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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Janakpur Jomsom



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

Members of the indigenous Magar community perform at Tundikhel in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark Bhume Puja, a festival dedicated to the worship of *bhumi* (earth). The Bhume Festival Preservation Committee is organising the three-day event at the army parade ground until Wednesday.

A pattern of threats in the name of good governance

The latest incident is part of a worrying pattern of using retaliatory language that undermines democratic institutions, observers say.

GAURAV POKHAREL
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

When Physical Infrastructure Minister Sunil Lamsal went to inspect the Nagdhunga-Mugling road project on Sunday, his primary focus appeared less on administrative bottlenecks and more on physical intimidation. Flanked by Dhading's Chief District Officer Laxmi Pandey Gautam and senior security officers, Lamsal issued a chilling directive targeting a sub-contractor responsible for relocating electricity poles along the highway.

"Find out where this electricity pole relocation contractor is on this earth, bring him here," said Lamsal, his outburst captured on a video that quickly went viral across social media networks. "If he refuses to work, break his legs. I don't care about the consequences."

While the aggressive stance found applause among some people frustrated by perennial infrastructure delays, it triggered intense condemnation from legal experts, rights defenders, and business communities. The incident is not an isolated outburst but forms part of an emerging, worrying pattern of behaviour within the current administration.

Observers note that Cabinet ministers, emboldened by populist rhetoric, are consistently flouting established legal guidelines, weaponising state machinery, and using retaliatory language that undermines democratic institutions.

Former Inspector General of Nepal Police Chandra Kuber Khapung raised immediate concerns online, asking publicly: "Is this order issued by the minister truly in accordance with our existing laws?"

This is by no means the first controversial remark by high-ranking



A grab from a video shows Minister Lamsal making controversial remarks.

officials in the Balendra Shah-led administration.

The main opposition Nepali Congress also reacted sharply. Party Vice-President Bishwa Prakash Sharma urged Prime Minister Shah to rein in his Cabinet colleagues.

"Are we heading towards a lawless society? If we are not, then please put a leash on the statements of your ministers, prime minister," said Sharma.

He linked Lamsal's remarks to other recent abuses of authority, such as government staffers pushing a three-wheeler down a cliff in Dhangadhi and police destroying smartphones seized from students during SEE examinations in Siraha.

Lamsal's highhandedness extends beyond words. Following his direct orders on May 11, the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office in Teku detained Ramesh Sharma, chairman of Sharma & Company, alongside Pitambar Badu of Lama Construction, bringing them directly to the ministry.

The deployment of a specialised unit meant for serious crimes to handle contractual disputes sent shockwaves through the private sector.

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Saudi Arabia's new skill test rule adds hurdles for Nepali workers

HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

Saudi Arabia has introduced a mandatory skills certification requirement for Nepali workers seeking employment in the kingdom. Labour officials and recruitment agencies say the move was implemented without prior consultation with the Nepal government and will place an additional financial burden on migrant workers.

Under the new rule, which takes effect on Wednesday, workers travelling to Saudi Arabia on labour visas must pass a skills assessment test before becoming eligible to work. Those who fail the test will not be allowed to take up employment in the country.

New rule mandates workers headed for Saudi on labour visas to have skills certification.

Saudi Arabia remains one of the largest destinations for Nepali migrant workers. The new requirement affects workers in occupations such as loading and unloading goods, portering, trolley operation and parts of the construction sector. Saudi authorities have not specified all construction-related occupations covered by the measure.

The certification process carries a fee of \$100, equivalent to around Rs15,000. Half of the amount is charged as examination fee, while the remaining \$50 is collected under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme.

A senior official at Nepal's Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment said there had been no formal bilateral discussion or agreement on introducing the certification scheme.

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Deubas seek assurances against arrest on return to Nepal

In letters from Hong Kong, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Arzu Rana Deuba say they are undergoing medical treatment and will cooperate with investigators.

SUDIP KAINI
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

Former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife, Arzu Rana Deuba, have written to the Department of Money Laundering Investigation (DoMLI), saying they intend to return to Nepal within two months and urging authorities not to create obstacles that could prevent their return.

The couple, being probed for money laundering, sent separate letters to the department via email and courier from Hong Kong, according to officials familiar with the matter. They have pleaded that they are innocent, have not fled the country and are currently abroad for medical treatment.



POST FILE PHOTOS

The Deuba couple

"We are acting in good faith and are fully prepared to cooperate with the investigation," the letters addressed to the director general of DoMLI state. "Narratives are being created suggesting that we have fled the country and failed to appear for questioning. We

request that arrest warrants not be issued against us on that basis."

They have also sought assurances for their safe return. According to a department official, the letters were received by email three days ago and by courier on Monday. Copies were also forwarded to the Special Court.

"The letters state that they wish to return to Nepal within two months and request that no legal measures be taken that could create hurdles to their entry into the country," the official said. "They argue that their reputation has been damaged by reports surrounding the money laundering investigation and insist that they are ready to assist investigators."

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Parliament's business could be hit as bills fail to arrive

Only one regular bill has been registered in the federal legislature since the formation of the current government, apart from the budget and ordinance-replacement bills.

RAJESH MISHRA
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has prepared a list of 45 potential bills submitted by various ministries for the current fiscal year. However, none are ready for immediate tabling in Parliament.

The government has been unable to introduce new bills to the federal parliament. Since the formation of the current government on March 27, only one regular bill has been registered, alongside the annual budget and ordinance-replacement bills. This shortage of fresh legislation means the Parliament is likely to face a "business crunch" after the budget talks conclude. According to the parliamentary calendar, deliberations on financial bills are scheduled to end by June 22.

Although the ongoing session is widely known as the budget session, it is standard practice for regular bills to be taken up and passed during the session alongside financial legislation.

"The main priority of this session is, of course, the budget. However, we anticipate a shortage of parliamentary business once the budget debate concludes," an official at the Parliament Secretariat said on condition of anonymity. "It is the government's responsibility to provide business to the House, but bills have not arrived as expected."

The official added that bills were expected to be tabled in quick succession under the government's 100-day roadmap, but progress has stalled. This is despite the Law Ministry holding a list of 45 potential bills forwarded by various min-

istries for the current fiscal year. At present, none are ready for immediate presentation.

On May 8, two ordinance-replacement bills were registered in the House of Representatives.

According to the calendar, deliberations on financial bills will end by June 22.

These replaced ordinances introduced by the former Sushila Karki-led government, which had amended the Electoral Roll Act and the House of Representatives Election Act for electoral purposes. Both the Voter

List (First Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Member of the House of Representatives Election (First Amendment) Bill, 2026, were subsequently passed by both chambers and authenticated by the President on May 31.

The Karki government had also issued an ordinance amending the Special Service Act.

Under this ordinance, the National Investigation Department (NID) was transferred from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, the current Balendra Shah-led government decided to retain the NID under the PMO and did not introduce a replacement bill. After the ordinance expired, the NID automatically came back under the jurisdiction of the PMO.

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G7 finds 'unity' on upping Russia pressure to end Ukraine war

Iran remains a key topic at the summit, with allies eager to question Trump over his deal with the Islamic republic to end the Middle East war.

FRANCESCO FONTEMAGGI & STUART WILLIAMS/AFP
EVIAN-LES-BAINS, FRANCE, JUNE 16

G7 leaders agreed on Tuesday to intensify pressure on Russia to end more than four years of war against Ukraine, with US President Donald Trump saying Moscow should "make a deal" and indicating Washington could re-impose waived sanctions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy joined the summit at the French resort of Evian, with both increased sanctions and the possibility of a face-to-face meeting between the Ukrainian leader and Russian President Vladimir Putin in discussion.

Analysts say Ukraine is increasingly holding up well on the battlefield but its cities are still the target of deadly Russian attacks in a conflict that has now lasted longer than World War I. The summit of the G7 group of world powers notably brought Zelenskyy together with Trump, who has sought to reach out to Putin but also showed signs of losing patience with Moscow.

"Russia should make a deal" to end the war

against Ukraine, Trump said after meeting Zelenskyy. He pointed to the high casualties on both sides in the conflict, the deadliest on European soil since World War II.

"The whole thing is ridiculous. So, yeah, I'm going to do whatever I can," Trump added.

He said the US will soon be able to reimpose sanctions against Russian oil after Washington imposed and then extended a sanctions waiver for Russian oil cargoes already at sea, troubling European allies.

"Soon we will be able to do that as the oil is now flowing" through the Strait of Hormuz after the deal with Iran to end the Middle East war, Trump said.

'Things are changing'

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said all the G7 powers were "in the same place" and there was "a real sense of unity in the G7, a sort of shared consensus that things are changing." "Ukraine has shown that it's able not just to defend itself but to take territory back and inflict quite significant losses on Russia," he told Times Radio.

Starmer said Britain was imposing a raft of



AFP/RSS

Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer and US President Donald Trump speak during the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France, on Tuesday.

new sanctions against Russia, including on tankers that transport LNG, in a bid to pres-

sure Moscow into halting the war against Ukraine. A French diplomatic source said after the talks "leaders decided today to increase the pressure on Russia through sanctions on gas and oil".

The summit's host, President Emmanuel Macron, has invited Zelenskyy to stay until the end of the three-day summit on Wednesday so that he can meet Trump and the other G7 leaders. Zelenskyy said in a message to Ukrainian reporters after his talks that "above all Putin does not want to end this, but he must be forced... first and foremost, through sanctions".

Zelenskyy brandished photos of the latest wave of Russian strikes, which on Monday killed at least 11 people and sparked a fire at a landmark Kyiv cathedral.

He has said Putin had rejected an offer of a meeting at the G7 but said he had also suggested to Trump that he could meet the Russian leader in the United States.

"The aim remains to encourage a face-to-face meeting between Zelenskyy and Putin, but it is up to Moscow to give concrete signals of a willingness for peace that have been totally lacking until now," said an Italian diplomat-

ic source, who asked not to be named.

'No boy scout'

Iran remains a key topic at the summit, with allies eager to question Trump over his deal with the Islamic republic to end the Middle East war.

Trump said the United States was under "no obligation" to invest in Iran after the deal, adding that its main focus was that Iran would not acquire a nuclear weapon and that "all hell" would "rain down" on the country if it did.

After Iran's former supreme leader Ali Khamenei was killed on the first day of the war on February 28, Trump described the surviving leadership in Tehran as "very rational people" who were "nice to deal with" and "not radicalised".

Trump also said he had suggested to Israel that Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa should deal with Lebanon's Tehran-backed Hezbollah militia as the Israeli campaign was causing too many casualties.

Sharaa "is very good with Hezbollah, does not like them", Trump said, adding that the Syrian leader—an ex-jihadist—is "no boy scout".

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Cancer patients continue to suffer, as chemotherapy drugs shortage persists

Suppliers say they have stopped importing the drugs due to rising costs and unadjusted government prices.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

Janak Khatiwada, a resident of Galchhi Rural Municipality-3, in Dhading reached various places of Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, and Kathmandu on Tuesday seeking a single dose of cisplatin, a platinum-based chemotherapy drug needed for the treatment of his wife struggling with liver cancer.

He visited suppliers at Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital, and in Kupandole, Jawalakhel and Sanepa of Lalitpur, and Sundhara, Teku, Tripureshwar and Kalimati of Kathmandu to plead for cisplatin but returned without the medicine.

"I woke up at 5 am and went from one hospital to another and to the addresses of suppliers in the hope of finding a single dose of cisplatin, but I couldn't get it anywhere," said Khatiwada. "I have neither been able to find the medicine for treatment of my wife nor got time to eat anything until now [at 2 pm]."

It's for months that Nepal has witnessed an acute scarcity of platinum-based chemotherapy drugs, including cisplatin, carboplatin and oxaliplatin, that are used in the treatment of various kinds of tumours, including ovarian, lung, head, neck, and breast cancers.

After the Post and its sister publication Kantipur reported about the hardships of cancer patients due to the scarcity of vital medicines some two weeks ago, the Department of Drug Administration had made the phone numbers of contact persons and hospitals public for the service of needy patients.

But relatives of cancer patients complain that most of the numbers made public by the department go



For several months, Nepal has been facing an acute shortage of platinum-based chemotherapy drugs, including cisplatin, carboplatin, and oxaliplatin.

unanswered, some are switched off and some reply that they do not have medicines to dispense, even if the government agency made public officials' personal numbers.

Due to the scarcity of the crucial drugs in the country, treatment of cancer patients has either been affected and halted, or their relatives are forced to purchase the medicines from black market paying manifold the actual price.

Suppliers of platinum-based chemotherapy drugs say they have stopped importing them due to a sharp rise in the prices of raw materials and manufacturing costs, and a government cap that prevents price recovery.

"My wife was supposed to undergo

chemotherapy three weeks ago, but due to a lack of cisplatin, her treatment has been halted," complained Khatiwada. "The new date for the chemotherapy session was today [Tuesday], but I could not arrange for the medicine yet again."

The couple have two children. "What should I say to them when they inquire about their mother's treatment? Due to the apathy of the concerned agency, ailing people are forced to die without treatment."

Khatiwada also complained about the discussions going on in Parliament about insignificant issues, which he said is a mockery of the plight of cancer patients. He added that a lawmaker from his constituency is actively

debating the issue of controlling the monkey menace affecting farmers, but she is uninterested in the plight of cancer patients, who are being pushed to die without treatment.

Samjhana KC, a local from Dhunibeshi Municipality in Dhading district, complained that she also tried hard to obtain 50 mg of cisplatin for her father, Raj Kumar Khatri, who has been suffering from Esophageal cancer, the cancer of the food pipe.

"Don't ask where we didn't go or whom we didn't beg for medicine," she complained. "My maternal uncle, who knew a supplier, paid two-fold the medicine's price on the black market."

KC found a dose on the black market, but due to a delay in reaching the hospital, her father's chemotherapy did not happen on Tuesday. Doctors at Bir Hospital told her to bring the patient only after ensuring that a bed is available to admit.

