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Power poles stand in way of road projects

Hundreds of them have been left in the middle after the widening of roads.

○ **BIMAL KHATIWADA**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 24

On June 14, Infrastructure Development Minister Sunil Lamsal was returning from Dhangadhi when he stopped at several sections of the Nagdhunga-Mugling road widening project to inspect the progress of work on one of the country's busiest highways.

Along the route, local residents complained about construction delays. Project officials told the minister that road expansion work had been obstructed because electricity poles had not been relocated on time. In frustration, Lamsal instructed officials to summon the contractor and break his legs if work did not move ahead.

Some contractors take multiple pole-relocation contracts and miss their deadlines.

The remarks sparked criticism from all walks of life, drew objections from construction industry representatives and prompted questions in Parliament. Yet the controversy also highlighted a longstanding problem affecting major highway projects across Nepal: why do electricity poles remain standing in the middle of roads even after a large portion of road upgrade work has already been completed?

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Discontent and chaos grip RSP's maiden national convention

As the election process draws out, delegates are frustrated by heat and mismanagement and head back home short on cash.



Rastriya Swatantra Party delegates are pictured at the party's general convention venue in Chitwan at midday, Wednesday.

○ **GAURAV POKHAREL**
BHARATPUR, JUNE 24

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which entered the country's political arena promising an alternative political culture, has faced severe criticism from its own delegates during its first national convention.

Delays in leadership selection, logistical mismanagement in extreme heat conditions and the rushed endorsement of crucial ideological documents without floor debates have triggered widespread resentment.

Many delegates from remote districts have begun returning

home prematurely due to mounting hotel bills, raising fundamental questions about the party's internal democracy and its departure from old political habits.

Bishnu Bahadur Khadka, the newly appointed RSP district secretary in Doti district, arrived in the sweltering city of Bharatpur with high hopes of personally witnessing a historic political transformation. Having joined the party following the Gen Z movement in September last year, Khadka expected a seamless, digitally driven democratic exercise. Instead, he found himself trapped in long queues under sweltering heat, counting his rapidly depleting personal finances.

"We, ordinary middle-class citizens, are forced to pay up to Rs2,000 every day just for our basic hotel accommodation," said Khadka. "How long can we sustain this heavy financial burden? I am certainly not the only one here. Hundreds of passionate delegates are facing this financial and mental distress due to the complete lack of institutional preparations."

The RSP's grand national convention, which was supposed to showcase a modern alternative to the traditional parties frequently criticised by the four-year-old party, quickly degenerated into complete administrative chaos.

>> Continued on page 2

RSP revives debate on directly elected executive

As the largest party takes constitution amendment agenda to its general convention, major parties are at odds over governance model and electoral reform.

○ **GANGA BC**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 24

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), during its first general convention, has reignited a debate within political circles after chairman Rabi Lamichhane proposed moving to a directly elected executive governance model. This formal proposal comes at a time when the government is already engaged in discussions with various stakeholders regarding constitutional amendments.

Historically, this issue was one of the points of contention during the Constituent Assembly deliberations, with the then-Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum fiercely debating whether the head of state should be directly elected or selected via Parliament. When the constitution was promulgated in 2015, the agreement to select the prime minister through Parliament led the Maoists to register a note of dissent, while the Forum chose to boycott the process.

Alongside the governance model, Lamichhane has also proposed a fully proportional electoral system. Similar proposals were previously championed by the then CPN (Maoist) and the Janata Samajbadi Party, Nepal. However, then major political parties, the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML, remained in favour of the existing parliamentary system, while supporting potential improvements. The formal introduction of these two issues at the RSP convention is expected to intensify the discourse surrounding constitutional reform.

Despite holding nearly a two-thirds majority under the current electoral system, the RSP maintains its stance for a directly elected executive. "We have held distinct views on the constitution since the party's inception. We are in favour of a directly elected executive with a stable leadership and

clear responsibilities," Lamichhane stated in his political report. "We support a fully proportional electoral system instead of the current, highly expensive one, to ensure the representation of all communities."

Additionally, the RSP has proposed transforming the National Assembly into a non-partisan assembly of experts, with the country's Vice President serving as its chair.

RSP's outgoing joint general secretary Bipin Acharya noted that the political proposal presented by the newly re-elected chairman would be taken forward following extensive internal discussion.

Congress and UML oppose proposal, but Maoists are for directly elected chief executive.

"We will conduct a comprehensive debate on the chairman's proposal and refine it before passing," he told Kantipur. "Extensive deliberation is necessary on whether to have directly elected president or prime minister."

While the RSP has a strong presence in the House, it currently has no members in the National Assembly, where the Nepali Communist Party (NCP) holds 17 seats. The party expects to secure seats in the Assembly following local level elections next year. Since the RSP did not participate in the previous local and provincial elections, it had no candidates for the Assembly.

If the RSP and NCP were to secure a combined 40 out of 59 seats in the Assembly, a constitutional amendment to introduce a directly elected executive and a fully proportional electoral system could be possible.

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Chinese EV makers are shut out of India—but their tech isn't

India ramped up scrutiny of Chinese businesses after a 2020 border clash between the two countries killed soldiers on both sides.

○ **ADITI SHAH/REUTERS**
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Chinese automakers may be shut out of India, but their electric-vehicle technology is starting to make inroads in the world's third-largest car market.

New Delhi has largely blocked Chinese companies from entering the market since 2020 and now Beijing is clamping down on the export of its tech know-how. Yet ties between the two countries' carmaking industry are only growing.

Tata Motors said earlier in June it will use Chery's carmaking platform to manufacture premium EVs in India. The deal doesn't involve

an equity stake, and both companies stressed it is a supply arrangement without any transfer of technology know-how to Tata, highlighting the political sensitivities.

India ramped up scrutiny of Chinese businesses after a 2020 border clash between the two countries killed soldiers on both sides. While New Delhi and Beijing are working to improve ties, some friction remains.

"If India wants to expand its manufacturing sector and be a bigger part of the global supply chain, partnership with China is inevitable. If Chinese companies want to be global leaders, they cannot wish away India and its economic potential," said Santosh Pai, partner

at law firm Dentons Link Legal.

For Tata, India's third-largest automaker, Chery's platform offers a quicker way to launch EVs. Tata plans to eventually shift from relying on imported kits from China to developing components locally—a move seen favourably by some Indian policymakers because it would boost Indian manufacturing.

"We are supportive of deals that lead to more local manufacturing or supply-chain shifts down the road. That is a good way to approach China," said a senior Indian government official. For Chinese carmakers grappling with a slowdown at home and excess manufacturing capacity, such deals could be the answer to

boosting revenue without violating Beijing's export control orders. Tata and Chery did not respond to requests for comment.

Growing market

The Tata-Chery deal shows that, despite its best efforts, India can't keep China's EV industry completely out. The world's most advanced EV industry is likely to continue to make inroads into India, a huge and still growing market.

That's bad news for Japanese automakers and others who are investing big in India—in part because they don't face major competition from Chinese rivals there now.

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Event Highlights

NEWS

Special Court grants seven-day custody of ex-minister Paudel

○ SUDEEP KAINI
KATHMANDU, JUNE 24

The Special Court on Tuesday authorised the Department of Money Laundering Investigation (DoMLI) to keep CPN-UML vice-chair and former finance minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel in custody for seven days for investigation over allegations of abusing authority to facilitate the undervaluation of high-value shares.

He was detained by the DoMLI on Monday.

According to investigators and government attorneys, Paudel is alleged to have played a key role in enabling the sale of shares worth around Rs300 million for Rs37.5 million.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI
Former finance minister Bishnu Poudel (second left) pictured at Department of Money Laundering Investigation, Tuesday.

Officials said the investigation focuses on alleged abuse of ministerial authority for financial gain, pressure on regulatory processes to benefit a business group, and possible policy-level corruption linked to businessman Deepak Bhatta, who is already in judicial custody on money laundering charges.

A DoMLI official said Paudel was arrested following statements from businessmen Chhunna Prasad Sharma and Kamal Kishor Malpani during interrogation of Bhatta.

They alleged that a 20 percent stake in Shreeram Tobacco Udyog Pvt Ltd was sold at an artificially low valuation after assurances were given during Paudel's tenure as finance minister regarding facilitation of government approvals. Sharma had contested the House of Representatives election from Rupandehi-2 on a Nepali Congress ticket against Paudel; both were defeated.

Paudel was arrested on Monday in Surkhet on an emergency warrant and flown to Kathmandu overnight. He was then produced before the Special Court for endorsement of the arrest and remand extension. Government attorneys presented grounds for custodial interrogation, citing risk of evidence tampering.

Government attorneys Bhimsen Kafle and Badri Kumar Karki argued that Paudel allegedly used his position to facilitate the transfer of a 20 percent stake in Shreeram Tobacco to Himalayan Assets Management Pvt Ltd, a company owned by Bhatta, at a significantly undervalued price. According to the Office of the Company Registrar, 375,000 units of shares were transferred for Rs37.5 million in March–April 2024.

The prosecution said further investigation is necessary due to established links between Paudel and Bhatta, including allegations of promised kickbacks in exchange for facilitating the transaction during Paudel's tenure as finance minister.

Investigators also suspect Paudel of "parking" illicit assets under proxies. Officials said they are examining whether assets linked to him were held under other names and invested in different sectors to conceal ownership.

DoMLI alleges that Paudel helped launder Rs262.5 million through the Shreeram Tobacco share transaction and received financial benefits in return. The claim remains under investigation. Officials also said he is being probed for alleged facilitation in betel nut imports for Shreeram Tobacco and regulatory approvals linked to Himalayan Reinsurance and seven insurance companies.

Paudel's legal team, including senior advocates Ramesh Badal and Tika Ram Bhattarai, argued that the allegations are based on statements from third parties and lack evidentiary basis. They described the arrest as politically motivated and requested bail, citing low flight risk and his public profile.

Government attorneys opposed bail, arguing that release could lead to evidence destruction and interference in the investigation.

The CPN-UML has condemned the arrest, calling it politically motivated. A statement by party chair KP Sharma Oli alleged that Paudel was illegally arrested while carrying out party duties in Surkhet.

Meanwhile, Paudel's wife, Domaya Paudel, filed a habeas corpus petition at the Supreme Court on Wednesday, challenging the legality of his detention. The hearing is scheduled for Thursday. The Special Court, the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Home Affairs, DoMLI and the District Police Office, Surkhet, have been named as defendants.

Prior to his arrest, Paudel had reportedly attempted to clarify matters with government officials after learning of the investigation. Sources said Prime Minister Balendra Shah, who was in Chitwan for the Rastriya Swatantra Party general convention, instructed officials to arrest Paudel within two hours of receiving updates on the case. Paudel is currently held at the Police Sector, Pulchowk in Lalitpur.

Paudel is a veteran politician who has served as minister eight times, including five terms as finance minister in 2015, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024. He first entered the Cabinet in 1997 as the minister for youth, sports and culture, later serving as the minister for water resources in 2008 and the minister for defence in 2011. He is widely regarded as a key coalition strategist. During the Panchayat era, he was sentenced to three years in prison and fined Rs3,000 over political charges.

RSP's first general convention turns tiring and financially burdensome for delegates

>> Continued from page 1

The opening session on Sunday set an incredibly disappointing tone. Scheduled to begin at 1:00 pm, the entire event was delayed by hours. Party Chair Rabi Lamichhane and Prime Minister Balendra Shah, who also serves as a senior RSP leader, finally arrived at 3:30 pm. This mirrored the standard operating delays of the older parties that the RSP had vowed to replace.

By Wednesday afternoon, Prime Minister Shah had returned to Kathmandu with his family without casting his ballot.

Deeply disillusioned by the total chaos of the voting system, many delegates started returning home. The mismanagement extended deep into the operational core of the convention. The RSP had continuously championed automated governance, yet delegates were forced to stand in lines for hours just to register their details into electronic voting machines. Over 400 candidates filed nominations for central committee positions, leaving the technical infrastructure overwhelmed.

"The party promised a fully digitised system," said Khadka. "Yet, we have to stand in line for two hours just to fill out a single nomination form. They did no homework. The internal management is an absolute disaster."

Beyond these logistical failures, serious questions have emerged regarding the party's core commitment to internal democracy. During closed sessions, key ideological roadmaps were pushed through without deliberations on the floor. Party Chief Lamichhane presented his political report, which was instantly endorsed through a forced applause without allowing a single delegate to speak or raise questions.

