Asia-based oilseed trader at an international trading company that runs soybean processing plants in China.

"They can be bought for crushing as well as stockpiling."

State-owned COFCO and Sinograin are expected to be the main buyers of US soybeans until China lifts an additional tariff of 10 percent, traders said. China has sharply reduced its reliance on the US oilseed since Trump's first term, with US soybeans

making up about a fifth of imports in 2024, down from 41 percent in 2016.

Corn and wheat

Chinese state traders are likely to remain the dominant buyers of US corn and wheat as well, since they are largely allocated low-tariff import quotas. China has import quotas of 9.64 million metric tons for wheat and 7.2 million tons for corn at a 1 percent tariff. Imports beyond the quota face prohibitively high duties of 65 percent. It bought just \$5 million worth of US corn in 2025, down from \$561.5 million a year earlier, with shipments stalling after June, Chinese customs data shows. Wheat imports fell to near

zero in 2025 from 1.9 million metric tons, worth \$600 million, in 2024.

Sorghum and ddgs

China is expected to increase purchases of feed grains, including sorghum, after heavy rains damaged its northern crop in 2025. Unlike wheat and corn, sorghum is not subject to quotas. Since November, Beijing bought at least 2.5 million metric tons of US sorghum to make up domestic corn shortages, but significant DDGS purchases would require it to lift anti-dumping and anti-subsidy tariffs dating from 2017.

Meat

China is a key market for US chicken feet, pork ears and offal - items for which there is little US demand.

Imports of US beef and poultry are likely to rise after Beijing said both sides would work to resolve issues.

China gave five-year registration extensions on Friday to 425 US beef plants largely shut out after their registrations lapsed last year, and approved new five-year registrations for 77 additional US facilities.

Beijing introduced a beef import quota system last December, with a 55 percent tariff on imports above the quota for major suppliers, including the United States, to protect domestic industry.

Non-food agriculture products

China's imports may also include non-food products such as cotton and timber. Cotton imports dropped to \$225.7 million last year from \$1.85 billion in 2024.

WORLD

G7 finance ministers vow cooperation to face 'heightened risks'

Western countries accuse China, which is not a member of the G7, of restricting exports as a dominant power.



(Left to right, front row) France's Economy, Finances and Industry Minister Roland Lescure, Governor of the Bank of France François Villeroy de Galhau, US Secretary of Treasury Scott Bessent, Governor of the Bank of England Andrew Bailey, (Left to right, second row) South Korea's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance Koo Yun-cheol, Governor of the Bank of Korea Hyun Song Shin, Brazil's Finance Minister Dario Durigan, India's Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs Anuradha Thakur, (rear, left) European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde pose for a family photograph of G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors as they meet to prepare the summit of heads of State and government to be held in June 2026 in Evian, in Paris on Tuesday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, FRANCE, MAY 19

Leading global economies on Tuesday vowed multilateral cooperation to address mounting challenges to economic stability due to the Middle East war, after talks in Paris which underscored tensions between the US and its allies.

The meeting of the G7 finance ministers came as economies grapple with the fallout from the US-Israeli war on Iran, while European nations fret over the tariff blitz from the US administration under President Donald Trump and fears of a softening line on Russia.

"We have had frank, sometimes difficult, direct discussions to find long-term and short-term solutions to major global economic challenges in order to guarantee economic stability," said French Finance Minister Roland Lescure after the meeting attended by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent.

But the final communique of the G7 ministers and central bank governors reaffirmed "our commitment to multilateral cooperation in addressing risks to the global economy".

Against the backdrop of the Middle East war, the statement highlighted "multiple and complex global challenges requiring coordinated responses".

"Economic uncertainty has heightened risks to growth and to inflation, amid the ongoing conflict," it said.

'Considerable progress'

The statement singled out "pressures on energy, food, and fertilisers supply chains, which particularly affect the most vulnerable countries".

It urged a "swift return to free and safe transit" through the Strait of Hormuz, a key Gulf waterway where shipping remains severely restricted after Iran imposed an effective blockade at the start of the war.

The Paris meeting, held under France's rotating G7 presidency, prepares the ground for a summit in the French Alpine lakeside resort of Evian in June, chaired by President Emmanuel Macron, which should be attended by Trump.

In line with Macron's aim to broaden the relevance of the G7 club which groups Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, the UK and US, non-mem-

ber nations Brazil, India, Kenya and South Korea were invited to the Paris meeting.

"I think we have made considerable progress in the work, so that our leaders can [in Evian], I hope at least, conclude it on such important, very concrete issues as critical minerals and the resolution of global imbalances," Lescure said.

'Unanimous' on Russia

As concern grows over how to combat the surge in crude oil prices due to the war in the Middle East, the US unsettled allies by announcing a temporary extension of the suspension of sanctions on Russian oil stored at sea.

The "willingness to keep pressure on Russia was unanimous," Lescure insisted.

But before the second day of talks started, EU economy commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis denounced the latest US waiver of sanctions on Russian oil.

