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Foreign Minister Khanal to visit China next week

Officials say the visit is also intended to reassure Beijing amid concerns over Kathmandu's perceived tilt towards the West.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

A week after wrapping up his three-day visit to India, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal is heading to China as part of an apparent effort of maintaining a balance in ties with the two neighbours.

He is leaving for Beijing on June 14 on a four-day visit at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. Besides holding bilateral talks with Wang, he will also meet leaders of Communist Party of China (CPC).

"The foreign minister has already begun preparations following the confirmation of the visit," said a senior foreign ministry official. "In fact, he visited New Delhi on short notice only after his trip to China was confirmed."

While in Delhi, he met with External Affairs Minister of India S Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and others and discussed a range of bilateral issues ranging from border and boundary, trade, commerce, connectivity, infrastructure, energy and fertiliser.

Ahead of Khanal's visit, two countries reviewed progress of dozens of China-funded projects.

The foreign minister is traveling to Beijing at a time when there is growing suspicion in diplomatic circles in Beijing that Nepal's current government is increasingly leaning towards the West, said the official, who is close to Minister Khanal.

"The foreign minister's visit to Beijing is aimed at dispelling this perception and reassuring the Chinese leadership that Nepal remains committed to balanced diplomacy. It is also meant to demonstrate Nepal's balanced approach to its relations with both India and China," the official added.

Minister Khanal will meet and solicit views from former ministers, leaders, officials and China experts before leaving for Beijing.

Soon after the March elections, some CPC leaders landed in Kathmandu and held talks with senior leaders of the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party, including Khanal, and discussed the outlook of the new government. They also inquired whether the new government would toe a pro-Western line.

The concerns from Chinese leaders prompted the RSP leadership to conclude that the new government should reassure both neighbours that it would not depart from Nepal's principled foreign policy position.

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Weak arbitration defence costs government billions of rupees

The government has lost at least Rs5.5 billion over the past five years, as state agencies repeatedly failed to pursue strong counterclaims against several construction companies.



A section of the Sikta Irrigation Project in western Nepal. The contractor won an arbitration case against the government worth millions of rupees.

TUFAN NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

Two years ago, the Sharma/Bishoi/Surya JV construction company claimed Rs1.44 billion from the Department of Roads before an arbitration tribunal. The amount sought in the construction dispute was around Rs100 million higher than the total contract value of the project.

The contractor for the Keshaliya-Chimadi-Laukahi Road Upgrading Project in Sunsari claimed losses, arguing that unexpected soil extraction costs and delays in relocating electricity poles left trucks and equipment idle.

According to records of the Nepal Council of Arbitration, which resolved the dispute, the tribunal awarded around 20 percent of the claimed amount, ordering the department to pay Rs288.5 million to Sharma/Bishoi/Surya JV, including Rs57.6 million in interest.

The Keshaliya-Chimadi-Laukahi project is not an isolated dispute.

The case reflects a broader pattern emerging from Nepal's public procurement disputes. A review of arbitration records and Auditor General reports shows that government agencies routinely enter arbitration without strong legal defences, rarely pursue counterclaims against contractors and operate within a system criticised for inconsistent decision-making and weak oversight. The result has been billions of rupees in payouts from public funds.

Over the past five years, construction companies, suppliers and consultants have claimed around Rs14 billion from the state, with tribunals ordering

payments of at least Rs5.5 billion.

In the past two years, 84 percent of 89 disputes resulted in contractors receiving full or partial compensation through arbitration.

The Office of the Auditor General has identified weak government defence as one of the key reasons behind the high rate of contractor victories. In its latest report, it found that only 27 of 160 disputes involved formal counterclaims by government agencies.

Referring to the report, Auditor General Toyam Raya told Kantipur that government bodies rarely file counterclaims.

Government agencies avoid counterclaims due to lack of legal expertise, says an advocate.

The report states that government agencies often fail to defend cases effectively, sometimes do not respond at all, and are unable to present sufficient evidence and documentation before arbitral tribunals. As a result, decisions that could have favoured state agencies end up benefiting contractors.

Baburam Dahal, a former general secretary of the council, said he had seen very few instances of government agencies filing counterclaims, describing it as a major weakness.

"There is no proper mechanism for them to work on this. Employees do not put in effort and lack expertise," said Dahal, also a senior advocate. "If

a contractor fails to complete work, the law allows recovery of the remaining cost. But since agencies never claim it, tribunals cannot award it."

According to him, there is no proper mechanism to work on this.

"However, since they [the government agencies] never file such claims, the arbitrator cannot award or recover those amounts on their behalf," he added.

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After India visit, RSP chief seeks to ease political gridlock

Rabi Lamichhane consulted PM Shah Sunday, and convened an all-party meeting Monday in a bid to end House standoff.

JAY SINGH MAHARA
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

Rabi Lamichhane, chairman of the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), has taken the initiative to address two of the country's most pressing challenges: mending ties with India and ending the prolonged parliamentary deadlock.

Lamichhane's visit to India came at a time when New Delhi had expressed dissatisfaction over Prime Minister Balendra Shah's remarks during a House of Representatives meeting on May 31.

Responding to lawmakers' queries, Prime Minister Balendra Shah had said that England (the United Kingdom) should also take an interest in Nepal's border dispute with India, given its historical link to the 1816 Sugauli Treaty.

The remarks drew an immediate response from India's Ministry of External Affairs. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the countries have established bilateral mechanisms to deal with all aspects of boundary matters, and that there should be no role for third parties in bilateral issues.

The day after the prime minister's address, the RSP chief flew to New Delhi at the invitation of Nitin Nabin, head of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), where he held talks with senior party and government leaders.

During his visit, Lamichhane received a warm welcome and held



Lamichhane at all-party meeting on Monday.

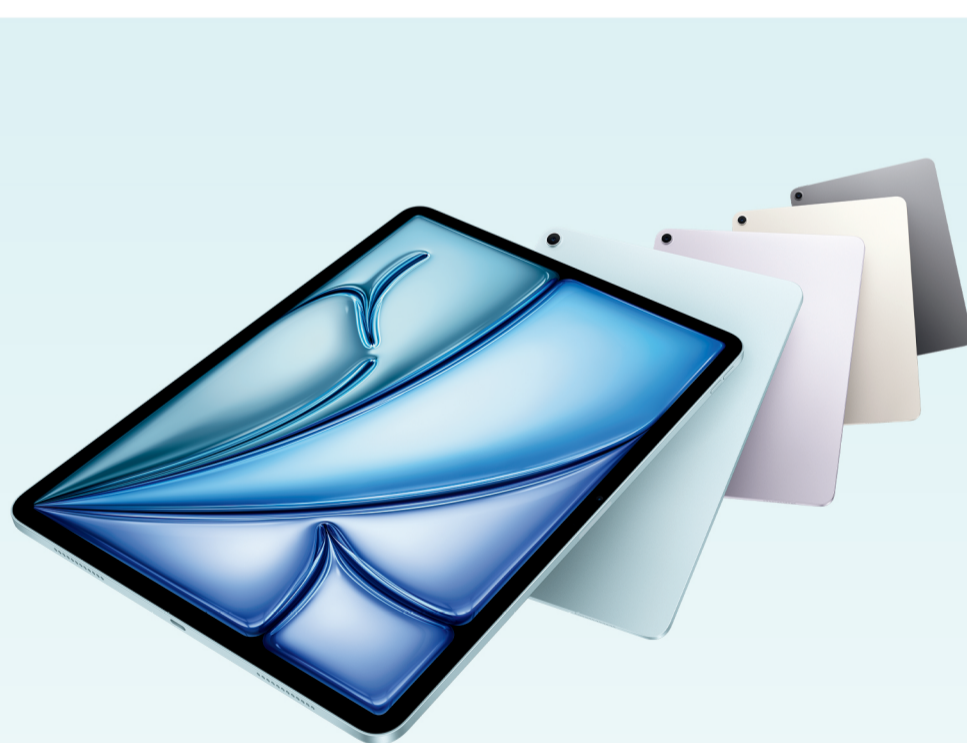
high-level talks with Indian political leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an effort to reassure New Delhi on bilateral issues. Following his five-day visit from June 1 to 5, Lamichhane held consultations with Prime Minister Shah before initiating efforts to break the parliamentary deadlock.

Lamichhane met Prime Minister Shah on Sunday for lengthy discussions covering his India visit and the latest political developments. By Monday morning, Lamichhane had convened an all-party meeting aimed at ending the impasse in the House. This marked the first time the RSP had hosted an all-party meeting since emerging as the largest party in Parliament following the March 5 snap elections.

"The all-party meeting was called out of a sense of responsibility as a leader of the ruling coalition," said Bipin Acharya, joint general secretary of the ruling RSP, who attended the meeting.

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Don't litter on Everest, the rangers are watching

Stationed at Camp II, Nepal's first Everest rangers monitor climbers, enforce waste rules and tackle growing garbage on the peak.

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

The face was sunburned and weathered by years in the high Himalayas. Thin and pale from weeks spent above 6,000 metres, the man in a black cap quietly stepped onto a stage in Kathmandu last week. He was introduced as Ngima Wangchu Sherpa—Nepal's first mountain ranger.

For most people, the title may sound unusual. But on Mount Everest, where decades of commercial climbing has left behind tonnes of garbage and human waste, the role could become one of the most important jobs on the mountain.

During this spring climbing season, Ngima Wangchu, 53, spent weeks stationed at Camp II, nearly 6,400 metres above sea level, overseeing waste management, educating climbers and providing emergency support in one of the harshest environments on earth.

"At first glance, climbers see me from a distance and think I'm just another guide walking around," he said. "But most of them don't really want to encounter me."

The reason is written across the back of his jacket: Mountain Ranger.

"I stare at them sometimes just to give them the feeling that I'm like a policeman here and that throwing gar-

bage is being monitored," he said with a smile. "This season many climbers started noticing me. I don't want to make them afraid, but I want them to know someone is watching."

The mountain ranger programme was introduced this spring by the Sagarmatha Pollution



Ngima Wangchu Sherpa

Control Committee (SPCC), the organisation responsible for waste management in the Everest region. The initiative comes as criticism grows over the amount of trash accumulating on the world's highest mountain.

For the first time, the SPCC established an Everest Rangers Base at Camp II.

Ngima Wangchu, a four-time Everest summiteer, was tasked with monitoring climbers and ensuring compliance with a new rule requiring every climber and high-altitude guide to bring down at least two kilograms of garbage from higher camps, particularly Camp III and Camp IV.

"We collect the waste brought by climbers, weigh it, put it into sacks and issue a clearance chit," he explained. "Later, the collected waste is taken to Camp I and then transported by drones to Everest Base Camp."

For Ngima Wangchu, the assignment was unlike anything he had done before.

"This is my first experience as a ranger," he said. "We not only collect garbage but also encourage climbers to keep Everest clean." "Besides, we do respond to emergencies—supplying bottled oxygen to those in need in the higher camps or rescue climbers."

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NEWS

Lumbini's heritage conservation is evolving

MANOJ PAUDEL
LUMBINI, JUNE 8

Dressed in a spotless white apron, trainee Chandra Prakash Pathak kept his gaze firmly fixed on the ancient artefact resting on the table before him. In the field of archaeological conservation, people have to be extremely careful when handling ancient objects, and even a simple mistake or moment of distraction can permanently alter or destroy the authentic form. Pathak stood motionless, fully absorbed in his work.

"To conserve an archaeological object effectively, the absolute first step is identifying its underlying decay," said Shanti Sharma, a senior archaeology officer and the chief of the Tilaurakot Museum in Kapilvastu. Peering through a specialised laboratory lens, she carefully adjusted her instrument. "Right now, I am placing these ancient fragments directly under a microscope to pinpoint microscopic structural damage before determining an intervention."