RSP Central Committee member Ramesh Paudel openly expressed his dismay over this lack of debate. In a public message addressed to Lamichhane following the latter's re-election as party chief, Paudel wrote: "There was a mere seven-second gap between the completion of your report reading and your call to the hall for its endorsement. At this rate, the 'deep discussion' conducted by 4,200 delegates in seven seconds is automatically eligible for the Guinness World Records."

Delegates from remote regions felt totally excluded from the policy-making process. Janak Raj Joshi, a convention delegate who travelled from the far-western



POST PHOTO: ANGAD DHAKAL
Electronic voting machines at the Rastriya Swatantra Party's national convention venue in Bharatpur.

district of Darchula, expressed deep concerns over the rushed proceedings.

"We undertook an exhausting journey to actively participate in defining the ideological direction of our party," said Joshi. "Tragically, we were not permitted to discuss a single political document during the closed session." A primary point of contention arose from the economic-political document presented by party Vice-chair and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle. Wagle's report introduced radical proposals, including the dissolution of provincial assemblies and a major restructuring of federalism by reducing the number of local units from the current 753.

"Wagle presented the document without any group discussion or debate," said Joshi. "While the leadership expects us to nod along due to time constraints, this document represents a direct assault on the spirit of federalism. The people of Sudurpaschim, Madhesh, and Karnali provinces will never accept this. Altering constitutional rights so casually will trigger severe public backlash," he warned.

Another delegate, speaking on the condition of anonymity, noted that if the RSP outlaws intellectual dissent and robust

debates, it ceases to be different from traditional political parties. "The old parties always suppressed ideological debates. If the same culture is adopted, what alternative political values do we represent?"

Political analyst Uddhav Pyakurel is of the opinion that Wagle's proposals to dissolve provincial assemblies and reduce the meaning of local units are problematic. "These sensitive matters will naturally provoke intense resistance across the provinces," said Pyakurel. "The leadership must allow exhaustive debates on these issues. Suppressing them now will only invite a far more complicated and dangerous political crisis in the future."

The administrative failures have also fuelled suspicions of internal political engineering. Pramod Mandal, an RSP Koshi provincial committee member, accused the leadership of deliberately prolonging the election process to exhaust independent delegates and force them to leave.

"Delegates from faraway districts cannot afford to stay [here] indefinitely," Mandal stated. "Many are packing their bags. This artificial delay gives us reasons to suspect a conspiracy designed to clear the field and

ensure the victory of handpicked loyalists close to the leadership."

Stating that he does not oppose chair Lamichhane, Mandal said he was protesting "this absolute failure of management". The election committee must explain "the paralysis", he demanded.

Mandal directly confronted Wagle on Wednesday afternoon to voice his dissatisfied faction. "I told him directly that our financial situations are fragile and we are running out of money," said Mandal.

Wagle, who is also contesting a leadership position, acknowledged the mess but deflected immediate responsibility.

In a brief conversation with Kantipur, Wagle said: "I need to look into the details, but someone must definitely be held accountable for this delay."

Ganesh Parajuli, the lawmaker and RSP joint general secretary, defended the party, attributing the delays to initial disputes over the delegates list and unforeseen technical snags.

"We integrated electronic voting machines, but candidate data forms were collected manually," said Parajuli. "Verifying physical documents, checking photographs, and converting them into digital formats created a bottleneck for the election commission. Since this is their first time managing a digital election of this scale, it took longer than anticipated."

The RSP has purportedly struggled with organisational indiscipline and internal power struggles as its highly centralised decision-making often courts controversies. Observers note that the party rushed into the national convention without holding conventions in seven out of the eight districts of Madhesh Province.

Political analyst Navin Tiwari said that the RSP squandered a great opportunity to set a new benchmark for Nepali politics. "There was neither ideological debate nor adherence to the official timetable. The new party has failed to demonstrate any alternative character," said Tiwari.

Defending the management, Law Minister and RSP leader Sobita Gautam said that party officials had worked tirelessly. "As this is our very first experience handling a national convention, delays occurred," Gautam acknowledged. "We agree that there are areas needing improvement, and we will return far better prepared for the next convention."

Poor coordination at the heart of highway project delays

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Kantipur interviews with officials involved in several major highway projects suggests that responsibility for the delays is shared among road agencies, contractors, the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), and firms hired to relocate utility infrastructure. The result has been repeated delays, cost overruns and extended deadlines on nationally important road projects.

Rajan Dhakal, spokesperson for the NEA, referred questions to Navaraj Ojha, deputy executive director at the authority's Distribution and Consumer Services Directorate. Ojha said the authority follows established procedures when relocating electrical infrastructure.

"Contracts for pole relocation are awarded according to approved procedures. It is unfair to claim that road construction has been delayed solely because of pole relocation. Delays have not occurred everywhere," said Ojha.

He argued that road projects themselves are sometimes responsible for slow progress because construction sites are not cleared and handed over to contractors on time.

"Contractors working on road expansion often make these allegations while seeking deadline extensions," said Ojha.

"In some cases there have also been problems on the part of contractors hired by the NEA as well."

According to Ojha, one of the major issues is that the same contractors secure multiple pole-relocation contracts across several highways and struggle to manage all of them simultaneously.

Bal Krishna Karki, a representative of Sohan Construction, a company involved in relocating poles on several highway projects, said the work is more complex than many people assume.

"There are technical challenges in relocating electricity poles. Power shutdowns have to be coordinated, lines must be disconnected safely, and only experienced personnel can handle the work," said Karki. He claimed that in some places his company had already relocated poles but road construction had still not progressed as expected.

"When we cut power to relocate poles, local residents often become angry because electricity service is interrupted," he said. "Nevertheless, we are working to complete the job as quickly as possible."

Asked how long it would take to relocate the remaining utility poles along major highways, Karki said the poles on the Malekhu-Mugling section can be relocated within a few days. "In the Kakarbhitta area, the work can be completed within three months if there are no complications, while the remaining poles in Kapilvastu along the Butwal-Gorusinghe-Chandrauta road can be shifted within four months," he said.

One of the clearest examples of the problem can be seen on the 94.66-kilometre Nagdhunga-Mugling road project, a crucial gateway connecting Kathmandu with the rest of the country. The project has been divided into three sections: Nagdhunga-Naubise (12.26 km), Naubise-Malekhu (43.54 km) and Malekhu-Mugling (38.86 km).

Construction on the Nagdhunga-Naubise

section has reached around 88 percent completion, with six kilometres of final asphalt already laid. However, progress has been much slower on the Naubise-Malekhu section.

Keshav Prasad Ojha, chief of the eastern section of the Nagdhunga-Mugling project, said delayed pole relocation remains a major obstacle.

"We signed a memorandum of understanding with the Nepal Electricity Authority in 2022 to remove the poles," he said. "Even now, 75 poles remain to be relocated."

The Naubise-Malekhu section, being built by the ZICG-Sharma-Lama joint venture, was originally scheduled for completion by mid-June, 2025. After missing the deadline, the project received an extension until mid-October, 2026. Progress currently stands at about 60 percent.



POST FILE PHOTO
This undated photo shows an electricity pole standing in the middle of a widened road in a hill district.

"Because the poles were not relocated on time, contractors have been forced to black-top only within the available width," said Keshav Prasad Ojha. "They have repeatedly complained that they cannot proceed with work in several locations."

He warned that leaving poles standing beside partially completed roads also increases the risk of accidents.

"If the poles had been removed and work still failed to progress, we could blame the contractor," he said. "But pole relocation has clearly become one of the causes of delay."

More than 12,000 vehicles commute the Nagdhunga-Mugling road on a daily basis, making the project one of the country's most important transport links.

The western section from Malekhu to Mugling faces similar challenges. Sajana Adhikari, chief of the western section, said construction has been affected because 107 poles have yet to be relocated.

"In Mugling and Malekhu bazars, work cannot proceed because the poles are still there," she said. "Malekhu market alone has a large number of poles, and there are also problems in the Fishling-Chumlingtar area."

According to Adhikari, a recent meeting at the Ministry of Infrastructure Development concluded that the remaining poles should be relocated within seven

days. However, the contractor responsible for the work had yet to begin work.

Project officials say the memorandum with the NEA does not specify a clear deadline for completing pole relocation, allowing contractors considerable flexibility. Sohan Construction is responsible to shift electricity poles in this road stretch as well.

The same pattern is visible on the Kakarbhitta-Laukahi section of the East-West Highway, which forms part of the Asian Highway network. Stretching nearly 96 kilometres, the project has been divided into several packages with support from the Asian Development Bank.

Overall progress stands at just 37 percent.

On the first package between Kakarbhitta and Sitapuri in Jhapa, 914 of 2,422 poles have yet to be relocated. Sohan Construction

old poles have not been moved," said Dhakal. "We have already paid all relocation costs to the NEA."

According to project officials, an agreement regarding pole relocation was signed before the road contract itself was awarded. They argue that the work should have been completed long ago.

Under the current arrangement, road projects transfer funds to the NEA, which then calls tenders and hires contractors to relocate poles and power lines. However, officials across several projects say the same handful of contractors repeatedly win multiple contracts, spread resources thinly across different sites, which leads to slow progress.

The experience has prompted authorities to consider alternative approaches. For the Narayanghat-Hetauda road expansion project, which is also being implemented with ADB support, officials have already agreed that the road contractor will directly carry out relocation work under the authority's supervision.

"We asked the NEA only to provide supervision, approve shutdowns and monitor quality. The project itself will bear the costs," said Dhakal.

Meanwhile, the long-delayed Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel road expansion project has finally made progress in clearing utility infrastructure. Sohan Construction is the responsible contractor in this road section as well.

Bijay Kumar Mahato, chief of the project, said repeated follow-ups had helped accelerate relocation works. "Only 25 poles remain to be relocated on the Suryabinayak-Sanga section," said Mahato.

"The Sanga-Dhulikhel section has already been completed."

The 15.8-kilometre project, a key section of the Araniko Highway linking Bhaktapur and Kavre, has reached around 61 percent completion overall.

Similarly, utility poles remain a major obstacle on the Butwal-Gorusinghe-Chandrauta road project.

Kushalata Neupane, chief of the project office in Gorusinghe, said progress has suffered because most of the required pole relocation has yet to be completed.

"Out of around 2,300 poles that need to be moved, nearly 1,900 are still pending," she said.

According to Neupane, contractors have already installed around 1,000 new poles in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu districts, but old poles cannot be removed until power lines are fully transferred.

The project, being built by the Sansi-Girvan joint venture, has achieved only about 25 percent progress after more than a year and a half of construction.

According to Neupane, the contract to relocate utility poles from Butwal to Kothikhola was awarded to the Bhagwati-Renu JV while the section from Kothikhola to Gorusinghe is being handled by Sohan Construction.

Across Nepal, road expansion projects funded by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and government resources continue to face similar hurdles. While contractors, project offices and the NEA disagree over who is most responsible, they acknowledge that poor coordination has become a recurring problem.

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Karnali's organic dream slips away after eight years and billions spent

From failed nurseries to incomplete testing labs, the 'Organic Karnali' campaign reveals significant implementation gaps.

● KRISHNA PRASAD GAUTAM
SURKHET, JUNE 24

Shortly after the formation of the Karnali provincial government, the first Cabinet meeting held on February 18, 2018, announced an ambitious goal of transforming Karnali into an organic province.

Nearly two years later, on December 25, 2019, the second meeting of the Provincial Coordination Council formally endorsed the decision. As part of the campaign, Karnali hosted the First Karnali Organic Agriculture Conference in 2020 and spent nearly Rs160 million on programmes, including subsidies for transporting compost, subsidies on bio-pesticides, and support for establishing industries to produce and process organic fertilisers, compost, and biological pesticides through partnerships with cooperatives and the private sector.

Yet little came of those efforts. Most programmes were implemented as scattered, small-scale projects with limited coordination or continuity. As a result, tangible outcomes remained elusive.

Similarly, between fiscal years 2018-19 and 2021-22, the provincial government allocated Rs328.6 million over four consecutive years to establish high-tech nurseries. The primary objective was to produce all required seedlings within Karnali through climate-controlled and automated nursery systems.

However, 23 nurseries built at a cost of nearly Rs100 million now lie abandoned.

Under the organic campaign, the government also allocated Rs20 million in 2020-21 to establish biofertiliser and biopesticide factories in Birendranagar Municipality of Surkhet and Bheri Municipality of Jajarkot.

The factories were never built, and budget allocations for the project have since been discontinued.

Likewise, in fiscal year 2019-20, the Karnali government allocated Rs5 million each to 13 local governments to operate organic agriculture model programmes. Those initiatives have also stalled, and no budget has been allocated for them over the past two years.

In the fiscal year 2020-21, the province allocated Rs15 million to establish rapid pesticide testing laboratories in Harre of Surkhet and Kapurkot of Salyan. Buildings and related infrastructure were constructed at both sites, with around Rs7 million spent on each facility.