"From the EU point of view, we do not think that this is a time to ease pressure on Russia," Dombrovskis said. "In fact, Russia is the one which is gaining from the war in Iran and the increase in fossil fuel prices. If anything, we would need to strengthen the pressure."

The announcement had been made by Washington after the first day of talks on Monday, with Bessent saying on X the measure would "provide additional flexibility" and "help stabilise the physical crude market".

"Secretary Bessent was reassuring us that this is a temporary measure, but we know that it's already a second extension of the measure which initially was meant to last only 30 days," Dombrovskis said.

Writing on X, Bessent said he had "constructive discussions" in Paris on issues including global imbalances, cybersecurity, "the terrorist threat posed by Iran", and critical minerals.

The supply of critical raw minerals used in a range of goods is set to be a key issue at the leaders' summit.

Western countries accuse China, which is not a member of the G7 and has not been invited to the meetings, of restricting exports and taking advantage of a dominant position.

Congo reports sharp rise in Ebola cases as WHO worries about outbreak's scale, speed

JUSTIN KABUMBA & MONIKA PRONCZUK/AP
BUNIA, CONGO, MAY 19

The World Health Organization director-general openly worried on Tuesday over the "scale and speed" of an outbreak of a rare type of Ebola in eastern Congo, where authorities reported a sharp increase in suspected deaths—to at least 131—and more than 500 suspected cases.

The virus spread undetected for weeks after the first known death as authorities tested for a more common type of Ebola and came up negative, health experts and aid workers said. The Bundibugyo virus has no approved medicines or vaccines.

Congo's health minister, Samuel Roger Kamba, said that investigations were underway to determine whether the deaths and 513 suspected cases were "actually linked to the disease".

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said he is "deeply concerned about the scale and speed of the epidemic," adding that the UN health agency will convene its emergency committee later Tuesday. He pointed to the emergence of cases in urban areas, the deaths of healthcare workers and significant population movement.

'Patient zero' hasn't yet been confirmed

WHO has declared the Ebola outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, requiring a coordinated response. Resources were being rushed to the two affected provinces near the border with Uganda, which has reported one death in a person who travelled from Congo.

The head of the WHO team in Congo said that authorities haven't identified "patient zero" in the outbreak.

Dr Anne Ancia also said the Erbevo vaccine, used against a different type of Ebola, was among those being considered for possible use. But even if that or another is approved, it would take two months to become available.

For now, Ancia said, neither the US Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention nor the Africa Centers for Disease Control were on the ground, but others were, including Doctors Without Borders and the Red Cross.

She said that she expected a long road ahead: "I don't see that in two months we will be done with this outbreak."

Inside Congo, cases have been confirmed in the capital of Ituri province, Bunia; North Kivu's rebel-held capital, Goma; and the localities of Mongbwalu, Nyakunde and Butembo—home to well over a million people in all.

Dr Peter Stafford, an American doctor, is among the Bunia cases, said Serge, the Christian organisation that he works for. He had been treating patients at a hospital. Three other Serge employees were working there, including Stafford's wife, but weren't showing symptoms.

False negative tests delayed response

Congo has said the first person died from the virus on April 24 in Bunia, and the body was repatriated to the Mongbwalu health zone, a mining area with a large population.

"That caused the Ebola outbreak to escalate," said Kamba, the health minister.

When another person fell ill on April 26, samples were sent to Congo's capital, Kinshasa, for testing, according to the Africa CDC. Bunia is more than 1,000 kilometres away in a country with some of the world's worst infrastructure. Samples from Bunia were initially tested for the more common type of Ebola, Zaire, Congolese officials said. They came back negative, said Dr Richard Kitenge, the health ministry incident manager for Ebola, and local authorities assumed that it wasn't the virus.

Only laboratories in Kinshasa and Goma, which is now controlled by the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group, have the capacity to test for the Bundibugyo virus.

Benjamin Mbonimpa, M23's permanent secretary, told reporters on Sunday that the rebel government had

established entry and exit points in the city and would take responsibility for funeral services in the event of continued spread.

"Our priority is to protect the population within our jurisdiction, and we urge people to resume their daily activities," he said.

On May 5, WHO was alerted to about 50 deaths in Mongbwalu, including four health workers. The first confirmation of Ebola came on May 14.

"Our surveillance system didn't work," said Jean-Jaques Muyembe, a virologist at the National Institute of Bio-Medical Research.

Virus spread for weeks after first known death as tests for a common type came up negative.

"The Bunia laboratory ... should have continued searching and sent the samples to the national laboratory. Something went wrong there. That's why we ended up in this catastrophic situation," he said, adding that members of parliament and senators were aware "there were deaths and nothing was being said."

Matthew M Kavanagh, director of the Georgetown University Center for Global Health Policy and Politics, criticised the Trump administration's earlier decision to withdraw from WHO and make deep cuts in foreign aid—"the exact surveillance system meant to catch these viruses early," he said. The US State Department pushed aside criticism on Monday, saying it sprang into action immediately and has provided \$13 million in assistance for the response.

This is a rare type of Ebola

Ebola is highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen. The disease it causes is rare but severe and often fatal. During an outbreak more than a

decade ago that killed more than 11,000 people, many were infected while washing bodies during community funerals.