"The crisis of chemotherapy medicines has not yet been resolved," said Dr Sandhya Chapagain, a consultant oncologist at Bir Hospital.

"Every day, dozens of relatives of cancer patients come to the hospital to complain that the contact number given by the government did not respond or that there was no help by those who responded to the calls."

Doctors say the main issue is the price cap and the need for price adjustment, but health authorities simply chose to disclose contact numbers of suppliers, who hardly respond.

Chemotherapy medicines—carboplatin, cisplatin, and oxaliplatin—are used to treat various types of cancer. The medications damage the DNA of cancer cells and prevent them from dividing. Oxaliplatin is used primarily in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer.

Oncologists say these medications need to be administered in combination with other medicines. They warn that the medication's efficacy will diminish if it is not included in the treatment.

Due to a critical shortage of medicines, relatives of cancer patients are forced to pay up to Rs15,000 for a vial of medicine, which used to cost around Rs1,300 earlier; some have even gone to India for medicine. Some patients are forced to purchase higher doses of medicines than they actually require.

Experts have warned that a prolonged shortage of medicines will affect treatment outcomes.

Meanwhile, officials at the Department of Drug Administration said that relatives of cancer patients have also reached out to complain about the lack of chemotherapy medicines in hospitals, which the department said would be able to supply.

"Yes, I also get complaints from visitors of cancer patients about the lack of medicines," said Shiwani Khadgi, acting director general of the department.

"We have asked suppliers to deliver medicines to those 11 hospitals, and it is the responsibility of those hospitals to provide the medicines."

DDA officials say that they are working seriously to adjust the price of the chemotherapy drugs, which needs to be approved by the health ministry and the Council of Ministers.

There is no exact census of cancer patients in Nepal, but the Global Cancer Observatory estimates over 22,000 new cancer cases and 14,000 deaths every year in the country. Around 60 percent of cancer patients are believed to undergo chemotherapy.

New Saudi test for Nepali job seekers set to add costs and hurdles

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The development has raised questions because Nepal and Saudi Arabia signed a labour agreement on January 25, aimed at strengthening protections for migrant workers and improving labour migration governance. The agreement established a joint technical committee comprising officials from both countries to monitor implementation and evaluate labour-related issues. Matters affecting worker recruitment were expected to be discussed through that mechanism before decisions were taken.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development said in a public notice that the programme was designed to certify workers' professional competencies and improve occupational standards. Notices regarding the scheme have also been displayed at the Saudi Embassy in Kathmandu. Workers must first register through Saudi Arabia's Professional Accreditation Portal before paying the fee electronically using a bank card. Applicants are required to select their occupation, choose an approved testing centre and book an examination date. The test lasts three hours, and results are expected within 24 hours to one week.

Those who fail the test thrice will become ineligible for work in Saudi Arabia.

Applicants will be given up to three attempts to pass the examination, according to the notice. Those who fail after three attempts will become ineligible for employment in Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities say the programme is being implemented across all labour-source countries. The Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies on Tuesday drew the attention of Minister for Youth, Labour and Employment Ramjee Yadav to the issue. Association president Dik Bahadur (Kumar) Khatri said the additional requirement would increase migration costs and create further hurdles for workers.

"If implemented, Nepali workers travelling to Saudi Arabia will have to bear additional expenses. The certification process will take extra time and create unnecessary complications in recruitment," said Khatri. "There is a risk that workers' interests will be adversely affected because the overall cost of foreign employment will rise."

The association has urged the labour minister to take up the matter diplomatically with Saudi authorities. Khatri said experiences from countries such as India and Bangladesh suggested that certification systems had not always remained worker-friendly. "Workers often face delays and end up paying more than the prescribed fees because of time pressures. Instead of making migration easier, the process can become another obstacle," he said.

Saudi Arabia had previously attempted to require educational certificates from unskilled migrant workers, but the rule was later withdrawn following widespread criticism.

Deubas say they want to return home, promise cooperation with probe

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Earlier, the Interpol had declined requests from Nepal Police, made at DMLI's request, to issue Red Notices against the couple. Interpol returned the requests in the first and fourth weeks of May.

The department had obtained arrest warrants against the Deubas from the Kathmandu District Court on April 7 as part of its money laundering investigation. However, on May 25, the Supreme Court issued an interim order directing authorities not to arrest them, ruling that the warrants had effectively become inactive because offences investigated by the Department of Money Laundering Investigation fall under the jurisdiction of the Special Court.

A senior department official said there are currently no legal impediments preventing the couple from returning to Nepal.

"Interpol has already declined to issue Red Notices and there are no active arrest warrants against them at present," the official said. "There is nothing preventing them from travelling or returning to Nepal."

The official added that the department has not yet decided whether to formally respond to the letters and will first consult the investigating officer handling the case.

Krishna Sharan Lamichhane, deputy registrar and spokesperson for the Special Court, said he was unaware of any such correspondence reaching the court.

"I cannot say whether it has been received by the registration section or elsewhere, but it has not come to my attention," he said.

The Deuba couple had travelled abroad for "medical treatment" after a primary check-up in Nepal. They had sustained injuries during an attack by protesters at their Budhanilakantha residence on the second day of the Gen Z uprising on September 9. They flew to Singapore on October 27 and returned to Nepal on November 24. Arzu later travelled to Singapore via Delhi on January 5, while Sher Bahadur left for Singapore in the last week of February. Although they were later reported to have been in Hong Kong, their whereabouts had not been officially confirmed.

A day after the arrest warrants were issued in April, Sher Bahadur criticised the move on social media, saying misleading claims were being circulated about his family's assets. He argued that details of their property holdings were already known to state agencies.

Because the couple was abroad when the warrants were issued, the department requested Nepal Police to seek red notice through Interpol. Police subsequently approached Interpol's Asia-Pacific regional office in Singapore. According to senior police officials, Interpol declined both requests and sought clarification on the specific legal provisions under which the couple were being investigated, the exact offences involved and the amount of money allegedly laundered.

The department's request had been based on an ongoing investigation into suspected illicit wealth accumulation and the arrest warrants issued by the district court.

45 bills are in the pipeline, but none ready for Parliament

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In addition, the government has not tabled replacement bills for eight other ordinances issued last month to amend various laws, nor has it moved motions to accept or reject those ordinances. Under constitutional provisions, an ordinance automatically lapses if no decision is taken within 60 days of its presentation at the first sitting of Parliament. If the government does not initiate the approval process, these eight ordinances will expire after July 10.

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle presented the annual budget in Parliament on May 29. Three budget-related bills—the National Debt Recovery Bill, the Appropriation Bill, and the Finance Bill—have already been registered in the lower house.

Apart from the two ordinance-replacement bills and the three financial bills, the Nepal Rastra Bank (Third Amendment) Bill is the only other regular legislation registered in the House of Representatives so far, introduced on May 25.

At present, 10 draft bills are being processed at the Law Ministry. These, prepared by respective line ministries and forwarded to the ministry,

include bills relating to liabilities of domestic airlines, amendments to the Passport Act, urban development, amendments to the Building Act, and control of infectious animal diseases.

In addition, draft bills on the Citizen Investment Trust (Amendment), mining, federal civil service, mediation, and prohibition of child labour are also awaiting drafting consent at the Law Ministry. Once the ministry grants approval, these drafts will return to their respective ministries before being placed before the Cabinet.

A bill is formally registered in Parliament only after review by the relevant Cabinet committee and approval by the full Cabinet, a process that takes time.

Dal Bahadur Adhikari, spokesperson for the Law Ministry, said that for bills introduced in the previous Parliament that lapsed following the dissolution of the House, ministries can resume drafting without seeking fresh principle approval. He said ministries may already be working to fast-track such bills.

Adhikari further said the ministry has granted in-principle approval to draft new legislation on artificial

intelligence, cybersecurity, information technology, company law, human body burn control, the Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM), cooperatives, and savings and credit cooperatives.

In-principle approval has also been given to amend the Nepal Rastra Bank Act, the Nepal Special Service Act, and the Payment and Settlement Act.

Among these, only the central bank amendment bill has reached Parliament. He added that since several bills are at different stages of drafting, they will be tabled sequentially in the House once all legal procedures are completed.

Meanwhile, Ekram Giri, spokesperson for the Federal Parliament Secretariat, said that since this is the budget session, presentation and debate on the government's policies, programmes, and the budget remain the primary focus.

"Given that the budget takes precedence, the government may have delayed introducing other bills," Giri said. "There are also a few bills sent by the National Assembly. We expect more bills to come in gradually, so parliamentary business should not

face a major crisis."

He expressed optimism that additional legislation would be tabled by the time the budget and related financial bills are fully cleared.

A Law Ministry official suggested the delay could be linked to the government's effort to revise existing drafts in line with its policies and programmes, alongside preparing entirely new bills.

The official also noted that legislative drafting follows a strict and time-consuming legal process. Before drafting a bill, the ministry concerned must prepare a concept paper and secure approval from both the Law Ministry and the Cabinet.

Following this, under the Legislative Act, an initial draft must be prepared and made public for feedback from citizens.

After receiving concurrence from the Ministry of Finance, the draft is sent back to the Law Ministry for final drafting approval. Only after the Law Ministry signs off can the line ministry submit a proposal to the Cabinet seeking permission to introduce the bill in the federal Parliament. A draft bill can enter Parliament only after receiving final Cabinet approval.

Ministers' words could encourage abuse of authority, warn experts

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"The police force is not an executive tool to settle construction disputes," said Hemanta Malla Thakuri, a retired deputy inspector general of Nepal Police. "If a contractor fails to deliver, the Department of Roads or the respective line agency must initiate actions. Deploying criminal investigators to threaten businesspeople is a misuse of state authority."

The Federation of Contractors' Associations of Nepal said Lamsal's behaviour has created an atmosphere of terror within the private sector.

"The minister used violent words that cannot be found in any public procurement handbook or standard dictionary," said Shiva Hari Ghimire, general secretary of the federation.

"The government must first understand the structural reasons behind project delays. If a contractor fails to perform, the Public Procurement Act explicitly provides the authority to terminate the contract and reassign the work. Bypassing legal mechanisms to issue violent threats is inhumane and sends an alarming message to investors," said Ghimire.

Laxmi Pandey Gautam, chief district officer of Dhading, said everyone shares the minister's concern that work should not be delayed.

"It is the minister's wish, as well as ours, that there be no delay in work. There is nothing more to it than that," she told Kantipur. Multiple attempts to contact Minister Lamsal went unanswered.

This culture of intimidation flows from the top. Before assuming office, Shah set the tone during a Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) election rally in Dhangadhi.

"A road that should take two years is not finished even after twenty. We want it completed in eighteen months. That is our agenda. Whether we have to tie contractors to trees, force them to lie down on the dirt roads, or throw them into cages, the work must finish," he declared.

Although RSP Chairman Rabi Lamichhane later attempted to soften the rhetoric during a rally in Itahari, stating that his party intends to



This combo photo shows (from left to right) Prime Minister Balendra Shah, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Infrastructure Minister Sunil Lamsal.

bind errant contractors with the law rather than physical ropes, the trend has persisted.

Yet, even after the RSP led the government, the stream of controversial remarks from government ministers has shown no signs of abating.

Recently, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle used the floor of Parliament to threaten opposition lawmakers who questioned changes in tax rates. Instead of addressing policy queries, Wagle warned that he would expose the past personal scandals of his critics.

"I hope the lawmakers pointing fingers at me possess the moral height to withstand scrutiny. We are not ignorant of your past deeds. Those scandals will also be made public soon," warned Wagle.

While the prime minister's initial remarks were dismissed as poll campaign hyperbole, recent actions show a systemic disregard for due process. On June 4, government secretary Krishna Hari Pushkar was detained from his residence and interrogated for four hours by the

Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office, allegedly for sending text message to the prime minister seeking personal favour.

Shah later mocked the incident on social media. "I also want to become an ambassador. If anyone has the prime minister's number, please share it," he wrote on his social media account.

Legal experts argue that such behaviour erodes the core of the rule of law. "An official who issues such degrading and illegal threats from a public position should not only be removed from office but also prosecuted in democracy," said senior advocate Dinesh Tripathi.

"When governance mimics gangsterism, public trust in the state completely evaporates."

Mohna Ansari, a former member of the National Human Rights Commission, warned that such language filters down to the rank and file, encouraging police officers and lower-level bureaucrats to abuse their authority.

"This is not the language of democratic leaders; it is the language of hoodlums. If ministers

normalise violence and intimidation, society will emulate them," said Ansari.

The opposition has challenged the government's highhanded tactics. Responding to Wagle's threats in parliament, CPN-UML lawmaker and former minister Padma Aryal demanded that the government open investigations immediately instead of using them as blackmail.

"The government holds the files. If you have evidence of corruption against the opposition, open them today. We will not run away from any probe," asserted Aryal.

International and domestic precedents show that such behaviour often carries severe political costs. In the United Kingdom, Gavin Williamson resigned in 2022 following an investigation into bullying and threatening messages sent to colleagues. In India, the Election Commission banned Union Minister Maneka Gandhi from campaigning for forty-eight hours in 2019 after she threatened Muslim voters, while Bharatiya Janata Party MP Pragya Thakur was removed from a defense advisory panel for public remarks glorifying violence.

Nepal has its own history of ministerial accountability. In July 2018, then Law Minister Sher Bahadur Tamang resigned following public outrage over insensitive remarks regarding Nepali female medical students in Bangladesh. Similarly, in 2022, then Physical Infrastructure Minister Renu Kumari Yadav was forced to issue a public apology after the National Human Rights Commission cautioned her for publicly threatening to repeat political violence.

Former physical infrastructure secretary Keshav Kumar Sharma offered a more moderate view, suggesting that Lamsal's words might have been metaphorical.

"A minister's words do not instantly result in broken bones. Sometimes aggressive language is used out of frustration to push slow projects forward. However, it is always better to summon the parties to the ministry for a formal review rather than issuing public threats," he said.

Government releases 649 impounded EVs amid budget leak suspicions

Officials cite no evidence of wrongdoing regarding the Mustang convoy; over 200 vehicles continue to face scrutiny at the Rasuwagadhi border.