Sharma, who has spent years participating in major excavations across the Lumbini area—including the ancient sites of Lumbini, Ramagram and Tilaurakot—previously relied primarily on theoretical knowledge. Working alongside global experts has allowed her to elevate those concepts into practical, technical expertise.

Sharma is currently mastering scientific methods to classify and treat ancient items made of terracotta, stone, and iron. "Before this, our training was mostly confined to textbooks. Being able to apply these advanced techniques directly in a high-tech laboratory to save museum pieces is incredibly fulfilling," she said.

Sharma and Pathak are part of a specialised group of ten archaeologists, officers, and advanced students undergoing intensive training to preserve historical relics. This initiative marks the first time that such advanced lab equipment and scientific diagnostic methods have been systematically introduced for heritage conservation in Nepal. The training was led by Anupam Sah, a globally renowned art conservation specialist and head of the Mumbai-based Anupam Heritage Lab. Participants learned to document every phase of an artefact's treatment, creating digital logs detailing whether an object underwent manual, mechanical, or chemical conservation.

Manual and mechanical techniques remain the preferred methods to safeguard historical integrity, according to Himal Upreti, the chief archaeology officer of the Lumbini Development Trust.

The intensive hands-on workshop, which ran from April 18 to May 18, was made possible following the establishment of a state-of-the-art conservation laboratory inside the Lumbini Museum. The facility features advanced diagnostics, including photogrammetry tools, endoscopy cameras, ultrasonic ablaters, magnetic stirrers, moisture meters, light meters, and high-intensity ultraviolet torches.

The rigorous preservation protocol taught during the session requires conservators to thoroughly document each relic before physical handling begins. The objects are photographed from multiple angles and assigned unique tracking codes.

The introduction of ultraviolet light torches has revolutionised the authentication process. By casting varying degrees of fluorescence across an object's surface, the light immediately reveals past restoration attempts, modern patches, or synthetic alterations, allowing experts to verify the historical layers of an artefact.

During the training session, the team successfully conserved 100 historical objects discovered within the Lumbini area. The treated items included medieval iron hoes, three ancient terracotta ring wells, and delicate clay and stone sculptures depicting Shakyamuni Buddha and various deities.

Leaders and experts laud RSP efforts to resolve parliamentary stalemate



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Leaders of various parties at an all-party meeting convened by ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party on Monday.

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"We believe the parliamentary deadlock must end. We also briefed leaders of other parties on current political issues and the outcomes of our party delegation's visit to India at the BJP's invitation."

Political analyst Professor Krishna Pokharel said Lamichhane's efforts to improve relations with India and ease tensions among domestic political parties were in line with his political responsibilities.

"Upon returning, he consulted the prime minister and sought to break the domestic political deadlock by calling an all-party meeting. The RSP chairman's efforts on both fronts are commendable," Pokharel said. Nepali Communist Party lawmaker Barshaman Pun also welcomed Lamichhane's outreach.

"The ruling party chairman has made a good start. Dialogue has finally resumed after a period of complete stagnation among political parties," Pun said.

Pun said Lamichhane proposed during the all-party meeting that the foreign minister address Parliament on behalf of the government to help break the deadlock.

"Their side proposed that the foreign minister would respond on behalf of the prime minister. However, we argued that others cannot answer for a mistake made by the prime minister himself. Nonetheless, the all-party meeting explored various options, and the discussions were positive," Pun said. The ruling coalition reportedly agreed during the meeting to remove a controversial phrasing used by the prime minister on May 31, in which he claimed that "Nepal has also encroached upon Indian land in many places", from the parliamentary record.

CPN-UML chief whip Ain Bahadur Mahar said Lamichhane briefed the meeting on his

India visit and floated several proposals to resume parliamentary proceedings.

"He shared details of his meetings with BJP leaders. We pointed out that an all-party meeting should have been called before his Delhi visit [if Lamichhane was going to meet PM Modi]," Mahar said, adding that Lamichhane clarified that the meeting with Modi was finalised only after he reached India. Acharya reiterated that the RSP chairman had called the meeting to foster cordial relations among political forces.

"In a parliamentary democracy, parties alternate between the government and opposition benches. Every party has its own principles, working style and objectives, but the ultimate goal must be the welfare of the country and its people. That is why we believe in moving forward through dialogue, and a ruling side backed by a two-thirds mandate must lead such initiatives."

Acharya added that similar all-party meetings would be held in the future to build consensus on national issues.

Professor Pokharel said the division of responsibilities, with Prime Minister Shah focused on governance and implementation while Chairman Lamichhane handles inter-party engagement, reflected an evolving political culture.

"The prime minister is action-oriented and a man of few words, while the chairman is an articulate communicator who is equally determined to deliver results. Their cooperation bodes well," Pokharel said.

"This marks a departure from past political practice in Nepal. It is still too early to assess what outcomes this dynamic will produce, but if it helps break the political deadlock and steer relations with India in a new direction, it will be highly beneficial for the country."

Back from India, Foreign Minister Khanal to visit China next week in push for diplomatic balance

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In a meeting with Chinese ambassador to Nepal Zhang Maoming on April 8, the foreign minister had assured that Nepal's stance towards China would remain unchanged under the new administration led by Prime Minister Balendra Shah.

While highlighting the priorities of the new government, Khanal assured the Chinese ambassador that Nepal upholds both the letter and spirit enshrined in the constitution and its foreign policy doctrine.

As he did in Delhi, the foreign minister will brief the Chinese leadership on the priorities of the new government and its expectations from China in the changed political context in Nepal.

Since RSP leaders, including party president Rabi Lamichhane, Khanal, and others had maintained that "they did not carry the past baggage" during their recent India visit, if the same approach is applied in the case of China will be closely watched.

Nepal and China have, in the past, reached

several understandings and agreements, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Trans Himalayan Multi Dimensional Connectivity Network (THMDCN), and various projects like expansion of the Chinese railway from Kerung to Kathmandu.

After the formation of the Shah government, on April 9, Minister for Physical Infrastructure, Transport and Urban Development Sunil Lamsal and Ambassador Zhang signed an agreement for widening the Ring Road's 8.2-kilometre stretch from Kalanki to Basundhara, including construction of a concrete bridge at Dhungedhara and three disability-friendly pedestrian bridges at Sitapaila-Balaju, Balaju-Machhapokhari, and Samakhushi-Basundhara Police Post. China will provide around Rs11 billion in grant support for the project.

On May 25, Nepal government sent its response to China regarding the implementation of the cross-border transmission line between the two countries. The letter conveyed Nepal's commitment to the transmission line

(Chilime-Kerung) project.

Likewise, the government on May 20 decided to accept a grant assistance of RMB 79.36 million (equivalent to Rs 1.8 billion) from the Chinese government for the repair and maintenance of the Araniko Highway.

In its policy and programs, the government also announced that it gives priority to the Kerung-Kathmandu railway.

The Xi'an-based China Railway First Survey and Design Institute Group Co Ltd was entrusted with carrying out its feasibility study, which was started in December 2022. The Chinese company had earlier said it would submit its report in June.

Ahead of the foreign minister's visit, Nepal and China have concluded a review of the progress of over two-and-a-half dozen China-funded projects in Nepal.

During his stay in China, discussions are expected to focus on infrastructure development, reducing Nepal's trade deficit, connectivity, cross-border movement, tourism revival, and projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), given China's interest in further strengthening political and economic engagement with Nepal, said officials.

Observers say China remains in a "wait and see" mode, with perceptions in some of its diplomatic circles that Nepal's current government tilts towards the West. They argue that the foreign minister will need to actively engage Beijing to build trust and reassure it about Kathmandu's foreign policy direction.

"Under the overarching goals and objectives of THMDCN, we should seek to construct four corridors and two transmission lines as soon as possible," said former Nepali Ambassador to China, Krishna Prasad Oli.

"We should construct dedicated four-lane north-south corridors through Humla, Kerung-Kathmandu and other strategic areas. Second, we have to build two dedicated transmission lines, Rasuwa-Kerung and Kimathanka. Moreover, we should assure the Chinese of political, policy and economic stability in Nepal. Without that, it will be hard to develop much trust. Building trust is very important while working with China," said Oli.

Poorly fought arbitration cases drain billions from state coffers

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Arbitration is an alternative dispute resolution mechanism used to settle commercial and contractual disputes outside the formal court system.

In Nepal, the main legal basis is the Arbitration Act, 1999. The Public Procurement Act, 2007, and related regulations also require disputes between government agencies and contractors to be resolved through arbitration if mutual settlement fails.

Due to its ability to provide speedy dispute resolution, binding decisions, and confidentiality, arbitration has emerged globally as a widely recognised alternative dispute resolution mechanism for commercial disputes.

Under these legal provisions, construction companies often take disputes to independent institutions such as the council rather than the courts. Hearings are not public, and claims and evidence remain confidential, with decisions made by appointed arbitrators in confidential arbitral proceedings.

The data suggest contractors are securing substantial payouts while government agencies rarely pursue counterclaims.

In the Keshalya-Chimadi-Laukahi project, the contractor's first and largest dispute concerned soil availability.

The contract stated that the contractor was responsible for arranging the soil required for road filling. However, soon after construction began, the contractor claimed that the government had failed to provide a nearby extraction site free of charge, forcing it to purchase soil.

During arbitration, the government's defence remained weak. Officials failed to argue effectively that the contract placed responsibility for sourcing materials on the contractor. The tribunal subsequently ruled in favour of the contractor.

Another dispute in the same project involved 110 electricity poles. The contractor claimed that delays in removing the poles restricted the movement of heavy vehicles and equipment.

The tribunal ruled that "idle equipment costs" should be shared equally between the government and the contractor, ordering the department to pay Rs46 million, along with Rs8.4 million in interest. However, the report noted that the claimed losses were based on estimates rather than objective measurements.

Data from the council show arbitration claims have increased nearly fivefold over the past four years. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, claims stood at Rs1.2 billion, rising to around Rs6 billion in 2023-24. Government counterclaims, however, remained minimal. The clearest imbalance came in 2021-22, when contractors claimed more than Rs2.5 billion while the government filed counterclaims worth only Rs10 million, just 0.4 percent of the claimed amount.

Arbitral decisions also appear mutually conflicting. For example, in one case under the Department of Roads' Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transport Project involving the construction of Teku Bridge, a tribunal awarded Rs16.6 million to the contractor, citing losses arising from a reduced scope of work and overhead costs.



POST FILE PHOTO

The 62-metre Teku bridge, built by Pappu Construction, was declared substandard immediately after it was handed over to the Department of Roads in 2019.

However, in another case under the Postal Highway's Birgunj-Thori Road Section Upgrading Project, a similar claim worth Rs13.8 million was rejected claiming "the contractor had accepted variation orders."

In another claim of a similar nature, the arbitrator rejected the claim on the grounds that it could not be presumed that a business would necessarily earn a profit and that the claimant had sought 15 percent compensation for lost profits based merely on speculation, without supporting documents.

A report by the Auditor General's office, however, commented that in similar cases, arbitration decisions have sometimes awarded compensation based on estimates rather than objective evidence of actual loss or overhead costs incurred. Such differing decisions in disputes of a similar nature create a lack of the expected consistency and reliability in the arbitration system, the office said.

Under Nepal's legal system, decisions made by the regular courts serve as precedents for subsequent disputes. When deciding similar cases, courts are required to follow the reasoning and principles established in earlier decisions.

If a court finds it necessary to depart from a previous precedent, a larger bench of judges must hear the matter and explain the jurisprudential reasons for overturning the earlier position, stating that a new approach will be adopted going forward. Subsequent decisions must then follow that new precedent. Arbitration, however, is not subject to any such obligation to follow previous decisions or precedents. As a result, disputes of the same nature can produce different outcomes—as seen in the cases of the Teku Bridge and the Birgunj-Thori Road projects.

Auditor General Raya stated that arbitration decisions should be consistent and that standardised criteria need to be developed to achieve this.

"The work should be carried out by qual-

ified experts with a mechanism to evaluate their performance," he said. "There must be consistency in decisions as well. In disputes of the same nature, some claims are upheld while others are not. That aspect needs to be standardised to some extent."

One of the reasons for this problem is related to who is appointed as an arbitrator and how such appointments are made. Under the law, each of the two parties to a dispute selects one independent arbitrator and the two arbitrators so selected jointly choose a third arbitrator. This panel then decides the dispute.

Regardless of who appoints them, once they have taken the oath, arbitrators are expected to act independently and impartially, rather than representing the interests of the party that selected them.

Matrika Niraula, a senior advocate and an independent arbitrator, said that one of the main causes of the problem is the government's tendency to appoint arbitrators based on personal connections and affiliations rather than competence and expertise.

"The situation is truly alarming. When it comes to appointing arbitrators, the government is reluctant to select the right people," he said. "What it needs are competent and credible professionals, yet that is often not the priority. In fact, individuals within the government itself are contributing to the erosion of the integrity of the very forum entrusted with resolving disputes."

Recent rulings also show cases in which poorly performing contractors have been rewarded.

One example is the Sikta Irrigation Project.

Under the project's Duduwa Irrigation System, a contract for canal reconstruction and expansion was signed with Coastal-Pappu JV on June 26, 2016, with a completion period of two and a half years.

However, the contractor was not present at the site even by mid-December 2016. The work did not progress even after agreements reached in tripartite meetings. On October 11, 2017, the company admitted its failure and submitted an apology. After repeated deadline extensions and continued non-performance, the government terminated the contract. Under procurement law, performance guarantees are forfeited and compensation can be recovered from the contractor. The firm was subsequently blacklisted for three years.

Despite this, the blacklisted contractor later filed an arbitration claim worth Rs333.9 million in May-June 2023. The Sikta project filed a counterclaim of Rs1.14 billion covering project continuation costs, first-bill payments and consultant fees.

The counterclaim was one of the few exceptions, accounting for more than 40 percent of the Rs2.5 billion in counterclaims filed by the government across 27 projects over five years.

On June 1, 2024, a majority of tribunal members, with one dissenting opinion, ruled in favour of the contractor and awarded more than Rs150 million. About a month later, the tribunal revised its decision and ordered an additional payment of more than Rs10 million. The Arbitration Act per-

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Several national pride projects remain delayed for decades

From irrigation projects launched decades ago to highways and transport corridors, many national pride projects remain unfinished after repeated deadline extensions and billions of rupees spent.

○ **BIMAL KHATIWADA**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

Decades after construction began on some of Nepal's largest infrastructure projects, several national pride and strategically important projects remain unfinished despite repeated deadline extensions, rising costs and billions of rupees already spent.

A review of major irrigation, road and transport projects shows a consistent pattern of delays, revised budgets and implementation challenges. Many projects launched between the late 1980s and 2000s are still far from completion, while others have seen costs multiply several times their original estimates.

Officials cite inadequate budget allocations, land acquisition disputes, environmental clearance delays, contractor performance issues and bureaucratic bottlenecks as key reasons for slow progress. In some cases, cross-border water-sharing issues have further complicated implementation.

The delays have raised concerns over the government's ability to deliver large-scale infrastructure within planned timelines, even as successive administrations continue to set new deadlines and allocate additional funding.

Among the long-delayed projects are the Babai Irrigation Project, Sikta Irrigation Project, Rani Jamara Kulariya Irrigation Project, Mahakali Irrigation Project, Bheri-Babai Diversion Multipurpose Project, Mid-Hill Highway, Postal Highway and several north-south corridor roads.

The Babai Irrigation Project in Bardiya illustrates the scale of delays. Construction began in fiscal year 1988/89, but the project remains incomplete 38 years later despite multiple deadline extensions and a six-fold rise in estimated cost.

Under the revised schedule, completion was expected by fiscal year 2025-026, but the deadline has now been pushed to fiscal year 2028-29. Officials say even that timeline remains uncertain.

The original estimated cost was Rs2.87 billion, which has now increased to Rs18.96 billion. Once completed, the project is expected to irrigate 36,000 hectares of farmland in Bardiya, including 21,000 hectares in the eastern command area and 15,000 hectares in the western section.

Physical progress has reached 81 percent, according to Shekhar Nath Neupane, information and public relations officer for the Babai Irrigation Project.

The government has already spent around Rs17.5 billion. Neupane said the master plan was last revised in 2025-26.

"The ministry has developed a strategy to complete the project by fiscal year 2027-28," he said. "Contracts awarded this fiscal year will run for two years, and an additional Rs 2.5 billion worth of contracts will be issued next fiscal year. All remaining contracts should be completed by fiscal year 2028-29, with a plan to wrap up all project operations within the following year."

Work continues on the main canal in the Gulariya section of the western command area, while branch canals are yet to be completed. Remaining works include access roads, slope protection and river training structures under the irrigated area development programme.

Irrigation has already reached around 28,500 hectares through the Babai system. The next fiscal year budget aims to extend coverage by an additional 1,066 hectares.

Another national pride project, the Sikta Irrigation Project, has also remained incomplete more than two decades after construction began.

Launched in fiscal year 2005-06, it has achieved 46 percent physical progress. The project was initially scheduled for completion in fiscal year 2014-15, later extended to 2021-22 and then to 2027-28. With progress still lagging, the deadline has now been pushed to fiscal year 2032-33.

The original cost of Rs12.8 billion has risen to Rs52.89 billion. So far, the government has spent Rs23.77 billion.

Once completed, the project is expected to irrigate 42,766 hectares in Banke district.

"Progress is improving and there are currently no budget constraints," said Manoj Kumar Sah, project information officer. "If work proceeds smoothly, the project could be completed within four years."

He said early delays were due to funding shortages, but financing is no longer the main issue.

"In the beginning, construction focused only on the main canal. The branch canal network has now largely been completed, and remaining branches will be built soon," he said. "We have received source approval and plan to award those contracts within the current fiscal year."

He added that most major structures have already been built, with remaining work focused on smaller components and maintenance.

"The main canal is already 20 years old, so maintenance work is also becoming necessary," Sah said.

The government has allocated Rs2.55 billion for the project in the next fiscal year, aiming to expand irrigation coverage by another 5,000



The site of the under-construction Babai Irrigation Project in Bardiya district in this undated photo. Construction began about four decades ago.

hectares in eastern and western Banke. The project currently irrigates around 22,300 hectares.

The Rani Jamara Kulariya Irrigation Project has also missed its completion target despite 17 years of construction.

Launched in fiscal year 2009/10, it was initially scheduled for completion in fiscal year 2017-18. It aims to provide year-round irrigation to 38,300 hectares in Kailali district, including areas under the traditional Rani Jamara Kulariya system, the Lamki branch canal extension and river basin command areas.

Physical progress stands at 73 percent after more than 15 years.

The government has spent Rs21.71 billion against an original estimate of Rs12.37 billion.

Project engineer Ankur Subedi said key structures, including the intake, the 14.65-kilometre Lamki extension main canal and related infrastructure, have been completed. A 4.71-megawatt hydropower plant has also been built.

The project is jointly financed by the government and the World Bank, with total estimated investment of Rs27.7 billion. Government funding accounts for Rs17.57 billion, while the World Bank has contributed Rs9.96 billion.

"Construction under the third phase is underway, and the target is to complete the project by fiscal year 2028-29," Subedi said. "Work continues on a new 13-kilometre section of the main canal."

The Mahakali Irrigation Project has also struggled to progress.

Work began in fiscal year 2006-07, but overall progress remains at just 30 percent. The estimated cost has reached Rs35.03 billion, with around Rs10 billion already spent.

The project aims to irrigate 28,225 hectares through surface irrigation and 5,265 hectares through groundwater systems in Kanchanpur district, including Brahmadev, Malakheti, Dodhara Chandani and Tribhuvanbasti.

Completion is now targeted for fiscal year 2029-30. Although 29 kilometres of the main canal have been completed, project information officer Yadav Baral said progress remains constrained as India has not supplied the required water for operation.

The project is located in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur. According to a National Planning Commission publication on national pride projects, Nepal is entitled under a 1996 agreement with India to receive 300 cusecs of water from the Tanakpur Barrage during winter and 1,000 cusecs during summer.

"We have already built infrastructure capable of irrigating about 7,500 bigha of land (approximately 5,079 hectares) once water is supplied," Baral said. "The system will benefit around 5,000 hectares in Bhimdatta, Bedkot and Shuklaphanta municipalities."

The project schedule has been revised under its third phase, with completion now targeted for fiscal year 2029-30.

Baral said land acquisition remains one of the biggest obstacles. Parts of the proposed canal alignment pass through public land, requiring a government decision on compensation. Other sections run through land allocated to former bonded labourers, which cannot legally be sold, complicating construction. In some cases, land is occupied by one person but registered in another's name, preventing work from moving ahead.

"If the Ministry of Finance provides source approval and there are no funding constraints, the project can be completed," Baral said. "An allocation of Rs25 billion over the next four fiscal years would significantly accelerate the work, but only Rs2 billion has been allocated for the next fiscal year. If

construction proceeds without major obstacles and adequate funding is ensured, completion would not be difficult."

Another national pride project facing delays is the Bheri-Babai Diversion Multipurpose Project.

Construction began in fiscal year 2011-12 and was originally scheduled for completion by fiscal year 2022-23. Overall progress has reached only 70 percent. Project officials say additional components added to the master plan have pushed the completion target back to fiscal year 2027-28.

The project's original estimated cost was Rs16.43 billion. After the inclusion of a dam, powerhouse, hydromechanical and electromechanical systems, the revised cost has doubled to Rs33.2 billion.

The government has already spent Rs18.92 billion. Once completed, the project will divert water from the Bheri River into the Babai River, providing year-round irrigation to about 51,000 hectares in Bardiya and Banke districts through the existing Babai head-works system. The project is designed to transfer 40 cumecs of water and generate 46.8 megawatts of electricity.

Hari Bahadur Thapa, senior divisional engineer and information officer for the project, said progress remains slow in key technical components. Electromechanical works are 58 percent complete, while hydromechanical works have reached 60 percent.

The dam contract was awarded jointly to China's Guangdong Yuantian Engineering Co. Ltd. and Nepal's Raman Construction for Rs6.89 billion.

However, Raman Construction's joint venture with India's Patel Engineering was blacklisted for three years by the Public Procurement Monitoring Office after failing to complete the Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Multipurpose Project in Sindhuli on schedule.

"Raman faced financial difficulties after problems at the Sunkoshi Marin project and has been unable to mobilise sufficient resources here," Thapa said. "We have been trying to create an environment where both joint

venture partners can work together, but the Chinese company has yet to respond. Progress would be faster if the ministry made a clear decision."

Although the government has instructed officials to complete the project within two years, the project office estimates it will take at least three more years.

"We are facing a shortage of manpower," Thapa said. "Only 11 of our 22 technical positions are currently filled. Even with our best efforts, we have been unable to operate around the clock in three shifts."

The delays are not confined to irrigation projects. Several major road projects have also fallen years behind schedule.

Among them is the Pushpalal (Mid-Hill) Highway, one of Nepal's largest national pride projects.

Launched in fiscal year 2007-08, the highway is intended to connect 215 settlements across 26 hill districts and is expected to benefit around 10 million people.

The project involves a two-lane blacktopped highway stretching from Chiwabhanjyang in Panchthar district in the east to Jhulaghat in Baitadi district in the far west. The network includes 1,879 kilometres of roadway and 137 bridges.

So far, 1,093.11 kilometres under the main project and another 462 kilometres under related projects have been blacktopped. Of the planned 137 bridges, 114 have been completed.

The original estimated cost of Rs33.36 billion has risen to Rs84.33 billion. Government spending has already reached Rs72.66 billion, while physical progress stands at 83.58 percent.

Initially scheduled for completion by fiscal year 2017-18, the deadline was later extended to fiscal year 2022-23 and subsequently to fiscal year 2027-28.

The government says the highway can be completed within three years, but project officials are sceptical.

"We have only received source approval this fiscal year for contracts covering eight bridges," said Sachin Shrestha, engineer and information officer at the Pushpalal Highway Project Directorate. "We also requested approval to blacktop 44 kilometres of road during the current fiscal year,

but that approval has yet to come."

The government has allocated Rs2.16 billion for the next fiscal year to upgrade 65 kilometres of road and complete five bridges.

The Postal Highway has also fallen far behind schedule after 17 years of construction.

Physical progress stands at 74.35 percent. Launched in fiscal year 2009-10, the project aims to connect Kechana in Jhapa district with Dodhara Chandani in Kanchanpur district and is expected to benefit nearly 10 million people across 21 Tarai-Madhesh districts.

Funding shortages and policy delays have repeatedly slowed progress.

The highway network covers 1,857 kilometres, including 975 kilometres of east-west roadway and 882 kilometres of north-south connector roads. Of the total network, 1,380 kilometres have been blacktopped.

Only 153 of the planned 300 bridges have been completed.

Contracts have been awarded for another 150.9 kilometres of road and 69 bridges, although construction has yet to begin. Officials say route alignment disputes remain unresolved in several sections.

Originally scheduled for completion in fiscal year 2017-18, the deadline was extended to fiscal year 2022-23, then to 2023-24, later to 2026-27 and most recently to fiscal year 2029-30.

Government spending on the project has reached Rs71.55 billion. The original cost estimate of Rs47 billion was first revised to Rs65.2 billion and later to Rs101.93 billion.

Under the budget for the next fiscal year, road widening is expected to begin in densely populated areas and eight bridges are scheduled for completion. The government has allocated Rs4.65 billion and says it aims to finish the project within three years.

Road sections passing through forest areas along Chitwan National Park, the Kapilvastu-Dang border and other protected zones remain without construction contracts. Contracts have also yet to be awarded for road and bridge works in forest areas along the Dang-Banke border. A shortage of bitumen has further slowed construction, affecting overall progress on the Postal Highway, according to Kuber Nepali, director of the Postal Highway Directorate.

"The government's target is to complete construction within three years, but delays have been caused by route alignment disputes and budget constraints," he said.

The Koshi Corridor, a national pride project launched in fiscal year 2008/09, is also behind schedule.

The 345-kilometre corridor connects the Rani border point with Kimathanka in Sankhuwasabha via Biratnagar, Dharan, Dhankuta, Hile, Leguwa, Tumlingtar and Khandbari. An alternative 390-kilometre alignment runs through Hile, Chainpur and Tumlingtar.

The Rani-Khandbari section has already been blacktopped, while work continues on the 162-kilometre Khandbari-Kimathanka stretch. Upgrading of the 134-kilometre Khandbari-Chyamtang section is currently under way, according to the North-South Trade Route Improvement Project Directorate.

Designed to strengthen Nepal's connectivity with both India and China, the corridor has achieved only 46 percent physical progress. Initially scheduled for completion in fiscal year 2023/24, the deadline has now been extended to fiscal year 2028/29.

The project's estimated cost has increased from Rs11.93 billion to Rs16.20 billion, while government spending has reached Rs6.85 billion.

The Kaligandaki Corridor, launched in fiscal year 2009/10, has also missed repeated deadlines.

The 495-kilometre road links Gaidakot with Korala via Beni and Jomsom. The entire road track has already been opened, but completion

has now been pushed back to fiscal year 2028/29.

The project includes 87 kilometres of gravel road, 408 kilometres of blacktopping and 85 bridges. So far, 87 kilometres of gravel work, 328 kilometres of blacktopping and 51 bridges have been completed.

Overall progress stands at 82.05 percent. Government spending has reached Rs22.88 billion, against a revised project cost of Rs35 billion, up from the original estimate of Rs30.57 billion.

Progress on the Karnali Corridor has been even slower.

Launched in fiscal year 2008/09, the 268-kilometre road linking Khulalu in Kalikot with Hilsa in Humla has achieved only 20.5 percent progress.

The project was originally targeted for completion in fiscal year 2013/14, but repeated extensions have pushed the deadline to fiscal year 2027/28.

Its estimated cost has increased from Rs4.10 billion to Rs18.66 billion, while expenditure has reached Rs3.01 billion.

Dharmendra Kumar Jha, director of the North-South Trade Route Improvement Project Directorate, said inadequate funding remains one of the biggest barriers to completing the projects on time.

The Mahakali Corridor, launched in fiscal year 2007/08, is also unfinished.

Initially conceived as the Darchula-Tinkar road, the project was expanded into a two-lane corridor in fiscal year 2017/18.

According to project officials, 43 kilometres of track had already been opened when responsibility for the 79-kilometre Tinkar-Tusharpani section was handed over to the Nepali Army.

The project was later expanded further to extend road connectivity along the Mahakali riverbank through Chandani-Gaddachauki-Brahmadev-Jhulaghat-Darchula-Tusharpani.

The corridor now covers 413 kilometres from Chandani to Tusharpani. Of that total, the Nepali Army is constructing 79 kilometres, while the Department of Roads is responsible for the remaining 334 kilometres.

The project's estimated cost stands at Rs18 billion, with government spending reaching Rs3 billion. Physical progress is only 17 percent.

Ishwar Karki, acting project chief of the corridor project, said annual budget allocations ranging from Rs500 million to Rs1 billion have slowed construction.

"The completion target has now been pushed back to fiscal year 2028/29. Authorities plan to move to blacktopping contracts once track-opening works are completed."

"Budget remains the corridor's biggest challenge," Karki said. "At present, blacktopping contracts are under implementation for 30 kilometres of road in Darchula district, while 3.2 kilometres have already been blacktopped in the Dadeldhura section."

Progress on the East-West Electric Railway, another national pride project launched in fiscal year 2008/09, has been limited.

The government has frozen 5,424 land plots for the project, including 2,457 in Jhapa, 1,638 in Morang and 1,329 in Sunsari. Compensation has yet to be finalised, although officials estimate it will cost more than Rs24 billion.

Hari Kumar Pokharel, director general of the Department of Railways, said compensation payments would begin once funding assurances are secured from the Ministry of Finance.

The railway is planned to run from Kakarbhitta in Jhapa to Gaddachauki in Kanchanpur.

Initial studies estimated the route at 945 kilometres, but realignment through protected areas has reduced the length to 925 kilometres.

Trains are currently operating on 52 kilometres of the Jayanagar-Janakpur-Kurtha-Bijalpura section, part of a larger 69-kilometre route extending to Bardibas, which is expected to connect with the proposed East-West Electric Railway.

The government has also constructed railway infrastructure along a 70-kilometre stretch from Bardibas through Sarlahi, Rautahat and Bara.

According to the Department of Railways, around Rs30 billion has already been spent, including compensation payments in the Bardibas section. A feasibility study estimates the total project cost at Rs655 billion.

Arjun Jung Thapa, a member of the National Planning Commission, said irrigation projects should receive priority because of their direct economic impact.

"Such projects have an immediate impact on economic activity," he said. "The Babai Irrigation Project has already brought significant economic transformation in Bardiya."

Thapa said inadequate budget allocation remains the main reason many national pride projects have failed to meet their deadlines.

"There is a problem of not allocating sufficient funds, and even when budgets are allocated, disbursement is often delayed," he said. "The budget appears in the Red Book, but the Ministry of Finance has often been unable to release the funds on time."

He added that delays in land acquisition and approvals for tree felling have also contributed significantly to project delays.

Land acquisition disputes, funding delays and contractor issues stall progress.



This image shows ongoing road widening work in Khahare of Baglung district along the Mid-Hill Highway.

POST FILE PHOTO: PRAKASH BARAL

OPINION



OUR VIEW

Universal neglect

Every Nepali should have access to essential health services, regardless of their financial status.

Nepal has long sought to expand access to essential health services and cut related financial burden on the poor and the middle class, with the ambitious goal of achieving universal health coverage by 2030. To this end, in 2017, the country introduced the National Health Insurance Programme (NHIP) under the Health Insurance Act. However, this ambition of universal coverage seems increasingly elusive given the persistent issues plaguing the NHIP, including structural weaknesses, weak governance and, most crucially, underfunding. The insurance programme has become so unpopular that the renewal rate has declined to around 50 percent.

The NHIP-targeted decisions over the past few months have only worsened its sorry state. In January, the government slashed the outpatient department (OPD) ceiling for families from Rs100,000 to Rs25,000. And recently, citing a financial burden on the Health Insurance Board, the board starting this month halted outpatient services under the insurance scheme at private hospitals. As a result, state-run Bir Hospital and Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) are seeing a massive increase in the number of patients, overcrowding OPD services, and further delaying essential services.

Now, patients, despite paying the insurance premium, are forced to top up with exorbitant fees at private hospitals. But, for their part, as the government has yet to pay them their insurance coverage fees, state-run hospitals have also not been providing full services under the insurance scheme. These hospitals also lack most medicines covered by insurance, forcing patients to go to expensive pharmacies. In this state, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Nepal has failed its citizens by selling a health scheme that no longer insures them.

Reportedly, private hospitals account for a disproportionate share of claims compared to governmental facilities, and rising liabilities have left the Health Insurance Board financially constrained. Yet a financial crisis, however serious, cannot justify abandoning commitments already made to citizens—and that, too, in a matter as serious as health. Insurance is fundamentally a contract of trust. People pay premiums expecting to get affordable and hassle-free services in return. When the government fails to do so, it breaks that trust. The solution is stronger oversight of hospitals, not denying patients access to health facilities. Still, officials at the Health Insurance Board are not worried about the declining renewal rate, as they believe it reduces the board's burden. Such a mindset raises a crucial question: how can the country achieve the goal of universal health coverage when the very scheme introduced for the purpose lacks public trust?

Universal coverage should ensure that every Nepali has access to essential health services, regardless of their financial status, rather than falling further behind with every policy reversal. For the fiscal year 2026-27, the government has set aside Rs15 billion for the Health Insurance Programme. The new government has the means to revive the NHIP, which is already on the verge of collapse. It is upon this strong government to prove that under it, health is a right, not a luxury in Nepal. The scheme was designed with the right purpose, and it shouldn't be left in limbo, as many people living below the poverty line, elderly people, family members of people with HIV and differently-abled people, among others, still pin high hopes on it. A democratic state cannot fail its most vulnerable members.

THEIR VIEW

Damaged childhoods

Political focus towards awareness, conviction rates and strengthened vigilance can ensure justice.

Child abuse is so prevalent that the UN ranked Pakistan as the least safe country for children. Even so, more than five years after the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020—Pakistan's first national child protection law—central provisos, including the agency for rapid alerts for missing children, are lifeless due to shoddy implementation. The Islamabad High Court has taken notice of data from the ICT administration—562 criminal cases relating to missing children and child abuse were registered in Islamabad between 2022 and 2025—and ordered the human rights ministry to present a report on 11 areas of concern. It has also asked for legal mechanisms for victims, the constitution of the ICT Child Protection Advisory Board and the assimilation of the Zainab Alert Act database with Islamabad Police. Named after little Zainab, whose brutal rape and murder in Kasur shook the country, this law was to serve as a lifeline. Instead, a rise in child abuse cases has been recorded.

A toxic societal cycle that protects offenders and treats the abhorrent crime as a private affair only darkens the setting—on average, 11 children were abused daily in Pakistan in 2023. This is just the reported number. Battling child abuse is a complex process; the combination of police lethargy and weak institutions renders implementation virtually absent. The result is a system that cannot rescue children who are being exploited within and outside family contexts. Greater political focus towards awareness, conviction rates and strengthened vigilance, together with improved child services can ensure justice. While the Act, in line with the tenets of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Pakistan, serves the well-being of our young, the aspect of psychological recovery must not stay peripheral. When justice is an outcome of mass rage, protests and hashtags that grip global attention, innocence is either at risk or lost.

—Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

Humiliation, a new Dalit narrative

The Dalit movement must move beyond traditional narratives and adopt new ones, mainly humiliation, in accordance with the changing realities.

MITRA PARIYAR



On June 4, I visited the Gurkha village of Dhampus in the Machhapuchhre Rural Municipality, close to the town of Pokhara. I was invited there to address a gathering of Dalits to celebrate the Day for the Elimination of Untouchability and Caste Discrimination. What I saw there was not just the persistent exclusion and humiliation of Dalits, but also a great mismatch between the aspirations of the Dalit community in Dhampus (and beyond) and the narratives of the Dalit movement.

The Dhampus story

The village of Dhampus is about 60 km north-west of Pokhara. The beautiful Gurung village atop a massive hill lies on the trekking route to Mardi peak and has itself transformed into a tourist destination. Long a hub of Gurkha recruitment, the village has been twinned with the Welsh town of Brecon.

Thanks to the 2009 change of Gurkha immigration policy, many former soldiers and their families have emigrated to England. A few of their relatives remain back home. Indian Gurkhas and their families, as well as many civilians, have shifted to Pokhara and beyond.

Once a vibrant community boasting of Gurung culture, of folk songs, dances and of traditional rites and rituals, Dhampus is now being rapidly emptied. Indeed, a dwindling population is characteristic of most parts of the Himalayan foothills, but the process seems faster in Gurkha villages.

Some Dalits of Dhampus, too, have made money and moved down to Pokhara. Many, however, cannot afford to leave the village. Yet, their lives are not the same.

Thanks to the employment opportunities in the Gulf countries and Malaysia, fewer Dalits now rely on the mercy of the upper castes. Their traditional economic dependence on the dominant castes has largely ended. Extreme poverty is rare; most Dalit children go to school. A few Dalits of Dhampus have become medical doctors



SHUTTERSTOCK

and engineers.

Behind the upward social mobility, the practice of untouchability persists. Caste still bites Dalits hard. They continue being publicly humiliated and excluded in the name of keeping the tradition, appeasing the lineage deities and preserving the ancestral traditions.

Dalits are not allowed to enter many temples and homes. They must eat and drink separately in communal feasts; they must wash their own dishes when they eat. Exclusion is such that there have been instances where local Gurungs have refused to ride the jeeps operated by blacksmiths on their pilgrimage to the Muktinath temple.

In other rural areas such as Kaskikot, Lwang Ghalel and Puranchaur, the situation is similar. Needless to say, this is a typical scenario across rural Nepal. Freedom from untouchability remains a mirage.

Unlike the claims of many scholars, class does not trump caste. Economic advancement and educational progress make Dalit lives slightly more acceptable in society. But, even after twenty years of Nepal's declaration as free from untouchability, there's no sign of achieving that aim. Who is to blame?

A new narrative

It is largely the failure of the state, of course. The country has never been eager to end caste discrimination in

practice, and, unfortunately, the Balen regime is no different.

But, I also lay blame on the Dalit movement. It has not been able to fathom the changes in recent years, come up with powerful narratives and launch effective campaigns for genuine change in the lives of ordinary Dalits.

A reason for this failure is that they have always been controlled and guided by upper-caste politicians. The established parties themselves have greatly lost credibility and have run out of an effective agenda for expected economic progress and social transformation.

Dalits are stuck with the same old and tired narratives, framed while fighting for democracy prior to 1990. Still, Dalit leaders and intellectuals emphasise economic advancement, economic progress, employment opportunities and better representation in state authorities.

They mostly fight to win a seat in the parliament and the government. The same is true, sadly, of some of the well-known activists aligned with the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party! They used to make loud noises from the streets, but now, they have gone silent.

Ending poverty, educating children and having many more ministers and MPs are important for Dalit freedom. But these agendas have not been adequate, as evident in the village of Dhampus. Even the Dalits owning big houses in Pokhara are excluded once

they return to their original place (there's a degree of exclusion in the town too, of course).

How do we overcome the problem of persistent exclusion and humiliation of Dalits? I suggest we now need a new vision and new narratives.

In 2011, Gopal Guru, a former political science professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, published an edited volume, aptly named *Humiliation, Claims and Context*. Nepali activists and academics would do well to read this book and use the notion of 'humiliation' as a powerful new narrative.

Professor Guru states, "Humiliation is not so much a physical or corporeal injury; in fact, it is more a mental/psychological injury that leaves a permanent scar on the heart." This theorisation of infernal feelings deserves more attention.

Humiliation has long been our almost-daily experience. It transcends the rural-urban divide—it transcends class and education. Caste-based humiliation transcends national borders.

In this digital era, people can dominate and humiliate Dalits at any time from virtually anywhere on Earth! Living in Kathmandu, I am not as exposed to offensive behaviour as in places like Dhampus.

But, people easily humiliate me online—some of the comments on my Facebook and Twitter posts are very offensive and illegal. But there's no way to punish the criminals who may be residing abroad.

As I have long argued, Dalits have made the mistake of treating untouchability as a purely legal issue. Far from it! It is also a great psychological problem.

Many Dalits experience humiliation. Often, mental violence hurts more than physical violence. Humiliation is more open and widespread in rural areas like Dhampus, but it also exists in towns. More so on social media. And there's hardly any legal recourse, especially when the perpetrators live in America, Britain, Canada, Australia, Japan and South Korea.

So, we must drastically reform the Dalit agenda. Let's not continue to repeat the same old mantra of economic progress, educational achievement and access to political power. Let's also think of resolving the problem of, for example, Dalit ministers and parliamentarians struggling to rent properties!

Pariyar is a Dalit rights activist.

Tourism and connectivity diplomacy

The question is no longer whether Nepal has the assets, but whether it has the institutional discipline to negotiate their value.

RAJAN SHARMA & SHREYASI RANA



Nepal has spent decades defining itself as a country that others should want to engage with on account of its mountains, its geography and its spiritual heritage. That representation isn't incorrect; however, it has been passive. When a country solely relies on its geographic attributes to entice visitors, it remains at the mercy of how others choose to value those attributes. It is time to focus on the ability to oversee and leverage the conditions that determine who arrives, from where and to what end.

At the heart of this transformation lies the integration of tourism, trade logistics and connectivity into a unified national framework. Diplomacy in trade and tourism implies going beyond standard bilateral agreements and analysing what Nepal can offer that its neighbours need. India, Bangladesh and Bhutan are three economies with distinct but interlocking interests, and Nepal sits in the middle of that arrangement in chronically underused ways. Bangladesh lacks direct air access to Bhutan. Nepal's airports could serve as transit hubs for that route. This kind of arrangement is a negotiated exchange that generates traffic, revenue, and diplomatic capital simultaneously.

Smaller economies have demonstrated what this looks like in practice. Singapore built its economic identity around being the most reliable connector in its region—for goods, people and capital. The UAE, with no particular natural advantage beyond location, turned Dubai into a global transit node through investment in infrastructure and aggressive air service negotiations. Neither country waited for traffic to arrive organically. Connectivity is not a byproduct of development; it is a deal that gets made.

Expanding air connectivity beyond Kathmandu falls under this diplomatic agenda. Provinces with airports that currently handle minimal traffic represent untapped capacity. Routing international charter traffic or regional flights through Pokhara or Bhairahawa, tied to pilgrimage circuits, trekking seasons or cargo movement, requires negotiation with foreign carriers and neighbouring governments, which should be driven by a clear national position.

Constraints in Nepal's trade and tourism performance are not a short-

age of policy ideas. There is no deficiency of master plans and roadmaps that correctly diagnose the gaps and recommend sensible action.

The problem lies between the document and the outcome, which is almost always an institutional problem. Tourism, commerce, civil aviation and physical infrastructure are managed by separate ministries that coordinate poorly and are subject to different political pressures. An investment in Lumbini's tourism infrastructure involves multiple ministries and agencies, each with its own approval chain. Projects stall not from lack of intent but from the absence of a single mechanism that holds the different parts accountable to a shared timeline.

What Nepal requires is the establish-

values what logistics actually does, particularly where physical constraints are significant and the margin for supply chain failure is low.

In the context of international business, logistics companies determine whether Nepalese exporters will be able to provide credible assurances to their customers. A carpet maker in Kathmandu and an exporter of herbal products from the mid-hills area will not be able to develop buyer-client connections due to the uncertainty of delivery schedules. Cold chain facilities, bonded storage close to border crossings and cargo services at regional airports should not be mere afterthoughts in export growth.

Tourism has a logistics dimension that rarely appears in policy docu-

ment of an inter-ministerial task force with a clear mandate, comprising representatives from tourism, business, civil aviation and infrastructure, and having oversight from the Prime Minister's office. Nations successful in boosting their commerce and tourism performance have tended to do so through the formation of execution groups that transcend conventional bureaucratic procedures. The task force approach is effective if it has substantive decision-making power and its success is measured against tangible outcomes.



POST FILE PHOTO

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More importantly, logistics tends to be treated as a background function—the part of the economy that moves things around after the real decisions have been made. That framing under-

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Sharma is a General Secretary, and Rana is a Programme Associate at the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI).



Presents

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Opening Remarks by
Ms. Sabina Kafle

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Moderator



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Member of Parliament
Rastriya Swatantra Party



Khusbu Oli
Member of Parliament
Rastriya Prajatantra Party



Bashana Thapa
Member of Parliament
Nepali Congress



Bhumika Shrestha
Member of Parliament
Rastriya Swatantra Party



Laxmi Bhandari
Journalist
Nari Magazine

Session 2: Social Harassment: The Price of being Visible

Moderator



Amisha Parajuli
Youth Activist



Samjhana Wagle Bhattarai
Sociologist



Rekha Thapa
Actress



Dr. Raman Koirala
Neuropsychiatrist
HAMS Hospital



Prabina Poudel
Journalist
Kantipur

Session 3: Pathways to Leadership

Moderator



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Aama Ko Achar



Radhika Adukia
Entrepreneur / Jeweller
Azaya Jewels



Laxmi Uprety
Manager
Account & Finance
KFC & Pizza Hut



Binjul Shrestha
Social Media Influencer/
Entrepreneur / Nurse



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SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

Mountain rangers take the fight against trash to Everest

>> Continued from page 1

The challenge is enormous. Decades of commercial mountaineering have transformed Everest into one of the world's highest garbage dumps. Every climbing season, hundreds of climbers, Sherpas, guides and support staff leave behind oxygen cylinders, tents, ropes, food packaging, gas canisters and bodily waste. Many of these materials remain frozen for years in the mountain's upper reaches before reappearing as glaciers melt.

Plastic has become one of the most persistent threats. A single plastic bag can take centuries to decompose. Chocolate wrappers, energy gel packets and other expedition waste gradually fragment under intense ultraviolet radiation, extreme cold and strong winds, creating microplastics that contaminate snow, streams and drinking water sources throughout the Khumbu region.

Even the smallest piece of litter can have long-term consequences. The challenge of cleaning Everest extends beyond discarded tents, oxygen cylinders and food packaging. More than 300 people have died on Mount Everest since climbing records began, and an estimated 200 bodies remain on the mountain, many of them in the notorious "Death Zone" above 8,000 metres. The extreme altitude, harsh weather and difficult terrain make body recovery one of the most dangerous operations in mountaineering.

Removing bodies from higher camps is both risky and costly because of the thin air and the manpower required. According to mountaineering officials, retrieving a body from Everest can cost anywhere between \$20,000 and \$200,000, depending on its location and the complexity of the operation.

"Most climbers' bodies are left behind on Everest due to the difficulties and cost factors involved," said Tshering Sherpa, chief executive officer of the SPCC. "Some families want the body to remain on Everest, while others simply cannot afford the expense of retrieval. This is a real challenge when we talk about cleaning Everest."

The issue has prompted policymakers to consider stricter regulations for expedition operators. Under a proposed law, agencies



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SPCC

This undated photo shows staffers of Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee weighing trash collected from Everest slopes at Everest Base Camp.

organising mountaineering expeditions would be required to obtain insurance coverage from companies licensed under Nepali law before an expedition begins. The coverage would include personal accident insurance, medical treatment insurance, search-and-rescue insurance and insurance for the management and retrieval of dead bodies.

The proposal is part of a broader effort to address both environmental and safety concerns on Everest, where increasing numbers of climbers are placing unprecedented pressure on the mountain's fragile ecosystem and rescue infrastructure.

For the SPCC, the introduction of mountain rangers is only the first step. Alongside waste collection, future conservation efforts will increasingly focus on tackling long-standing issues such as abandoned equipment, human waste and the growing number of unrecovered bodies that remain frozen high on the mountain. As climbing traffic has surged over the years, Everest has increasingly become a symbol of environmental neglect alongside its reputation as the world's ultimate mountaineering challenge.

"A mountain is not just a moun-

tain," said Tshering Sherpa. "It is our god. It is connected to our livelihood. Keeping it clean is our responsibility." "Mountains have immense value to our communities and to the sustainability of high-value tourism," he added.

The ranger concept emerged after SPCC officials conducted an assessment expedition on Everest in 2024.

The ranger concept emerged after SPCC officials conducted an assessment expedition on Everest in 2024.

"For decades we have talked about the garbage problem," Tshering said. "People criticise Everest on social media and ask why it remains littered. We felt we had to go there ourselves and understand the situation."

What they discovered was both obvious and sobering. "There is waste above Camp II. That is reality," he said. "But another reality is that bringing it down is extremely

difficult. Waste management at those altitudes is dangerous and often life-threatening."

The pressure on the mountain has intensified as climber numbers continue to rise.

This spring, Nepal issued a record 495 climbing permits to foreign climbers attempting Everest from the south side. Since every climber requires at least one guide, more than 1,000 people reached the summit during the season, which ended on May 29.

"Anyone can imagine the amount of garbage generated in the higher camps," Tshering said.

The numbers collected by the SPCC illustrate the scale of the challenge.

This spring, the organisation recovered 1.22 tonnes of non-recyclable waste from Camp III and the South Col. Teams also brought down 210 empty gas canisters, a portable stove and 1.76 tonnes of human-waste bags from the upper mountain. Another 6.52 tonnes of waste—including plastics, metal cans, paper, kitchen refuse, tents, ropes and other climbing materials—passed through the SPCC's Khumbu Icefall checkpoint. "The garbage collected at Base Camp is still being assessed," Tshering said.

The problem extends far beyond a

Nigerian mega-highway faces down rising seas, protected forests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAGOS, JUNE 8

The long, grey concrete road stretches out a stone's throw from the Atlantic Ocean waves relentlessly crashing against the Nigerian shore.

Driving down the new six-lane highway, the hustle and bustle of Lagos gradually gives way to palm groves torn in two by the road, and fishing villages squeezed between it and the ocean.

The newly built expressway, which is to connect the megacity of Lagos—in the southwest of Africa's most populous country—to Calabar city, near the border with Cameroon, will run along the Nigerian coastline for 700 kilometres (435 miles) by 2028.

It is one of the flagship projects of President Bola Tinubu, who is seeking a second term in elections in January. The highway is meant to deliver on his campaign promises to "revolutionise" transportation and boost tourism.

"We have a road that will outlive all of us here," he said at the inauguration of the first stretch of the highway, held the same day as his two-year anniversary in office.

But many are questioning the sustainability of this mega-project amid rising sea levels that are eroding the coast along the Gulf of Guinea.

Officially dubbed the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, it is being built at an estimated cost of \$11 billion, through a private contract awarded to a Nigerian company, Hitech, owned by Lebanese businessmen Gilbert and Ronald Chagoury, close associates of

the head of state.

The same company developed Eko Atlantic, a neighbourhood built on land reclaimed from the ocean and often touted as the "Dubai of Africa", which is for the moment mostly empty land and a few scattered skyscrapers.

Nigeria's leading environmentalist, Nnimmo Bassey, called the project "an epitome of climate denial".

"We are experiencing very rapid sea level rise along Nigeria's coastline," he said, warning that the highway could be "very vulnerable".

According to a 2022 study published in the Journal of African Earth Sciences, 89 percent of Lagos state's coastline receded by an average of 2.8 metres (more than nine feet) per year between 1973 and 2019.

An environmental impact assessment for the section of the road covering Lagos state, done by Nigerian consultancy Natural Eco Capital and submitted to the public works ministry in May 2024—two months after construction began—states that "a water level rise of 0.5 metres around the coast of Lagos will not affect the proposed Lagos-Calabar coastal road".

The study specifies that a 1.5C rise in global temperatures would result in a 0.48-metre rise in sea level, and 0.55 metres in the event of a 2C increase.

Yet projections by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) find that warming will probably exceed 3 degrees by 2100, bringing sea level rise past 0.6 metres.

To reduce risks, the consultancy proposes erecting sea walls and natural barriers such as mangroves and

dunes "to reduce erosion".

There are currently no offshore dikes or shoreline mangroves along the first 60 kilometres of the highway that have so far opened to traffic.

Africa often finds itself on the front lines of climate change, even though it contributes the least to global greenhouse gas emissions.

Rising sea levels are driven by global warming through rising sea temperatures and the accelerated melting of glaciers.

The rise in sea levels poses a major threat to Nigerian coastal areas, and several entire communities have already been swallowed up by the waters.

Videos shared on social media in recent weeks showed water submerging houses in the town of Ayetoro, in Ondo state, not far from the highway's future route, and flooded roads in Lekki neighbourhood of Lagos, where the highway passes through. In Mosheler Kawga, about 30 kilometres from where the road starts, 53-year-old fisherman Lukman Igara said that around 20 years ago, the shoreline was a long walk away, "but now, we can see the ships... on the high sea".

Just 100 metres away on the other side of the village, the sound of passing cars buzzed away, the highway having already opened to traffic on the completed portions.

Igara's neighbour, Wasiu Adesanya, 50, marvelled at the new highway, which has opened up this small village—where there are no schools, running water, electricity or healthcare infrastructure—and made travel to

Lagos easier.

"Now new people are coming into the town," including to buy fish that fishermen's wives dry in the sun.

However, rumours of imminent eviction are causing concern among villagers, with some residents claiming that government officials have told them their land will soon be bought up and that they will be forced to vacate.

In a country with weak land rights and a history of violent, deadly evictions of the poor, those concerns carry weight.

"What we find hard to swallow is the rumour that we will be relocated. This is our ancestral home," said Igara, adding he fears they will be moved far from the sea, jeopardising his livelihood.

Already, right next to the Mosheler Kawga houses—modest abodes of concrete, with tin roofs—stands an imposing construction site: a future hotel, where rooms with ocean views will fetch a premium price.

The public works ministry, the Lagos state government and Hitech did not respond to AFP's requests for comment on the villagers' concerns.

In Akwa Ibom state, five states away in the southeast, the highway will cut through Stubbs Creek Forest, the largest in the state and a protected area home to endangered species.

The west African nation has already lost nearly 90 percent of its forest cover over the past 30 years, according to the Nigerian Conservation Foundation. Constructing the highway through the Stubbs Creek Forest Reserve is estimated to generate 3.5 million tonnes of CO₂—roughly "0.6 percent of Nigeria's total annual emissions", says Joel Benson, an Abuja-based academic.

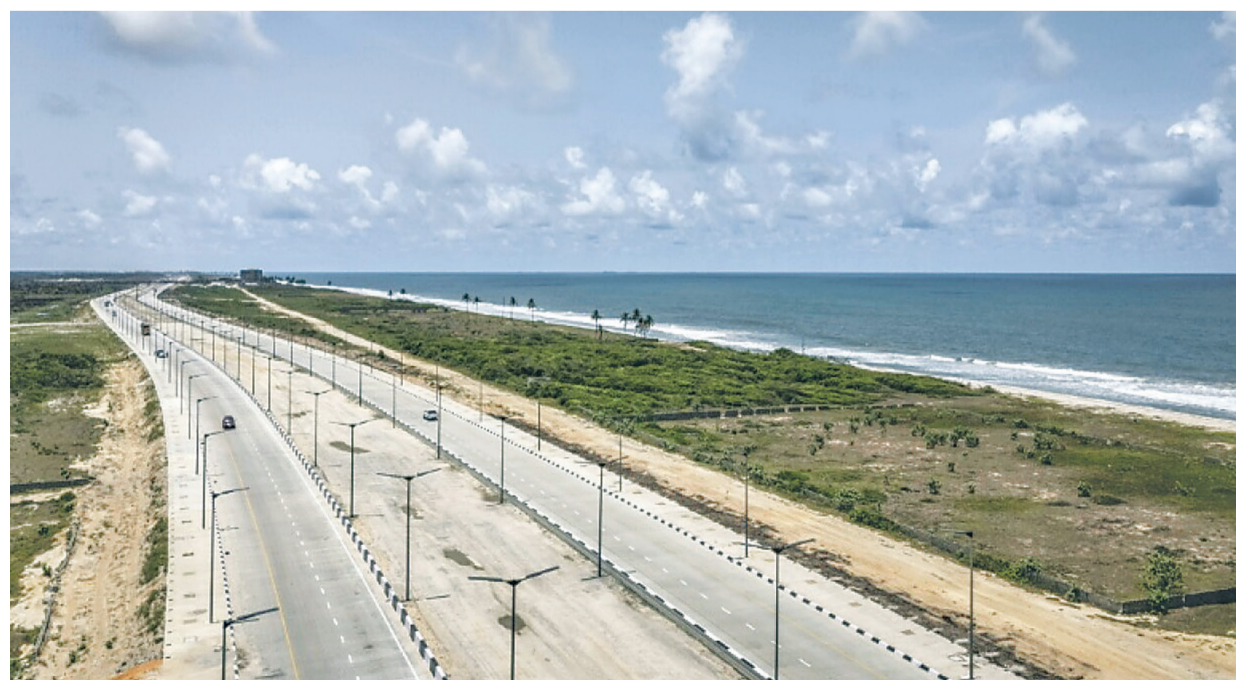
The road would turn the forest "from a major carbon sink into a significant carbon source".

He estimated the cost of emissions linked to the project at \$554.8 million, based on the carbon prices set by the World Bank of \$158 dollars per tonne.

"It's a biodiversity hotspot," providing natural defences for Niger Delta communities, said Tijah Bolton Akpan of the NGO Policy Alert, which is calling for the highway to be rerouted.

The Delta region in southern Nigeria has for decades been ravaged by environmental pollution linked to oil and gas exploitation. Nearly two percent of the country's mangroves have already disappeared, according to the Global Mangrove Watch platform. Local residents "have continued to suffer the negative impacts of oil and gas operations", Akpan said.

Losing the forest, which they've depended on for centuries for their livelihoods, he said, "would be like another level of loss".



AFP/RSS

The Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway runs parallel to the Atlantic Ocean. Shrinking coastline, linked to climate change, could threaten the road.

Nvidia unveils AI infrastructure deals in South Korea

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL, JUNE 8

US chip titan Nvidia announced on Monday a raft of artificial intelligence deals in South Korea, where booming business for semiconductor companies is fuelling debate over how much of the profits go to workers.

Nvidia, the world's most valuable company, unveiled with SK Telecom a "gigawatt-scale" AI data centre construction project, with the first facility set to come online in 2027.

It will support "AI services for enterprises and industries across Korea, with the vision to expand to greater Asia regions", the companies said. No figure was given for how much the pair will invest in the data centres, or for other new tie-ups that Nvidia touted with the likes of Naver, LG Group, Hyundai and Doosan Group, including on AI robotics. The deals were unveiled after Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang spent the weekend eating barbecue and fried chicken with the country's tech leaders in Seoul and appearing on a popular TV show.

Nvidia also said it would work with chipmaker SK hynix to develop advanced memory components that are needed to run AI systems but are currently in short supply.

Their "multi-year technology partnership" will "sustain the global buildout of AI factories" by supporting supply for advanced memory chips, they said. Lian Jye Su, a chief analyst at Omdia, told AFP that Nvidia's new deals were "about strengthening existing relationships and further validating South Korea's role in the global AI supply chain".

Governments and companies are pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into AI infrastructure, creating a global memory chip shortage.

That has sent profits skyrocketing for manufacturers such as SK hynix and rival Samsung Electronics, whose union recently agreed a deal with management on bonuses.

The chair of SK Group, parent of SK Telecom and SK hynix, vowed last week to double production capacity of the silicon wafers used to make memory chips. But Chey Tae-won also reiterated his prediction that shortages could persist until 2030.

Huang signed a memory chip display at the SK hynix booth at last week's Computex trade show in Taipei, writing: "Please make more."

Asked in Taipei about the labour dispute at Samsung, Huang said companies should pay workers "as much as possible". Under the union deal, struck to avert a strike, around 60 percent of Samsung's domestic workforce is eligible to receive a bonus of roughly \$330,000 this year, based on a market estimate of operating profit.

Nepal clinch Asian Games T20 Qualifiers trophy

Nepal, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Oman qualify for Asian Games. They will join India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and hosts Japan in the main event.



Nepal men's team with the trophy after becoming the champions of the Asian Games Men's T20 Qualifier after defeating Hong Kong by 19 runs (DLS method) in a rain-affected final in Singapore on Sunday.

BINOD PANDEY
KATHMANDU, JUNE 8

Nepal were crowned champions of the Asian Games Men's T20 Qualifier after defeating Hong Kong by 19 runs via the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern (DLS) method in a rain-affected final in Singapore on Sunday.

Chasing 189 for victory, Nepal were well placed at 114/2 in 11.3 overs when rain brought play to a halt at the Sings Oval. With no further play possible, Nepal were declared winners as they were comfortably ahead of the DLS par score.

At the time of the interruption, Rohit Kumar Paudel was unbeaten on 35 off 24 balls, hitting three fours and a six, while captain Dipendra Singh Airee was on nine runs from four deliveries in his 100th T20 International appearance.

Kushal Bhurtel once again laid the foundation for Nepal's chase with a blistering 65 off 40 balls. The opener struck eight fours and three sixes before his dismissal. Bhurtel had earlier scored two centuries during the tournament.

Nepal lost Asaif Sheikh for a duck in the third over after the opener was bowled by Ayush Shukla off the first ball he faced. Bhurtel then steadied the innings and kept the required rate under control before Paudel and Airee guided Nepal beyond the DLS par score.

Nepal reached the final after defeating Oman by eight wickets in the semi-finals, while Hong Kong booked their place with a six-wicket

win over Malaysia.

The Nepali side had dominated the group stage, thrashing China by 221 runs and Malaysia by 167 runs to secure a semi-final berth. By reaching the last four, Nepal had already qualified for the Asian Games, which will be held in Nagoya, Japan, in September and October.

Nepal, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Oman qualified for the Asian Games through the tournament and will join India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and hosts Japan in the main event.

Earlier, Hong Kong posted 188/7 after being asked to bat first.

Opener Anshy Rath top-scored with 80 off 45 balls, striking six fours and six sixes. Hong Kong had reached 156 when Rath was dismissed in the 16th over. Nizakat Khan fell for 2, while former captain Babar Hayat was dismissed for a duck. Rath shared a 48-run partnership with Shiv Mathur and later added 84 runs off just 39 balls with Shahid Wasif for the fifth wicket.

Wasif made 55 off 28 balls, hitting seven fours and three sixes. Captain Yasim Murtaza scored 9, while Nasrulla Rana added 8.

Sher Malla was the standout performer with the ball for Nepal, returning figures of 4-32 from four overs. He dismissed Khan, Mathur, Rath and Wasif to derail Hong Kong's innings.

Karan KC claimed 2-45, while Sandeep Lamichhane picked up one wicket. Airee bowled economically, conceding 28 runs from his four overs without taking a wicket.

Pressure is off Zverev but Sinner will 'become an even stronger player', Italian tennis chief says

ANDREW DAMPF/AP
PARIS, JUNE 8

The pressure is finally off Alexander Zverev, who played more matches at majors than anyone in the professional era—125 to be exact—before he won a Grand Slam title.

After raising the French Open trophy, he no longer has to deal with being called "the best player never to win a major title."

Now, Zverev feels, more Grand Slam titles are a possibility.

"It happened for me very early at the Masters Series because I won one when I was 20 years old, and I've won a lot of Masters after that," said Zverev, who has won seven Masters 1000s—the tournaments just below the Grand Slams in terms of importance. "So I had that release at a Masters-level event very quickly, and at a Grand Slam it took longer."

"Now, no matter what happens, I will always be a Grand Slam champion, and nobody can take that away from me," Zverev added. "Maybe that does give me some freedom. Maybe my mind will just be a little bit calmer when I play a final, meaning that even if I lose it, I will still be a Grand Slam champion."

Zverev won't have to wait long to find out how he plays in a major as a Grand Slam champion: Wimbledon starts in exactly three weeks.

It was at Wimbledon where Zverev made his Grand Slam debut as an 18-year-old back in 2015. In all, Zverev has played 125 matches across tennis' four majors: the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and the US



Germany's Alexander Zverev reacts after winning the final tennis match against Italy's Flavio Cobolli at the French Open in Paris on Sunday.

Open. He lost three Grand Slam finals before finally beating Flavio Cobolli in the Roland Garros championship match on Sunday.

According to statistics provider Opta, the next players in the professional era (since 1968) on the list of most Grand Slam matches before winning a title are: Goran Ivanisevic with 105 before he won Wimbledon in 2001 and Andy Murray with 100 before he won the US Open in 2012.

Ivanisevic never won another Grand Slam title, while Murray ended up with three. At 29, Zverev potentially has many prime playing years remaining in his career.

But the main stumbling block for Zverev lately has been two guys named Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz.

Zverev has lost nine straight matches to the top-ranked Sinner and four of his last five against No 2 Alcaraz.

Zverev took full advantage in Paris after Alcaraz had to skip the tournament due to an injured right wrist and Sinner was stunningly defeated due to physical issues amid a heat wave in the second round.

Sinner and Alcaraz had accounted for nine straight Grand Slam titles until Zverev's victory.

While Alcaraz will also miss Wimbledon, Sinner will be defending his title at the All England Club.

Sinner's physical issues

Sinner came to Paris on a 29-match winning streak and was an overwhelming favorite for the title. But the Italian said he started feeling dizzy and "very low on energy" when he needed to win just one more game against 56th-ranked Juan Manuel Cerundolo. He ended up losing in five sets in one of the more memorable meltdowns in tennis history. "He was winning too much; playing too much," Angelo Binaghi, the president of the Italian tennis federation, told The Associated Press. "It was just fatigue."

"He still has margins for improvement. You can still learn things like increasing your stamina or improving your serve, as he's done over the last two years. You can do that until you hit 30. So he's going to become an even stronger player," Binaghi added of Sinner, who is 24. "That's the positive aspect: He can still improve and become an Iron Man like (Rafael) Nadal and (Novak) Djokovic."

After wasting three points in last year's French Open final against Alcaraz, Sinner came back and beat his Spanish rival a month later in the Wimbledon final. "At Wimbledon he's the strongest of anyone," Binaghi said of Sinner. "He ought to win—we wouldn't expect anything else. But if for some reason he doesn't win, we have other players, too."

Indeed, Italy does have depth in men's tennis right now with players like Cobolli, who just played his first Grand Slam final and made his debut in the top 10 of the rankings Monday at No 10; Matteo Berrettini, a former Wimbledon finalist who made the quarterfinals in Paris and is considered one of the sport's top grass-court players; and Lorenzo Musetti, a former Wimbledon semifinalist, among others.

Andreeva thanks herself

French Open women's champion Mirra Andreeva concluded her victory speech during the trophy presentation by thanking herself—which has become a personal trademark for the 19-year-old Russian player. So much so that she wore a black jacket during the ceremony featuring a patch that said "I want to thank myself."

Andreeva explained later: "It's one of my trademarks now to say that during my speech. In the beginning, I just said it to joke around and so everyone would laugh at how funny I am and at my humor."

"Then after I kind of realized, 'Why not to thank yourself?' Because you are the one that works, you are the one that is doing the job, you're the one that (is) feeling all the nerves... It's actually very important to thank yourself."

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Take initiative on goals that feel far away, darling Aries. As thoughts drift toward distant futures, you will begin to realise where focus should be applied in the present.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

This energy is introspective and responsible, forcing you to examine financial and professional aspirations. Get serious about your long term goals by outlining a solid budget and five to ten year plan.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Valuable connections could emerge out of the blue, dear Gemini. Don't shy away from unfamiliar faces. Expand your social network by exploring mysterious subcultures or interests.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Change hangs in the air, though transformation won't happen all at once. Determine where you wish to gain power and notoriety, then start walking in that direction. Promote your goals and ideas.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Relationships, dreams, and ideas move quickly, dear Leo. Collaborative efforts strengthen your position, allowing you to reach milestones faster than you ever thought possible.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Manifesting goals can be disruptive at times. Start adjusting your routines now to ease into these transitions. New social spheres open up to you.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Praise is yours for the taking, dear Libra. These vibes bring lucky changes to your creative, romantic, and social life. If you are willing to take center stage, an audience will surely arrive.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Embrace the spirit of teamwork to initiate positive change, dear Scorpio. Focus on a specific project or goal, determine who is best suited to elevate and benefit from this agenda, and pitch your visions.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Try to view loved ones with fresh eyes, asking questions about their interests, creative outlets, and special talents. Romantic connections are revitalised and your character evolves as you absorb new perspectives.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Changes you've struggled to implement have a better chance of sticking today, dear Capricorn. Fortify your will with positive reinforcement to ensure morale stays up.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Voice your opinion and chase passions, dearest Aquarius. Allow yourself to be driven by desires, even if doing so takes you out of your element at times.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Shake off unhelpful emotions and reclaim your sense of self, dear Pisces. Taking time to nurture yourself in private can alleviate insecurities that have been holding you back.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

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DOWN

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PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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- 57 Radio part
- 59 Decorated tinware
- 60 Ms. Fitzgerald of jazz
- 61 Expensive
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SUDOKU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆



'Journey of Cultural Respect'

○ RIVASH RIJAL
KATHMANDU

The exhibition 'From Siraha to Kathmandu' is a sizable 28-piece collection of paintings that gives Kathmandu audiences an opportunity to familiarise themselves with life in the Mithila heartlands. Artist Hare Ram Yadav, born and raised in Siraha, has illustrated various aspects of life in Madhesh as he has seen it. From the retelling of the famous myth of "Lok Debta Salhesh" to depictions of several religious and cultural symbols, such as those of happiness and protection, among others, the exhibition leaves little more to be asked for in the way of an honest portrayal of village life.

Alongside being a detailed showcase of life in the lowlands, the exhibit is also an equally detailed showcase of the coming of modernity in Tarai.

Piece 13, titled 'Journey of Cultural Respect', depicts a veiled woman cycling. "The veil tells us that the woman is married. Women are often married young. Sometimes they have finished the tenth grade, and sometimes the twelfth. After marriage, these women are expected to take on much responsibility in their new homes. If they are able to continue school, they have to make time on top of what is expected of them after marriage," says Yadav.

In the painting, a woman rides a bicycle away from a couple engaged in household chores and towards medical scrubs. The medical professionals are walking towards a red-cross-essque vehicle. Yadav explains that the woman, wearing a veil and cycling towards healthcare providers, symbolises the journey towards their dreams and aspirations that many women undertake while juggling household responsibilities and social expectations.



Exhibit

The painting places the woman in the middle and, behind her, depicts two realities of life. The background hosts both thatched-roofed village homes and modern buildings. The painting has both a car and cattle in the same frame. While Madheshi women now have access to better and higher education than in the past, the progressive developments brought by modernity have not replaced old ways. Instead, modern Nepal's new opportunities exist in a messy, not necessarily harmonised, manner alongside old Nepal's asks.

The very next piece, number 14, titled

'Modern Era', shows another woman. In this painting, the veil has been replaced by a helmet from which free, unkempt hair flows. This woman does not seem to be married. Maybe she is, but at the very least, she is not being asked to veil herself. Her wheels have definitely gotten better, too. She has gone from a bicycle to a motorcycle or maybe a scooter.

The life the viewer might imagine this woman leads is markedly different from the one Yadav describes in discussing the last painting. And yet, she is Maithili all the same. The designs on her apparel are distinctly Maithili in style. In piece thirteen, the woman is attempting to define a life for herself in tune with what has been defined for her. In piece fourteen, that attempt at defining and redefining has been completed. The woman seems to be truly independent while also being truly Maithili.

In addition to social change, Yadav shares that modernity has also brought structural change in Madhesh. Piece 23, titled 'Ox-Farmer Bond', primarily illustrates the use of oxen in ploughing the fields of Nepal's breadbasket. "It is hard to find these kinds of oxen nowadays," Yadav says. "It has been replaced by tractors and chemical fertilisers. Modern equipment is expensive. Oxen eat what grows in the fields; we have to buy fuel for the machines. The chemical fertilisers destroy the soil, whereas the oxen produce manure for us."

Tracing Madhesh between memory and modernity

Artist Hare Ram Yadav's 'From Siraha to Kathmandu' captures a region negotiating change, where village traditions and agricultural transformations coexist in complex ways.

The painting glorifies the beast of burden in many ways. The whole piece is framed by the outline of a cattle skull. In the forefront sits the image of a man ploughing the fields with yoked oxen, while another man scatters seeds, and some hunched-over women work the field with their hands. The painting depicts hard work. Add in the several small images of similar agrarian work, and it is hard to miss the conclusion that the farmer's life is not easy. Despite the toil, however, there is a sense of harmony in the image. There is no modern technology in sight, and one gets the sense that life just works.

Nepal has seen much development in the past few decades. In different ways and degrees, modernity has arrived in all parts of the country. As such, every aspect of people's lives has changed. Most of Hare Ram Yadav's paintings show life as it has existed for centuries. These depictions of old Mithila are beautiful. And some of his paintings show new Mithila life as it undergoes change. Are these changes good? Are they wanted? Are they welcome? Depends who you ask.

Yadav does not have the answers, but he has certainly asked the questions in a captivating way.



'Modern Era'

From Siraha To Kathmandu

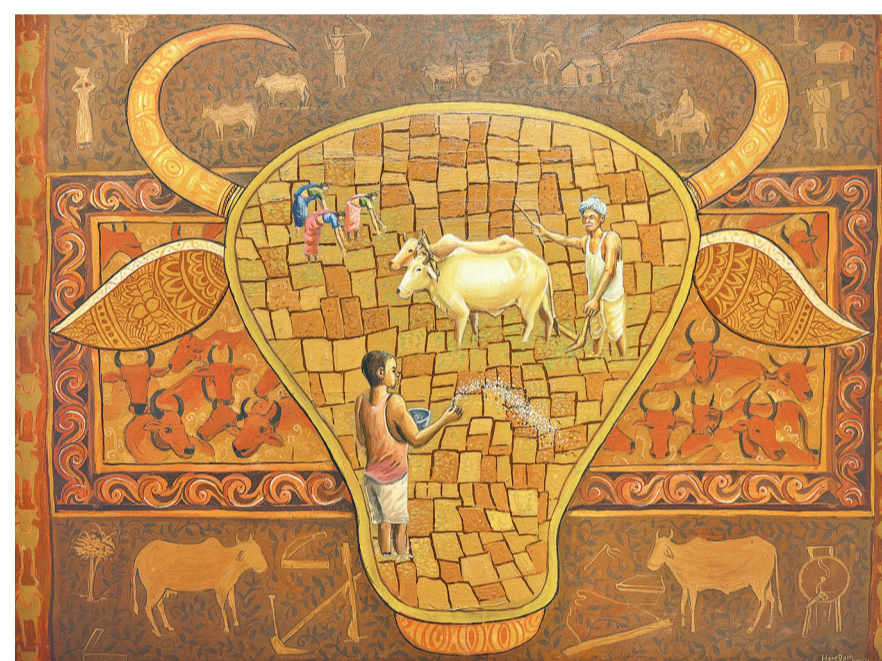
Where: Kathmandu Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu

When: Until June 9

Sundays to Fridays: 11 am to 5 pm

Saturdays: Noon to 5 pm

Entry: Free



'Ox-Farmer Bond'

Understanding menopause beyond the physical symptoms

From anxiety and irritability to low self-esteem, menopause can affect many aspects of a woman's life.

Early support and self-care can make a difference.

Call for contributions

The Kathmandu Post invites well-researched and creative pitches for 'Fiction Park' stories and feature articles—travelogues, book reviews, and pieces on technology, culture, and lifestyle. To ensure your articles get our attention, please keep the following things in mind when inquiring about and submitting your pieces.

All your stories should be pitched to the Features desk, not the editor. Email your piece or pitch (along with a high-resolution headshot and a one-line bio) to tkpfeatures@gmail.com.

We will respond only to well-written stories and pitches that have original ideas. Plagiarism will lead to blacklisting. We suggest that you Google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the Post or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece offers something new.

The Post receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers and students. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you.



SHUTTERSTOCK

○ MOKSHYADA THAPA
KATHMANDU

Young girls undergo transforming changes in their bodies after their menarche; likewise, menopause is a significant life stage that calls for greater awareness and care. It is the end of a woman's menstrual cycle, typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55. Everyone has heard of the term 'menopause', but many are not aware of the mental and behavioural changes that follow.

Dr Namrata Singh Chhetri, co-founder and psychologist at Mindwell Solutions, talks about the shifts women go through during menopause and how to cope with them.

What kind of changes in behaviour and moods can be seen in women going through menopause?

Menopause is not simply a medical shift but also an emotional transformation that can significantly damage a woman's mental state. During this time, many women suffer emotional ups and downs that may appear difficult to manage. Some become emotional while others experience anxiety, anger, restlessness, or emotional exhaustion without realising why.

Every day tension can start to feel heavi-

er than usual. In certain circumstances, women grow quieter and more reclusive because they believe no one understands what they are feeling inwardly. These emotional shifts are frequently linked to hormonal imbalance, changing life circumstances, and the pressure women continue to bear despite their emotional difficulties.

Behavioural changes may also occur gradually. They may lose interest in previously favoured hobbies or have difficulty concentrating and remembering information. Women who were once socially active may now avoid gatherings because they feel emotionally drained or misunderstood. Others may become more impatient or feel overwhelmed by responsibilities they previously handled effortlessly. These changes are not attention-seeking behaviour but rather normal responses to hormonal alterations within the body.

How can family members better support women experiencing emotional distress during menopause?

Family support can alleviate emotional suffering in ways that many people are unaware of. Women going through this stage require compassion, kindness, and emotional understanding from those around them. Listening quietly, providing emotional comfort, and avoiding harsh criticism can all help women feel emotion-

ally secure throughout this tough shift. Rather than disregarding emotional reactions as "mood swings", family members should attempt to grasp the deeper emotional issues that women may be experiencing.

Family members should try to foster a peaceful environment at home. Sharing household tasks, spending time together, and encouraging open conversations might help to alleviate feelings of loneliness. Partners should be aware that emotional reactions are not purposeful and are caused by physical and mental changes that occur throughout menopause. Women who feel supported by their loved ones are more likely to handle emotional stress in healthier and more confident ways.

How closely are sleep disturbances during menopause linked with mental health issues like stress and depression?

Sleep problems and mental health issues during menopause are closely connected. Hormonal changes frequently disrupt sleep habits, resulting in insomnia, discomfort, or repeated awakening during the night. When sleep becomes irregular over time, emotional health suffers as well.

Inadequate sleep can exacerbate feelings



— MENTAL WELLBEING —



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NAMRATA SINGH CHHETRI

Psychologist Namrata Singh Chhetri

of stress, irritation, anxiety, and depression. Continuous sleep deprivation may significantly increase the risk of depression if left untreated for too long. Good sleep is critical for emotional healing, and improving sleep patterns can frequently help women feel mentally stronger and emotionally calmer during menopause.

Are there some healthy coping mechanisms to treat these changes?

Several healthy coping strategies can be used to deal with menopausal emotional changes. Maintaining physical activity is one of the most effective approaches to achieving emotional balance. Exercise naturally reduces stress and enhances positive energy levels.

Mindfulness, meditation, and yoga can also help alleviate anxiety and emotional strain. Spending time with supportive friends, pursuing interests, and keeping social relationships might help avoid feelings of loneliness and emotional isolation. Self-compassion is the most significant coping strategy. Women should give themselves time to relax, recover, and adapt without feeling guilty or under pressure.

Can untreated menopausal mental health issues affect women's work life, relationships, and self-esteem in the long term?

Yes, untreated mental health problems during menopause can result in long-term emotional and social problems. Constant worry, anxiety, and emotional tiredness can undermine a woman's confidence and ability to perform well at work. Many women may experience mental burnout or emotional disconnection from their professional goals.

Personal relationships might also suffer if emotional issues are not appropriately addressed. Miscommunication, irritation, and emotional distance can gradually weaken family relationships and friendships.

Women who continue to suffer silently may develop low self-esteem and self-doubt. They may begin to question their worth, appearance, or purpose in life. This is why emotional support during menopause should not be overlooked. Menopause should never be viewed as a period that women have to tolerate. With the proper support and compassion, women may pass through this time with strength, dignity, and emotional stability.