"Ebola is very much a disease of compassion in that it impacts the people who are more likely to be taking care of sick folks," said Dr Craig Spencer, an associate professor at the Brown University School of Public Health who survived Ebola more than a decade ago after contracting it in Guinea.

Ebola causes fever, headache, muscle pain, weakness, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pain and unexplained bleeding or bruising. The severity of the symptoms and the rising caseload were fuelling growing panic in Bunia neighbourhoods.

"I know the consequences of Ebola, I know what it's like," resident Noëla Lumo said. She previously lived in Beni, a region hit by former outbreaks. When she heard about the latest one, she began making protective masks by hand.

Region already hit by a humanitarian crisis

Eastern Congo has grappled with a humanitarian crisis and the threat of armed groups that have killed dozens and displaced thousands in Ituri in the past year. Ituri already had more than 273,000 displaced people out of a population of 1.9 million, according to the UN.

UN staff have been asked to work from home and avoid physical contact and crowded areas, said a Bunia-based UN official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to speak publicly on the subject.

The most important challenge is breaking the virus transmission chain, Muyembe said.

"Of the 17 epidemics we have experienced in [Congo], 15 were brought under control simply by applying public health measures," he said. "The disease is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids. If you avoid this contact, you break the chain of transmission and the epidemic stops."

Russia holds massive drills of its nuclear forces as Ukraine steps up its drone attacks

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, MAY 19

Russia on Tuesday began massive maneuvers of its nuclear forces featuring practice launches of nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles in drills that come amid surge in Ukrainian drone strikes.

The three-day exercise will involve 64,000 troops, over 200 missile launchers, more than 140 aircraft, 73 surface warships and 13 submarines, including eight armed with nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Defense Ministry said.

The maneuvers will focus on the "preparation and use of nuclear forces under the threat of aggression," the ministry said.

The drills will also practice cooperation with Belarus, a neighbor and ally that hosts Russian nuclear weapons. Russian arsenals in Belarus include its latest intermediate range nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile system.

The maneuvers come as Ukraine has sharply intensified its drone attacks against Russia, including a weekend barrage on Moscow's suburbs that killed three and damaged several buildings and industrial facilities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly reminded the world about Moscow's nuclear arsenals after sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022 to try to deter the West from ramping up support for Kyiv.



In this image from video provided by Russian Defence Ministry Press Service on Tuesday, Russia's new Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile test launches at an undisclosed location.

The recent attacks have made it harder for officials in the Kremlin to cast the conflict in Ukraine—now in its fifth year—as something so distant that it doesn't affect the daily routines of Russian civilians. The exercise unfolded as Putin on Tuesday is starting a two-day visit to China.

Last week, he praised a successful test launch of the new Sarmat ICBM, which is set to replace aging Soviet-built nuclear missiles.

In 2024, Putin adopted a revised nuclear doctrine, noting that any nation's conventional attack on Russia that is supported by a nuclear power

will be considered a joint attack on his country. That threat was clearly aimed at discouraging the West from allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with longer-range weapons and appears to significantly lower the threshold for the possible use of Russia's nuclear arsenal.

Russian hawks long have urged the Kremlin to respond to the growing Ukrainian attacks by striking Kyiv's allies in Europe with conventional weapons, arguing that European NATO members wouldn't dare retaliate and enter a direct military conflict with the world's largest nuclear power.

Kentucky primary tests Trump's grip on Republican base

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES, MAY 19

US President Donald Trump's hold on his support base faces its latest test Tuesday, with voters deciding whether one of Congress's most independent conservatives can survive the Republican leader's full political firepower.

Several states are holding primaries to pick candidates for the November midterm elections, but the standout contest is in Kentucky, where Trump aims to oust seven-term Republican Thomas Massie, one of the president's most persistent internal critics.

The race is being watched as a measure of whether Trump's grip on Republican voters remains strong despite war, inflation and sliding national approval ratings—and whether there is still room in the party for lawmakers willing to break with him. Massie has angered Trump by opposing US military action in Iran and Venezuela, criticising aid to Israel, resisting parts of the president's agenda and helping push for the release of files related to multimillionaire sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump has endorsed Ed Gallein, a farmer and retired Navy SEAL, in what US media have described as the most expensive House primary in American history, with more than \$32 million in ad spending—much of it from pro-Israeli groups opposed to Massie.

The president has spent months attacking the 55-year-old former engineer and inventor as disloyal, calling him a "moron," a "nut job" and a "major sleazebag."

"He is the Worst 'Republican' Congressman in History," Trump wrote on Truth Social, after telling voters at a March rally he wanted "somebody with a warm body" to beat Massie. Massie has cast the race as a test of independence inside the Republican Party.

"They want 100 percent compliance," Massie has said of the White House, arguing that he votes with Trump most of the time but is punished for the moments when he disobeys. The Kentucky showdown comes after Trump-backed forces routed Indiana state lawmakers who resisted his redistricting demands and after Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, who voted to convict Trump after the 2021 US Capitol riot, failed to make a runoff over the weekend.