○ **BIMAL KHATIWADA**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

The Armed Police Force has released 649 electric vehicles that were held for nine days on suspicion of exploiting leaked budget details. The BYD cars, intercepted at multiple checkpoints along the Korala-Jomsom-Pokhara corridor, were freed after an internal investigation cleared them of custom violations, though the official report remains hidden from the public.

Security personnel had impounded the vehicles at Kushma in Parbat, Hemja in Kaski, and Jomsom in Mustang. The mass seizure occurred just before the budget presentation for the upcoming fiscal year of 2026-27, following allegations that importers received insider information about impending changes to customs duties.

Bidur Chudal, chief of the Mustang Customs Office at Korala, confirmed that the release process began on Saturday. "The cleared vehicles are currently being collected by their respective dealers," said Chudal. "A total of 649 vehicles had completed their customs clearance before being halted at various security points. On Saturday alone, businesses retrieved 108 cars."

According to Chudal, 774 vehicles had arrived at the Korala border. While 649 have been cleared and released, the remaining 125 vehicles are still undergoing standard customs processing. Representatives from the importing company have arrived in Mustang with drivers to transport the remaining units from Jomsom and Korala.

The Ministry of Finance had formed two separate probe committees, led by Customs Department directors Bhupalraj Shakya and Surendra Pandey, to investigate imports through the Korala and Rasuwa border points. However, the government directed the release of the Mustang convoy without publicising the findings of either panel.

Department of Customs Director and

Information Officer Kishore Bartaula defended the decision to release the vehicles, citing a lack of evidence of any wrongdoings. "It is natural for the state to be suspicious when an unusually large volume of goods enters the country right before the budget announcement," Bartaula said. "However, the investigation showed that all import procedures were fully compliant. Once no discrepancies were found, we could not legally hold commercial property and disrupt business."

The Ministry of Finance had previously issued a statement on June 10 through Nabin Dhungana, public relations adviser to Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, asserting that the imports followed regular procedures. The ministry dismissed claims of a budget leak as baseless, stating that the large-scale imports of these electric vehicles were planned months in advance.

Despite the breakthrough at the Korala border, a separate batch of more than 200 electric vehicles imported through the Rasuwagadhi crossing remains grounded at Timure. These vehicles, consisting of Kaiyi brand cars imported by Laxmi E-Mobility, are still under administrative scrutiny.

"We have not received any orders to release the vehicles here," said an official at the Rasuwa Customs Office, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The investigation concerning this checkpoint has not concluded." To ensure an impartial probe, the finance ministry has already transferred the customs staff involved in clearing the Rasuwa batch and deployed new officers to the site.

The APF confirmed that its actions throughout the incident were coordinated directly with civilian authorities. "We initially detained the vehicles following a formal request from the Ministry of Finance to facilitate a thorough investigation," said APF Spokesperson Deputy Inspector General Netra Bahadur Karki. "We have now initiated the release of the vehicles in Mustang in coordination with the finance ministry."



POST PHOTO

Security personnel had seized the vehicles before the budget presentation for the upcoming fiscal year of 2026-27.

Banished after release, jailed Bhutanese can't return even to their former refugee camp

Former Bhutanese political prisoners Chatur Man Tamang and Hasta Bahadur Rai are unable to enter Nepal after spending more than 18 years in Bhutan jail because they were not given release documents.

○ **PARBAT PORTEL**
BIRATNAGAR, JUNE 16

After spending more than 18 years in a Bhutanese prison, Chatur Man Tamang and Hasta Bahadur Rai thought they were finally heading home. For the two former political prisoners, home meant the refugee camps in eastern Nepal where they grew up after being expelled from Bhutan as children in the early 1990s.

Instead, they now find themselves stranded at the India-Nepal border, with no country willing to accept them.

"If they had proof of release from the Bhutanese prison, it would be easier for us to take them in," said Sanchahang Subba, secretary at the Beldangi refugee camp. "Unless we have documentary proof, we cannot allow them here."

Tamang, 42, and Rai, 44, were released from Bhutan's Chamgang Central Jail on June 1 after serving 18 years and three months in prison. Both were among Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who grew up in camps in Jhapa after their families were expelled from Bhutan around 1992.

According to the two men, Bhutanese security personnel escorted them to Jaigaon, a town on the India-Bhutan border, after their release. Each was allowed to take a television set and a few bags and was given 30,000 Indian rupees as travel expenses.

Before leaving, they said, security personnel warned them not to return.

"They told us never to come back to Bhutan," Rai recalled. "They said that if we returned, even by mistake, we would be sent back to prison."

Although they were released from jail, they were not provided with official release certificates. This has become the main obstacle preventing them from entering Nepal.

On June 2, the two travelled to Panitanki on the Nepal-India border, hoping to enter Nepal through Kakarbhitta and return to the Beldangi refugee camp.

Their journey ended there. Border personnel refused to allow them to cross because they lacked identification documents. Apart from a medical prescription belonging to Tamang, who has diabetes, they had no papers establishing their identities.

After spending the day at the border and approaching immigration authorities for assistance, they were forced to return to Jaigaon.

"We had to turn back after the camp secretary insisted that we show our prison release papers," Rai said.

The two men are now staying at the home of a Nepali-speaking labourer in Jaigaon who offered them shelter after hearing their story during an auto-rickshaw ride.

"I took them in out of sympathy as fellow Nepalis," the labourer told the Post by phone. "But I could face problems if authorities find out that I am sheltering them."

He urged the authorities and humanitarian



POST FILE PHOTO

Chatur Man Tamang (left) and Hasta Bahadur Rai, before heading for Bhutan earlier this month.

agencies to facilitate their return to Nepal as soon as possible.

At one point, Tamang considered returning to Bhutan to obtain the necessary documents, but fear held him back.

"I thought about going back and asking for the papers, but I am terrified," he said. "They clearly told us never to return."

Since being denied entry into Nepal, the two have been trying to find out how they might obtain proof of their release. Neither knows whom to contact or which authority could help.

"We are afraid we could be arrested again if we go back," Rai said. "We don't know who to ask or where to go."

According to human rights activist Gopal Krishna Siwakoti, records at Nepal's refugee camps confirm the identities of both men. Efforts are now underway, in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to facilitate their return to the camps.

"Once these two agencies verify their identities, they will have the documents to reach the refugee camps," Siwakoti said.

Tamang and Rai were children when their families were expelled from Bhutan and entered Nepal in the early 1990s. They spent their childhood in refugee camps in Jhapa and later became involved in campaigns demanding the repatriation of Bhutanese refugees.

Around 2008, determined to return to what they regarded as their ancestral homeland, the two crossed into Bhutan. Their attempt ended shortly after they entered the country when Bhutanese security personnel arrested them near Samjong.

They were subsequently sent to Chamgang Central Jail, where they spent the next 18 years and three months.

While they were behind bars, the Bhutanese refugee movement continued in Nepal. Refugees repeatedly staged protests demanding the right to return to Bhutan. Sit-ins and demonstrations were organised at the Mechi bridge, but India never opened a route that would allow refugees to travel back to Bhutan.

Instead, international efforts shifted towards third-country resettlement. Over the years, most Bhutanese refugees left the camps and resettled in countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada and Norway.

Today, only a few thousand refugees remain in the camps. Many of them are the elderly or infirm. With no family remaining in the camps and no home elsewhere, returning to the refugee settlements where they grew up was their only plan after release.

Cross-border movement has become stricter since the Covid-19 pandemic, with authorities requiring identity verification and supporting documents at border points. The tightened measures have directly affected the two former prisoners.

"If border controls were not this strict, we would have quietly entered the camp by now," Tamang said. "It wasn't like this before. Crossing the border has become very difficult."

The two men possess no documents recognised by any country. They have no Bhutanese identification, no Nepali citizenship certificates, nor Indian identity cards.

All they have is a medical prescription from a Bhutanese hospital, a few personal belongings and memories of more than 18 years behind bars.

"We wanted to step into Nepal and finally feel safe," Rai said. "But we could not even get across the border."

For now, the two men remain stranded, uncertain where they belong and unsure which country, if any, will accept them.

Nepal's LGBTQ rights gains remain out of reach for many

Despite landmark court rulings and legal guarantees, members of the community say they still encounter discrimination when seeking documents, education, healthcare, and jobs.

○ **BAALA SHAKYA**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

As transgender mountaineer Nilam Paudel stood atop Mount Everest, she fought back tears.

"I was crying on Everest," Paudel recalled at a Pride Month celebration and national dialogue event in Kathmandu on Monday. "I was thinking about my community, those who I had lost to suicide."

Yet before making history as the first trans woman to summit Everest, Paudel encountered countless obstacles at home, she said. While applying for trekking and climbing permits from the Department of Tourism, officials repeatedly demanded additional documents and initially refused her applications because she was transgender.

Her experience reflects what LGBTQ+ activists say is a persistent contradiction in Nepal. While the country is often hailed as one of South Asia's most progressive nations on sexual and gender minority rights, many members of the community continue to face barriers in accessing basic government services, legal recognition, education, and employment.

This disconnect was the focus of a new policy brief released by the Blue Diamond Society during Monday's Pride Month event, which brought together activists, lawmakers, artists, provincial representatives, and community leaders to discuss the status of LGBTQ+ rights across Nepal.

The report argues that despite constitutional guarantees and a series of landmark Supreme Court rulings recognising gender identity and protecting the rights of sexual and gender minorities, implementation remains inconsistent and often discriminatory. For many transgender, intersex, and non-binary Nepalis, obtaining citizenship documents that accurately reflect their gender identity remains one of the biggest challenges they face.

"The constitution exists, but implementation has not occurred," said Samon GC, one of the presenters of

the policy brief.

"We talked with representatives from all seven provinces," he said. "There are still many loopholes in obtaining educational certificates, passports, and other documents. Things that might take two or three hours for a cisgender person can take two or three years for us."

For decades, Nepal has been viewed as a regional pioneer on LGBTQ+ rights. The Supreme Court's landmark 2007 ruling in the Sunil Babu Pant case directed the government to recognise sexual and gender minorities and establish legal protections. Subsequent court decisions further affirmed the right to self-identification and legal recognition of gender identity.

Article 12 of the Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right to obtain citizenship certificates reflecting an individual's self-identified gender. Courts have repeatedly interpreted constitutional protections to include the rights of transgender, intersex, and non-binary individuals to live with dignity and have their identities legally recognised.

However, according to the policy brief and activists, those rights often remain inaccessible in practice.

The report documents cases in which local governments and District Administration Offices have refused to issue citizenship certificates based on self-identification, instead demanding medical examinations, proof of surgery, or psychiatric evaluations, despite court rulings stating such requirements are unnecessary.

The policy brief also highlights the continued use of "Sarjamin Muchulka," a public inquiry process requiring individuals to gather local witnesses to verify their gender identity, which activists describe as invasive and humiliating.

"Citizenship is not only a document," the report argues. Without legal recognition, individuals can be excluded from formal employment, education, healthcare, banking services, and legal protections.

Manisha Dhakal, executive director of the Blue Diamond Society, said Nepal's achievements should not obscure the work that remains.

"Nepal is very progressive in South Asia," she said. "But there is still work to be done and actions that need to be taken to address the legal and structural gaps that still exist."

Dhakal pointed to the legacy of the Pant decision as a milestone in the movement for LGBTQ+ rights while emphasising that progress has stalled in some areas.

"We have made great achievements, but we are not there yet," Dhakal said.

The policy brief argues that the consequences of inconsistent implementa-

tion extend far beyond citizenship offices. Educational institutions often refuse to update academic records after citizenship documents are amended, creating bureaucratic deadlocks that can prevent students from receiving transcripts, sitting for examinations, or continuing their studies.

The report cites cases in which transgender and intersex students were barred from examinations or accused of identity fraud because their appearance did not match information contained in official records.

Employment presents similar challenges.

Speaking at Monday's event, activists said discrepancies between an

individual's gender identity and official documents frequently result in exclusion from formal employment opportunities, forcing many into informal work where labour protections are limited. Financial institutions have also been accused of suspending accounts or creating obstacles during identity verification procedures when documents do not align with an individual's appearance.

The event also highlighted concerns that conditions outside Kathmandu are often far more difficult than national-level legal developments suggest.

Sanjay Sharma, programme director of Blue Diamond Society, said that

discussions about progress frequently focus on urban centres while overlooking realities elsewhere.

"We can always talk about Kathmandu," Sharma told the Post. "But what is the ground reality in the provinces?"

Representatives from all seven provinces presented reports on local conditions, achievements, and challenges facing LGBTQ+ communities. Several presentations cited limited funding, insufficient staffing, weak implementation mechanisms, and lack of public awareness as major barriers to advancing inclusion and equality.

In Madhesh Province, presenters highlighted budget shortages, administrative delays, and coordination problems between provincial, local and federal governments. Representatives from Bagmati Province identified citizenship, education, healthcare access, discrimination, and underrepresentation in policymaking as continuing concerns.

At the same time, speakers celebrated growing visibility and representation for LGBTQ+ Nepalis.

The event featured a panel discussion including Paudel, transgender lawmaker Bhumika Shrestha, actor Pushpa Lama, and Miss Universe Nepal 2025 first runner-up Aarohi Basnet.

The speakers reflected on personal milestones that would have been nearly unimaginable for previous generations.

Pushpa Lama discussed her experience appearing in "Elephants in the Fog," a Nepali film that recently received a standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival.

"At Cannes, nobody looked at gender or race," she said. "Everyone sat together. People were sharing stories." Basnet spoke about pursuing her childhood dream of competing in Miss Universe Nepal despite discrimination and social pressures.

"I did not win by myself, I won with this community," she said. "I created history with this community."



POST PHOTO: NOAH EPPS

People gather at Tundikhel, Kathmandu to celebrate Pride Month on Saturday.

OPINION



OUR VIEW

1,859 Ropani test

Reclaiming stolen land of Kathmandu is an opportunity to restore the lungs of the city.