A year later, another Rs2.9 million was allocated to purchase equipment. However, neither laboratory became operational.

Authorities failed to recruit the six staff members required for each facility, leaving the buildings and infrastructure unused and gradually deteriorating.

In the same fiscal year, the federal and provincial governments together spent Rs1.97 billion on organic agriculture programmes. Despite the substantial expenditure, few visible results emerged.

The provincial government has again included the operation of the laboratories in its policy and programme for the next fiscal year 2026-27 and has allocated funding accordingly.

In the current fiscal year, Rs61.8 million was allocated for programmes promoting organic agriculture, indigenous crops, and livestock.

Nearly 90 percent of that budget has already been spent. However, because most projects were fragmented and scattered across small schemes, significant results remain difficult to identify.

"Most of these programmes have become designed to benefit political workers rather than farmers," said



A farmer is pictured inside a tunnel built to grow mushrooms at Narharinath Rural Municipality-9 in Kalikot.

Devi Krishna Rokaya, an advocate of organic agriculture.

"Actual farmers are still struggling with issues like farming, access to fertilisers and seeds, and marketing their products. More than half of the agricultural enterprises that received subsidies have already shut down. Politically driven spending has created economic disorder in the agricultural sector."

Since its establishment, the Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives of Karnali Province has allocated Rs23.97 billion to the agricultural sector between fiscal year 2017-18 and the current fiscal year 2025-26.

By mid-June, it had spent Rs14.31 billion. Nearly 30 percent of that expenditure, or Rs4.29 billion, went to various projects implemented under the 'Organic Karnali' campaign.

However, the initiative has been hampered by a range of structural problems, including inadequate preparation, staff shortages, prioritisation of small and fragmented projects, lack of investment-friendly conditions, absence of viable alternatives to chemical fertilisers and pesticides, climate change, drought, inadequate irrigation infrastructure, and migration of the agricultural workforce.

Over the past two years, the ministry has also launched a programme under the Organic Karnali campaign to support the marketing of indigenous products through a regional brand known as 'Valuable'.

The programme provides assistance for obtaining certificates of origin, branding, labelling, and quality certification logos for local products.

However, farmers say the initiative has done little to address longstanding market challenges.

Nawaraj Neupane, an apple farmer from Jumla, said growers continue to struggle to secure fair prices despite apples being Karnali's most important agricultural product.

"Jumla apples are sold outside the district for Rs150 to Rs200 per kilo," he said. "But farmers here never receive more than Rs45 per kilo."

"Every year, the Karnali Highway is blocked during apple season. Because quality packaging cartons are not available, nearly a third of the apples rot before reaching markets. Pest and disease outbreaks continue year after year, and without meaningful government support, production keeps declining."

Data from the ministry supports his concerns.

According to ministry figures,

apples are cultivated on 9,377 hectares across the Karnali province. Of that area, only 3,419 hectares are considered productive.

Average apple production in productive orchards stands at 9.10 metric tonnes per hectare.

Last year, Karnali produced 31,102 metric tonnes of apples. Yet only 14,306 metric tonnes reached markets outside the province.

Agricultural economist Tej Kumar Sharma said another major challenge facing the Organic Karnali campaign is the steady influx of pesticide-treated vegetables from India.

Local production remains insufficient to meet demand, and this has forced the province to rely heavily on imports.

"Authorities banned chemical fertilisers and pesticides in mountain districts in the name of creating an organic province," Sharma said. "Yet vegetables treated with pesticides continue to enter districts such as Jumla and Humla without obstruction."

"At the same time, farmers are being forced to secretly buy expensive chemical fertilisers because they cannot control crop diseases and maintain production without them."

Ratna Budha, a farmer from ward 2 of Raskot Municipality in Kalikot district, said farmers are compelled to purchase chemical fertilisers illegally at inflated prices.

Urea that sells for around Rs25 per kilo in other provinces costs between Rs50 and Rs60 in Karnali, he said. DAP fertiliser that normally sells for Rs50 per kilo costs between Rs75 and Rs90.

"Traders sell them secretly at high prices," Budha said. "Farmyard manure is never enough. There is simply no alternative to chemical fertiliser if we want to increase production."

He added that recurring pest outbreaks have also forced farmers to use pesticides despite restrictions.

At present, vegetables imported from India are tested only at the Jamunaha border checkpoint.

Dhan Singh Thami, a technician at the federal government's Rapid Bioassay of Pesticide Residues Laboratory Unit in Birendranagar, said pesticide-contaminated vegetables continue to enter the province because the lab planned for Harre

remains incomplete even five years since the construction started.

As a result, monitoring remains limited while pesticide-laden produce continues to flow into Karnali.

According to officials, nearly two quintals of vegetables were destroyed on Saturday alone. Tests on the discarded produce found pesticide residue levels exceeding safe limits by 61 percent.

"If pesticide residue is below 35 percent, the vegetables are cleared for sale," Thami said. "If it is between 35 and 45 percent, they are held in quarantine for up to seven days and then retested before being allowed into the market. If it exceeds that threshold, disposal is the only option."

He added that around 50 metric tonnes of fresh vegetables enter the Bulbule wholesale agricultural market in Birendranagar every day.

Over the past year, approximately 289 metric tonnes of highly contaminated vegetables have been destroyed.

According to the ministry, Karnali produces 169,000 metric tonnes of vegetables annually, while demand exceeds supply by 2,374 metric tonnes.

Last year, 112,000 metric tonnes of vegetables were imported into Karnali. Secretary at the provincial agriculture ministry Sanjib Kumar Karn said nearly 80 percent of these

imports come from India.

Fertiliser traders, however, argue that pesticide use in Karnali has not declined.

Himal Oli, proprietor of Panchakoshi Agrovet and Trading Centre in Surkhet, said he sells nearly Rs5 million worth of pesticides annually and supplies products across most districts based on farmer demand.

"In commercial farming, there is no alternative to pesticides," he said. "On every farm, some kind of pesticide has to be sprayed at least every 15 days because pest and disease outbreaks are constant. There is no other way to control them."

An integrated agricultural laboratory currently operates under the provincial government in Birendranagar. However, Secretary Karn said its effectiveness has been limited due to shortage of staff and equipment.

Another flagship initiative of the organic campaign was the establishment of bio-fertiliser and bio-pesticide factories. For this, Rs50 million each was allocated in fiscal years 2019-20 and 2020-21.

But the projects failed to materialise, and funding has since been discontinued.

"We had planned to establish the factories through a 50-50 partnership with the private sector," Karn said. "But since we could not find investors or institutions willing to participate, the budget allocation has now been stopped."

Akash Tara Bayak, chairperson of the National Consumer Forum in the province, said setting up quarantine facilities at major entry points would be essential to controlling pesticide-contaminated imports.

"First, it is already difficult to ensure food supply for the entire population year-round," he said. "On top of that, banning modern technology, fertilisers and seeds in the name of organic province has increased the inflow of unsafe and pesticide-contaminated fruits and vegetables."

Agricultural expert Deepak Sharma said Karnali's dependence on food imports makes the organic campaign particularly difficult to implement.

"A kilo of farmyard manure contains only about 2 percent nitrogen, whereas urea contains around 46 percent," he said, arguing that banning chemical fertilisers on unproductive land would inevitably cause crop yields to plunge rather than rise.

He warned that the organic policy risked deepening Karnali's reliance on food imports.

According to the 2021 National Census, Karnali has a population of 1.688 million. Ministry data show the province faces an annual food deficit of around 25,000 metric tonnes.

Annual food requirement stands at



A vegetable farm at Dugeswar Rural Municipality-2 in Dailekh.

352,000 metric tonnes, while production is only 326,000 metric tonnes.

Karn said priority has been given to conserving and developing indigenous crops to implement the organic province policy.

"We are working to make Karnali self-reliant through indigenous crops," he said. "Agricultural subsidies have been restructured to focus on production. We have launched indigenous crop promotion programmes across all districts."

He added that the province is working to support the production and marketing of organic fertilisers and bio-pesticides, including training farmer groups, providing subsidies, and facilitating raw material procurement.

According to him, nearly three dozen private companies and cooperatives are already producing bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides in the province.

Government data show that 28 percent of Karnali's cultivable land lie fallow.

Out of 399,330 hectares of arable land, the province produces 326,000 metric tonnes of food grain annually.

A study conducted in Karnali by the Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC) in 2021-2022 revealed that between 100 and 200 metric tonnes of pesticides are used annually in the region. According to the report, 114 metric tonnes of pesticides were consumed in 2021-2022.

Deepak Sharma, the agriculture expert, said fungicides are the most commonly used chemicals in vegetable farming.

"Even if government records do not fully reflect it, pesticide use continues at significant levels every year," he said. "During our research, we found that farmers were using 24 types of pesticides that have been officially banned."

Agricultural spending in Karnali has been declining year after year, contributing to stalled organic agriculture programmes, according to former minister for Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Bimala KC.

"When spending declines, programme implementation suffers, and results become minimal," she said. "Large infrastructure projects in agriculture are repeatedly left incomplete, while fragmented small projects fail to deliver impact or proper utilisation of funds."

According to the Provincial Comptroller General Office, out of the Rs2.57 billion budget allocated for the ministry in the current fiscal year, barely 26.94 percent (Rs692.7 million) has been spent as of mid-June.

Binod Kumar Shah, spokesperson for the Karnali provincial government and minister for Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives, says the low expenditure figures were the result of bringing the budget into strict compliance and curbing irregularities in the agricultural sector.

"Early in the fiscal year, the Gen Z protests had an impact, followed by festivals and the parliamentary elections, all of which affected budget execution," he told the Post. "The organic agriculture campaign is aimed at making Karnali self-reliant in food, and its programmes are being implemented gradually."

He added that the government is supporting the marketing of local products under the "Valuable" brand.

According to him, for the upcoming fiscal year, the province has allocated Rs121.7 million for the indigenous crop protection programme, Rs339.5 million to establish model agricultural farms, Rs192.2 million for the "one village, one commercial agricultural orchard" programme, and Rs71.4 million for the "one local level, one agricultural school" initiative.

Nepal opposition divided over scale of constitutional change

>> Continued from page 1

However, the main opposition party in Parliament, the Nepali Congress, maintains that there can be no compromise on the fundamental tenets of the constitution—democracy, the characteristics of the Nepali state, republicanism, federalism, civic supremacy, a pluralistic multi-party parliamentary system, separation of powers, and an independent judiciary. The party asserts that the constitution can only be strengthened by upholding basic values such as freedom of expression and the press, rule of law, proportional inclusive principles, an open society, and human rights.

Congress vice president and coordinator of the Constitution Amendment Taskforce, Pushpa Bhusal, argued that the current parliamentary system of selecting a prime minister remains appropriate. She contended that institutionalising the system is best achieved when the prime minister is selected by members of parliament elected by the people.

She noted that the issue of a directly elected executive was already debated extensively during the constitution-drafting process and is no longer relevant. "The topic of a directly elected executive was discussed in the constituent assemblies; it is not relevant now. We need to strengthen and institutionalise the current constitution," she added. "We are not

considering that kind of amendment. The parliamentary system is the one that remains closest to the people." She clarified that the Congress is focused on strengthening the constitution to increase proportional inclusivity and ensure good governance.

Both the Congress and the UML support a reformed parliamentary system. During the tenure of the coalition government, there were even discussions about raising the "threshold" for national party status to five percent to ensure political stability.

UML secretary Padma Aryal stated that discussions on constitutional amendments would only take place while respecting the fundamental pro-

visions of the constitution. She claimed that political stability is achievable within the existing governance model and electoral system. "We are in favour of a robust parliamentary system. The recent election has shown that political stability is possible within this system," she said. "We will discuss other areas of constitutional amendment, for which our expert group will take a decision." She reiterated that political stability can be achieved by improving the parliamentary system. "The electoral system can be further enriched, but the current system is not weak; we are in discussions to strengthen it," she added.

While there are options to improve the mixed electoral system, party leaders indicate that neither the Congress nor the UML is in favour of a fully proportional system. "We can discuss the threshold within the mixed electoral system. The current electoral system can be made more proportional," Congress leader Bhusal added. "Trying to change the parliamentary system itself means weakening the constitution." She clarified that the Constitution Amendment Taskforce would prepare its report based on this premise.

The Congress and UML have previously discussed constitutional amendments to raise the proportional representation threshold for national party status from three to five percent to ensure political stability.