A Massie defeat would send another warning to his party about the cost of crossing Trump, while a victory offers rare proof that Republican critics can survive the president's wrath.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Georgia voters are choosing candidates in Senate and gubernatorial primaries, but the state's Supreme Court races may provide the clearest bellwether in a key swing state.

De-extinction company hatches chicks from artificial eggshell

ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN/AP
NEW YORK, MAY 19

A biotech company that aims to resurrect lost creatures said on Tuesday it has hatched live chicks in an artificial environment—a development that was met with mixed reviews from scientists and critics of its de-extinction mission. Twenty-six baby chickens—ranging from a few days to several months old—were born from a 3D printed lattice structure that mimics an eggshell, according to Colossal Biosciences.

Colossal previously announced it had genetically engineered living animals to resemble extinct species, including mice with long hair like the woolly mammoth and wolf pups that take after dire wolves. Colossal's CEO Ben Lamm said the artificial egg technology could one day be scaled up to genetically tweak living birds to resemble New Zealand's extinct South Island giant moa, whose eggs are 80 times the size of a chicken's and would be difficult for any modern bird to lay.

"We wanted to build something that nature has done a pretty good job of developing and make it better and scalable and even more efficient," Lamm said.

Independent scientists say the technology, while impressive, lacks some components to be truly considered an artificial egg. And they said the idea of reviving extinct beasts is likely impossible. "They might be able to use this technology to help them make a

genetically modified bird, but that's just a genetically modified bird. It's not a moa," said evolutionary biologist Vincent Lynch with the University at Buffalo.

To hatch the chicks, Colossal scientists poured fertilized eggs into the

artificial system and placed them in an incubator.

They also added calcium, which is normally absorbed from the eggshell, and imaged the embryos' development and growth in real-time.

Scientists say Colossal has designed an artificial eggshell with a membrane that allows the right amount of oxygen to get in, just like a real egg. But other components of an egg—like temporary organs that form to nourish and stabilise the growing chick and remove waste—weren't included.

"That's not an artificial egg because you've poured in all the other parts that make it an egg. It's an artificial eggshell," said Lynch.

In decades past, researchers have used cruder technology to create transparent eggshells that hatched chicks from plastic films or sacks. Such technologies are useful to study chicken development and glean insights that can also be applied to other mammals and even humans.

"Producing a chick from an artificial vessel is not necessarily new," said Nicola Hemmings, who studies bird reproductive biology at the University of Sheffield. Hemmings is not part of the Colossal team.

There's a long road ahead before

Colossal attempts a moa resurrection using this artificial egg system. Scientists first need to compare ancient DNA from well-preserved moa bones to genomes of living bird species. And they need a bigger eggshell.

"We didn't want to wait till we were ready to birth a giant moa. We actually wanted to start working on the engineering challenges for surrogacy and birth now," Lamm said.

Even if Colossal succeeds in creating a tall bird similar to the moa, some scientists are concerned about what happens after—including how it would survive in a landscape that looks nothing like that past.

"The big challenge is, what environment is this animal going to live in?" said bioethicist Arthur Caplan with New York University's Grossman School of Medicine.

Such de-extinction efforts may make more sense with currently endangered species, where scientists could preserve sperm and egg cells from living members to attempt to bring more back, Hemmings said.

"My personal interests lie more in preserving what we've got than trying to bring back what is already gone," Hemmings said.



This undated photo provided by Colossal Biosciences shows a chick hatched from an artificial environment.

Frisbee takes flight in Nepal

A newly formed federation is organising Nepal's first ultimate frisbee tournament on May 21 and 22 in Kathmandu, hoping to turn an informal park game into a structured sport.

NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, MAY 19

Ultimate frisbee does not require expensive equipment, modern stadiums or even referees—just a disc, an open space and willing players. Despite its simplicity, the sport has yet to find space in Nepal.

However, that may soon change as the newly formed Nepal Flying Disc Federation (NFDF) launches its first ultimate frisbee tournament and begins introducing the game to schools and communities with hopes of building a future player base.

Ultimate frisbee is not among the "most popular" sports in the world. Further, it is only a discipline of flying disc (frisbee) sports.

"Disc golf, freestyle, guts, overall and beach ultimate are other disciplines of frisbee," Santosh Khadka, secretary general at the NFDF, told the Post at a café along the Manohara riverbank near Dibyashwori Town Planning, Bhaktapur. "Ultimate frisbee is the most popular discipline. Disc golf is also popular, but we have prioritised ultimate frisbee in our initial phase."

Though not widely recognised as a sport, the flying disc would sometimes appear in Kathmandu's open spaces, passed between friends in informal games.

"It was in Norway in 2016 when I came to know about the sport through a guy from the Netherlands," said Khadka, who visits Norway every now and then for his job. "When I returned to Nepal after that, I started noticing the disc being thrown and caught in some parts of the Kathmandu valley."

Nine years on, Khadka found some friends fond of the sport and they teamed up to form the NFDF last year. The NFDF was recognised as a member association by the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) in October last year.