In a country where government reports are often buried in bureaucratic drawers, the decision to resurrect the 1995 Rawal Commission report is nothing short of a jolt to the status quo. After 31 years of political hesitation, the government has finally moved to freeze more than 1,859 ropani of public land in Kathmandu that had been illegally converted into private estates. This move, spearheaded by Land Management Minister PratiBha Rawal—the granddaughter of the commission's original chair—is a welcome and bold assertion of the state's duty to protect public assets. However, as the government moves from the 'what' to the 'how', it must tread carefully. If this long-due action is handled with the same haphazard haste seen in the recent move to evict landless squatters, the state risks a legal and social backlash that could stall action for decades still.

The scale of the encroachment documented in the 1995 report is astounding. Nearly 10 percent of the public land in Kathmandu metropolis was found to be under illegal occupation, affecting temple grounds, ponds and river corridors along Bagmati and Bishnumati. Public properties have been systematically cannibalised by private interests. The Cabinet's decision to finally implement the report—following years of ignoring Supreme Court directives—is a victory for the rule of law.

Yet, the government's current 'no ifs and no buts' rhetoric must be matched by surgical precision rather than political and administrative arrogance. The greatest threat to this initiative is not the encroachers themselves, but the potential for procedural errors that lead to a deluge of litigation. Unlike the clear-cut cases of three decades ago, much of the land has been transferred multiple times since the report was first submitted in 1995. The government is no longer dealing solely with the original 'direct encroachers' who merged public land into their holdings. Instead, it is often dealing with third- or fourth-generation buyers who may have purchased these plots in good faith.

The government must acknowledge that the right to property is a constitutional bedrock. If the state acts in a hurry without ample study and research, it risks undermining this fundamental right. A rushed execution will inevitably drive affected parties to the courts, where the entire process could be stayed, reversed, or permanently mired in legal limbo. Minister Rawal has noted that some records still contain annotations from the Commission, while others require 'extensive verification'. This verification is the difference between a successful reclamation and a public relations disaster.

An eight-member facilitation committee has been handed a meagre 15 days to prepare a roadmap. This timeline is dangerously ambitious, given that some records have been lost since the 1990s. Solution-oriented action requires following the roadmap already laid out within the Rawal Commission's own findings. The report proposed several models, including a pilot campaign in high-encroachment areas like Baudha or smaller, manageable sites like Khichapokhari. Starting with a pilot project would allow the newly formed facilitation committee to test its roadmap, reconcile 30-year-old findings with present-day cadastral records, and establish a clear legal framework for addressing complex ownership histories. The government must ensure that every plot identified for recovery is backed by airtight evidence that can withstand the scrutiny of the judiciary.

According to a report published by the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, only about 2.3 percent of Kathmandu Valley's land is allocated to public open space, far below the 15 to 20 percent recommended by urban planners globally. In addition to being a moral and legal imperative, reclaiming the 1,859 ropani of stolen land is an opportunity to restore the lungs of the city. But the government must remember that in the pursuit of justice, the process is just as important as the outcome. Let this not be another example of bullish tactics that end in a courtroom stalemate. The public wants their land back, but they also want a government that respects the law it is trying to enforce.

THEIR VIEW

Prioritise the poor

Increased social safety net funding favours subsidies and pensions over pro-poor programmes.

Inclusive development is one of the 10 broad themes on which the BNP government prepared its proposed budget for FY2026-27, yet a closer look into social safety net (SSN) reveals the same old tendency of inflating the social protection portfolio. A total allocation of Tk1.44338 billion has been proposed for this sector. This is nearly a 14 percent increase from the revised FY2025-26 budget. However, much of the increase will go to agricultural subsidies and civil service pensions, rather than pro-poor programmes.

Reportedly, only 48 of 90 SSN programmes are pro-poor, receiving Tk562.29 billion or 39 percent of the total allocation. But agricultural subsidies and pensions for lower-level government employees together will receive 43.2 percent of the allocation. It is unclear why agricultural subsidies are included in the SSN allocation when agriculture already has a separate budget. The same argument can be made against pensions. What rationale justifies including these under SSN except to inflate the total figure? Although interest on savings certificates and various paper-based block allocations previously included in the SSN budget were removed last year, experts opine that keeping pensions under this particular category is not justified. We hope that the finance minister will follow through with the necessary changes in either the revised or the next proposed budget.

There is actually no need to inflate figures if the intention to improve the situation is in the right place. For example, the FY2027 budget proposes several new and positive initiatives other than the family and farmers' cards. There is an allocation for monthly honorariums and festival allowances for 260,000 religious leaders of different faiths, 15,000 unemployed workers will receive a monthly allowance of Tk5,000 for up to three months, and 1.5 million poor working people will receive cash equivalent to 110,000 tonnes of rice under an integrated Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) scheme. The number of beneficiaries of allowance programmes for senior citizens, widows, and persons with disabilities is being increased. Allowances are also increasing in some of the programmes, though by a marginal amount—not enough to cover food inflation. Perhaps the increase in allowance could have been more meaningful if the allocation of Tk623.79 billion for pension and agricultural subsidies under SSN could instead be used for pro-poor programmes.

The other reasons why the social safety net allocation has been ineffective in the past were mistargeting, fragmentation, and leakages. In this regard, the BNP government plans to implement the Dynamic Social Registry, which will contain names, addresses and contact information of the beneficiaries, to prevent duplication of benefits. But this would only be helpful if implemented properly, a measure that requires administrative reforms across several ministries handling the social protection portfolio. The challenge is not presenting good intentions on paper; it is making them come true.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

Making sense of the West India Company

The WIC has no flag, no monarch, no charter, no headquarters and no single board of directors. Yet its reach is unmistakable.

|| SOUTH SIDE ||

CK LAL



Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal followed his customary visit to New Delhi with a routine trip to Beijing. A balancing journey to Washington may not be far behind. Educated in the United States, at the University of Bridgeport and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Khanal brings to diplomacy the polished ease of the global NGO world: Suave, soft-spoken and wrapped in the charming simplicity of development activism. He probably also knows his limitations. On the eve of his departure for Beijing, he said his talks with Chinese leaders would focus on dispelling misperceptions about the RSP government's foreign-policy orientation.

The Indian establishment offered red-carpet treatment to his party chair, Rabi Lamichhane, while the official response to Khanal was warm and cordial, but far from effusive. The Chinese will probably press for the implementation of past commitments, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), rather than make fresh promises. The 'pro-Western' image of the Shah regime is likely to hinder its attempt to break new ground in improving relations with either China or India.

There is hardly anything new in the 'pro-Western' turn of South Asian countries, as Brahma Chellaney, a self-described geostrategist well known for his hawkish views on Pakistan and China, seems to imply in his assertion that Washington increasingly saw the world's largest autocratic state less as a challenger to be contained and more as a peer superpower whose cooperation America now urgently needs. That has been so since the Nixon-Mao rapprochement of the 1970s helped produce a joint front against Moscow.

In South Asia, American alliance-building was aimed chiefly at containing the Soviet Union. Pakistan was a partner through the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), while Nepal had been friendlier to the Western camp of the Cold War since the 1950s. Both Islamabad and Kathmandu continued to court Beijing, with Washington looking the other way. The exception came when King Mahendra allowed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to run its Khampa rebellion campaign from Nepali soil. The Khampa warriors were abandoned only after the CIA began to disown them following President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972.

Washington's interest in South Asia may have faded after the Soviet collapse and the triumphalism of the so-called 'End of History'. China, meanwhile, was being woven into the very fabric of global capitalism. After



SHUTTERSTOCK

it entered the World Trade Organisation in 2001, it offered cheap labour, reliable infrastructure, political stability, export discipline and the promise of easy profits. In return, Beijing extracted technology, factories, jobs and industrial capability from the West, chiefly the US.

The 2008 subprime crisis changed the mood. As the American financial system staggered, China discovered its own weight. By the time BRI was launched in 2013, Beijing was no longer content to remain the workshop of the world. Despite the pandemic and mounting pressures at home, the challenge to Western hegemony has only grown more open.

The forces that built and benefited from the unipolar world are unlikely to yield to an emergent power without resistance. I use the term West India Company (WIC) as a metaphor for the alliances, interests and institutions—states, corporations, finance, security establishments, think tanks, media, donor agencies, sanctions networks and trade regimes—that operate below the surface to withstand the Chinese challenge.

Power matrix

More than four centuries after Queen Elizabeth I granted the East India Company its royal charter on December 31, 1600, another imperial-commercial formation has taken shape. The WIC has no flag, no monarch, no charter, no headquarters and no single board of directors. Yet its reach is unmistakable.

Its roots can be traced at least to the Bretton Woods institutions, but it came into its own with the Washington Consensus, when trade, investment, conditional lending and market access began to replace aid as the preferred instruments of hegemony. After the dismantling of USAID and the resulting shock to the aid industry, the power of less visible instruments—finance, sanctions, ratings, investment rules and strategic philanthropy—has only increased.

At times, this dispersed formation may even help engineer regime change—sometimes through independent contractors for plausible deniability.

ty—to secure higher profits or serve the interests of a powerful patron. Unlike its chartered predecessor, it cannot be summoned before one parliament or disciplined by one electorate. Its power lies precisely in its dispersion. To understand contemporary geopolitics, one must look past the comforting language of cooperation, development and rules-based order, and examine the transactional machinery through which wealth is extracted, dependency is managed and political leverage is produced.

It is not that clandestine funds no longer flow into electoral contests that form parliaments or produce electoral authoritarianism. Rather, local business interests are mobilised to help erect legitimate authority—often a demagogue or a populist, sometimes both—on the Y-axis of power.

Along the X-axis, several political parties are assisted in strengthening their organisations to maintain the façade of competitive politics. This also gives the WIC the ability to replace one formation with another when ambitious politicians become too big for their boots or when scandal hits its favourite vehicle.

More important than the legitimate hierarchy on the vertical axis or the supporting organisations on the horizontal axis, however, is the third dimension: The oligarchic control of media and the intelligentsia. In a two-dimensional framework, the Z-axis is the most powerful precisely because it remains unseen.

Hindutva triad

The Hindutva power matrix is easier to see in India. The century-old Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), unregistered anywhere but headquartered in Nagpur, provides the ideological footing and organisational depth of committed cadres on the X-axis. The Bharatiya Janata Party, claiming to be the world's largest political party, occupies the Y-axis of formal authority under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, though the party machine appears to be disciplined as much by Home Minister Amit Shah as by its former president. The plutarchy—symbolised

When will women lead in academia?

Listing of only four women out of 188 shortlisted for the post of VC at eight universities is a serious issue.

ROSHEE LAMICHHANE



With the shortlist for the post of vice-chancellors (VC) at each of the eight universities released, one statistic is more revealing than anything else: Only four women among 188 shortlists. For someone working in higher education for 14 years, such an outcome didn't come as a surprise.

In my 2021 piece, I discussed the increase in female literacy in Nepal and how that alone does not lead to greater equality for women in higher education. Female enrollment in higher education as consumers had grown, but the lack of representation of females in higher education as producers of knowledge in academic institutions was glaring. Even five years later, the question of why women in academia are underrepresented remains relevant.

One may wonder if it is the recruitment process. It is right for the recruitment process for the position of a VC to be open and competitive, with procedures openly advertised, and qualifications, research outputs, experience, vision papers and interviews assessed. All of this is supposed to happen. But when analysed from the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) perspective, this process is not inclusive at all.

The issue is not the process itself; it runs deeper than that. Where women have historically been excluded from networking, mentoring processes and institutional exposure, a seemingly impartial procedure cannot guarantee proportionate results. The lack of representation on the shortlist reflects years of neglect. What I am not emphasising here is that there should be mandatory appointments or quotas for women in the appointment of the VCs; this is a different discussion altogether. However, I want to point out that four women out of 188 shortlisted at these

eight universities is not a statistical anomaly but a deeper issue that demands serious reckoning.

Barriers and constraints

Asian women are still underrepresented in top leadership roles due to a combination of factors, such as cultural barriers, family duties, organisational practices and lack of mentorship. For instance, India has 11 percent women vice-chancellors. Recent research in South Asian and Southeast Asian countries also reveals the factors that prevent women from rising to VC positions

and committees.

From my observations, I understand that some competent women simply do not see themselves as suitable candidates for those positions, not because they are unqualified but because no one made such suggestions. Politically, the aspect of VC appointment within Nepal, that is, lobbying, visibility and institutional ties, has always been a field in which women have traditionally been sidelined.

Academically, publications and research work, which play an essential role in the process of nomination as a



AI GENERATED IMAGE

tions. Those factors work together on cultural, institutional, systemic and psychological levels.

On the cultural level, Nepali women, as in other South Asian countries, are excessively burdened by domestic duties. Women have to look after both young and elderly family members. As most women lack help from their husbands, they don't have enough time and automatically rule themselves out of any chance of leading in top executive positions. As far as the institutional aspect goes, women in Nepal often face male-dominated environments, where they are neither seen as potential leaders nor invited to join influential insti-

VC candidate, too, have been influenced by such gender discrimination. Women do not publish as much as men do, not necessarily because women do not think much, but because they lack institutional backing and uninterrupted time to conduct research. Then there is also the issue of self-perception. In essence, women lack self-confidence and readiness and avoid competition that would put them in situations of negative visibility, as women in leadership positions receive greater criticism for everything than men do.

What can be done?

The good news is that countries and

by the corporate empires of Adani, Ambani and other powerful oligarchic interests spread across Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Surat—operates on the Z-axis through monetary muscle and media power, producing an unprecedented concentration of influence.

This convergence of capital and ideology has been cemented by the repurposing of state instruments. Critics argue that the Election Commission and the Enforcement Directorate no longer function as autonomous arbiters or investigators, but increasingly as tactical extensions of the ruling regime—used to induce compliance, harass opponents or manufacture scandals that push the opposition toward irrelevance. The atmosphere of pre-poll malpractice, including controversy over the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, has added another layer to the construction of Modi's aura of invincibility.