Meanwhile, Narayan Kaji Shrestha, leader of NCP, stated that his party remains committed to the issues of a directly elected executive and full proportional representation. "The NCP has not abandoned these issues," he said. "However, no further formal discussions have taken place regarding this since the merger between the CPN-Maoist Centre and the CPN (Unified Socialists)."

While NCP coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal is firm in his support for a directly elected executive and full proportional representation, co-coordinator Madhav Kumar Nepal believes

the parliamentary system is appropriate. Another NCP leader, Prakash Jwala, said that Dahal and Nepal would decide on the matter of constitutional amendment. "Discussions on the governance model and electoral system are ongoing. Other matters have been finalised by the Constitution Amendment Taskforce. The remaining issues will be settled by the coordinator and co-coordinator," he said.

In his greetings sent at the RSP's general convention in Chitwan on Sunday, NCP coordinator Dahal noted that there are several commonalities between the NCP and the RSP. "We have defined our political path by the discontinuation of continuity. We find ourselves closer on the agenda of social transformation," Dahal said.

Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal leader Manish Suman stated that his party would continue to support a directly elected executive and a fully proportional electoral system during constitutional amendments. "The public should be able to choose the directly elected executive themselves. Due to political bargaining, the government formed by Parliament is sometimes against the public's wishes," he said. "Political stability can only be maintained if there is a directly elected head of state or head of government." He expressed the view that a fully proportional system is appropriate because the current mixed system is

expensive. "The current electoral system has become financially costly. If there were a fully proportional system, it would be free from the influence of 'money and muscle'," he said. "It would also be more inclusive and healthy."

Former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai, who has advocated for a directly elected executive President and a fully proportional system since the Constituent Assembly days, said that constitutional amendments would ensure political stability and effective governance. "A directly elected executive President is the most appropriate. A directly elected prime minister, as suggested by the RSP, does not provide a complete solution," he said. "A directly elected presidential system provides political stability."

He argued that a fully proportional electoral system would further enrich inclusivity, discourage the expensive current electoral system, and allow the government to work effectively if provisions for appointing non-parliamentary ministers are included. "Parliament should only be responsible for making necessary laws. If there is a provision for non-parliamentary ministers, the government can focus on its work," Bhattarai added. "The current electoral system is very expensive and unhealthy; a fully proportional system will discourage that."



President Ram Baran Yadav promulgated the Constitution of Nepal in 2015.

POST FILE PHOTO

OPINION



OUR VIEW

Disappointing RSP convention

From managing delegates to endorsing policy proposals, the convention left a lot to be desired.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party leadership had been hyping up the party's general convention, saying it would set an example for other parties. Instead, it largely followed the same flawed path of the older parties that the RSP had long criticised. The RSP's shortcomings and incompetence were exposed right from the beginning. The blue billboards and garish entrance gate, which even obstructed the passage of lorries, seemed to have been copied from the handbook of traditional parties.

Finalisation of representatives is among the first things any party needs to accomplish before holding a general convention. However, it took four days after the convention's start for the RSP to finalise its representatives. Interestingly, the RSP's political and economic papers, which set the party line for the next four years, were endorsed even before the representatives were finalised. The way the political and economic dossiers were endorsed is not without questions. Through its political paper, the party adopted positions on major constitutional and governance issues. The paper envisions transforming the National Assembly into a non-partisan chamber of experts chaired by the Vice President. Presented by party president Rabi Lamichhane during the closed session of the general convention, it also backs a directly elected executive head, a fully proportional electoral system, non-partisan local elections and the abrogation of provincial assemblies.

These are important proposals which, if implemented, will have far-reaching consequences for Nepali politics and hence call for intense discussions on their implications. But these issues were never put up for discussion. The party president read out the document and convention representatives were asked to endorse it. They did. The paper was approved without any member being allowed to put forward views, questions or objections. The process was turned into a rubber stamp that even party leaders mocked, remarking that the "intensive deliberation conducted by 4,200 delegates lasted just seven seconds". The mismanagement, too, was not limited to the delayed finalisation of representatives. It was also evident in the party's inability to effectively manage the voting process to elect its leadership. The convention, which was scheduled to end on Tuesday, has already been extended by two days, and whether it will conclude even within the extended period remains uncertain.

The immense support the RSP received to be a major political force within just four years of its formation owed not just to the failure of the traditional parties to perform while in power. It was also because people were frustrated by how those parties functioned internally and how they bulldozed policies through party structures without adequate debate. It cannot be deemed healthy for a party that has projected itself as the torchbearer of alternative politics to face criticism from its own leaders and cadres for barring democratic discussion on key policy issues and on something as fundamental as the party statute.

The party had the opportunity to set the bar high and demonstrate how a party's general convention could be held in a true democratic spirit. However, on every front—from convention management and the finalisation of representatives to policy discussions and leadership selection—the RSP's first general convention has fallen short of expectations. This is an insalubrious development for the health of the RSP and as far the largest party in parliament, for Nepali democracy.

THEIR VIEW

Resilience as development priority

While the world debates emissions targets and agreements, those on the front lines cannot wait.

The emphasis of modern environmental policy has been on prevention. Governments, international institutions and activists have rightly focused on reducing emissions, protecting ecosystems and slowing the pace of climate change. Yet as weather patterns become more erratic and natural systems come under increasing stress, another question is demanding equal attention: How do societies adapt when change is already underway? The answer may not always lie in grand national missions or expensive technological breakthroughs. Often, it emerges from communities confronting immediate threats to their survival and finding practical ways to overcome them.

Across vulnerable landscapes worldwide, the most consequential climate innovations are increasingly those that help people live with a changing environment rather than merely warn about it. This shift in thinking is particularly important for mountain regions. The Himalayas are frequently described as Asia's water tower, feeding rivers that sustain hundreds of millions of people. Yet the retreat of glaciers and changing snowfall patterns are altering long-established hydrological cycles. Communities that once depended on predictable seasonal water flows are finding that nature's timetable no longer matches agricultural needs.

The challenge is not simply the quantity of water available but its timing. Such disruptions carry consequences far beyond agriculture. Water scarcity accelerates economic distress, encourages migration and weakens the social fabric of remote regions. When farming becomes unreliable, younger generations leave in search of opportunities elsewhere. Villages lose population, local knowledge erodes and already fragile frontier regions become more vulnerable to decline. This is why adaptation deserves a central place in public policy.

The most effective responses are often those that combine local knowledge with modern engineering. Communities understand their terrain, climate and water systems better than distant planners. Technology, when designed around those realities, can amplify rather than replace local capacity. The objective is not to recreate the past but to build resilience for a future that will not resemble it. India has witnessed similar successes elsewhere. Watershed restoration in drought-prone districts, decentralised rainwater harvesting in arid regions and community-led groundwater management have demonstrated that environmental security is often strengthened through local institutions and targeted innovation rather than through one-size-fits-all solutions. Climate adaptation works best when it is embedded within communities rather than imposed from above.

The broader lesson is that resilience must become a development priority in its own right. Investments in water security, climate-resilient agriculture and local infrastructure should no longer be viewed as peripheral environmental spending. They are investments in economic stability, social cohesion and national security. A village that retains its farmers, sustains its livelihoods and secures its water resources contributes as much to long-term resilience as any large infrastructure project. Climate change remains a global challenge requiring global action. But while the world debates emissions targets and international agreements, communities on the front lines cannot wait. Their future may depend on a simple principle: When nature's systems become less reliable, human ingenuity must become more so.

— The Statesman (India)/ANN

Nepal's untapped carbon goldmine

In the new carbon economy, the wealth is not only in what countries produce, but in what they protect, reduce and never emit.

SAMIKSHA BARAL



The global market for high-integrity carbon credits is in the grip of a peculiar crisis. The corporate demand is surging, however, verified credits are running dry, and Nepal is unusually well placed to respond to it.

Corporate climate commitments rose 227 percent in 2025. Credit retirements, which is often used as a measure of actual market demand, have declined. Serious buyers are looking for verified, nature-based emission reductions. Demand exists, but buyers are no longer willing to purchase weak credits. The shortage is in credible supply.

Nepal's carbon sector is one of the most underappreciated economic opportunities in the world. Buyers looking for credible credits are increasingly looking at countries like Nepal. Yet Nepal has earned only a fraction of what it needs from carbon markets, barely 0.02 percent. In fiscal year 2025-26, AEPCC reported around \$35.27 million in carbon revenue from household biogas, improved water mills and micro-hydro projects, while Nepal has also begun earning from forest-carbon programmes such as the Terai Arc Landscape REDD+ payment.

Forests cover 46.08 percent of Nepal's land, up from 29 percent in 1994, making it one of the most successful community forest management systems studied and replicated across Asia. The country also holds 83,000 megawatts of hydropower potential, with approximately 42,000 MW considered economically viable, and has run on 100 percent renewable electricity for years. It has no manufacturing base and no legacy of industrialisation. For generations, its agricultural communities have been living low-carbon lives by practice. Nepal is a country that has barely produced any emissions. And the world's carbon buyers know it.

Nepal has made a formal promise to the world under its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the climate commitment every country files under the Paris Agreement. Nepal has pledged net-zero emissions by 2045. Meeting those targets requires an estimated USD 121 billion in climate finance by 2035. Carbon markets are among the most direct mechanisms



SHUTTERSTOCK

available to meet the target. In 2019, Yeti Airlines sought to become carbon neutral and needed roughly 19,665 credits. Finding nothing accessible in Nepal, it bought from Indian hydropower projects instead.

The market exists, but Nepal has not built enough accessible projects to serve it. However, carbon credits only become tradeable assets when the country makes clear laws, strong institutions, recognised investment channels, and communities that understand the value they are creating.

From law to execution

Until December 2025, Nepal's environmental law recognised carbon trading only under the Kyoto Protocol. It expired in 2020. For four years, private developers had no clear legal basis to operate in this space. The Carbon Trading Regulation, 2022, became Nepal's first legal framework for carbon trading, which signalled that the government was finally beginning to see carbon as an economic sector.

But a law alone does not make the process easier. Carbon projects need technical review, verification, approval, authorisation and registry before credits can be sold. This requires institutions with expertise, resources and continuity. In May this year, the Ministry of Forests and Environment was merged into the new Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Environment. A very frequent problem of institutional knowledge and momentum that had to be rebuilt once again.

For example, Ghana became the first country to complete a bilateral carbon credit transfer under Article 6 with Switzerland, despite not having the same natural resource advantages as Nepal. It did so by building a separate Carbon Market Office, which gave investors long-term security that could survive political changes.

Investment gap

Nepal's carbon trading regulation permits joint ventures between foreign entities and Nepal-registered firms. The investors can legally establish carbon-related joint ventures, but the approval system still appears to lack a clear standalone category for carbon trading and carbon project development. As a result, projects that could bring foreign capital, employment and investment into energy, agriculture, waste management and industry face delays and uncertainty.

Awareness gap

As important as regulations are, it is equally crucial for communities to understand what carbon credits are. How they are generated, and how benefits return to them. A 2025 study in Environmental and Sustainability Indicators found that only 5.76 percent of farmers have high awareness of carbon credits. Nearly 20 percent of those below the poverty line have no knowledge of them at all.

This is crucial because Nepal's carbon value is created largely through local stewardship. Agreements like

LEAF may bring international recognition and finance, but the actual value is created by communities protecting forests, managing land, and sustaining low-carbon practices. If communities do not understand the value they are helping create, they cannot demand a fair share. Lessons from India, Congo, Borneo and Zimbabwe show that if communities are excluded or unformed, carbon projects lose trust and often fail. Closing this awareness gap must be part of building the market.

Ticking clock

Another ticking clock is Nepal's LDC status. Nepal's LDC status confers automatic additionality on carbon projects. A lower evidentiary threshold that makes project registration faster, cheaper, and more attractive to developers globally. This applies to community forestry, micro-hydro, agricultural methane, clean cooking, urban waste, and many other eligible sectors. It is expiring in November 2026. The government has formally requested a three-year extension from the United Nations Committee for Development Policy. That request may be granted but an extension should be viewed only as a temporary reprieve. The window of urgency still remains.

The Voluntary Carbon (VC) market has already channelled over 237 million tonnes of credits. Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Uganda, and Zambia, hold over 75 percent of all LDC credits. Bangladesh holds about 22 percent. Nepal holds a tiny fraction, despite having better forests, water, and agriculture.

Nepal contributes 0.056 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Last year, floods killed 249 people, in 2024 a glacial lake outburst swallowed an entire village, and climate-related damage cost an estimated \$345 million. This is roughly what a strong tourism year brings in. These are the crises Nepal had almost no hand in creating. Carbon markets were designed, at least in their original conception, to begin correcting that injustice.