"After the formation of the national federation, we started promoting the sport, especially through schools. We started a month-long training camp at Kapan and Chunikhel in April, where 50 children, a third of them girls, participated," said Khadka. "We now have an ultimate frisbee tournament, the first of its kind in Nepal, in a couple of days."

Branded as the "Himalayan Spirit Cup", the NFDF is organising a two-day ultimate frisbee tournament at the Handball Ground in Kapan, Kathmandu, on May 21 and 22.

The tournament will see five teams playing for two days, Khadka said. "Hope Foundation, a rehabilitation centre in Kapan, will be one of the teams, while the others have been introduced to the game before."

The athletes will include seniors and children who have completed their Secondary Education Exam (SEE). Each of the matches will be 30



Children practise ultimate frisbee in a month-long training camp, organised from April 23 by the Nepal Flying Disc Federation in Kathmandu.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO THE POST

minutes long. The winner will be the one who scores 15 goals first or the one with the most goals in the allotted time. "If there is a tie, the golden goal rule will apply," Khadka said.

Under the standard format of ultimate frisbee, a match is 100 minutes. The rule for winning is the same: the first to score 15 goals or the one with the most goals by the end of the match.

How is ultimate frisbee played?

The disc used for ultimate frisbee is almost like a discus, but it is not so heavy. A disc is 175 grams in weight, while that of a discus weighs two kilograms for men's and a kilogram for women's events.

"The disc is roughly the size of a normal plate we use for a meal," said Khadka. "It is made of plastic, and it does not hurt when players get hit while missing the catch."

There are two teams of seven players each when the sport is played outdoors on grass. When played indoors or on the beach, there are usually five players in each team.

The teams field their players in a ground that is 100 metres long and 37 metres wide. At each end of the playing field,

there is an end zone, which is 18 metres long.

"There is a 64-metre-long playing area for the players. It is a goal when a player of a team passes the disc to his/her teammate inside the opponent's end zone," Khadka said. "When there is a goal, the end zone changes for each of them so that a single team does not get an environmental advantage, such as the direction of the wind. The play starts and resumes from the end zone."

Meanwhile, it is a foul when a team drops the disc while catching or when the disc touches the ground while throwing. A player cannot run with the disc after catching. S/he should throw the ball within 10 seconds, with the opponents disallowed from snatching the disc unless it is thrown.

The most interesting part of the game is that ultimate frisbee does not require on-field referees. The sport boasts itself for relying on the "Spirit of the Game".

"Ultimate relies upon a Spirit of the Game that places the responsibility for fair play on every player,"

the WFDF writes about the discipline of ultimate frisbee. "There are no referees; the players are solely responsible for following and enforcing the rules, even at the World Championship. Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules, and the basic joy of play."

Khadka believes that ultimate frisbee improves bonding among players. "There is not much physical contact in this sport, as a player cannot touch the thrower when s/he has the disc. There is some contact when an opponent player is disturbing the catcher," he added.

Moreover, ultimate frisbee can be played with a mixed team of boys and girls.

"This is an inclusive sport," Khadka said with pride. "Mixed teams of boys and girls can compete. There is no gender barrier as it is the skills that matter."

A good disc costs Rs1,000, but it is not easily available in Nepal. "There are average discs available in Kathmandu, but they break easily," Khadka said. "A disc, a pair of shoes and casual clothes used for any other sports will suffice for a game."

Nonetheless, like any other sport, frisbee is also struggling to find proper places to play in the packed Valley.

(NSC), the governing body of Nepali sports.

"Unless we are registered with the NSC, we cannot create bank accounts, receive funding from the international federation and operate effectively," Khadka said.

As per the National Sports Development Act, a national sports association can be registered only after it has at least four provincial associations.

"We only have district associations in Kathmandu and Lalitpur for now," said Khadka. "We are planning to take the game outside the Valley, create new district associations and form provincial associations."

Similarly, the NFDF is also struggling to retain athletes. "Children show interest in the game when we reach schools for demonstrations," Khadka added. "But in the lack of regular tournaments and the popularity of the game, many don't continue."

It is also difficult for Kathmandu-

based schools to allow students to play frisbee at their compounds. It is because school compounds are mostly made of concrete, which increases the risk of injuries.

"With less physical contact, frisbee has an extremely low injury rate. And the risk reduces as it is played mostly on grassy grounds and sand," Khadka shared. Moreover, with frisbee struggling for popularity globally, the challenges are more in Nepal, where even the established sports like cricket, football and volleyball are not having an easy time.

The WFDF is recognised by the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee and the International University Sports Federation. However, flying disc sports are yet to make their debut in the major sporting events like the Olympics and the Asian Games.

Frisbee has shown potential for an Olympic debut for over a decade.

"There's an early indicator that Ultimate has an edge over baseball, squash, and other would-be Olympic sports for inclusion in the summer of 2024," The New Yorker wrote in an article published in August 2015.

However, with the sport being played less outside the United States and European countries, frisbee has not made its mark at the biggest stages. "But ultimate frisbee is at the World Games. And there are several world championships organised across the world every now and then," Khadka said. "It is growing because it is a great sport. Once you start playing frisbee, it is hard to stop."