With firm control over the vertical axis and the full support of the oligarchs, Modi has implemented much of the ideological agenda of the base while politely refusing to be answerable to Nagpur. Perhaps the Modi magic over the electorate has begun to fade. The ideologues and moneybags constituting the Indian subsidiary of the WIC may now want to ease him towards the Margdarshak Mandal. The celebration over a technical record—4,399 *uninterrupted* days in office as an *elected* prime minister—may be preparing the ground for his farewell rather than merely honouring his endurance.

The performative reception accorded to RSP chair Lamichhane, including high-level meetings with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Prime Minister Modi himself, was largely optics. Sewa Teerth is fully cognisant that it is not merely the government, but the regime itself, that has changed at Singha Durbar. Both sides are weighing each other: Shah indulges in aura farming, while the WIC increases pressure to bring him to the negotiating table.

Indian mangoes, Nepali tea leaves and chemical fertilisers are administrative matters. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly told Khanal that distant relatives were not as good as close neighbours. It is not known whether he also reminded him of what every Chinese strongman since Chairman Mao has impressed upon Nepali interlocutors in one form or another: Relatives are important, neighbours are more important, but maintaining cordial relations with the closest neighbour, who also happens to be a relative, is most important for the sovereignty, integrity and prosperity of a country such as Nepal. That, however, is a call premier Shah will have to take himself—once he finds time for the urgent business of governing between chilling, shitposting and curating his own spectacle.

Lal is a writer and political analyst.

FOREX

US Dollar	151.6
Euro	175.99
Pound Sterling	203.49
Swiss Franc	190.85
Australian Dollar	107.23
Canadian Dollar	108.29
Singapore Dollar	118.3
Japanese Yen (10)	9.45
Chinese Yuan	22.44
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.4
Qatari Riyal	41.6
Thai Bhat	4.66
UAE Dhiram	41.28
Malaysian Ringgit	37.27
Korean Won (100)	10.06

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 298,500
Silver	Rs 4,990

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Deadline looms for UniCredit's hostile bid for Commerzbank

MILAN: Tuesday marks the final day for UniCredit's hostile and highly political takeover offer for Commerzbank, as Italy's second-largest bank has its sights on an ambitious pan-European banking merger. The Milan-based bank launched its bid valued at 35 billion euros (\$40.6 billion) in early May to gain control of its German rival and cement its status as a European heavyweight. UniCredit's offer officially ends Tuesday at 11:59 pm (2159 GMT), unless extended. On Monday, the Italian bank hailed the fact that it had exceeded the 30 percent threshold it had set for this takeover bid. The offer price is widely seen as too low, but it marks the latest move in UniCredit's relentless pursuit of Commerzbank that has sparked fury from the lender and top German politicians. If the offer succeeds and is approved by the European Central Bank, it should mainly allow UniCredit to gradually increase its stake in Commerzbank and merge it with its German subsidiary HypoVereinsbank. (AFP)

Myanmar inflation hits 25 percent on US-Iran fuel shock: World Bank

YANGON: Myanmar's inflation spiked to nearly 25 percent as shocks from the Middle East conflict compounded the effects of the country's civil war, the World Bank said Tuesday. The Bank also slashed its growth forecast for the financial year that started in April, citing "a less favorable external environment". Myanmar has been mired in civil war since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup, plunging it into a half-decade of instability and a backslide into poverty for many of its more than 50 million citizens. The country also imports 90 percent of its fuel oil, according to official figures, leaving it highly exposed to closure of the Strait of Hormuz since the US-Iran war started on February 28. That sent inflation to as high as 24.6 percent on-year in April, according to the Bank's biannual Myanmar Economic Monitor report, which also saw officials cut their 2026-27 economic growth outlook to two percent, from three percent previously estimated. Myanmar's economy is "stabilising at low levels" the World Bank said, but "a renewed fuel shock magnifies longstanding structural weaknesses and leaves the outlook highly vulnerable to further disruption". (AFP)

China retail sales fell in May for first time since 2022

BEIJING: China's retail sales fell last month for the first time in more than three years, data showed on Tuesday, as leaders of the world's second-largest economy struggle to kickstart domestic consumer activity. The 0.6 percent year-on-year drop in May, revealed by the National Bureau of Statistics, was a big miss compared with the 0.2 percent forecast in a Bloomberg survey, which was itself in line with April's lacklustre performance. While the Chinese economy has enjoyed a historic boom in exports, it has been dragged for years by weak household consumption that has so far failed to recover from the Covid pandemic. Beijing is targeting overall growth of 4.5-5.0 percent this year, though soaring energy costs and uncertainty caused by the Middle East crisis have complicated matters. NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui acknowledged in a news conference a "complex and volatile international environment" and domestic "...high temperatures and heavy rainfall... that disrupted market supply and demand". (AFP)

Nepal's economy still lags behind political change, experts say

Business leaders and policymakers call for deeper institutional reforms, policy stability and full implementation of past recommendations to unlock Nepal's economic potential.

○ KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

Despite sweeping political transformations over the past decades, Nepal has failed to achieve a corresponding economic transformation due to weak institutions, policy instability and poor implementation of reforms, experts said on Tuesday.

Speaking at "Bodhi Sambad", a dialogue forum hosted by the Centre for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy in Kathmandu, policymakers and business leaders stressed the need for structural reforms and warned against recurring policy inconsistencies and delays in implementing recommendations.

"Over the past decades, we have witnessed changes in the political system. We have seen changes in governments. We have seen changes in the constitution," Finance Minister Swornim Wagle said while addressing the event. "But one thing that has not changed sufficiently is the institutional structure through which the economy and the state are governed."

"We weakened our institutions. We made policies unstable. We distorted the incentive structure. As a result, access, protection and influence became more valuable than production, innovation and competition," he said. According to Wagle, Nepal's biggest challenge is not financial but institutional and psychological.

"Our greatest failure is not merely economic; it is political-economic," he said.

Wagle argued that expensive elections, opaque political fundraising and cadre-based party structures have gradually transformed politics from public service into an investment.

"As a consequence, policy corruption, state capture and crony capitalism began to become institutionalised," he said.

Instead of rewarding entrepreneurship and innovation, a culture emerged in which opportunities were secured through political access and personal connections, he added.

"When an economy is based on access and protection rather than production and competition, it cannot deliver long-term prosperity. It benefits only a limited group and increases social dissatisfaction, which we are witnessing today."

During a panel discussion titled "Reform 2.0: Is This Nepal's Defining Economic Moment?", former finance secretary and minister Rameshore Khanal said Nepal's debt situation



Panelists at the Bodhi Sambad 2026 dialogue that started in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

remains manageable despite a rapid increase in borrowing over the past decade.

"Every year, the government spends only about 1.3 percent of its revenue on debt repayment," Khanal said.

By comparison, debt servicing accounts for around 14 percent of government revenue in Laos and roughly 8 to 9 percent in Cambodia.

Nepal is nowhere near bankruptcy because it cannot repay its debt, Khanal said. "Our corridor is still relatively comfortable. However, the walls on both sides are somewhat narrow, which means the corridor itself is narrow."

He noted that a large portion of Nepal's external debt consists of highly concessional loans from multilateral lenders such as the World Bank, while comparatively costlier loans from countries including China and India make up a smaller share.

"The current situation is not alarming," he said.

"However, if one examines the time-series data, debt stock has nearly doubled since 2017 within a relatively short period."

Govinda Pokhrel, former vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission, urged policymakers to adopt a realistic approach to economic self-reliance and international trade.

"No matter how much we talk about

self-reliance, except perhaps in agriculture, we should not claim complete self-sufficiency in every area," Pokhrel said. "In reality, we are inter-dependent."

He stressed the need to identify strategic sectors carefully and negotiate trade agreements more deeply and effectively.

Former finance minister Surendra Pandey highlighted the poor performance of state-owned enterprises, saying many continue to drain public resources.

"Among the 45 state-owned enterprises, 16 are heavily loss-making," Pandey said. "The rest are partly profitable and partly loss-making. If we look at the accumulated figures, most of them remain in deficit, even though some report annual profits in terms of cash flow."

He said Nepal must decide whether commercial enterprises should be left to the private sector and competitive markets or managed through privatisation, divestment or strategic partnerships.

"Different modalities have been tried over the years, but most have failed," he said.

Pandey noted that proposals to revive some state-owned enterprises had resurfaced and were even included in an earlier reform agenda. However, after discussions before the

budget, the government chose not to pursue that path.

"The finance minister clarified that reviving loss-making enterprises was not the intention, and the current budget contains no such provision," he said.

Anjan Raj Shrestha, president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said Nepal has undergone major political and social changes, but economic transformation has remained elusive because it has rarely been treated as a national priority.

"One thing that has remained unchanged is the economy," Shrestha said. "Economic transformation was never made the central agenda of successive governments."

He recalled that the private sector had proposed the establishment of an Economic Reform Commission, which later submitted a series of recommendations to the government.

"Our expectation was that after forming such a large commission, if the intention was truly to bring change, then the recommendations would be implemented in their entirety," Shrestha said.

"Instead, we were told that they would be implemented gradually and systematically. That is where doubts arise. It seems to me that the same old mindset has resurfaced."

Bank of Japan hikes rate to 31-year high

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO, JUNE 16

The Bank of Japan hiked interest rates to a 31-year high on Tuesday as it battles inflation caused by the Middle East war—even after Washington and Tehran agreed a peace deal.

The central bank for the world's fourth-largest economy raised its benchmark rate 25 basis points to 1.0 percent, the highest since 1995 and marking the first increase since December.

The widely expected decision followed rate rises by the European Central Bank and in Indonesia last week after the conflict caused economic havoc and rising prices worldwide.

With US inflation at a three-year high, expectations are growing that the Federal Reserve will follow suit, albeit not at new boss Kevin Warsh's first gathering this week.

"While higher crude oil prices have been exerting downward pressure on economic activity, the economy has generally been supported by factors such as high levels of corporate profits and an improvement in the employment and income situation," the BoJ said. The consumer price index (CPI) has been below two percent thanks in part to government energy subsidies.

"However, the price pass-through stemming from the rise in crude oil prices has been progressing at a relatively fast pace in business-to-business transactions, which could spread to an increase in consumer prices across a wide range of items," the central bank added.

"Against this backdrop, taking into account that medium- to long-term inflation expectations have also continued to rise, there is a risk of underlying CPI inflation deviating upward to a level above the price stability target of two percent."

Looking ahead, the BoJ said that it will "continue to raise the policy interest rate and adjust the degree of monetary accommodation."

"In this regard, it will consider the timing and pace of adjustment, while closely monitoring the impact of the future course of the situation in the

Middle East on Japan's economic activity and prices," it said.

It also indicated that it would pause the tapering of its colossal programme of bond purchases after next April.

The United States and Iran agreed to end their three-month war on all fronts and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, through which pre-conflict about a fifth of world oil and gas passed.

The accord was set to be physically signed in Switzerland on Friday, but hundreds of ships remain stuck, and it will likely take considerable time for trade flows to normalise.

Japan relied on the Middle East for around 90 percent of its crude supplies before the war began on February 28. Its problems have been exacerbated by a falling yen, caused by the rise in oil prices and the gap between US and Japanese interest rates, which are among the lowest in the developed world.

The government spent around 11.7 trillion yen (\$72 billion) last month propping up the currency, which has been languishing at around 160 yen against the dollar.

The yen briefly jumped against the dollar after the announcement on Tuesday, while the Nikkei 225 stock index rose above 70,000 points for the first time.

BoJ deputy governor Shinichi Uchida was slated to address the media on Tuesday afternoon after the rate decision, filling in for governor Kazuo Ueda, who is in hospital.

The central bank is under pressure from markets to keep tightening interest rates, and also from Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's government not to snuff out growth with high borrowing costs. The BoJ began hiking rates from below zero in 2024 after nearly two decades of ultra-loose monetary policies.

Akino Fukuda at Moody's Analytics said Tuesday's move was "another step toward policy normalisation."

"Real rates remain negative, financial conditions are still relatively loose, and inflation pressures are turning higher, so more hikes are necessary," Fukuda said.

"The question now is the pace."

India eyes biofertilisers after Mideast war stoked supply fears

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TAPPAL (INDIA), JUNE 16

Under a shed in north India, women scoop cow dung, lumps of unrefined sugar and flour to produce biofertiliser—part of a growing effort to tackle anxieties over the supply of chemical fertilisers.

Demand for the organic blend has risen in the country in recent weeks as farmers prepare for the monsoon planting season, with concerns mounting over the availability of diammonium phosphate, a key ingredient in chemical fertiliser.

India is among the world's largest consumers of chemical fertilisers, using roughly 63 million tonnes annually. But the Middle East conflict has strained shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for supplies, heightening unease among farmers ahead of the July-October sowing period.

While biofertilisers remain a niche input, interest is being driven by supply uncertainty, government promotion of sustainable farming and growing awareness of soil degradation.

The domestic biofertiliser market is still modest—valued at roughly \$150 million but expanding at the rate of about 10 percent as more farmers experiment with alternatives.

"We started thinking about what would benefit small farmers and improve soil health," said Kamlesh Devi, 57, a managing director of Tappal Samridhhi Mahila Kisan Limited, which runs the biofertiliser unit in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Formed under the government's Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) programme, the company has 1,050 women members across 92 villages in the state and has been designated a "Lighthouse FPO"—intended as a model for replication.

"Small land-holding farmers struggle to get enough fertiliser, so we thought our FPO could help them," she told AFP.

Drawing on traditional knowledge and support from leading experts, the women prepare the biofertiliser using locally available raw materials.

Unlike their chemical counterparts, biofertilisers contain live microorganisms that help plants access nutrients

already present in the soil.

For many in Tappal village, the enterprise has helped empower women, traditionally expected to perform household duties.

"We used to remain inside the house," said Joginder, a member who goes by one name. "Earlier my husband handled all farming decisions. Now I can advise him on what to use in the fields and when."

The unit has supplied some 200 farmers this season, mostly in nearby villages, though similar initiatives are being promoted across other states as part of a national push toward sustainable agriculture.