The next 12 to 18 months are unusually important for Nepal to properly utilise this market. The country must study successful global models closely, think steps ahead, and build its own institutional pathway before the best buyers move elsewhere.

Baral is the CEO of The Promised Group and a director of Nepal Treasure Carbon Pvt Ltd.

Remittance at what cost?

We cannot build anything meaningful by securing a good balance sheet at the bank while leaving our parents to die in lonely terror.

ANJU GUPTA



The remittance economy in Nepal is both a wonder and a curse. The money that enters the country in the form of remittances is equal to more than one-third of GDP, which is among the highest percentages in the world. It has certainly changed people's lives by bringing them out of poverty, replacing houses made of mud and thatched roofs with concrete ones, paying for the private education of children from families who couldn't afford it before and connecting rural areas with paved roads. But along with all those benefits comes an even darker reality.

The remittance paradox is what you call it: An economic framework that saves families from a monetary crisis but empties them out socially. Money comes in, but belongingness goes out. The extended family system, the common land of the village and the caring community are all fading away. Yet, no one has truly calculated the price.

Moving into the mid-hills and the Terai region through Syangja, Khotang, Mahottari and Kailali districts, one will notice the same trends. Land is left uncultivated. Tea shops that once buzzed with lively debate are now quiet. The working-age population—people aged between 18 and 45 years—has migrated to countries such as Qatar, Malaysia and elsewhere for construction, industrial activities and service-related work. The only people left behind are a vulnerable demographic alliance of grandparents and their grandchildren.

The ramifications go well beyond aesthetics. In Nepal's traditional agricultural setup, work was communal; the parma (reciprocal labour exchange) system kept communities bonded through shared planting and harvest seasons. But the system has now broken down. Food security is ironically worsening in certain rural areas where remittance-dependent families buy imported Indian rice from local markets using money sent from abroad. Emergency response by the community has also degraded; when the monsoons bring landslides, there is usually no one around to help rescue people.

The Nepali joint family wasn't just a mode of living, but a complete social security system. The elders were custodians of the culture and caretakers. The grownups worked hard to earn a



POST FILE PHOTO

living while being connected to the family, and the kids were brought up with multiple levels of supervision by the parents, uncles, aunts and grandparents. Far from perfect, often conservative and patriarchal, it did offer an effective protection net.

Migration has disrupted this process at either end at once. When a young man migrates out in search of employment, he usually takes his wife away from the village to live in a nearby town or Kathmandu. This second internal migration process completely breaks the link between the young couple and their extended kinship system. And the outcome is elderly parents left alone in decaying ancestral homes, cut off from their sons working outside the country and grandchildren living in other places—nuclear families in urban settings, deprived of the support of the community.

Thousands of senior citizens in Nepal live through an old age, navigating loneliness and physical frailty. Reports of senior citizens dying in far-flung villages and their deaths being known to their neighbours only days after are now common occurrences. Tasks such as fetching water, dealing with ill health and travelling to health posts have become mammoth tasks for seniors without the backing of their families. Money transfers via wire cannot prepare food or be present to comfort ailing senior citizens. Mental health issues have become rampant in the form of increased depression, anxiety and existential crisis.

There is a term which teachers in rural towns whisper amongst them-

selves—remittance orphans. It is about kids with good shoes, fancy cell phones and money in their pockets without anyone in the family to discipline them or hear them out. Grandparents have all the best intentions in the world, but they are too tired and not educated enough in the modern sense to deal with digital influence, academic pressure and the dynamics of peer interaction. The obvious outcomes range from increased drug use among adolescents, high dropout rate from schools despite being able to afford it financially, to complete emotional detachment from everything around.

Mass migrations are not ending any time soon because our structural unemployment and macroeconomic weaknesses mean they cannot. However, we can no longer consider social degradation as an acceptable byproduct. The government must undertake three policies:

Ward-level elder care centres: Each ward needs to come up with Senior Citizens' Engagement Centres which need not be the old age homes of disgrace but rather centres where senior citizens come together for health checks, sharing of meals and mentoring schemes where school-going children interact with their seniors. It's a way to pass on history and skills while also solving the twin problems of loneliness among the elderly and lack of guidance among young people.

Family-centred pre-departure counselling: Current orientation programmes are focused on labour laws and logistical details of airports. These orientation programmes have to be

revamped and made to cover spouses and elders, making it mandatory for them to learn how to manage their long-distance relationships, how to deal with changing gender roles, and how to do financial planning. If the financial burden is taken care of prior to the move, survival is easier.

Returnee reintegration through cooperative farming and micro-credit: The objective is for migration to be converted into an interim stage of wealth generation rather than a permanent means of survival. Lines of credit at low interest and without collateral that are proportionate with the skills developed overseas such as construction, logistics and other technical professions can help returning migrants to start their own business ventures locally. Rural economic activity can be revived and the youth sent back to their villages through cooperative farming systems utilising idle lands and labour.

Again, building a nation economically comes at a cost; it destroys its culture. By gaining a house for ourselves in an urban area at the cost of losing the protection from our parents and securing a good balance sheet at the bank yet leaving our parents to die in lonely terror, we are not developing anything. A country is not judged only on its balance of payments. The infrastructure for care, the support systems for families and the reintegration pathways must ensure that the remittance machine does not continue to run on the destruction of families.

Gupta is an associate professor at the Central Department of English, TU.

FOREX

US Dollar	151.77
Euro	172.18
Pound Sterling	199.73
Swiss Franc	186.74
Australian Dollar	104.58
Canadian Dollar	106.67
Singapore Dollar	116.85
Japanese Yen (10)	9.39
Chinese Yuan	22.28
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.43
Qatari Riyal	41.64
Thai Bhat	4.54
UAE Dhiram	41.32
Malaysian Ringgit	36.68
Korean Won (100)	9.81

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 283,500
Silver	Rs 4,485

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Airbus to inspect 16 A380s after cracks found on plane wings

TOULOUSE: Airbus has announced it will inspect 16 of its A380 superjumbos, five of them immediately, after cracks were found in a key wing component on some of the jets used by the Emirates and Qantas airlines. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) ordered urgent inspections requiring airlines to examine the wing-spar structure on the affected jets after inspectors found cracks during routine maintenance checks, the plane maker said late Tuesday. The cracks appeared in a structural beam that runs along the wing and carries much of the aerodynamic load of the massive double-decker planes during flight. Of the 16 planes to be inspected, 15 are operated by Emirates and one by Qantas. The five aircraft to be inspected immediately are flown by Emirates, and they were to undergo the process as soon as Wednesday. (AFP)

Seoul bounces as Asian markets look to recover from rout

HONG KONG: South Korean stocks bounced back Wednesday from the previous day's rout, while the rest of Asia fought to recover from a region-wide sell-off amid lingering concern about the AI spending boom. Oil prices extended losses to sit around their lowest levels since the early days of the Middle East crisis, even as strain emerged in talks to bring an end to the conflict. Investors tentatively got back on the horse in Seoul as they picked up the pieces following a 10 percent collapse Tuesday in the KOSPI that was led by 12 percent losses in chip giants and market heavyweights SK hynix and Samsung. While no specific catalyst was blamed for the selling, analysts said it illustrated the growing concern on trading floors about the extended valuations of the tech firms that have been the key driver of a rally to record highs in several markets globally. Questions over when firms will see a return on the trillions that have invested in all things artificial intelligence have also been cited, as has the prospect of a US interest rate hike following last week's hawkish pivot by the Federal Reserve. (AFP)

Trump orders probe because gas prices not falling enough

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump said on Wednesday he ordered an investigation into major oil companies over high gasoline prices as the US leader faces criticism over the impact of the Mideast war. Global petroleum prices soared after Iran blocked the flow of oil through the vital Strait of Hormuz in response to US-Israeli strikes in February. "The big Oil Companies are not dropping their price at the pump commensurate with the sharply lower prices they are paying for Oil," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "Those prices are dropping like a rock! In other words, customers are being 'gouged'," he added. Gasoline prices are a political issue in the United States, where fossil fuel-powered vehicles are many Americans' primary means of transport. Trump has faced criticism for launching the war and its impact on the fuel costs paid by millions of Americans as November's congressional elections draw closer. The president repeatedly predicted that fuel prices would "come down like a rock" after the conflict ended. (AFP)

Private education sector adds Rs160 billion to Nepal's GDP annually

On average, each institution spends around Rs11.04 million annually, charges students a monthly fee of Rs3,305 and pays employees an average monthly salary of Rs15,683.

○ SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JUNE 24

Nepal's private education sector generates an estimated Rs195.5 billion in gross annual economic output and contributes around Rs160 billion to the national economy, according to the first comprehensive survey of non-government educational institutions released on Tuesday.

The sector's growing economic footprint underscores its role as a major service industry, supported by fixed capital investment of over Rs309.2 billion and providing employment to more than 300,000 people.

The Nepal Education Institution Survey 2023-24, conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), provides the first detailed assessment of the economic contribution of educational institutions operated by private, community-managed, cooperative and trust-based entities since the sector was opened to private investment.

The survey covers the period from mid-July 2023 to mid-July 2024 and includes all schools and colleges that are not owned by the government.

The survey estimates that educational institutions generated gross output worth Rs195.5 billion during the reference year. After accounting for inputs and investments totalling Rs114.4 billion, the sector added approximately Rs160 billion to Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP).

Bagmati Province accounted for the largest share of the sector's value addition, contributing Rs70.9 billion, or roughly 44 percent of the national total. Madhesh ranked second with Rs22.9 billion, followed by Lumbini and Koshi, which contributed Rs21.24 billion and Rs21.19 billion respectively.

The remaining provinces generated smaller shares. Gandaki recorded value addition of Rs12.75 billion, Sudurpashchim Rs7.95 billion and Karnali Rs3.04 billion.

The findings show that the economic contribution of non-government educational institutions is heavily concentrated in Bagmati, while Karnali and Sudurpashchim lag behind.

Nationwide, the survey counted 10,411 non-government educational institutions employing or engaging 311,516 people. Of them, 300,021 were employees, while 11,495 were proprietors or unpaid family workers.

On average, each institution spends around Rs11.04 million annually, charges students a monthly fee of Rs3,305 and pays employees an average monthly salary of Rs15,683.

The institutions spent approximately Rs74.6 billion on wages, salaries and employee benefits during the survey year. They also held gross fixed



SHUTTERSTOCK

Bagmati Province hosts 2,903 institutions, accounting for about 28 percent of the national total.

assets worth Rs309.2 billion and incurred intermediate consumption—goods and services used in the production process—amounting to Rs35.4 billion.

Nepal nationalised all community and private schools in 1971. However, the policy was reversed in 1980, allowing private investment in education and paving the way for the rapid expansion of private schools and colleges. The private education sector has expanded steadily ever since.

"After privatisation, schools expanded rapidly, but there had been no comprehensive survey of the sector," said Hem Raj Regmi, spokesperson and data curator at the National Statistics Office. "This is the first survey that provides reliable data on the contribution of private education to GDP and gives a clear picture of private sector investment in education."

The survey shows significant differences in fees across provinces and educational levels.

Students in Bagmati pay the highest fees, averaging Rs5,176 per month. Gandaki follows with Rs3,249, while Koshi and Lumbini charge Rs2,700 and Rs2,545 respectively. Average monthly fees stand at Rs2,483 in Madhesh, Rs2,307 in Karnali and Rs2,067 in Sudurpashchim, the lowest in the country.

At the school level, fees are comparatively modest. Pre-primary and primary education institutions charge an

average of Rs2,341 per student per month, while general secondary schools charge around Rs3,004.

Post-school education is significantly more expensive. Technical and vocational education institutions charge an average monthly fee of Rs11,498, the highest among all categories, while higher education institutions charge around Rs5,814.

The survey also highlights Bagmati's dominance across nearly all performance indicators. The province hosts the largest number of educational institutions, employees and engaged persons. It also records the highest levels of wages and salaries, fixed assets, intermediate consumption, total inputs, gross output and value addition.

Bagmati has the highest labour productivity, with value added per person engaged reaching Rs571,000. It also records the highest annual expenditure per institution at Rs17.57 million and the highest average monthly salary at Rs18,335.

Madhesh stands out for efficiency. It has the lowest input-output ratio of 0.42 and the highest value added per unit of capital at 0.66. The province also records value added per person engaged of Rs555,000, indicating relatively efficient use of capital and labour.

By contrast, Karnali and Sudurpashchim show lower productivity levels. Value added per person

engaged stands at Rs395,000 in Karnali and Rs356,000 in Sudurpashchim. Both provinces also have lower average fee levels despite maintaining relatively high value-added-to-output ratios.

The survey further reveals a highly uneven distribution of educational institutions across provinces.