The best positive in recent times for flying disc sports is that mixed ultimate frisbee and disc golf debuted at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Thailand last year.

"Frisbee is a popular sport in India. It is played in other South Asian countries as well. It can be a major sport in this region if we all collaborate," Khadka suggested. "But first, we need to produce quality players in the country." The NFDF also believes that it will take some time for the sport to reach the corners of the country.

"We will grow gradually. It won't be long before we see Nepalis of all ages throwing and catching discs in the public spaces of Kathmandu and beyond," Khadka said with optimism. "Frisbee does not need dedicated playing spaces. We can utilise available spaces, like football grounds. And as we grow, we will invest more in athletes and tournaments." For now, ultimate frisbee remains a novelty in Nepal's sporting landscape. But with a federation in place and the first organised tournament underway, its flight is no longer informal—it is beginning to take shape and direction.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Big feelings trigger meaningful epiphanies this morning, dear Aries. Trace the flow of your emotions to determine where the universe is guiding you. Unresolved pain creates blocks this evening.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Pull at the thread of your own ideas to unravel brilliance, dear Taurus. Owning your unique perspective will win you influence and the support of peers.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Wishes big and small could manifest suddenly, especially when you are grateful for what you have and optimistic about what's to come, dear Gemini.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Set specific goals and take a visible approach to gaining support for your cause, dear Cancer. Just be mindful not to oversell your strengths, and acknowledge where more experience is needed.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Explore the vibrant world that resides within you, dear Leo. Dreams grow clearer and more attainable when you take space to fully nurture and expand them.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Celebrate diversity within your social sphere, dear Virgo. Appreciate and draw inspiration from the various talents, cultural traditions, and belief systems that keep your community interesting.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Simple courtesies can elevate your professional standing, dear Libra. Go above and beyond to grow your reputation today. You'll be ready for a break this evening. Set boundaries with colleagues who reach out after hours.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

A limitless energy follows you, dear Scorpio. Take your aspirations to the next level, and don't be afraid to swim in unfamiliar waters. Enthusiasm grows as opportunities trickle in.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Sacrifices you've made in the name of growth pay off, dear Sagittarius. Romantic and professional partnerships can also emerge, and you'll feel empowered with the knowledge that someone else has your back.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You're lucky in love, dear Capricorn. If you've been harbouring a secret crush, harness these vibes and make a move. Opportunities could also arise through your sweetheart or a close friend.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

The favours you perform won't soon be forgotten, dear Aquarius. These vibes are all about paying your dues, trusting that payoffs will emerge down the line. Be a team player to secure future leadership opportunities.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Open your heart, dear Pisces, and love will rush in. Friends and family will be delighted to connect in meaningful ways, and you'll thrive while under the influence of such adoration.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Acquires
- Buzz off
- Pita treat
- Styptic
- Take —!
- Pored over
- Royal honorific
- Genuine
- Sarge's pooch
- Cure-all
- More spiteful
- Walks heavily
- Found a perch
- Swings around
- Unit of resistance
- Rich cake
- More difficult
- Sweet potatoes
- Greer or Holbrook
- Appropriate
- Caesar's law
- Mare's tidbit
- Nonflying bird
- Brooks or Gibson
- Roman poet
- Set against
- Helen, in Spanish
- Dye vessel
- Rockhound's find
- man out
- Further up

DOWN

- Pant
- Essay byline
- Capsize
- Rich cake (2 wds.)
- Did some mudslinging
- Oregon's capital
- El — (inferior)
- Fix, as a boxing match
- Related
- Refinery output
- Cavernlike recess
- Sasquatch cousin
- Use a scale from 1 to 10
- Fragrance
- Courts' counts
- Waits (2 wds.)
- Not sociable
- Disgrace

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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C	A	R	A	T	O	P	A	L	E	R	M	A	
A	M	E	N	A	B	L	E	B	U	T	T	O	N
A	D	D	S	U	P	B	O	R	A	X			
G	O	A	T	S	N	O	R	T	H	E	A	S	T
H	O	U	R	C	O	N	K	S	N	I	C	E	
A	M	B	I	G	U	O	U	S	D	O	S		
P	A	R	K	S	S	I	N	E	W	S			
F	I	G	P	T	S	R	A	E					
U	N	S	E	E	N	L	A	N	S	B	U	R	Y
D	E	U	S	E	G	O	S	E	E	R	I	E	
G	R	I	T	S	N	I	P	L	L	A	M	A	
E	T	T	A	S	U	N							

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- Jacket feature
- Kind of jacket
- Tending to use bombast
- No longer wild recess
- Give the slip
- Race the engine
- Chart
- Caesar's 14
- Lah-di —
- Seesaws
- Grabbed a cookie
- Slight traces
- Hibachi sites
- Happily
- Gift-tag word
- Company's identifying symbol
- Peace Prize city
- Lisbon lady
- Reasoner's word
- Bit of chicanery
- Legal matter

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
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40				41		42		43					44	
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73						74						75		

SUDOKU

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4	3	2	7	6	9	5	8	1
7	6	4	2	1	8	9	3	5
2	8	3	9	5	7	4	1	6
9	5	1	6	4	3	8	7	2
1	2	8	3	9	6	7	5	4
3	7	9	4	2	5	1	6	8
6	4	5	8	7	1	2	9	3

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

8				2				7
				6		7		
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	3	5		8		7	9	
2					5		4	3
		4				6		9
			5		6			
8								5

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Who gets left out of mental health conversations?