The unit was set up last year, before the latest geopolitical tensions, but demand has picked up as farmers brace for possible shortages despite government assurances of adequate stock.

"There is concern among farmers, especially about urea availability," said Amit Chauhan, the head of Bharatpur village, adding that some growers had begun stockpiling.

Kishan Prasad, a farmer in a nearby village, said he had already stored 40 sacks of urea, which is used in rice growing.

"There are rumours we may not get DAP and urea," he said. "We need it for

EU nears finish line on US tariff deal

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
STRASBOURG (FRANCE), JUNE 16

The European Parliament is set on Tuesday to give a final sign-off to implement a tariff deal with the United States as it seeks to close a volatile chapter of transatlantic trade relations.

It has been a long time coming.

The EU and the United States clinched the agreement in July last year, setting levies on most of the bloc's goods at 15 percent, while Brussels agreed on zero tariffs for US products. But to President Donald Trump's chagrin, the EU had yet to fulfil its side of the bargain, after Trump's threats to Greenland and a US Supreme Court decision striking down many of his tariffs fuelled months of delay.

EU capitals have already endorsed the deal, meaning the approval by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) would be the final political step before its implementation—putting the bloc well on track to meet Trump's July 4 deadline and defuse his threat of new tariffs on European vehicles.

The biggest political forces in the parliament including the largest, the conservative European People's Party (EPP) to which EU chief Ursula von der Leyen belongs, have all made it clear they will endorse the agreement.

That would leave only a few formal steps—a final rubber stamp by member states expected in coming days or weeks, and publication in the EU's official journal—for it to take effect.

Parliament has introduced a series of safeguards into the text including an expiration date of the end of 2029 for the agreement unless it is renewed.

Another "safety net" measure gives the European Commission, in charge of EU trade policy, the power to suspend the pact if the United States fails to meet its commitments or disrupts trade and investment.

"The European Parliament made it quite clear that we are not really accepting any deal coming from the United States without defending our European interests," trade committee head Bernd Lange said on Thursday.

Socialist democrat EU lawmaker Brando Benifei said Brussels needed to "stop being weak" and "be firm" in its relations with Washington, after parliament strengthened the trade pact to empower the bloc's executive.

After Trump returned to the White House last year, he unleashed a tariff blitz, with duties and levies targeting the steel, aluminium and auto sectors. Seeking lower levies, von der Leyen scrambled to get a deal with Trump in the hope of reducing trade tensions with the EU's largest trade partner—a relationship worth \$2 trillion.



This photograph taken on June 9 shows Tappal Samridhhi Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited's managing director Kamlesh Devi adding fly ash to dried cow dung at a biofertiliser plant in Bharatpur village near Uttar Pradesh's Tappal town.

WORLD

Trump signals swift return of sanctions on Russian oil as G7 refocuses on Ukraine

○ ASSOCIATED PRESS
EVIAN-LES-BAINS, FRANCE, JUNE 16

The United States could soon reimpose sanctions on Russian oil shipments after President Donald Trump and fellow leaders at the Group of Seven summit of major industrialised democracies moved on Tuesday to put the war in Ukraine back on top of their agenda, more than four years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion.

The Iran conflict has in recent weeks overshadowed Ukraine, but following his announcement of an agreement to end the 3 1/2-month-old conflict in the Gulf, Trump said he now wants to focus on Ukraine.

Trump said Iran will soon be “back in the rearview mirror.”

Asked if he would reinstate sanctions on Russia that were eased to help lower oil prices, Trump said the restrictions can go back in place as more oil moves through the Strait of Hormuz.

“Soon we’ll be able to do that because the oil is now flowing,” Trump told reporters. “We’re in a position to do that soon.”

The US in March temporarily eased some sanctions on some Russian oil shipments as crude prices sharply increased. The waiver has been extended as the war in the Gulf stretched on.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy joined the G7 leaders for talks on the war in his country that wrapped quickly, as leaders gathered for just 75 minutes.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine is serious about peace while Russia toys with world leaders. “The entire ‘Seven’ supports Ukraine unanimously today,” Zelenskyy said.

The Russian side, meanwhile, is failing to show any serious activity toward peace, Zelenskyy said, calling Russia’s actions “a game.”

Zelenskyy added that G7 leaders supported Ukraine’s need for more Patriot missiles and discussed how to increase production by licensing production. Patriot missiles are able to counter Russian ballistic missile attacks on Ukraine’s power grid and cities.

As the US under Trump has cut back aid to Ukraine, France and its European allies are now the biggest providers of military and financial support to Kyiv.

In Evian, the French spa town close to the Swiss border that is hosting the summit, Trump downplayed the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the US but lamented the death toll.

“The whole thing is ridiculous,” Trump said. “So, yeah, I’m going to do whatever I can.”

Meanwhile, the UK announced a new set of sanctions targeting the “

shadow fleet” Russia uses to ship oil and gas, and the finance networks used by Moscow to evade Western sanctions. The ships targeted include several vessels recently purchased by Russia to transport liquefied natural gas from its sanctioned Arctic LNG 2 project.

Trump has been frustrated by a lack of movement toward Ukraine-Russia resolution.

Hours before the summit began, Russia fired hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles at Ukraine’s biggest cities in a barrage that killed 11 people and set fire to a religious landmark.

The attacks on Ukraine’s biggest cities came after Zelenskyy and Putin spoke separately by phone with Trump on Sunday, the US leader’s 80th birthday.

While campaigning in 2024 for a return to the White House, Trump claimed he could end the Russia-Ukraine war within 24 hours of taking office. However, negotiations have stuttered and Trump has since acknowledged it has proved much harder than he initially thought.

Ukraine on Monday officially started European Union membership negotiations, launching a process that will require its government to commit to years of political reforms even as it fights the Russian invasion.

Ukraine sees EU membership as a security guarantee for a stable future once the war ends. Its best guarantee would be membership in the NATO military alliance, but the Trump administration insists that cannot happen, and others are wary of Ukraine joining while the war continues.

Iran war has been a flashpoint between Trump and European leaders. The US-Iran ceasefire deal also got plenty of attention at Tuesday’s sessions, with Trump voicing his openness to sending the deal to Congress for review.

The president made the move at the start of a meeting with United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on the sidelines of the summit.

“I like the idea, send it to Congress please,” Trump said. He added, “I mean who wouldn’t approve it?”

Republicans on Capitol Hill say they want Trump to provide more information about the agreement between the United States and Iran, with some expressing skepticism that the deal can deter Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapon.

Trump also held one-on-one talks with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. The Gulf nations are not part of the G7, but French President Emmanuel Macron extended invitations to their leaders to take part in the summit at a fraught moment for the region.

Signing ceremony for US-Iran deal to take place Friday at Swiss resort



People walk along Tajrish square in northern Tehran, on Monday.

○ ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, UAE, JUNE 16

Switzerland’s foreign ministry has said a signing ceremony for a deal between the United States and Iran will take place on Friday at the Bürgenstock resort near the city of Luzern.

Ministry officials said on Tuesday that the location was proposed by Pakistani and Qatari mediators, along with the US and Iran.

The ministry said it has been in close contact with the four countries about the possible signing of the memorandum of understanding that US and Iranian officials announced over the weekend. Iran’s top diplomat said on Tuesday that the tentative deal to end the war with the United States would require Israel to withdraw from Lebanon—a condition Israel has already rejected and that could sink the agreement, leading to the resumption of all-out war.

The deal has not been made public,

and officials have sometimes offered contradictory interpretations of what is in it. While Israel is not party to the agreement, it is part of the war: It joined the US in launching strikes on Iran on February 28, and has since fought the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon and seized large swaths of that country.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Israel’s continued occupation of southern Lebanon would violate the deal.

“Without the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories they occupied during this war, the war has not fully come to an end,” Araghchi said.

A US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss outlines of the agreement, has said the deal did not call for an Israeli withdrawal. And Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that Israel would remain in Lebanon “as long as necessary.”

The negotiations to end the war have been plagued by such disagree-

ments before—leading to a prolonged but uneasy ceasefire that has failed to develop into a permanent end to hostilities and that has left the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for the world’s energy supplies, effectively shut.

Lebanon tests the durability of the deal

Pakistan, a key mediator, has said the deal called for an end to military operations, including in Lebanon, as Iran long insisted. But Araghchi’s call for an Israeli withdrawal adds a new wrinkle. It puts Israel into a dilemma as it juggles trying to degrade Hezbollah’s military capabilities and restore deterrence without undermining an agreement championed by its most important ally, the United States. Israel invaded southern Lebanon after Hezbollah fired missiles across the border during the first week of the war. Since then, it has expanded its military footprint to levels unseen in decades and struck targets deep inside Beirut.

India blocks Telegram before retest exam to curb cheating

○ BHUVAN BAGGA/AFP
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

India blocked access to Telegram messenger on Tuesday ahead of a retest of a nationwide medical college entrance examination, after a scandal last month over a question paper leak.

The failure of the hugely competitive exam, along with a separate marking fiasco in high school tests, sparked outrage and fuelled youth protests demanding the education minister’s resignation.

The Ministry of Electronics issued the order restricting access to Telegram until June 22, the day of the retest. Message-editing features, which allow users to alter existing posts, will remain restricted until June 30.

“Both measures have been taken in the interest of public order, in response to the organised use of the platform by cheating rackets to defraud candidates,” India’s National Testing Agency (NTA) said in a state-

ment. The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) is one of the country’s most competitive exams, attracting more than two million aspiring doctors.

The NEET exam was scrapped in May following allegations that the question paper was leaked in advance, including reports that it had been circulated through Telegram channels.

The intense pressure to succeed in these exams has fuelled a lucrative industry, with tens of thousands of coaching centres across the country.

Fierce competition means that success often comes at a significant personal and financial cost—creating opportunities for criminal networks seeking to sell leaked examination papers to the highest bidder.

India’s Central Bureau of Investigation has arrested the “kingpin” alleged to be behind the leak, naming him as a chemistry lecturer involved in the examination process for the NTA.

The education ministry launched

on Monday a website where the public can report “suspicious claims, unauthorised content, or fraudulent activities” related to the NEET exam.

Indian air force helicopters on Tuesday were seen readying for the delivery of the test papers, to “prevent any possibility of leak”, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, broadcasting images of preparations in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Despite rapid economic growth, millions of people in the world’s most populous nation still struggle to find stable and well-paying jobs, fuelling discontent. Students spend years preparing for exams in the hope of securing a professional career, with the pressure intensified by limited opportunities and intense competition.

Indian media reported suicides of teenagers following the fiasco over the NEET exam. The NEET scandal came on top of another controversy, related to the online marking system used for tests taken by nearly two million high school students.

Rights group: China detains two leaders of underground church

○ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING, JUNE 16

Chinese authorities are holding two leaders of a prominent Protestant church in detention after police raided a service over the weekend, a rights group told AFP on Tuesday, the latest incident in a crackdown on unofficial Christian organisations.

Early Rain Covenant Church, based in southwestern Sichuan province, is one of China’s unregistered “house” or “underground” churches that some Christians choose to worship at instead of state-sanctioned ones regulated by the government.

On Sunday, dozens of police and government officials raided a gathering in the city of Jiangyou, according to a church statement shared Monday to its Telegram channel.

More than 30 members were taken to a local detention centre for questioning before most were released Sunday night, the church said.

However, two church elders, Wu Wuqing and Yan Hong, were given 15 and 14 days respectively of “administrative detention”, rights group ChinaAid told AFP on Tuesday, citing family members.

Relatives have not received any “formal notice on charges”, added Bob Fu, the founder of the US-based group. China’s ruling Communist Party has historically regarded organised religion with suspicion, and under President Xi Jinping, has tightened scrutiny of unofficial groups.

Early Rain has drawn the ire of authorities previously. In 2019, its leader Wang Yi was sentenced to nine years in jail for “incitement to subvert state power”, drawing condemnation from the United States. This year, Chinese authorities have interrupted gatherings or detained the leaders of multiple unregistered churches across the country, rights groups say.

Asked about this on Monday, China’s foreign ministry defended the country’s laws on religion.

“The Chinese government lawfully handles religious affairs and protects citizens’ freedom of religious belief and normal religious activities,” spokesman Lin Jian told a news briefing. “We resolutely oppose using so-called religious issues to interfere in China’s internal affairs,” he said.

At Early Rain’s service on Sunday, police wearing SWAT uniforms surrounded dozens of congregants, including children, footage shared by the church showed.



France’s President Emmanuel Macron (right) welcomes India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France, on Tuesday.

Huang pledges AI will boost manufacturing jobs. A test will come in Texas

○ JOSH BOAK/AP
SHERMAN, TEXAS, JUNE 16

Jensen Huang’s company Nvidia makes the computer chips that unleashed a revolution in artificial intelligence. Now he’s wagering that an AI buildout can revive US manufacturing, pushing past limits facing science and society.

That vision might hinge on a factory groundbreaking an hour north of Dallas.

Nvidia is formally unveiling on Tuesday plans for a major upgrade to its AI infrastructure as part of its \$2 billion partnership with the factory’s owner, Coherent. The factory will produce the material for a laser to transmit data among computer chips, allowing those chips to work as a single system with more power, speed and efficiency, according to executives who discussed the technology before the public announcement.

“AI factories are the infrastructure of the new industrial revolution,” Huang said in a statement.

The factory represents a fundamental test of whether, as Huang believes, AI will be a source of job creation instead of a technology that supplants workers as it becomes possible to write software, analyze a spreadsheet, run an assembly line or even drive an automobile without much human effort.

Huang has led Nvidia as it became the world’s most valuable company, worth roughly \$5 trillion, to a point where it’s looking beyond chips to developing entire AI systems. The companies expected to rely on those systems to further develop AI models could soon join the elite circle of those with a valuation of more than \$1 trillion. Just how that wealth spreads and the consequences of the technology have rapidly evolved into fundamental debates about how America itself is structured.