Bagmati hosts 2,903 institutions, accounting for about 28 percent of the national total. Koshi, Madhesh and Lumbini follow with 1,917, 1,891 and 1,556 institutions respectively. Sudurpashchim has 907 institutions, Gandaki 862 and Karnali only 375.

Most non-government educational institutions are relatively small. Institutions employing between 10 and 20 people form the largest group, numbering 3,467 and accounting for roughly one-third of the total. Another 2,386 institutions employ between 20 and 30 people.

Combined with institutions employing fewer than 10 people, these categories account for around two-thirds of all educational institutions, indicating that the sector is dominated by small and medium-sized establishments.

As staff size increases, the number of institutions declines sharply. Only 259 institutions, or around 3 percent of the total, employ more than 100 people, underscoring the fragmented nature of Nepal's non-government education sector.

Global physical crude markets mired in discounts as Middle East ramps up supply

○ REUTERS
SINGAPORE/LONDON, JUNE 24

Physical crude oil cargoes are selling at discounts across the globe, changing trade flows as markets come under pressure from fast-rising Middle Eastern supply with Iran set to boost sales following a temporary reprieve from US sanctions.

The steep drop in prices follows the 60-day interim deal between the US and Iran to end the war that started on February 28, allowing some shipping to resume in the Strait of Hormuz which used to see a fifth of the global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments before the war.

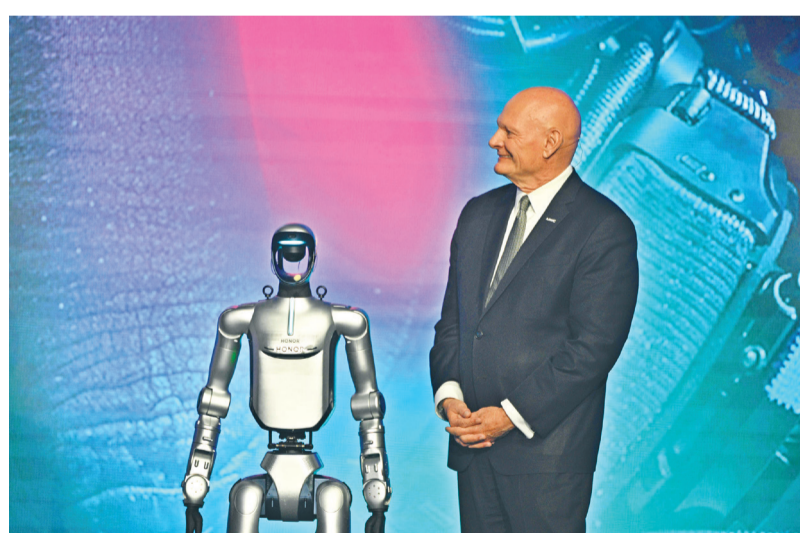
Tehran is also ramping up oil exports, seeking sales beyond China, after Washington temporarily lifted sanctions as part of the deal.

The release of cargoes stranded inside the Gulf and a wave of crude offers from Abu Dhabi National Oil Co, Kuwait Petroleum Corp and Iraq's SOMO have also boosted supply and depressed Middle East benchmarks Dubai, Oman and Murban to discounts. Asian refiners, which typically buy crude two months in advance, have already booked cargoes for delivery up to August.

"Refineries in the East have already been well supplied for the next two months and have no need for the incremental barrels, leading to a very weak market and Dubai spreads in contango," said June Goh, a senior oil market analyst at Sparta Commodities. Cash Dubai slipped to a discount of 27 cents a barrel on Tuesday, after peaking at more than \$60 in March, while discounts for Oman and Murban widened to 96 cents and 67 cents, respectively, Reuters data showed. [CRU/M]

Prompt cargoes trade at a discount to later-dated ones in a contango market, indicating ample supplies.

ADNOC sold at least 48 million barrels of spot crude so far this month for June-August loading, boosting regional supply. The collapse in Middle



AFP/RSS

CEO and Director of Global System for Mobile Communications John Hoffman speaks alongside a humanoid robot during the opening ceremony of the Mobile World Congress in Shanghai on Wednesday.

Eastern crude prices has made Gulf oil cheaper against Brent, enabling energy majors Exxon Mobil, Eni and TotalEnergies to send supertankers of crude such as Abu Dhabi's Murban and Upper Zakum to Europe, traders said. On the other hand, weak Middle East prices have shut the arbitrage window for Atlantic Basin crude to Asia, traders said. Spot differential for US West Texas Intermediate Midland crude has flipped from a premium a week ago to a discount of about 45 cents. [CRU/C]

"We're expecting US crude export premiums to Asia to erode and AB (Atlantic Basin) differentials to soften as the weeks progress," Rystad analyst Janiv Shah said. US crude exports to Asia are set to ease in the third quarter after hitting a record high of 2.634 million barrels per day in May, ship tracking data from Kpler showed.

Discounts for European and West African grades have also widened this week with the increase in Middle East

supply. North Sea Forties crude, one of the six grades that can set the value of the dated Brent benchmark, traded on Monday at a discount of \$1 a barrel to dated Brent, the lowest since November and sharply down from a record premium of \$21.50 a barrel in April, according to LSEG data.

"Europe is becoming the clearing point for crude that either lost its eastern outlet or now screens cheap enough to travel west," analysts at Kpler said in a note. For West African grades, Eni has sold Angolan Nembra crude for August loading to Glencore at \$7.95 a barrel below dated Brent while ExxonMobil offered a cargo of Angolan Hundo for loading on August 6-7 at a discount of \$4.05 per barrel to dated Brent, traders said.

Pricing agency S&P Global Energy Platts assessed on Tuesday that Congolese crude Djeno was at a discount of \$10.80 per barrel to dated Brent, the lowest in a record dating back to 2013.

Chinese EV makers know worth of gaining a foothold in India

>> Continued from page 1

Chinese EV makers understand the importance of gaining a foothold in India through such supply deals, said Gao Hua, a former director at China SAE and now an independent analyst. "If Chinese firms don't participate, others from different countries will step in," Gao said.

Chinese partnerships are increasingly appearing in sectors long dominated by Japanese, Korean and European firms, and they are challenging the incumbents with technologies that many analysts say are cheaper and faster to deploy.

For instance, Indian component maker Uno Minda has a joint venture with China's Inovance to manufacture EV powertrains in India—a sector where Bosch, Nidec and Aptiv are already present.

Battery co-operation halted

Technology licensing deals between India and China started to gain traction in the aftermath of the 2020 investment restrictions.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. In 2025, Beijing's export control curbs in retaliation to Trump's tariffs, forced Indian battery maker Amara Raja to end its licensing deal with China's Gotion for lithium-ion cell technology for EV batteries.

"All technical collaboration has stopped," Amara Raja's executive director Vikramadithya Gourineni told Reuters.

"The main things we were able to take away was understanding on factory and line layouts, technology roadmaps ... and connecting to the vendor base," Gourineni said.

Because the licensing deal was no longer possible, Amara Raja is instead ramping up investment in in-house R&D and talent, he said.

Dollar hits 13-month high as rate-hike bets and stock selloff boost demand

○ REUTERS
HONG KONG/LONDON, JUNE 24

The US dollar extended gains to reach a 13-month high against a basket of major currencies on Wednesday, as investors prepared for rate hikes from the Federal Reserve and sought shelter from a tech stock selloff.

Expectations of a US rate hike continued to build, with Fed officials sounding increasingly hawkish as the economy remains strong.

Investors were also nervous about stock market volatility after a broad selloff of technology and semiconductor sectors, which sparked safe-haven demand for the dollar and bonds.

Adding to the search for safe havens, the US and Iran appeared to be at odds on some major aspects of their framework agreement.

The dollar index, which measures the US currency against a basket of major peers, climbed to a high of 101.71, the strongest level since May 2025. It was last up 0.3 percent on the day.

"The US dollar is still the preferred safe haven," said Ray Attrill, head of FX strategy at National Australia Bank.

"Obviously the momentum is on its side at the moment, but I think there is a lot priced in," he said.

Markets are pricing in around a 35 percent chance of an interest rate hike at the Fed's July meeting, up from 9 percent a week ago, according to CME FedWatch. For September, the chance of a rate rise has risen above 70 percent from 29 percent.

The euro fell 0.35 percent to a more than one-year low of \$1.134 as the dollar strengthened.

"The move lower in EUR/USD has been driven by the recent divergence in market expectations for ECB and Fed policies," said Lee Hardman, senior currency analyst at MUFJ.

"While the US rate market has moved to price in multiple Fed rate hikes, the euro zone rate market has become less confident over the need for further ECB rate hikes."

The Japanese pound fell 0.35 percent to a seven-month low against the dollar at \$1.3149.

The risk-sensitive Australian dollar also fell 0.35 percent to \$0.6885, its lowest since early April, as mixed inflation data muddled bets on a rate hike.

The Japanese yen last traded at 161.66, as it struggled to regain ground against a persistently strong dollar. A break above 161.96 would leave the yen at its weakest level since 1986.

The latest verbal warnings from Japanese officials this week have done little to relieve pressure on the currency and the government is making plans to better manage its \$1.3 trillion foreign exchange reserves for yen intervention.

Chinese EV makers know worth of gaining a foothold in India

The company is now importing equipment, battery cells and other material from Chinese suppliers to meet its cell manufacturing ambitions, but it struggles to get enough visas for engineers to come from China for operational support.

Chery's other Indian partner
Last year, steel-to-cement billionaire Sajjan Jindal's maiden carmaking venture, JSW Motor, agreed to a partnership with Chery similar to Tata's.

JSW, which is investing \$3 billion, is targeting sales of 300,000 vehicles by 2030.

Under the deal, JSW has secured rights to use and adapt multiple Chery platforms to build a range of hybrids and EVs for India, sources familiar with the plans told Reuters. This involves an upfront payment of about 20 billion rupees (\$209 million) plus royalties, one of the people added.

JSW, which is investing \$3 billion in the venture, is targeting sales of 300,000 vehicles by 2030, the sources said.

The initial vehicles will largely come as imported kits from Chery with JSW gradually building out an Indian supply chain and scaling up car production at its factory in western India, they added.

JSW Motor and Chery did not respond to requests for comment.

"This highlights the importance of nuanced approaches. Cutting ties is not always the best option," Gao said.

How Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, 15, became the great sporting prodigy of this generation

He made his debut in elite senior cricket at age 12. At 13, he became the youngest player to get an IPL deal when Rajasthan Royals bought him for the 2025 season for \$1.1 million.

STEVE DOUGLAS/AP
NEW YORK, JUNE 24

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi shifted his back foot to the side, dipped his broad shoulders, extended out his bat almost horizontally and bludgeoned the white ball out of the field, right into the facade of a packed corporate stand.

It was the shot of a veteran baseball slugger, not of a 14-year-old facing his first ever ball in the world's biggest and most-watched cricket league.

So began the elite career of a kid who, for many, is the greatest sporting prodigy of this generation.

Perhaps any. "Truly God's gift to Indian cricket," was the description Sunil Gavaskar—a great of the sport—has given to Sooryavanshi, whose cherubic face belies the ferociousness with which he has been striking the ball in the glitzy, pressure-filled environs of the Indian Premier League over the past year.

In his recently completed first full IPL campaign, he finished as the top run scorer, hit a record number of sixes and was voted the MVP. Among his prizes was a car, which, of course, he cannot legally drive for three years.

Now aged 15, likened to India cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar and chased by sponsors wanting a piece of cricket's—sport's?—Next Big Thing, Sooryavanshi is going international.

On Friday, the left-handed opening batter will become the youngest ever player in India's senior men's team—15 years, 91 days—if, as expected, he is picked for the first of two Twenty20 internationals against Ireland in Belfast. Then come five T20Is in England, where the glare on Sooryavanshi will be even fiercer.

Expect him to take it all in stride. Last month, former England captain Michael Vaughan told the story of when he bumped into Boy Wonder ahead of an IPL match this season and told him how much he admired the way he plays.

"I said, 'How do you prepare for matches?'" Vaughan recounted on the "Stick to Cricket" show. "And he went, 'Watching cartoons.' I said, 'What do you eat?' He went, 'Everything.'" "There's the modern player: Watch a cartoon, eat what you want, smack it out of the ground."

A million-dollar deal at age 13

Sooryavanshi hails from Tajpur, a small agricultural town in the northern state of Bihar between the Ganges River and the border of Nepal.

His father, Sanjiv, was a cricket lover, and he gave his middle son of

three a bat at the age of 4. By the time he was 10, Vaibhav had been making early morning trips to a Next Gen academy around 100 kilometres away, and his prodigious talent was clear, especially the way he hit the ball so fiercely and cleanly and with such a high back-lift that it reminded onlookers of West Indies great Brian Lara.

Sooryavanshi made his debut in elite senior cricket at age 12—for Bihar in the Ranji Trophy—and, at 13, became the youngest player to get an IPL deal when Rajasthan Royals bought him for the 2025 season for \$1.1 million. His first IPL shot—that mighty six over extra cover off India fast bowler Shardul Thakur—underlined his status as the next Tendulkar, as did a 35-ball century, which was the second-fastest in IPL history, in his third match.

A star was born.

A technique that makes it look 'effortless'

Watch Sooryavanshi—thick set with strong arms and a side-parting in his dark hair—and what immediately stands out is his uncanny ability to strike the ball hard and far, wherever it is bowled at him.

It's down to a technique that typically sees him get back and across in his crease, dip his shoulder, deliver a high back-lift—just like Lara—at a 45-degree angle, keep his arms away from his body and, with remarkably coiled wrists, follow through with a shot generating enormous power.

Mark King, a professor of sports biomechanics at Loughborough University who has worked on projects with the England and Wales Cricket Board, noted how Sooryavanshi "uses his body maximally" by using his core to generate hand speed and therefore speed of the bat.

King said that from the clips he has seen, Sooryavanshi's technique evokes comparisons with Lara, another West Indies great in Viv Richards and former England captain Jos Buttler: "Those really skilled people that seem to be effortless."

The kid is making the world's best fast bowlers look silly, including smashing Jasprit Bumrah and Pat Cummins for six off the first delivery of their spells in the IPL.

"He'll wait for a ball at 90 mph," former England test cap-

tain Alastair Cook said, "and then react to it and still hit it for six so cleanly. That's what's unusual about him."

Wants to 'dominate for 10-20 years'

After being named MVP in the IPL, Sooryavanshi said in an in-house interview by Rajasthan that he wanted to play all three formats—T20, 50-over and Test—for India "in such a way that I should not just play but dominate for 10-20 years." Big words, and he's backing them up.

In February, he helped India to the trophy in the Under-19 World Cup, smashing 175 off 80 balls in the final against England—the highest individual score in any ICC global tournament final. Playing for India A on Sunday, he brought up a half-century in 11 balls—the fastest ever fifty in 50-over cricket, according to the BBC—in a knock of 94 off 29 balls against Sri Lanka A featuring just one dot ball.

If he's picked against Ireland on Friday, Sooryavanshi will be the youngest player in a top-tier men's T20, breaking the record of Ireland's Joshua Little (16 years, 309 days). Tendulkar was 16 years, 205 days when he made his test debut in 1989, then made his ODI debut 33 days later. There's been only one younger player than Sooryavanshi in men's international cricket, and that's Hasan Raza, who was 14 years, 227 days when he made his test debut for Pakistan in 1996.

In 2020, the International Cricket Council set the minimum age of 15 for players to compete internationally.

Off the field, Sooryavanshi's age prevents him from taking up certain sponsorship opportunities, like with gambling firms, but experts still believe his marketing potential is huge.

Dan Plumley, senior lecturer in sport finance at Loughborough University, pointed to the teenager being an ambassador for nutritional health drink Complan as evidence of him being able to partner with

"brands aiming at a more health-conscious generation."

"What's really fascinating from a wider perspective," Plumley added, "is he's got the ability to bring younger generations of people into a sport they might not necessarily have been interested in."

Comaneci, Pele and other sporting prodigies

It's rare for someone to be this good at such a young age in an elite-level team sport. Pelé was the star player at age 17 for Brazil in its World Cup-winning campaign in 1958, while Lamine Yamal starred for Spain as a 16-year-old at the 2024 European Championship.

In individual sports, Romanian gymnast Nadia Comneci was aged 14 when she became the first person in Olympic history to score a perfect 10 to win the all-around at the 1976 Montreal Games and American diver Marjorie Gestring was an Olympic gold medalist at 13.

In tennis, Jennifer Capriati started competing in professional events at 13 and was Olympic singles champion at 16, while Martina Hingis and Monica Seles won grand slam singles titles at age 16.

Congo fan who poses as living statue of independence leader Lumumba makes it to World Cup



Congo supporter Michel Nkuka Mboladinga poses as a statue of the country's assassinated independence hero Patrice Lumumba before the World Cup Group K match between Colombia and Congo in Zapopan, near Guadalajara, Mexico, on Tuesday local time.

TALES AZZONI/AP
GUADALAJARA, JUNE 24

Congo's famous living statue finally made his World Cup debut on Tuesday.

Michel Nkuka Mboladinga, who gained fame during the Africa Cup of Nations for posing as a statue of Congo's assassinated independence leader Patrice Lumumba for the entirety of the games, attended Congo's 1-0 loss to Colombia after missing its opener against Portugal because of Ebola quarantine requirements.

Lumumba Ve, as the sharply dressed supporter is known for his resemblance to the slain leader, was at his seat about an hour before the game at Estadio Akron. He wore a bright red jacket and tie, a yellow shirt and blue pants. When the game began, he stood motionless on a pedestal behind the Congo bench with his right arm raised.

Nkuka Mboladinga was a few minutes late back to the pedestal after halftime, but he stood there until the end and even a few minutes after the final whistle.

He did not want to be interviewed but nodded and smiled when asked if he was happy to have finally made it to the World Cup.

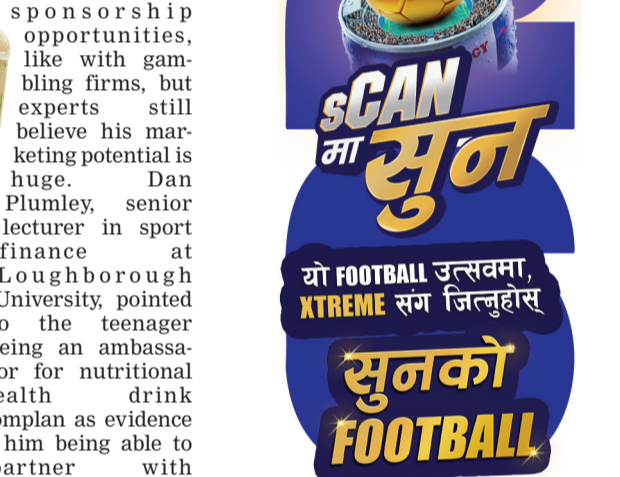
Congo played Portugal to a 1-1 draw last week in Houston.

Nkuka Mboladinga also missed Congo's World Cup playoff match against Jamaica earlier this year—when his nation secured a return to the tournament after 52 years—because he was unable to get a visa in time. He had travelled to Kenya and then Ethiopia in a bid to get a visa for the game, which was also played in Guadalajara.

Nkuka Mboladinga became a social media sensation at the Africa Cup for posing as a statue of Lumumba on a pedestal with his right hand raised and standing still throughout the games.

Lumumba was an activist who helped to end Belgium's colonial rule over Congo in 1960. He became the newly independent country's first prime minister and was seen as one of Africa's most promising leaders, but he was assassinated within a year during a struggle against a Belgian-backed secessionist movement in the mineral-rich Katanga region.

A Belgian court in March ordered a 93-year-old former diplomat to stand trial for the slaying. Etienne Davignon, who previously denied wrongdoing, is the last living among 10 Belgians suspected of involvement in the killing and has been charged with "participation in war crimes" for his role in the "unlawful detention and transfer" of Lumumba.



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi gestures as he warms up before the start of the Indian Premier League cricket match against Gujarat Titans in New Chandigarh, India, on May 29.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Your response to conflict can strengthen or deteriorate relationships, so try to pause and think before reacting. Act like a leader by calmly setting boundaries and pointing out when others are out of line.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Try to be enchanted by your world, dearest Cancer. A lack of drive or purpose may contribute to these feelings. Having aspirations can massively influence your overall happiness.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Though your altruistic nature is admirable, it's important to maintain a healthy perspective so happiness isn't compromised. Find joy and simplicity within your own little bubble when the world seems too chaotic and vast.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Choose your company wisely this morning, dearest Capricorn. Go deeper with people you trust, and back away from those you do not. Set boundaries to avoid toxic social dynamics.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

You could feel groggy and somewhat antisocial this morning, dearest Taurus. Check in with yourself, using gentle movement to alleviate stress and reestablish balance.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Try not to get down on yourself this morning, dearest Leo. If you're going to be hard on yourself, use the energy to insist that you put an end to negative self-talk.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Now is a good time to discuss long-term goals with someone who believes in you, dearest Scorpio. If you're in a relationship, ask your partner to help you stay focused and accountable.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Reflect on your ultimate goals and whether unexpected opportunities have led you astray. You'll need to decide if these new paths are worth sacrificing other aspirations, or if it's time to strike out on your own.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Before you tackle the day's agenda, consider where assistance can make your life easier. Just remember to appropriately show your gratitude this afternoon. Otherwise, peers may start to feel taken advantage of.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Words could fail you this morning, dear Virgo, especially where matters of the heart are concerned. Consider writing down your feelings before expressing them.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Love your flaws while seeking growth, dearest Sagittarius. Take space to work through any challenges you'd rather not face within the public arena. Focus on your strengths.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

String together all those tiny details that make up your bigger picture, dearest Pisces. You'll feel increasingly secure in your ability to pull off goals that have been overwhelming at times.

CROSSWORD

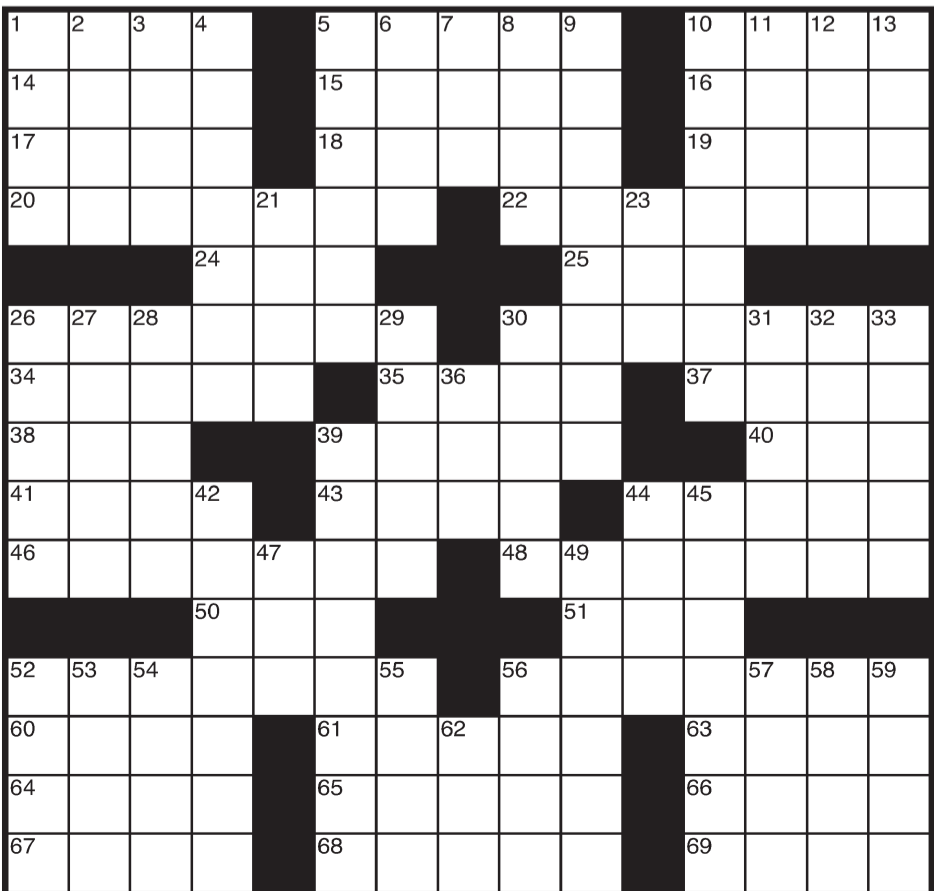
- ACROSS**
- Flood the market
 - Winner of the gold, briefly
 - Enthusiastic
 - Learning method
 - Rustic
 - Tearoom
 - Trebek of "Jeopardy!"
 - Prefix for "below"
 - Teeming
 - Speediest
 - Theasaurus entry
 - Luau strummer
 - Dartboard locale
 - Leading lady
 - Beirut locale
 - Items for sale
 - of bricks
 - Ocean phenomenon
 - Outstanding
 - Shores up
 - Asner and Ames
 - Attack with a knife
 - Lo-cal
 - Gem surface
 - Appalling
 - Would-be callers
 - Entree choice
- DOWN**
- Tennis star
 - Steffi
 - "Damn Yankees" siren
 - Comanche neighbors
 - You can feel it
 - Emergencies
 - Quest
 - Kennel sound
 - Red planet
 - Nursery items
 - Tumbler
 - Self-centered
 - Up in the air
 - Consider
 - Barely manages
 - Small lump
 - Overflowing
 - Saguaros

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



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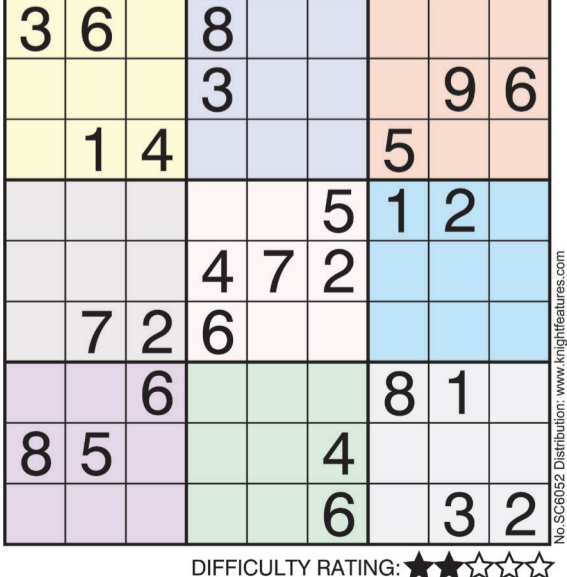
- Tire feature
- Graceful wraps
- Went at an easy gait
- Dorothy, to Em
- Minor mistake
- Tree abodes
- Rug rat
- Pipe fixers
- Gazes upon
- accompli
- Eager to hear (2 wds.)
- Rowboat need
- Coin-slot word
- "Waterloo" group
- Lisa's brother
- Where Anna taught
- Minor mistake
- Collar or jacket
- Business VIP
- Food list
- Enjoy a snowy slope
- Census info



SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

In Kathmandu, the World Cup means jerseys, memories and dreams of glory

Thousands of kilometres from the stadiums of North America, Kathmandu's football fans show how the city has been swept up in football's biggest spectacle.



○ RIVASH RIJAL
KATHMANDU

Despite still being in the group stage, the 2026 FIFA World Cup has already delivered on the upsets and tight, seesaw games expected of the tournament. And fans are hopeful the blockbuster start means it's only going to get better from here.

As the World Cup continues to pick up pace in North America, here in the Nepali capital, fans have also been swept up in the festive mood. Roadside vendors are displaying team jerseys for sale on shop-fronts, restaurants and bars are putting on nightly screenings, and fans are flocking to stores to make sure they don't go another game without their team's colours.

The *Post* spoke to a number of customers and vendors at New Road's many stores about their favourite teams, World Cup memories, what it means to them, and why they were all lined up to buy team jerseys.

Ramesh Subedi, 54, from Bhaktapur, was picking up an Argentina kit. He has been supporting the team since 1986, when Diego Maradona led the team to its second title in Mexico. He fondly remembers

growing up watching the World Cup. While at the store, he also picked up the German, English and Uruguayan kits. "These teams always perform on the big stage. I want an Argentina jersey because that's been my team for so long, but these other teams are impressive as well—they are all winners," he says. Subedi says he thinks of the World Cup as football's *Kumbh Mela* and hopes to see Nepal at the

New Road's jersey sellers are cashing in on the loyalties and passions that make this event special.

games someday. "Even if Nepal makes it two decades later, I would like to sit back on my couch and watch them play."

Another customer, a 20-year-old college student from Sarlahi, says she has never seen the World Cup before but is excited to watch it for the first time. She tagged along with her friends to the store. "I think I will get a Brazil kit, I like the country."

Rohit Tamang is a 21-year-old college student in Kathmandu. He has been a Manchester City supporter for a few years now and is a big Erling Haaland fan. "I have been looking for the Norway away kit. I saw they have the home kit, but I am looking for the away one; it's nicer. I hope I can find it," he says, "having a jersey is a 'chino' of having watched the games."

Musician Sunny Mahat was at a New Road store to get a Portugal jersey for his son. He remembers watching the 1994 World Cup in his Dhapasi neighbourhood. "Not everyone had a colour TV like today. So we would all gather at someone's place and watch the games. It was an opportunity to socialise and talk to people," he says. Mahat does not want to get a jersey for himself. He says he is not a big football guy, but totally gets why people do it.

New Road's jersey sellers are cashing in on these loyalties, superstitions and passions that make football's biggest event special.

Jersey Pasal Nepal has been run by a husband-and-wife team since 2015. "The World Cup definitely brings in more customers. We have a daily footfall of around 500 people nowadays. There are many worse copies on the market. We sell stuff that's very close to the real deal. When

people buy a kit, they want it to look like what the players wear and to last. We provide those things," she says.

At another store in the area, 72-year-old Nanda Lal Dhakal was buying a full Argentina kit for his 5-year-old grandson. Dhakal, a resident of Bharatpur, had been in Kathmandu for work for a few days and wanted to get the kit before he left. "I haven't really seen much football. But I would like my grandson to take an interest in these things. He likes to play a lot," Dhakal said smilingly.

Another couple, who own a clothing store close to New Road gate, told us they were surprised by the demand this time around. "We have been selling jerseys for the last three World Cups. We have never had so many customers coming to buy," the husband said. "People want to support the big guys, the players who score and the teams who do well," the wife added.

"We had been selling a lot of Spain jerseys in the last few weeks. But since their draw [against Cabo Verde], we have noticed that the jersey does not sell as much anymore."

Prior to speaking to the *Post*, she shut down someone haggling with her over a Messi kit, saying, "He just scored a hat trick the other day. These big names don't come cheap, sir." The couple shared that they were worried about whether the games would happen at all, given the US's rhetoric leading up to the tournament. "No one stocked up. Importers were worried about the games not happening,

and we did not order as much as we should have."

From uncles buying kits for their SEEPASS nephews to veteran watchers collecting some good-looking pieces, people from all walks of life are celebrating the festival of football in Kathmandu.



Ramesh Subedi, 54, from Bhaktapur, has supported Argentina since 1986, when Diego Maradona led the team to its second title in Mexico. He thinks of the World Cup as football's 'Kumbh Mela'.



"We had been selling a lot of Spain jerseys in the last few weeks. But since their draw against Cabo Verde, the jerseys haven't been selling as much anymore," say a couple who own a clothing store near New Road Gate.

POST PHOTOS: RIVASH RIJAL

In 'Roots & Blooms', emotions take abstract form

Contemporary artist Shivangini Rana presents 72 works, blending paintings with wearable art pieces crafted on shawls.

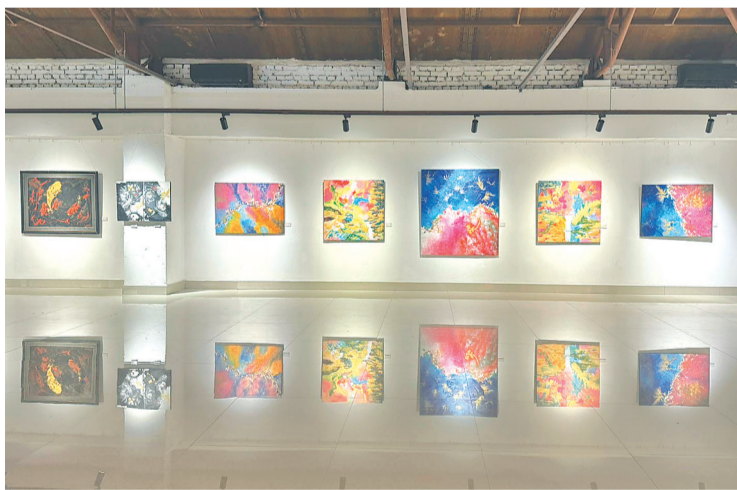


PHOTO: COURTESY OF SHIVANGINI RANA

Where: Kala Salon, Thamel, Kathmandu

When: Until July 12

Time: 11:00 am to 7:00 pm (Mondays only by appointment)

Entry: Free

○ MOKSHYADA THAPA
KATHMANDU

Kala Salon presents 'Roots & Blooms', a solo art exhibition by contemporary artist Shivangini Rana, until July 7. Following the theme of abstract expressionism, the artist has created 72 pieces that connect with her personal emotions.

The style of art originated in New York between the 1940s and 1950s, when artists began using their raw, unfiltered emotions as the foundation of their work.

Rana has also experimented with Pashmina and silk shawls as part of her craft, in addition to the conventional method of canvas paintings. Abstract designs imprinted on fabrics have turned her work into distinctive, collectable art. This sort of diversification

in art is a testament to Rana's commitment to pushing her creative boundaries.

"Sometimes my work emerges from happiness, sometimes from longing, and often from the beautiful uncertainty that exists between the two," reads the artist's statement.

For her, abstraction is more than just showcasing a style; it's a way to convey and share her emotions with the world.

In contrast to the popular belief that abstract art can be done by anyone, the curator of the exhibition, Sophia L Pande, thinks otherwise, "Abstract expressionism is as much an exercise in restraint as it is one of emotion, where craft wars with creativity to produce a work of art," noting that the layers and figurative symbols can only come from an intentional practice.

Pharrell sends Vuitton surfing as Jeremy Allen White and Missy Elliott look on

For spring-summer 2027 men's collection, surfing supplied the wardrobe.

○ THOMAS ADAMSON
PARIS

Pharrell Williams sent Louis Vuitton's dandy surfer at star-filled Paris Fashion Week over a giant curling wave Tuesday, closing the opening day of menswear shows with a glass-walled camper, a moonlit set and a collection that put clothes ahead of spectacle.

A moon rose overhead, stars were visible above the runway, and beneath them came the wave: a barrel built tall enough to swallow the show.

It rose from a sandy outdoor set, spraying mist into the heat and giving the evening's surf fantasy a practical appeal.

The front row had its own stars. Jeremy Allen White, Charles Melton, Future, Missy Elliott, Lola Young, Coco Jones, Quavo, Victor Wembanyama, Jackson Wang, BamBam and Finn Bennett were among the guests.

Out of the wave walked Williams' surfer—sun-bleached, salt-worn and tailored for somewhere between shore and city.

For Louis Vuitton's spring-summer 2027 men's collection, surfing supplied the wardrobe: wetsuit textures, patched outerwear, weathered denim, beaded bombers, loaged surfboards and tailoring loosened by travel.

Since arriving at Vuitton, Williams has returned often to the dandy: elegant but easy, polished but relaxed.

This season, he sent him to the beach—or at least to the kind of beach reached after the boardroom, with luggage and cashmere in tow.

A silver camper, reimagined as a glass-walled habitat and parked among dunes, framed the Vuitton man

on familiar house terrain: travel. Vuitton began with trunks, after all.

Hang 10, tailored

The clothes worked best when the surf references were handled lightly.

Technical wetsuits met tailoring fabrics, including functional diving pieces marked with Vuitton's Monogram.

Weathered jackets looked already lived in.

Hoodies came sun-faded and salt-softened, with gilded LV drawstrings.

Denim and coats had shibori-like indigo effects. Bomber jackets were weighted with dense ropes of beadwork.

Williams' trompe l'oeil effects also returned, with surfaces made to mimic other surfaces and casual pieces revealing more handwork up close.

Several pieces leaned into the after-surf wardrobe: robe-like coats, soft jackets and easy layers with the comfort of a towel thrown over cold shoulders.

The new flat-soled skate shoe brought the collection back to Williams' older world: skateboarding, Billionaire Boys Club, Ice Cream and Nigo.

That gave the surf theme a sharper edge, and an obvious commercial engine.

Surf's up, spectacle down

Williams' Vuitton has always known how to stage an event. His debut turned the Pont Neuf into a gold Damier runway. Other shows have brought games, houses, orchestras, choirs and front rows built for the camera.

Tuesday had plenty of production: a cinematic prelude with surfers Mikey February and Julian Wilson, a soundtrack featuring Quavo, Williams and Angélique Kidjo, and live performances by L'Orchestre du Pont Neuf and the Voices of Fire choir.

But the set did not overwhelm the clothes. The wave was huge. The collection held its own.

Vuitton said it would support Coral Gardeners, with plans to help out-plant 1,000 corals and restore 250 square meters of reef habitat in French Polynesia in 2026.

Williams took his bow as the wave still towered behind him.

This time, the clothes were not swept away.

—Associated Press



A model wears a creation from the Louis Vuitton men's Spring Summer 2027 collection.

AP/RSS



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