Emotional well-being support cannot remain limited to urban centres and awareness campaigns—it must reach the people who are most often ignored.

○ DIPESH TANDUKAR

Whenever we have conversations about the need and importance of mental health, we often come to the conclusion that it is a very important issue and that everyone needs to address it because it can impact how they go about their lives. The conversation then usually shifts towards how understanding mental health is vital in workplaces and, by extension, within families.

However, something that is often missing from these conversations is that the people who require the most support are not part of the conversation at all.

Across many countries, mental health services are growing. Cities now have counselling centres, awareness campaigns, workshops, and social media pages that provide information and guidance on various mental health issues. Schools and colleges now have counsellors. Offices organise wellness sessions frequently. Urban communities are slowly becoming more open to conversations about emotional well-being. But beyond the cities lies a very different reality.

In many rural and marginalised communities, people are still struggling in silence. Many have never even heard the word “self-care,” let alone have any conversations about mental or emotional health. Many go through difficult times with little emotional support, not because they do not want it, but because they do not even know they need it.

Mental health support is often more prevalent where visibility is highest. Conferences and seminars happen in cities. Awareness events are organised where media coverage is easier. Mental health professionals stay where resources, opportunities, and infrastructure already exist. So, what about the places where these resources do not exist? What happens to the people who cannot speak up to say they need support? Where do they go for help when the people who can support them are so far away? The unfortunate answer is that they and their voices remain invisible. It is easy to assume that everyone is progressing when that is all we see around us.

Human beings are shaped by the connections they form. They cope better when they feel heard, included, and supported. When communities are ignored for long periods, hopelessness quietly



Conferences and seminars happen in cities. Awareness events are organised where media coverage is easier.

grows. They begin to believe that their suffering does not matter enough to warrant attention and that it is simply their fault for going through it. And that is exactly the reason why we often do not hear about them.

Think about the student in a village who struggles with anxiety but has nobody to talk to. Or a mother carrying years of stress while managing financial hardship, family pressure, and emotional exhaustion without support. Or an elderly person living alone after the younger family members migrate to other places for work. These experiences may not always look dramatic from the outside, but emotional difficulties do not need to be loud to be serious.

These situations are very common, yet often difficult to fully understand from the outside. However, the solutions to these problems are sometimes simpler than we

imagine. Most of the time, what people need is safety, trust, community, and someone willing to listen without judgment. Meaningful community presence itself can be therapeutic.



— MENTAL WELLBEING —

When talking about supporting these communities, we often look only to larger stakeholders like wards, municipalities, and governments, believing it is solely their responsibility. While their support is important, creating trust and safety often has to start small. It can begin with a vol-

unteer group visiting their neighbourhoods, a youth club creating safe spaces for discussion, or a local women's group checking on vulnerable members.

These actions may appear small, but psychologically, they reduce loneliness, shame, and emotional isolation. And yes, these groups can definitely perform better with the support of local authorities. That is what we need to emphasise: training and supporting groups that genuinely care and want to help, while encouraging them to work hand in hand with local institutions to create an environment where even marginalised communities can safely voice their concerns.

Another issue is that we think that guiding or supporting them once is enough, but such support should be consistent. Think about when you learned something. Did you learn it quickly, or did it take some time?

Community mental health is not about entering a village or marginalised area believing professionals have all the answers. It is about listening first. Every community already has its own coping systems, cultural strengths and relationships. Effective mental health work needs to integrate those aspects without imposing their thoughts and ideas.

Rural communities are not always emotionally weaker than urban ones. In fact, many have stronger community bonds, a sense of shared responsibility, and a collective identity. What they often lack is access to structured mental health resources and long-term institutional support. The goal should not be to “save” communities from the outside. The goal should be to strengthen existing support systems while making professional care accessible and culturally relevant.

Mental health awareness has grown significantly over the past decade, and that progress deserves recognition. But awareness alone is not enough if support remains concentrated only where resources already exist. Real progress means reaching the communities that are easiest to overlook.

It means going beyond hashtags, seminars, and one-day campaigns. It means building trust slowly in places where people have learned not to expect help. It means understanding that emotional well-being is not a luxury issue reserved only for urban populations. It is a human issue.

If mental health matters, then it must matter everywhere. Not only in hospitals. Not only in universities. Not only in cities. But also in rural schools, isolated neighbourhoods, underserved communities, disaster-affected areas, and forgotten corners where people continue carrying invisible burdens every single day.

The next time conversations about mental health happen around you, ask this question: Who is still missing from this conversation? Because sometimes the places that need mental health support the most are the places we have learned to ignore.