AI is powering academic breakthroughs and it creates the promise of rapid economic growth. But even if stocks are buoyed by those possibilities, there are voters who see reasons for concern over its use of electricity, the potential for job losses and the newfound national security risks.

A shifting approach on AI
President Donald Trump’s administration, which once saw a light regulatory touch as essential for fostering AI’s development, has recently begun to reverse course. It placed export controls on the AI company Anthropic’s latest models, leading the company on Friday to shutter all public access to those models over security concerns.

Trump, a Republican, signed an order to have new AI models voluntarily vetted by the government. He has

also mused about the government owning a stake in the companies that develop AI, so that the public could benefit from the expected windfall even if that would blur the lines between the public and private sectors.

Still, Trump depends on the AI boom to fuel economic growth, drive future gains in manufacturing and construction, and push the stock market to new heights. He has insisted on Huang accompanying him on foreign trips, most recently having Air Force

One pick up the leather-jacketed CEO in Alaska while en route for the state visit to China.

Trump has called Huang “smart,” a “friend” and “amazing”—and he’s publicly recounted that he once mused about breaking up Nvidia because of its dominance, only to admit that Huang was someone that he needed as an ally.

“We are proud to have you in our country,” Trump told the Taiwanese immigrant last year.



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang waves at the Gimpo Airport in Seoul, South Korea, on June 5.

Shock World Cup call for Renard to coach Tunisia in turmoil

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, JUNE 16

It seems no World Cup is complete without Hervé Renard, and suddenly, somehow, surprisingly, he will also be at this one.

The sunnied Frenchman in the trademark open-necked white shirt was hired to coach Tunisia on Tuesday for their final two group games following turmoil.

Tunisia fired coach Sabri Lamouchi early Tuesday after the team was routed 5-1 by Sweden in its opening game on Sunday.

So here comes Hervé for his third straight men's World Cup with a third different team. In between times, he also took France to the 2023 Women's World Cup.

Renard's latest reprieve comes just two months after he was fired by Saudi Arabia despite leading the kingdom through a shaky qualifying programme, where it was given home advantage through the final rounds.

His finest World Cup hour was guiding the Saudis to a shocking 2-1 win over eventual champion Argentina and Lionel Messi in their 2022 opener in Qatar.

Between men's World Cups, Renard left Saudi Arabia to coach the French women at their World Cup three years



FILE PHOTO: AP/RSS
Saudi Arabia's head coach Herve Renard reacts during the World Cup's Group C match against Argentina in Lusail, Qatar, on November 22, 2022.

ago and then as the home team at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Both ended in quarterfinal exits.

His first World Cup was in 2018 with Morocco, which impressed in Russia with the core of a team that would reach the semifinals in Qatar. However, Morocco under Renard did not advance to the knockout stage from a

tough group with Spain, Portugal and Iran.

Renard has yet to lead a team out of the World Cup group stage, which is now his short-term mission that could be all over within 10 days.

His appeal in an emergency to an African football federation like Tunisia—now the sixth to hire him—is that he made history winning the Africa Cup of Nations titles with two different teams: Zambia in 2012 and the Ivory Coast in 2015.

Renard has just four days to get his ideas across before Tunisia face Japan on Saturday in Monterrey, Mexico. Tunisia then play the group favourite Netherlands in Kansas City on June 25.

It could be another compelling chapter in the colourful career of a coach who first made headlines in the wider football world at English lower-tier club Cambridge in 2004.

Back then, Renard was an assistant to another well-travelled French coach. Claude de Roy coached Cameroon at the 1998 World Cup six years before arriving at a football backwater in the city more famous for its university.

Still dashing striking at 57, Renard should carry his usual style and glamour at yet another World Cup stage.

This Swedish defender isn't your typical football player: He's a baron!

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MONTERREY, JUNE 16

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are among the football royalty gracing the World Cup in North America.

If you want real-life aristocracy, head to Sweden's squad.

Gustaf Lagerbälieke, a 26-year-old defender who played the entire match in Sweden's 5-1 defeat of Tunisia on Sunday, is a baron from a noble family in Sweden. His father and grandfather are counts.

Footballers typically come from modest backgrounds—take Messi and Ronaldo, for example.

Not Lagerbälieke. "I mean, it's rare," he said in an interview ahead of the World Cup.

Lagerbälieke grew up in Djursholm, a wealthy suburb in the Swedish capital, Stockholm. When he played football as a kid, he says he had the family's coat of arms on his shin pads.

"When I was a kid, I wanted to become a professional footballer," Lagerbälieke said after Sunday's match



in Monterrey. "They have taught me goals. They are very happy for me and very proud."

Lagerbälieke's heritage has been a talking point throughout a career that has taken him from Sweden (AIK, Sollentuna, Västerås, Elfsborg and Degerfors) to Scotland (Celtic) and now Portugal.

Sections of the British media reported he was 254th in line to the Swedish throne, though Lagerbälieke said, "I don't know if it's true."

"But I think for it to happen," he added, "a lot of people need to go away. And I don't want that to happen."

For now, Lagerbälieke just wants to help Sweden become the king of football at the World Cup.

"To have one of the biggest wins in Swedish history at the World Cup, it's amazing," he said.

AP/RSS
Sweden's Gustaf Lagerbälieke during the World Cup Group F match against Tunisia in Guadalupe, near Monterrey, Mexico, on Sunday.

Swimmers question Asian Games selection process

Athletes say the Nepal Swimming Association altered the qualification process midway through the selection event, while officials insist the process was fair and transparent.

NAYAK PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, JUNE 16

Nepal's top swimmers Ervin Shrestha, Medhavi KC and Nirnay Thapa have accused the Nepal Swimming Association of bias in the selection of athletes for the 2026 Asian Games in Japan.

The swimmers organised a press conference in Kathmandu on Tuesday and blamed the association for changing a pre-qualification event into the main qualifier.

The controversy dates back to May 21, when the Nepal Swimming Association issued a notice stating that the third Nepal Aquatics Championship will work as a pre-qualification event for the Asian Games.

"The championship [taking place on June 6 and 7] is mandatory for athletes in order to advance to the Final Selection Round," the notice read.

The final selection was slated for the end of June, where eight male and eight female swimmers from each stroke in the tournament will compete for four places—two male and two female—in the Asian main event.

However, after more than half of the swimmers had performed, the pre-qualification event was, without any prior notice, turned into the main qualification. "Furthermore, the qualification did not see the use of available technology," Ervin said in the press conference. "Electronic touchpads were not used in the heats on the opening day, and officials relied on handheld stopwatches to record times."

The NSA, on June 7, issued a notice and informed that the qualification event had to be changed after the National Sports Council (NSC), on June 5, had ordered to provide the final list of swimmers representing Nepal in the Asian Games within five days.

The swimmers claimed that the notice announcing the change was issued on the morning of June 7 without an official signature or stamp and was circulated through social media while the championship was still underway.

Ervin argued that the association was making illogical arguments, as there was still ample time to submit the final list of athletes to the organisers of the Asian Games.

"The rules were clear from the beginning," Ervin said. "We prepared for the competition based on those criteria. In the end, our hard work went in vain."

Ervin added, "The association violated the very criteria it had set itself. Athletes are expected to follow every



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE POST
Nepal's swimmer Ervin Shrestha (third from left) speaks during a press conference in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

rule and regulation, but the governing body has ignored its own selection process."

The swimmers have demanded an independent investigation into the matter and have taken the dispute to the Supreme Court. According to them, the court has summoned the Nepal Swimming Association, the National Sports Council and the Nepal Olympic Committee to provide written responses and has scheduled a hearing for Wednesday.

National swimmer Medhavi KC, who was also present at the press conference, said the athletes were not protesting against those who had been selected but against what they described as an unfair process.

"Whoever gets selected is our teammate," KC said. "Our only demand is that the selection be conducted according to the pre-announced criteria and in a transparent manner."

Swimming coach Megh Lama echoed the concerns, saying frequent changes in schedules and delayed notices affected athletes' preparation and performance.

Meanwhile, the NSA has refuted the accusations, calling them baseless.

"Ervin is one of our best swimmers. We even helped him to get the Olympic Scholarship of USD1,125 monthly," Jagat Man Shrestha, president of NSA, told the Post. "But the current accusations are baseless. He came second after being bested by Avin Pradhan and was not selected. I know he feels frustrated, but we are firm on the players selected for the Asian Games."

Jagat Man informed that Pradhan and Jaden Shrestha have been selected for the Asian Games in the male category. "Duana Lama and Aarya Maharjan are the female swimmers who will represent Nepal in the Asian Games," he added. Jagat Man said the association would defend its decision before the court.

"We have all the documents and evidence to show that the qualification process was transparent and fair," he said. "We are not worried."

The dispute is now set to move from the pool to the courtroom, with the Supreme Court scheduled to hear the case on Wednesday.



HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Be mindful of how you sort through an influx of emotions, taking care to process them with grace. Connect with people you can be your most authentic self around.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Don't underestimate the influence you have, and be mindful to act with poise. Appreciate skills and experience you've cultivated over the years, noting what separates you from others. People will respond to the image you project.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Turn to peer support if you can no longer keep up with certain tasks or obligations. If you're willing to part with work or invite collaboration, someone will likely step up to help you and themselves.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Fated connections will come out stronger. If you can't resolve problems that arise, consider making a clean break. Recognise the importance of working on yourself in order to play well with others.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Keep an eye on your internal dialogue, steering clear of negative thoughts before they have a chance to snowball. Be on the lookout for blessings and signs that you're on the right path.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Focus on personal goals that haven't been getting enough attention, but stay up to date with peers as well. You can forge valuable alliances if you immerse yourself in influential circles and put yourself out there.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

At times, manifesting visions could feel like a curse, and it might benefit you to share opportunities and bring in extra hands. If equal partnerships are on the table, ask detailed questions before committing.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Be mindful of how your upbringing shapes expectations you put on yourself and others. Celebrate loved ones as you embrace a softer, more evolved approach to developing relationships.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

As your audience grows, be mindful of what you want to say and be known for. Use your charisma and wit to capture the attention of peers you admire.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Avoid pandering to negative emotions, using creative outlets, meditation, and positive reinforcement to pick yourself back up. Spend the afternoon brainstorming big moves with anyone you're hoping to build success with.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Restrain
- 5 Mild oath
- 9 Like dishwater
- 14 Chocolate cookie
- 15 Girlfriend in Cannes
- 16 Peace goddess
- 17 Snow boots
- 18 Meter maid of song
- 19 Once more
- 20 Jubilantly
- 22 Processes ore
- 23 Flashy
- 24 Pool hall item
- 25 Hunter's org.
- 26 Bugs
- 31 Ms. Merkel
- 34 Scrape aftermaths
- 37 Uncanny
- 38 Corn holders
- 40 Hang of it
- 42 Seaweed
- 43 Grease jobs
- 45 Liverpool lockups
- 47 Not dry
- 48 Whenever
- 50 Above, in verse
- 52 Flair for music
- 53 Escargots
- 56 Fossil resins
- 60 Disparage

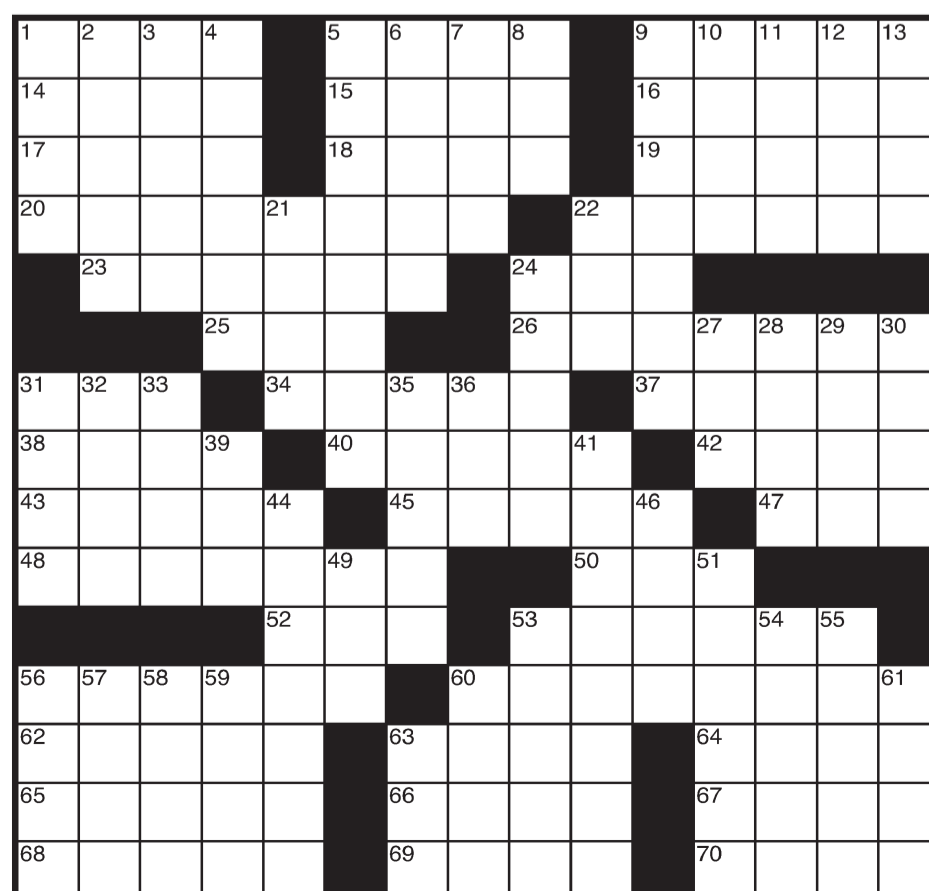
DOWN

- 1 Handle problems
- 2 Eurasian range
- 3 Brief summary
- 4 New England port
- 5 Ship biscuit
- 6 One of the Bronte sisters
- 7 — slicker
- 8 Type of parrot
- 9 Popular cat
- 10 Coax
- 11 Pass the cards out
- 12 Nasty mood
- 13 Itches
- 21 Does the wrong thing
- 22 Daystar
- 24 Networking giant
- 27 Mouse alert

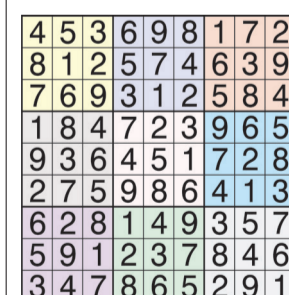
PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



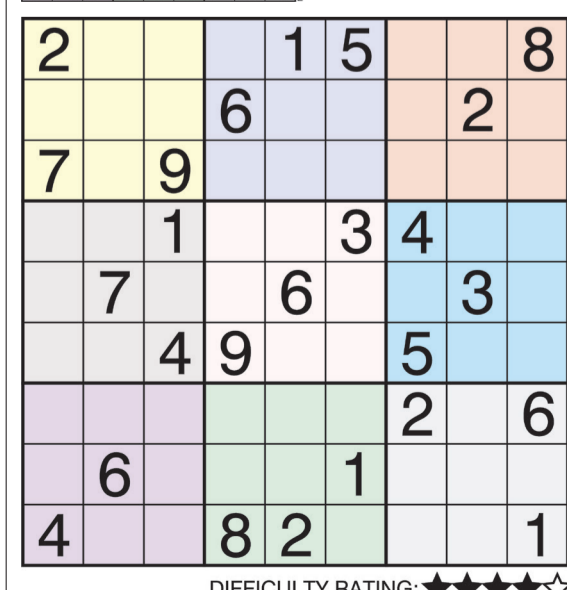
- 28 Sport of rowing
- 29 Domino
- 30 Equinox mo.
- 31 Home of the Bruins
- 32 Person, place or thing
- 33 Advice columnist
- 35 Tick off
- 36 Pasture sound
- 39 Ready
- 41 Gold rush site
- 44 Mountain chains
- 46 Vein of ore
- 49 Graduate degs.
- 51 Rampaging one
- 53 Yeggs' targets
- 54 "Hasta —!"
- 55 Famed violin
- 56 Blvds.
- 57 Like half of us
- 58 Cordon —
- 59 Geologic time divisions
- 60 Knot on a tree
- 61 Pelt
- 63 Fem. saint



SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Finding love after trauma in 'The World of Love'

Yoon Ga-eun avoids easy answers, examining how young people carry pain while still searching for connection and joy.

○ JONY NEPAL
KATHMANDU

Characterisation by Yoon Ga-eun is something to be admired. Examining love, trauma, childhood and youth, Yoon visualises her characters employing contemporary narratives with scrutinised observations and authenticity. And what she does best in this process is avoid clichés.

Moving from 'The World of Us' (2016) to 'The House of Us' (2019) and to her third feature 'The World of Love' (2025), her meditation on what it means to be a child or a youth in intricate surroundings grappling with identity, trauma, belonging and family defines her as a vibrant and celebrated filmmaker. What exceptionally stands out in all these movies is the masterful presence of debut actors.

'The World of Love' centres Lee Ju-in (played by Seo Su-bin), a 17-year-old, jolly, compassionate, and seemingly outspoken student. Love intrigues her. She wants to experience it fully, without fear or consequences. The audience's journey of understanding her character is notable. Initially introduced as a cheerful teenager, we are gradually exposed to the tangled undercurrents of her traumatic experiences of sexual assault. And again, we are brought right back to where it was.

"I'm okay. I'm really okay," she says often.

We are made to question how survivors of sexual assault navigate their lives. In what forms do grief and trauma surround them? And do people truly understand the burden of it?

When her school friend asks her to sign



SCREENGRAB/VANTAGE

a petition to prevent a sexual offender's reintegration into their neighbourhood, she disagrees to do so, expressing her resentment in one particular sentence.

Her emotional outburst while declining to sign ultimately compels her to confess her own trauma. This grabs the attention of her friends and teachers. Some empathise, becoming protective of her; others question her honesty. What follows is a series of mysterious letters on her desk now and then, judging her actions and asking for credibility.

She tries to learn about herself, her life, her circumstances, anger and trauma. Perhaps, she already has. What becomes more difficult is making others understand.

A visual metaphor of an apple persistently recurs in the film. Despised greatly by Ju-in, these apples, however, are not far away from her. Why would anyone hate something as ordinary as an apple, right? Perhaps it symbolises love. Something Juon-in believes others can easily achieve but not her.



One of the film's most memorable sequences takes place inside a car as it enters a tunnel.

Another intriguing character is Ju-in's mother, Kang Tae-sun (played by Jang Hye-jin). Tae-sun runs a day-care for nursery students. As a compassionate and empathetic woman with responsibilities at work and home, she lives a life without a dependable husband, becoming the only guardian for her children.

The mother-daughter relationship is compelling. Both characters carry guilt and frustration. Yet, beneath it lies a deli-

cate affection that neither of them knows how to fully express.

Jang Hye-jin, who also appeared in 'Parasite', an Oscar-winning South Korean movie, has been featured in several of Ga-eun's works. Her performance as Tae-sun captures the complexities of a mother who is trying to care for everyone around her while facing her own physical and psychological sufferings.

Keeping the main characters in focus, despite a crowd in frame, visually shows Ga-eun's directorial mastery. In one scene, the camera is positioned behind students playing basketball on the ground, yet Ju-in and the characters carrying on the conversation persistently remain in the focal point. This composition precisely guides the audience within movements and visual distractions.

One of the film's most memorable sequences takes place inside a car as it enters a tunnel for a wash. As streams of water and the violent hum of machinery engulf the vehicle, Ju-in's buried trauma erupts. She lashes out at Tae-sun, expressing her resentment toward a mother who devoted herself to caring for other children while failing to recognise her daughter's pain.

The sequence depicts Ga-eun's command of sound and space, placing the camera in the backseat and making this moment of catharsis truly theirs. It makes the claustrophobic setting a safe space for emotional release. The noise of the car wash further amplifies the intensity of Ju-in's anguish.

With this, Seo Su-bin delivers a remarkable performance, allowing the character's vulnerability and resilience to rest naturally in her embodiment.

Examining friendships and community, the film presents trauma as something that ebbs and flows rather than a firm, singular occurrence. It also explores how young people find ways to simply live, responding, or perhaps coping with this trauma.

With 'The World of Love', Ga-eun expands the concerns that have defined her filmography while venturing into a complex emotional territory. The result is her most mature exploration of adolescence, vulnerability and identity.

Characters drive the plot, making it the film's most notable strength. Refusing easy resolutions or sentimental clichés, the film brings a compassionate portrayal of survival, showing how healing and peace manifest differently for each individual. Ju-in refuses to let her past define her. Instead, she allows herself to be as carefree, resilient and open to love, reclaiming a sense of agency that trauma once threatened to take away.

Therefore, the film, rather than being about enduring pain, is about reclaiming the possibilities of joy on one's own terms.

The World of Love

Directed by: Yoon Ga-eun

Language: Korean

Year: 2025

Available on: Netflix



Steven Spielberg on his faith in alien life and the power of empathy

He is trying to revive and reconsider the alien wonder that's long lingered in his mind.

○ JAKE COYLE
NEW YORK

A moment early on in "Disclosure Day" will instinctively feel familiar to anyone who grew up with Steven Spielberg films. A TV weather report predicts hail. The camera pans downward, from television set to kitchen table. Plinking sounds begin. Cereal falls into a bowl.

"Those were Froot Loops," Spielberg says, smiling. "My favorite."

Spielberg's latest, like some of his earliest and most beloved films, again concerns what might fall from above. "Disclosure Day," which Universal Pictures releases June 11, returns Hollywood's preeminent big-screen craftsman to one of his most abiding questions: Are we alone?

Coming nearly half a century after "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Disclosure Day" is a grand bookend for one of the most cosmically-minded moviemakers of our time, whose dreams of extraterrestrial life have shaped all of ours. It's a distant answer to the final notes of "Close Encounters." But while Spielberg grants his 1977 film as "speculative," "Disclosure Day," he insists, is the real deal.

"It's my first film that will be considered science fiction that I do not consider to be science fiction," Spielberg said in a recent interview. "It's much more reflective of the world as it is evolving and discoveries that are being made as we speak."

Spielberg, at 79, is trying to revive and reconsider the alien wonder that's long lingered in his mind, from "E.T." to "War of the Worlds." "Disclosure Day," Spielberg's first summer movie in a decade, is already being hailed as one of his best in years. But this time, Spielberg is testing whether he can conjure some of his trademark movie magic less with imagination than with conviction.

Aliens again, but different

"Disclosure Day" stars Josh O'Connor as a cybersecurity whistleblower with government evidence, long suppressed, chronicling a history of alien encounters. Guiding him in his escape from a corporate executive (Colin Firth) trying to keep it all under wraps is the disclosure movement's leader (Colman Domingo). Meanwhile, a meteorologist named Margaret Fairchild (Emily

Blunt) begins having a mysterious epiphany. When he first began thinking about the movie, Spielberg called up the screenwriter David Koepp, a longtime collaborator who wrote "Jurassic Park" and "War of the Worlds."

"I said, 'Sure, what's it about?'" recalls Koepp. "And he said, 'Oh, you know, aliens again. But different this time.'"

Spielberg was coming off an unusually long break by his breakfast standards. His 2022 film "The Fabelmans" pulled from his own childhood, dramatizing his parents' painful divorce and his own origins as a filmmaker. Spielberg's first gut-wrenchingly autobiographical movie left him unsure of what was next.

"I didn't care whether people thought 'The Fabelmans' was just a tale, a yarn, or if they cared that it was all true. I didn't care about that. It was something I did for myself. I always used to say it was \$40 million of therapy that I didn't have to pay for. Universal did," he says, laughing.

But Spielberg, having long followed reports of alleged alien encounters, was inspired by the 2023 House Subcommittee on National Security hearing on UAPs: Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena. Among the witnesses was whistleblower and former Air Force intelligence officer David Grusch, who testified that the government concealed a program investigating UAPs.

The Pentagon then denied it. Yet in April, President Donald Trump said the Pentagon is preparing to release some "very interesting" UFO files.

Those 2023 testimonies and others so fueled Spielberg that he pro-

duced a 50-page treatment on what would become "Disclosure Day." During the writing process with Koepp, he texted him more notes, he says, "than I've ever sent to anyone in my life."

Extraterrestrial empathy

Spielberg has long considered his filmography split in two, between the filmmaker who made "Jaws" and "E.T." and "Raiders of the Lost Ark," and the one who, after 1985's "The Color Purple," was increasingly drawn to darker and more serious material with films like "Schindler's List," "Saving Private Ryan" and "Munich."

"I think every movie should have a great emphasis on empathy because empathy sometimes feels like it's in short supply," Spielberg says. "We have it, sometimes we can't use it. Sometimes it's not allowed to be used if you want to stay aligned with your friends and your belief systems. But I think empathy is there for all of us."

Spielberg will turn 80 this December. Around the same age, Martin Scorsese began to frankly ponder how many movies he had left. Spielberg doesn't think the same way.

"I never think about how many more I have," he says. "I'm just hopeful that I will be inspired when something comes along, as I was with 'Disclosure Day,' as I was with 'Fabelmans,' as I was with 'West Side Story.'"

More inspiration is already on the way. Spielberg hopes that his next movie will be a Western. Despite his deep fondness for the genre and an indelible encounter with John Ford, it's one genre that's eluded him.

"I always feel like parts of the 'Raiders' adventure movies are like Westerns," he says. "Whenever Harrison (Ford) was on a horse, it made me wishful for wanting to direct a full Western, a real Western."

Margaret Fairchild in "Disclosure Day" has some echoes with another Spielberg protagonist: Richard Dreyfuss' Roy Neary in "Close Encounters."

Both are compelled by a strange force beyond their control. It's a character type that Spielberg, a compulsive movie maker, grants he connects with. "Disclosure Day" is his 35th feature film. "I identify with characters who aren't afraid of mysterious things happening to them," Spielberg says, "and who are fighting for their survival by trying to discover what they don't know."

— ASSOCIATED PRESS



AP/IPS

EVERYDAY AI



ANEEL NEUPANE

Neupane is the director/co-founder of Jazz Productions (a creative production company) and Qi Studios (a 3D animation and VFX studio). Also a filmmaker, he is best known for his short film, 'Bob'.

While many people hold an opposing view towards AI, that it is going to replace our jobs. I think it's quite different for the type of industry I work in. With the extreme amount of new AI tools, platforms and models releasing day by day, it is essential that as creative professionals, we learn to adapt our work around it. When that kind of adaptability is applied in our daily workspace, that is when our work also evolves alongside the growing technology. Overall, my approach to working with AI is to maximise my output while minimising the tedious tasks and time.

Content improvisation

As a lot of fiction and storytelling are central in my work, sometimes there are elements that go without notice. After writing my final structure, I use ChatGpt and Claude as the script doctors. No, they do not write the script but detect the tiny details that I miss. They also provide a new shape to my structuring and content. That way, I can ensure the quality of work remains intact.

Referencing

At times, when I have to produce a pitch deck for a new idea or just tell the framework

behind a commercial video or project, I use Nano Banana Pro and ChatGpt images for generating such references. It makes it easier for me to communicate with clients and show exactly what we are trying to achieve. Similarly, these pitching materials also require video re-enactments, for Higgsfield Cinema Studio, Seedance 2.0 and Kling 3.0 have been really resourceful till now.

Mainly these video generation platforms, which can be used to create B-rolls (an additional video to provide visual context), have proved to be convenient in my work process. But one thing about them is that when real-world references are given, they work even better, keeping that natural touch to the content. Additionally, these platforms can also be used to turn animated raw renders into their final version.

AI in music

To produce various kinds of sounds and effects in the background, Suno, an AI music generator, works really well. Whether it be a jingle or customised audio, I find Suno to be effective with music.

Editing

For editing and fine-tuning photos, I use the built-in AI tool of Adobe Photoshop software. This feature makes editing a much less time-consuming process while achieving the kind of results I want.