Tandukar is a mental health professional. He is an organisational psychologist at FHEAL, a counselling hub for mindful healing.



KIMFF 2026 to screen over 50 films from 29 countries

The five-day festival in Kathmandu will showcase fiction, documentaries, shorts, and adventure films alongside discussions on storytelling and censorship.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KIMFF

○ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

The 23rd edition of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) will showcase diverse stories from May 27 to 31 at QFX Chhaya Centre in Thamel, Kathmandu. The festival will screen more than 50 films from 29 countries.

Kimff brings internationally acclaimed films—fiction, documentary, shorts, adventure cinema to Nepali cinephiles, filmmakers, and the general public. The Nepal Panorama section features films by local talent that spotlight contemporary stories from Nepal.

“We hope the line-up of films and events will entertain audiences and engage them in critical conversations in and around issues that affect the Nepali public,” says festival director Ramyata Limbu.

The festival will open with the Nepal Premiere of ‘Shape of Momo’, an award-winning film by Tribeny Rai (India). The film follows Bishnu, a woman who quits her job in the city and returns to her Himalayan hometown, where she must choose between conforming to tradition or claiming her independence.

The festival will also feature a panel discussion, ‘What’s In a Story—Cinema and Censorship’.

KIMFF 2026 international jury com-

prises Jury Head Deepti DCunha (international film programmer, India), Chalida Uabumrungjit (Director of the Film Archive, Thailand), Kumar Nagarkoti (writer and poet, Nepal), and Luca Bich (Director of Cervino CineMountain Festival, Italy). They will decide the Best Film for feature fiction (5 shortlisted), feature documentary (11 shortlisted), short fiction (7 shortlisted) and short documentary (10 shortlisted).

The Nepal Panorama jury—Cultural & Communication Coordinator at Alliance Francaise Kathmandu, Lucie De Barros (France), filmmaker Nabin Chauhan (Nepal) and film journalist and critic Reena Moktan (Nepal)—will decide the best documentary (5 shortlisted) and best fiction (9 shortlisted).

KIMFF 2026 awards in the international category are: \$1500 for best feature documentary, \$1000 for best short documentary, \$1500 for best feature fiction, and \$1000 for best short fiction. The best documentary and best fiction film at Nepal Panorama will each receive Rs100,000. The Kimff Audience Award is Rs100,000.

Tickets are Rs150 for the general public and Rs100 for students.

Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival
Where: Chhaya Centre, Thamel
When: May 27 to 31
Entry: Rs100 to Rs150

EVERYDAY AI



SHASHANK SHRESTHA

Shrestha is the executive director of Kathaharu, an audio-visual production company. He has been engaged in media production for two decades.

■ AI as an assistant

AI makes things faster, but you should not outsource your entire thinking to it. As a filmmaker and the director of Kathaharu, I have found AI tools to help with the project management and polishing aspects of the project. But as I said, AI can make mistakes, and you must be able to know its limitations before using it.

That out of the way, some of my biggest life-saving fixes have come from AI-tech. A lot of the conversation seems to be about generative AI, but the tools that really help creatives are the ones that simplify mundane tasks and free up time for brainstorming, ideation, and collaboration. I must stress that we need to adopt the tools that fix previously ‘unfixable’ things, but not remove the creativity from the process as a whole.

■ Faster research and planning

We work a lot with non-fiction material, and in such videos, research is a big part of things. ChatGPT and Claude have been excellent research assistants for this. For storyboarding, I do prefer sketching by hand, but lately—storybirdie has my attention. I have been tinkering with it for short films and ads, and its ability to do fast storyboarding really impresses me.

■ Production management

We have a lot of stock and samples from our years of work, so we still rely on that library for mood boarding and reference images. But a very underrated AI save came recently when we got Claude to create a database management system for our library. We are still experimenting with it, but

those administrative and system design aspects really free up our time to focus on the story and what to ‘shoot’. Another save has come from AI transcription tools like Sonix—transcribing hours of interviews can be daunting, but these tools truly free us up from busywork.

■ Post-production saves

I believe AI is a saviour in post-production, but not in the way it’s been positioned. AI tools really allow us to fix previously unfixable errors. Did the microphone pick up too much noise? Clean it up on the Adobe podcast. Is your shot out of focus? Sharpen with Topaz AI. You need a higher-resolution photo or video—upscaling is with Topaz. You just need a few more seconds of footage—use Adobe Firefly to generate them. These interventions were not possible before, and you had to live with the errors. Now, there are ways to save your videos while maintaining our editorial control and elevating the final product.

■ Human emphasis

I love AI-powered solutions that keep humans in the centre. As a creative professional, I feel there is a push to replace humans in the creative process, which totally misses the point of creating. But at the same time, the creative industry often finds itself at the forefront of technological disruption. The way to go is to use AI technology that reduces hurdles and friction that eat into the time we spend ideating and polishing our work. Keep humans in the centre while the tool gets better at streamlining our process.



Camila Mendes arrives at the premiere of “Masters of the Universe” on Monday, May 18, 2026, at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles.