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Financial constraints fuelling women's informal labour migration to Kuwait

Nearly 69,000 Nepalis, mostly women, are domestics in the emirate. Many lack access to Nepal's legal protections.

HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUG 2

Nearly 69,000 Nepalis are employed as domestic workers in Kuwait despite a government ban on sending workers for such jobs, proof that Nepal's migration policy is increasingly out of step with the economic realities driving women to seek work abroad.

The figures, provided by Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of Nepal in Kuwait, expose the widening gap between government policy and the reality of overseas employment.

> **Experts say unsafe migration will continue unless Nepal creates enough jobs at home.**

They also show how restrictions introduced to protect vulnerable workers have failed to prevent migration and have instead pushed many aspiring workers towards informal recruitment channels.

The ban originated from a directive issued on April 2, 2017 by parliament's International Relations and Labour Committee. The committee instructed the cabinet to stop sending domestic workers to Gulf countries until destination countries introduced protective laws and signed bilateral labour agreements with Nepal.

Following the directive, legal departures for domestic employment came to a halt.

However, official figures show that thousands of Nepalis have continued to work as domestic workers in Kuwait.

According to the diplomatic communication received by the embassy, Kuwait is home to 186,000 Nepali nationals. Of them, 115,000 work in the private sector, 421 in the public sector and 68,900 as domestic staff in private households.

Nepalis now account for around four percent of Kuwait's total population. Statistics released on June 30 by Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information show that the country hosts more than 2.8 million foreign workers, including 883,308 domestic workers.

For many Nepali women, the ban has not removed the need to seek employment abroad.

Instead, financial pressures have pushed many to rely on informal channels to reach countries where domestic work is in demand.

Sunita Limbu, a domestic worker in Kuwait, said economic hardship forced her to seek employment despite the restrictions.

"I have a five-year-old son and a chronically ill husband," Limbu told Kantipur. "I need to pay for my son's education and husband's treatment. I earn Rs50,000 a month here, but I had to come through unauthorised routes. Had we been allowed to migrate legally, we could at least visit our families during scheduled leave."

Recruitment networks operating in both Nepal and Kuwait have filled the gap created by the absence of legal channels.

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF NEPAL WELFARE SOCIETY, KUWAIT

Domestic workers at a holding centre in Kuwait in this recent photo.

Food prices surge as weak oversight squeezes Nepali households

Rice, vegetables and edible oil got costlier in recent weeks, while cooking gas shortages increase household burdens.



POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

People wait for a refill of cooking gas cylinders at the Teku depot of Nepal Oil Corporation in Kathmandu on Sunday.

SEEMA TAMANG
KATHMANDU, AUG 2

Households across Nepal are struggling with a sharp rise in the cost of daily essentials, as the prices of rice, edible oil, pulses, vegetables and eggs continue to climb, stretching family budgets just months before the Dashain and Tihar festivals.

While traders attribute the increases to higher import costs, seasonal supply shortages and rising transport expenses, consumer rights advocates say weak market oversight has allowed unjustified price hikes to go unchecked. They argue that inadequate monitoring has created room for profiteering at a time when demand for essential goods traditionally begins to rise.

The increase in food prices comes as consumers are also grappling with an artificial shortage of cooking gas in several parts of the country, adding to concerns over the rising cost of living.

Rice, the country's staple food, has seen some of the steepest increases, with retail prices rising by as much as Rs400 per bag over the past three months.

Vibhor Agrawal, executive director of Radhakrishna Rice Mills and a member of the Nepal Rice, Oil and Pulses Producers Association, said the increase was primarily driven by rising procurement costs in India. Nepal purchases large quantities of paddy from the southern neighbour.

"The price of paddy in India has increased by 800 to 900 Indian rupees per quintal," Agrawal said. "Once transport costs, milling expenses and customs duties are added, the increase is reflected in retail prices."

According to Agrawal, a bag of Jira Masino rice that sold for around Rs2,100 three months ago now costs about Rs2,500.

"Wholesale prices have increased by Rs300 to Rs400 per bag across most varieties," he said.

"Nepal does not produce enough paddy to meet domestic demand, so fluctuations in the Indian market immediately affect prices here."

Industry representatives also point to recent fiscal measures as another factor driving up costs.

From the beginning of the current fiscal year, the government imposed a five percent Value Added Tax on cargo transport services and a 13 percent VAT on electricity used by non-domestic consumers.

Agrawal said the transport VAT alone adds roughly Rs12 to the cost of every bag of rice before it reaches retailers, while higher electricity costs have increased milling expenses.

The price surge is not limited to grains.

Wholesale data from the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Board show that prices of several vegetables have risen sharply over the past month as monsoon rains disrupted production and reduced supplies.

Long eggplant, for instance, was selling at Rs14.25 per kilogram at the wholesale market on July 1. By August 2, the price had climbed to Rs45 per kilogram, an increase of more than 215 percent.

Bitter gourd rose from Rs25 per kilogram to Rs58.33 during the same period.

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America slips further out of reach for many aspiring Nepalis

With average per capita income of just $1,500, a $20,000 refundable visa bond is a formidable challenge for Nepalis.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, AUG 2

Eva Bhattarai (name changed on request) had hoped to travel to the United States for one simple reason: To attend her daughter's graduation in 2027. However, a new US State Department rule requiring some B1/B2 visa applicants to deposit a refundable bond of up to $20,000 before traveling has left that wish out of reach.

"No matter how much I want to go, I cannot set aside that much money," Bhattarai, a resident of Baneshwar, Kathmandu, says.

She is among many Nepalis reassessing their travel plans after the US Department of State announced that its visa bond programme, first introduced as a 12 month pilot in August 2025, would become permanent from Monday.

Under the programme, consular officers may require selected B1/B2 visa applicants from around 50 countries, including Nepal, to deposit US$10,000, US$15,000 or US$20,000 before a visa is issued.

> **Bond refundable if travellers comply with US rules, leave before authorised stay expires.**

Although US$15,000 is expected to be the standard amount, officers can require a lower or higher bond depending on factors such as the applicant's purpose of travel, employment, income, and other circumstances. The bond is refundable if travellers comply with US immigration rules and leave before their authorised stay expires.

For Bhattarai, the policy has effectively ended her plans to visit her daughter.

"I want to visit my daughter, not settle there," she says, describing the proposal as unfair. "By the time families prepare according to one set of rules, another policy is already announced."

The new proposed plan has already begun shaping how some Nepalis think about future travel to the United States. For instance, parents hoping to visit children, repeat visitors and business travellers all say the financial burden could alter their travel plans, even though the money would be refunded upon compliance with visa conditions.

For many citizens of a country with an average annual income of around $1,500, having to provide such a substantial deposit—even a refundable one—creates a major obstacle and makes the possibility of travel far less certain. The minimum deposit amount is several times greater than the country's annual per capita income.

Koteshwar resident Leela Bhandari, 53, whose son has lived in the US for seven years, said the rule did not affect her recent trip because her visa had already been issued before the programme was announced. Still, she says, she found the idea difficult to accept because applicants could be required to pay a large sum before knowing whether their visa would even be approved.

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Nepal once had a vibrant civil society. Now it has faded and fragmented

From a force for democratic change to a diminished role, civil society is struggling to find its place in a transformed political landscape.

TUFAN NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, AUG 2

Devendra Raj Panday was known less for his formal titles as an economist, former minister and planner than for his role as a "citizen leader".

Standing outside active party politics, he consistently questioned the state, governments and political parties. His views on Nepal's political crises, democratic backsliding and issues of public interest were difficult for governments and political parties to ignore.

Panday died on July 17 at the age of 87.

His death came at a time when the independent civic voice he represented has become far quieter than it once was.

The civil society and citizen movement that played a crucial role in Nepal's democratic struggles, creating public pressure for democracy, human rights and accountability while challenging governments and political parties, now appears fragmented, particularly after the constitution was promulgated in 2015.

Has Nepal's civil society and citizen movement weakened, or has it simply taken a new shape in response to changing circumstances?

Analysts say that at a time when parliamentary opposition has weakened, and the role of the press has narrowed, the broad civic coalition that once spoke with a collective voice has splintered into separate campaigns and movements without a common platform.

Analyst Dovan Rai believes the once-powerful citizen movement has weakened and become 'tired'. "When we were fighting regression in the past, we knew exactly what we were fighting for and against. That clarity is missing today," she said. "The leaders of the citizen movement have failed to grasp the political moment. Once the Balendra Shah government claimed ownership of ideas like youth, change and a new political order, the citizen movement was left without a distinct message of its own."

The Balendra Shah-led government was formed after the Rastriya Swatantra Party won the March elections with nearly a two-thirds majority, months after the youth-led movement in September last year.



AI GENERATED

Rai's assessment points to a deeper crisis: as Nepal's political landscape has changed, the citizen movement has struggled to redefine what it stands for.

The roots of this crisis go beyond recent political developments. For years, Nepal's civil society, often described as the citizen movement, has faced the challenge of maintaining the collective power and public authority it demonstrated during earlier democratic struggles.

Several studies have noted that Nepal's citizen movement has been most influential during periods of political transition. During the struggle against the Panchayat system, lawyers, professors, writers, journalists and professional organisations formed the intellectual foundation of the democratic movement. The citizen movement emerged as an organised force during the 2006 People's Movement.

Many studies define Nepal's "civil society" primarily as non-governmental organisations or registered civic institutions. For instance, the Asian Development Bank's 2024 publication Civil Society Brief: Nepal analyses civil society mainly through the lens of civil society organisations, including NGOs, community organisations and professional bodies.

According to the brief, institutional presence of such organisations remains extensive in Nepal, cooperation with the government continues at various levels, international donor support remains significant, and the World Social Forum held in Kathmandu in 2024 demonstrated the organisational capacity of Nepali civil society.

However, after the 2006 People's Movement, the independent civic voice that intervened in matters of public concern outside political parties increasingly came to be identified not as 'civil society' but as a 'citizen movement'.

Analyst CK Lal, in his July 22 column in Kantipur, argues that the term "citizen movement" was chosen instead of "civil society" based on his own proposal during discussions among independent citizens, including Panday, about the movement. The movement brought together human rights activists, lawyers, professors, journalists, writers, former bureaucrats and leaders of professional organisations. They campaigned for democracy and peace, questioned governments and political parties, and demanded accountability.

In his article in the Martin Chautari publication 'Civil Society in Democracy: A 25-Year Review', Chudamani Basnet writes that before the 2006 People's Movement, intellectuals were worried that political parties would be unable to mobilise citizens.

There were doubts that people would take to the streets under the leadership of parties that had been associated with corruption and disorder since the restoration of democracy in 1990. It was amid this uncertainty that the citizen movement emerged.

After the February 2005 state of emergency, political space gradually opened up, while the royal regime came under mounting international pressure. Many intellectuals who had left the country returned and began meeting at the Nepal South Asia Centre in Anamnagar for discussions.

Panday had established the centre soon after the 1990 democratic movement.

Basnet writes that among the senior figures who gathered there were Panday, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Khagendra Sangraula, Krishna Khanal, Saroj Dhital, Daman Nath Dhungana, Sundar Mani Dixit, Shyam Shrestha, Mahesh Maskey and Krishna Pahadi.

Although they held different ideological positions, they were united against the royal takeover.

Young researchers and activists from smaller organisations such as the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), Martin Chautari and the Human Rights and Peace Society gradually joined the movement.

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Safety failures are turning Phewa Lake increasingly deadly

The craze for stand-up paddleboards has brought thrill to Pokhara's iconic lake, but weak oversight and poor compliance are putting lives at risk.

DEEPAK PARIYAR
POKHARA, AUG 2



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK PARIYAR

Kayakers fill the waters of Phewa Lake in Pokhara in this recent photo. As activity expands on Phewa Lake, drowning incidents and accidents show the growing need for stronger safety and rescue preparedness. Pokhara Mayor Dhanraj Achayra told the Post that only five of the 42 paddleboard operators are licensed.

On June 23, 19-year-old Amar Thapa from Ram Bazar, Pokhara, went to Phewa Lake to try stand-up paddleboarding (SUP), a water sport that has rapidly caught the attention of the city's youth.

Thapa paddled into the lake after 6 pm. Within less than an hour, the outing turned fatal. At around 6:40 pm, he fell into the water and disappeared.

A disaster management team from the Armed Police Force, Pokhara, including trained deep-water divers, recovered his body at around 9:10 pm from a depth of about 25 feet. Police detained the lifeguard working for the paddleboard operator immediately after the incident and arrested the company owner the following day. Both were charged with causing death through business negligence and have since been released on bail.

Thapa's death was not an isolated tragedy. Eight people lost their lives in Phewa Lake in the last fiscal year alone, according to records maintained by security agencies.

The deaths expose a growing safety crisis in one of Nepal's most popular tourist destinations, where new recreational activities have expanded faster than regulations and enforcement mechanisms.

On February 14, 24-year-old Adit Gurung died after his car veered off the road near Gaira Chautara and plunged into the lake. On April 10, 32-year-old Nisu Bhagat (Agarwal), a resident of Siliguri, India, drowned while swimming. On May 1, 10-year-old Aarish Lama from Khapaudi died while swimming in the lake. Weeks later, on May 21, 27-year-old Riwaj Gurung from Kahun Khola, in Pokhara, also drowned while swimming.

The fatalities continued into June. A day after Thapa died on a stand-up paddleboard, 34-year-old Shankar Nepali from Nayabazar drowned at around 5:30 pm while fishing near Khapaundi.

Concerned by the rising number of incidents, the District Administration Office (DAO) issued a safety notice on June 25 along with stricter rules for boats, kayaks and surfing equipment operating on the lake.

The notice required all water sports operators to register their businesses, provide life jackets to customers, maintain safety insurance coverage, follow designated operating hours and monitor weather conditions before allowing activities. The administration also warned of legal action against businesses that ignored the rules.

But the directives have done little to prevent further deaths.

On July 10, 36-year-old Rohit Kumar from Bihar, India, fell into the lake near Tal Barahi Temple while visiting Pokhara with friends. Rescue personnel stationed at a nearby Armed Police Force monitoring tower responded immediately but failed to save him.

Five days later, the body of 50-year-old Bir Bahadur Rai, originally from Sindhuli and living in Ratnachowk, Pokhara, was found floating near the lakeshore.

Whenever emergencies occur on Phewa Lake, rescue teams from the APF Kalika Battalion are deployed. Personnel from the 24th Battalion operate round-the-clock from the Phewa Watch and Rescue Tower at Barahighat.

According to battalion records, 28 major water-related incidents occurred in the 2025-26 fiscal year. These included wooden boats, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards capsizing because of sudden winds or human negligence, as well as drowning incidents and people entering the water in risky circumstances. Rescue teams saved 85 people, but eight people died.

Inspector Binod Paudel, chief of the Gandaki Province Disaster Management Team under the APF, said 20 personnel work in two shifts at the rescue tower daily. At least three deep-water divers remain on standby at all times.

However, rescue capacity has not matched the increasing number of recreational activities on the lake.

Data from the Kaski District Police Office show nine people drowned in Phewa Lake in fiscal year 2023-24 and four in 2024-25. Five of those who died in the latter year were children.

Kumar Pariyar of Pumdibhumdi, who has operated wooden boats on Phewa Lake for more than a decade, says he has witnessed the risks created by the rapid growth of stand-up paddleboarding.

According to him, many young users venture into the lake alone, remove life jackets while swimming or enter the water after consuming alcohol.

"Many people take these boards out without understanding the risks. A small gust of wind can overturn them," Pariyar said. "If someone does not know how to swim, they can disappear under the water within seconds."

He added that during storms, traditional wooden boat operators often assist APF rescue teams in saving people stranded in the lake.

Balaram Giri, chairman of the Phewa Boat Entrepreneurs' Committee, said 767 wooden boats and 72 large motor-assisted boats operate under the official committee. However, hundreds of stand-up paddleboards are now available for rent through 42 operators, including private rental companies, hotels and lakeside restaurants.

Neither the local administration nor Pokhara Metropolitan City has an exact record on how many paddleboards are available to use on the lake.

A paddleboard can be rented for as little as Rs200 per hour. Giri said only five of the 42 operators have obtained permits from the local government.

"Stand-up paddleboards are unstable by nature. Even a small wave can overturn them," Giri said. "The bigger problem is that they operate without proper monitoring. The metropolitan city has failed to introduce clear operating guidelines, and the sector has grown largely unregulated."

Stand-up paddleboarding was introduced to Phewa Lake around seven or eight years ago by Paddle Nepal. But its popularity surged sharply over the past two years, with operators expanding across the lakeside area.

Assistant Chief District Officer Chitrangad Baral said the administration intervened after receiving repeated complaints about unregistered water sports businesses, lack of price lists, failure to provide receipts, absence of safety insurance and unsafe operating practices.

The June 25 directive required all water sports operators to register and renew permits before continuing operations. It also made life jackets compulsory for every user.

Operators must provide customers with safety briefings covering basic navigation, possible hazards and emergency procedures before allowing them onto the water. They are prohibited from serving people under the influence of alcohol or drugs and must refuse service to anyone appearing intoxicated.

The rules also prohibit children aged 16 and below from using paddleboards or boats without adult supervision. Operators must maintain continuous visual contact with customers and ensure immediate rescue assistance in case of emergencies.

To address monsoon-related risks, the administration has prohibited boating, kayaking, and surfing after 2 pm during adverse weather conditions. All water tourism activities must stop after 6 pm every day.

Compliance remains weak.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Namraj Bhattarai of the Baidam Ward Police Office acknowledged that many operators continue to ignore safety requirements.

"We have repeatedly detained operators violating safety protocols and released them after they signed written commitments," Bhattarai said. "Many recent accidents have occurred because people enter the water after consuming alcohol."

Pokhara Metropolitan City Mayor Dhanraj Acharya said the city has drafted a Water Transport Act to regulate recreational activities on the lake.

"The act will come into force within a few days after its publication in the official gazette," Acharya said. "We believe strict registration requirements, clear standards, and active regulation will help reduce accidents."

For now, Phewa Lake continues to draw visitors seeking adventure, but the absence of effective monitoring has turned a popular recreational activity into a growing public safety concern.

Bans fail when poverty pushes Nepali women to seek work abroad

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In Kuwait, the domestic worker recruitment system is formally regulated. The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) issues licences to agencies that recruit domestic workers and supply them to employers.

By 2025, as many as 488 manpower agencies held valid licences from PAM. A Kuwaiti employer can pay up to 1,500 Kuwaiti dinars, equivalent to around Rs750,000, to a licensed local agency to hire a domestic worker. Such payments create incentives for recruitment networks in Nepal to identify and send workers through informal arrangements.

Labour migration expert Saru Joshi Shrestha said restrictions alone cannot prevent people from seeking employment abroad when economic opportunities at home remain limited.

"Unless the state guarantees sustainable domestic employment, no administrative prohibition can stop women from seeking livelihoods abroad," Shrestha said. "When legal avenues are shut down without creating jobs at home, people inevitably find informal routes. The government must regulate the sector rather than enforce ineffective bans."

A government task force led by Ram Kaji Khadka, head of the Central, West Asia, and Africa Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reached a similar conclusion.

In a report submitted to the foreign and labour ministries, the task force said preventing unskilled or economically vulnerable people from taking up domestic work abroad had diverted them towards networks that arrange travel through visit visas.

The report said most domestic workers come from economically disadvantaged families and include many single mothers. It identified Jhapa, Sindhupalchok, Makawanpur, Morang, Kathmandu, Kavre, Ilam, Nuwakot, Sunsari and Chitwan as major districts of origin.

The report concluded that the ban had increased workers' vulnerability by limiting their access to social security, emergency assistance and legal protection.

Former Nepali ambassador to Kuwait Madhuban Paudel said the government's approach had failed to address the underlying challenges faced by domestic workers.

"Those who raise this issue in parliament do not understand the core reality of domestic workers' plight," Paudel said. "The state must either enforce a total physical restriction on departures, which is impossible, or regulate the process. Imposing a ban while allowing human trafficking to thrive is no solution."

Paudel said the policy had also complicated Nepal's diplomatic engagement with destination countries.

"Destination governments become aggrieved when Nepal labels these workers 'illegal' simply because they lacked Nepali labour permits," he said. "In their eyes, holding a valid passport and visa makes a worker legitimate under domestic law. They maintain that Nepal cannot brand workers illegal once they arrive on their soil."

The government has also acknowledged that the restrictions have not stopped women from travelling to the Gulf for domestic work.

On May 8, 2025, Foreign Secretary Amrit Kumar Rai informed parliament's Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Interest Committee that large numbers of Nepali women continue to reach Gulf countries as domestic workers through informal channels despite the existing restrictions.

Nepal has attempted to address the issue by negotiating a bilateral labour agreement with Kuwait that would establish a regulated pathway for domestic workers.

Pitambar Ghimire, spokesperson for the Ministry of Labour, said discussions with Kuwait are ongoing.

"Signing a bilateral labour agreement with Kuwait is a priority for the government," Ghimire said. "Drafts have been diplomatically exchanged, but we have yet to reach a final consensus."

However, progress has been slow, partly because of strict conditions set by parliament before domestic workers can be sent abroad again.

On September 29, 2020, the parliamentary committee issued a seven-point directive requiring destination countries to provide separate legal protections for domestic workers.

The conditions include guarantees on minimum wages, weekly and annual leave, social security, occupational safety, 24-hour insurance coverage, overtime payments, dispute resolution mechanisms, pre-departure and post-arrival training, protection against discrimination and strict penalties for abuse by employers.

Nepal has shared draft agreements based on these requirements with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. However, foreign ministry officials say destination countries have shown limited urgency in signing binding agreements as recruitment networks continue supplying workers through informal channels.

Meanwhile, the Embassy of Nepal in Kuwait faces difficulties assisting workers who arrive outside formal labour migration systems.

Nepali Ambassador to Kuwait Ghanshyam Lamsal said the absence of official records makes it harder for the embassy to provide legal support, insurance assistance and emergency rescue services.

"We have clearly communicated the ground realities and diplomatic complexities to relevant government bodies in Kathmandu," Lamsal said. "Rescuing workers who arrive through illegal channels poses enormous hurdles."

The ambassador declined to comment directly on the parliamentary ban.

Refundable bond for US visas becomes travel barrier for many Nepalis

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"It would only make sense if the bond were collected after the visa was confirmed," she says. "Otherwise, people could be refused at the interview despite paying."

Bhandari says she would still travel to the US if the money were refunded after her visit. While she believes the measure is intended to discourage overstaying and ensure travellers return home, she says it is unreasonable to require such a large financial commitment before a visa decision has been made.

Fifty-five-year-old Deepak Joshi (name changed on request), who has a son and daughter who have both lived in the US for the past decade, expressed a similar concern, saying the proposal was not a good policy, particularly for people from poorer countries. However, the Bhaktapur resident acknowledged that every nation has the right to set its own immigration policies.

"If the money is refundable, I would still travel," he says. Joshi said that the measure appeared to be aimed at controlling the number of foreign visitors and managing immigration more strictly. "It is the US government's policy," he says. "People who want to visit will have to comply."

Among repeat visitors, the policy has also raised questions about future travel.

Riti Dawadi, (name changed) 26, who works in the IT sector, has travelled to the US three times to visit family and for holidays, says her current visa remains valid until 2028, so the rule will not immediately affect her. But she said it has already made her think differently about future trips.

"Earlier, I could just book a ticket and go," she says. "Now, depositing such a large amount of money will make it much less straightforward."

Dawadi says the policy seems somewhat unfair, even if she understood that countries have the right to set their own rules. She also worries that travellers could lose the deposit if something unexpected happened and they overstayed unintentionally.

"The measure could also discourage tourism to the US by reducing the number of visitors", says Dawadi.

Business travellers see a more nuanced picture.

Some fear travellers could lose deposits if sudden events cause unintended overstays.

Fifty-two-year-old Raj Pokharel (name changed on request), who heads a Kathmandu based-think tank working on security and governance and expects to travel to the US next year for a business programme, says the requirement would create an additional financial burden but would not necessarily prevent essential travel.

"Even though arranging a large refundable bond would create an added burden, I would still travel to the US if the meetings were important", says Pokharel. He believes the policy is intended to address visa misuse, including overstaying or changing immigration status after arrival.

"Many genuine travellers do return," he says, adding that the policy would hurt people who have no intention of overstaying but lack the resources to deposit a large sum.

He says the rule could also reduce the number of Nepalis traveling to the US, especially among families, young people and first time visitors.

FNCCI

FNCCI invites Proposals for Conducting Tax Training Programs

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) calls for proposals from interested firms to conduct the tax training programs in 19 districts across all seven provinces of Nepal. The objective of the program is to enhance taxpayers' knowledge & understanding of the prevailing tax laws and regulations, strengthen voluntary tax compliance, and minimize errors in the tax compliance process through awareness activities.

Interested firms meeting the eligibility criteria are requested to submit a sealed proposals to the FNCCI secretariat no later than **16 August 2026.**

For detail information, please visit FNCCI website www.fncci.org

Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry

Teku, Kathmandu. Tel: 01-5362061, 5362218

FNCCI

FNCCI invites Proposals for Conducting Training to Women Entrepreneurs on Financial and Digital Business Literacy

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) calls for proposals from interested firms to conduct the training programs in 5 districts of Nepal. The objective of the program is to enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs on financial and digital business literacy

Interested firms meeting the eligibility criteria are requested to submit a sealed proposals to the FNCCI secretariat no later than **16 August 2026.**

For detail information, please visit FNCCI website www.fncci.org

Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry

Teku, Kathmandu. Tel: 01-5362061, 5362218

माइग्रेसन हरायो

मिति २०८३/०१/०६ गते भक्तपुरबाट काठमाडौंसम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको माइग्रेसन सर्टिफिकेट हराएको हुँदा पाउनुहुने महानुभावले फोन नं. ९८४२४४६५५२ वा नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालयमा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु ।
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स्याम्बल नं.: ५२६००५५३
वर्षः ई.सं. २०२२
ठेगानाः रामेछाप ।

Nepal once had a vibrant civil society. Now it has faded and fragmented

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The citizen leaders had experience in struggles, but not in mass mobilisation.

According to Panday's own account, one incident pushed him to act. On July 19, 2005, the seven political parties had called a 'session' of the dissolved House of Representatives at the Nepal Academy.

When leaders including Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhav Nepal arrived, security personnel stopped them at the main gate, forcing them to return home.

Panday, then 65, watched the scene with his young colleague Anil Bhattarai. Disappointed that the political parties had no clear strategy against King Gyanendra's takeover, Panday wrote in his autobiography 'Ek Jyan, Dui Juni' that he told Bhattarai: "Let us take to the streets without waiting for the inspiration and blessing of the seven parties."

Following that decision, a group of independent citizens announced a demonstration at the restricted Ratna Park on July 25.

Basnet writes that the Ratna Park protest, along with the police's heavy-handed response, propelled the "Citizen Movement for Democracy and Peace" into public consciousness. The movement, later known simply as the "citizen movement", quickly emerged as a powerful civic force.

With media support and public participation, a mass gathering was organised at New Baneshwar on August 5. Around 10,000 people attended the rally, making it the largest protest since King Gyanendra seized power on February 1, 2005, Basnet writes.

Panday said the citizen movement had neither an organisation nor financial resources. Yet it managed to organise rallies across the country.

From the east to the west, the same slogan echoed: "Maoists, give up your weapons. The seven parties, give up the king."

The 2006 People's Movement eventually became a turning point in Nepal's political history. King Gyanendra was forced to hand power back to political parties, while the 240-year-old monarchy was subsequently abolished.

The civil society that played an important role during that historic transition remained active for another decade, continuing to question governments and political parties.

After the Constituent Assembly elections, individuals involved in civil society and the citizen movement continued participating in public debates on federalism, inclusion, human rights and transitional justice.

But that presence began to fade after the constitution was promulgated.

Some argue that the citizen movement completed its historic mission once the democratic transition ended with the promulgation of the constitution. Others say the movement lost public trust because it was dominated by Kathmandu-based, male elites who failed to listen to groups dissatisfied with the constitution.

Writer and columnist Chandrakishore argues that the decline of civil society's influence began accelerating after the constitution was promulgated in 2015.

"The Nepali Congress, the UML and then Maoists grew more confident as they came together to bring in the constitution. They started believing that their consensus itself represented the national interest," he said. "As a result, they began dismissing the role of civil society. That gradually weakened the citizen movement's influence."

Chandrakishore argues that debates over identity further divided the movement. Many prominent civil society figures struggled to take a clear position on movements by Madhesi, Tharu and Janajati communities demanding greater recognition of their ethnic and regional identities.

"Earlier, the movement had a clear target: Gyanendra and the active monarchy," he said. "But when identity-based movements emerged, it became much harder to decide which causes to support and which positions to take."

Questions remained over acceptance of the constitution among large sections of society when the constitution was promulgated on September 20, 2015. But the citizen movement, which had played a prominent role in street protests and public debates before its adoption, no longer appeared as a force with the same influence.

"Madhesh was observing it as a day of mourning at a time when Kathmandu was celebrating the constitution. Where was civil society then?" Chandrakishore wondered. "When Kathmandu's citizen movement did not support identity-based movements, it lost trust among people on the ground. At the same time, the state also ignored it. The citizen movement was trapped between the two."

The movement's decline has also been linked to the fact that some prominent figures who had previously been active in it entered electoral politics, received appointments to constitutional bodies, became government advisers or joined donor-funded institutions.



POST FILE PHOTO

After the constitution, collective civic interventions became far less visible.

A study published in the Journal of Peace Research in 2026, based on research into 26 civil society organisations in Bhojpur, Sarlahi and Kapilvastu districts, concluded that "the entry of experienced civil society actors into politics after the People's Movement weakened institutional leadership, limited effective generational transition and changed the direction of organisations in line with donor priorities."

During the conflict years, issues such as enforced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings and press freedom were central concerns of civil society. After the peace process, transitional justice remained a major focus for several years.

But after the constitution, collective civic interventions on issues such as civil liberties, economic rights, state accountability, public services and digital rights became far less visible.

Writer and activist Sanjeev Uprety believes there are structural reasons behind this decline.

"The 2006 movement brought together many people, including Devendra Raj Panday, Krishna Pahadi and others. I was also involved," he recalled. "But after the political transformation, the citizen movement began to lose momentum. We were unable to maintain the same level of mobilisation."

"Sustaining it was difficult because it was a volunteer-based movement. It was neither a political party nor an NGO. People moved on to their own paths. We remained part of civil society, but not as a movement."

Uprety says the movement regained some momentum after then-prime minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved Parliament in 2020 in what critics called an unconstitutional move.

"After that, we realised the citizen movement had to continue in some form," he said. "Even after Parliament was restored, movements by sugarcane farmers, Chure conservation activists, usury victims and squatters continued."

"The difference is that in 2006, the goal was to transform the political system itself. Today, movements are focused on the concerns of ordinary citizens. At that time, party cadres came to the streets. Now it is sugarcane farmers and victims of sexual violence who are coming forward."

While citizens continue to raise issues through various campaigns, these movements include not only affected communities but also professionals and public figures who collectively represent civil society. However, analysts and activists acknowledge that the absence of the kind of unified civic voice seen in the past remains a major weakness.

They argue, however, that this should not be interpreted as the death of civil society in Nepal.

Uprety says societies do not have a single civil society but multiple civil societies. Nepal, like other countries, sees fragmented groups come together during moments of major crisis, but keeping them connected during normal times remains difficult.

"We tried to bring together movements around land rights and usury victims. Dalit rights, indigenous rights and squatters' rights should have been connected, but we could not do that," he said.

"The Koshi identity movement, the Chure conservation campaign and the struggle of usury victims have not been able to come together. That fragmentation has prevented them from becoming a more powerful civic force."

The youth-led movement of September last year not only changed Nepal's political landscape but also transformed how ordinary citizens view society and politics.

In this changed environment, questions have emerged over the future shape of civil society and the citizen movement, particularly because leaders have yet to develop a clear position on broader public concerns such as economic rights, public services and digital freedoms.

Rai argues that the citizen movement has become even more uncertain after the youth movement because it lacks a clear political narrative.

"It looks as though they have not been able to grasp the new political reality," she said. "What does today's politics represent? Is it progressive or regressive? Should we support it or oppose it? When the Balendra Shah government appoints a woman minister, are we supposed to welcome it or criticise it? The movement seems to have lost its direction."

She warns that the weakening of the movement affects society more broadly.

"When reform-minded people within political parties look for advice, whom do they consult? Who stands alongside them? That creates a vacuum," she said. "The recent mistreatment of Majid Ansari was serious. Last year's September movement also saw widespread violence and deaths. When older generations fail to offer strategic direction, younger people end up carrying the risks of confrontation on their own."

Uprety does not believe civil society has disappeared. Instead, he argues that its form has changed.

He says civic interventions that once appeared as nationwide movements have now spread across local campaigns, issue-based activism and digital platforms.

In recent years, public reactions against the Guthi Bill, environmental concerns over the proposed Nijgadh airport, the Citizenship Bill, the TikTok ban and social media regulation demonstrated strong civic engagement.

"Digital activism is part of a broader civil society. People are writing and speaking out. But a citizen movement happens on the streets," Uprety said. "When a crisis emerges, these scattered groups come together again and return to the streets."

Today, the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party holds nearly a two-thirds majority in Parliament, leaving opposition parties weakened. Questions have also been raised about the credibility of other public institutions.

Critics of the government say they do not see a strong commitment to democratic values.

In such a situation, Birgunj-based writer Chandrakishore says the citizen movement has weakened, and the voice of dissent in Kathmandu has become quieter.

The silence in the Capital, he says, appears eerie.

"I am watching Kathmandu right now. There is silence. Why is everyone afraid? Why is nobody speaking?" he asked.

He believes the root of the problem lies in ethics.

"People are afraid to speak, perhaps because some feel constrained by questions of personal ethics and accountability," he said.

He also pointed to concerns that this government could weaken the constitutional framework and, in return, erode democracy itself.

"Yet even at such a moment, there is no one willing to speak out," he said.

Uprety also sees such risks.

"I cannot predict where the country's politics will go, but I see a major risk to democracy. The current government is showing signs of danger to democratic institutions," he said.

Chandrakishore believes the current government itself may eventually bring fragmented civic leaders back together.

"I think this government will once again unite citizen leaders who are scattered today in the struggle for justice. During Gyanendra's rule, circumstances brought them together. It will happen again," he said.

Rai shares a similar hope.

"There is still a group that worked together during that period. As the crisis deepens, perhaps that group will consolidate again," she said.

Sociologist Chaitanya Mishra concluded his obituary, published in NepalNews, for Panday with a warning about the possible democratic crisis Nepal faces today.

"In the changed political context, citizens are once again beginning to feel fear. Dr Panday remained concerned about this until his final days," Mishra wrote. "If this crisis deepens, we will once again need independent, committed and courageous intellectual citizens like him."

Fewer Nepali girls are becoming mothers too soon

New study says Nepal reduced adolescent pregnancy and childbirth by 35 percent over the past two decades and outpaced many low- and lower middle income countries.



POST FILE PHOTO

Nepal has been identified as a positive outlier in South Asia, the study says.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 2

Nepal has reduced adolescent pregnancy and childbirth rates by 35 percent within two decades, outperforming many countries with similar socio-economic conditions, including India, a new report shows.

The report, titled "Improvements in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Nepal", by the Centre for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities (CREHPA), the African Institute for Policy Development (AFIDEP) and the Exemplars in Global Health (EGH), shows that adolescent fertility rate has declined to 71 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years in 2022, from 110 births per 1,000 in 2001.

Likewise, adolescent pregnancy fell from 56 percent to 14 percent over the same period.

"Nepal witnessed a decade-long armed conflict, prolonged political instability, a devastating earthquake and the Covid pandemic, among other challenges, during this period," said Dr Mahesh Puri, the study's lead researcher. "Despite these challenges, Nepal made remarkable progress in reducing adolescent pregnancy and childbirth."

The study is part of the Exemplars in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights multi-country study, which includes Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda, Malawi, India, and Nepal, and aims to identify positive outlier low- and lower-middle-income countries that have made exceptional progress in improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights.

"Nepal has been identified as one such positive outlier in South Asia," the report stated. "Positive outlier countries are those whose progress across a range of global health issues has surpassed that of other countries with comparable characteristics."

> The study found wide disparities by wealth, education, religion, geography and ethnicity.

The study found wide disparities by wealth, education, religion, geography, and ethnicity. According to the study, in Nepal, adolescent pregnancy among girls from the wealthiest families was lowest compared to the girls from poor family backgrounds.

Likewise, girls with no formal education or only primary education were more likely to become pregnant during adolescence than those with secondary or higher education.

Similarly, adolescent pregnancy rates were higher among girls from Dalit and Muslim communities than among Brahmin girls. Among Muslims, the rate remained unchanged at 23 percent between 2016 and 2022. This is the highest among religious groups, the study found.

Madhesh and Karnali provinces recorded the highest adolescent pregnancy rates between 2006 and 2022, indicating that progress is not equal across provinces despite overall national progress.

Despite the remarkable decline in adolescent pregnancy and childbirth rates, unintended births increased from 25 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2022.

The highest proportion of unintended births, around 40 percent, was reported among adolescents from the wealthiest families, according to the report.

Likewise, urban adolescents reported a slightly higher proportion of unintended births than their rural counterparts—32 percent compared to 28 percent.

Among the provinces, Gandaki recorded the highest proportion of unintended births at 37 percent, compared with 22 percent in Madhesh.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)'s 2022 report "Seeing the Unseen" found that nearly half of all pregnancies in Nepal are unintended and close to two-thirds end in abortion.

"Unintended pregnancy is a reality for millions each year, accounting for nearly half of all pregnancies," reads the UNFPA's report. "Sixty percent of these unintended pregnancies will end in abortion."

The UN agency's report stated that the cost of these pregnancies have long remained largely unseen.

Researchers attributed Nepal's progress to four major factors: legal and policy reforms supporting adolescent health rights; expansion of adolescent-friendly health services, including family planning and safe abortion services; increased investment in girls' education and empowerment; and collaboration between the government, development partners, civil society organisations and communities.

"Our study shows that with sustained investment in health education and adoption of rights-based policies, countries can achieve remarkable progress in sexual and reproductive health despite major hurdles and challenges," said Puri.



OPINION

OUR VIEW

The power of consultation

The Shah administration has adopted a consultative approach, which it should continue to embrace.

Cocooned within their own circle and relying primarily on the mobilisation of security forces to contain the communal tensions in the Tarai-Madhesh, Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his key Cabinet colleague, Home Minister Sudan Gurung, finally came forward in search of a consultative solution to the crisis. Three lives were already lost, with several others sustaining bullet injuries in days of violence before Gurung descended to Sunsari and Shah addressed the nation on Thursday.

Stepping out of his chamber, Shah not only called on President Ramchandra Paudel for the first time since taking charge as the executive head four months ago, but also telephoned Vice-President Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav and held a meeting with Madhesh-based parties. Gurung, on the other hand, visited the violence-affected districts, reaching out to victims' families and negotiating with different communal groups. His determination that he would not return to Kathmandu until law and order is restored deserves applause.

The results of the engagement can already be seen. Life in the clash-affected districts is gradually returning to normalcy, and there have been no reports of violence over the past three days. This also gives every reason to argue that had the prime minister and his team embraced consultation and stakeholder engagement immediately after the violence erupted on July 26, the crisis could have been contained much earlier, with minimal loss.

Nepal has gone through several crises over the years. Each time, political parties have set aside their rivalries and united to find a solution. It is a beautiful political culture that is seldom seen in our neighbourhood. This time as well, representatives of all the parties, in an all-party meeting held by the ruling party, called for peace and restraint.

The response once again demonstrated that Nepal's political challenges are often best addressed through dialogue and collective ownership rather than through the strength of numbers alone. This is a lesson that remains relevant for the incumbent government as it navigates the crisis and the broader responsibilities that come with power.

Rastriya Swatantra Party leaders and Shah's ministers often cite the overwhelming number of seats they won in the March elections to defend their moves. While it is true that people showered them with unprecedented support through their votes, it is equally true that the RSP secured less than 50 percent of the total vote share. This means that more than half of the votes were for other parties, even though this did not secure them seats in Parliament. That is also a reminder that the political parties representing the other half of the electorate need to be taken into confidence when making crucial decisions or responding to times of crisis.

The Sunsari violence was a test case for the incumbent government, and it appears that Shah and his team have understood the importance of a consultative approach. And rightly so. Shah should now appear in Parliament and entertain questions from lawmakers. He should also face the media and interact with the general public, as Gurung has done. The position of the prime minister or ministers is not merely administrative; it is political. It demands stepping out of the chambers of Singha Durbar and the four walls of Baluwatar. The Sunsari incident seems to have triggered that much-needed departure, and the country now expects the government to sustain the same level of engagement, if not more, in the days ahead.

Madhesh tests Nepal's secularism

The unrest in Madhesh has highlighted the urgent need to translate the political principle of secularism into a lived experience.

DINESH KAFLE





POST PHOTO

After a week of communal turmoil, Madhesh is finally settling down. The home minister's crisis management strategy has helped bring leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities to the talks table. The prime minister's earnest outreach to political actors in the region, though a tad belated, has helped establish a sense of accountability and fraternity. However, the flames of communalism hardly die down with ad hoc measures. Bureaucratic management of the communal tension must be followed by long-term strategies to address deep-rooted problems, beginning with the concept of secularism itself.

From what we have heard from the media, Prime Minister Balendra Shah is firm in his commitment to secularism. His argument, as his interlocutors put forth, is clear: Any debate on the desecularisation of the Nepali state entails an unviable quest to undo republicanism and federalism. Based on this information, we can rest assured that secularism as a political principle of the Nepali state is in good hands—at least for now. But we cannot remain complacent.

First things first, the timing of the communal tension tells us something about a subterranean effort underway in Madhesh to undo secularism. Certainly, the tensions began with a display of machismo from men belonging to two different communities in Kaptanganj of Sunsari: Hindu devotees on the Bol Bam procession blasting religious hymns at night and local Muslim youths trying to cut the former down to size. Enter the trigger-happy police, and a local brawl explodes into a vulgar display of communal hatred spanning an entire province.

Consultations on constitution amendment are underway at the national level, and this is the right time for anti-secularists to intervene. The signs are already out there: Members of various Hindutva-aligned outfits are in constant negotiations with the home minister, with a prominent demand of a return to 'Hindu Rashtra.' The home minister is said to have circumvented this demand, instead committing to more viable outcomes in the immediate run. But the negotiations have veered towards reinforcing a unilateral communal suspicion, including a greater scrutiny of madrassas.

Yes, scrutinise Madrassas, but also *mandirs*. Incidents in the last few years have shown that communalism is not the prerogative of just one religion or community. Instead, we are too quick to provoke and be provoked: Social media used to share communally insensitive videos; religious processions rerouted through the village of a different community. Banke, Dhanusa and Sarlahi have seen similar cases of communal tension in the recent past, reinforcing the belief that the same grammar of communalism is being taught across Madhesh: Individuals from a certain community commit verbal or physical acts that undermine communal harmony, followed by the politicisation of the incidents. The Armed Police Force recorded 25 incidents of religious or ethnic conflict between the fiscal years 2020-21 and 2023-24. But who is fueling the communal flare-ups in Madhesh?

An obvious suspect is the wave of communalism sweeping through the bordering towns in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh of India. The open border presents a significant challenge in containing the politicisation of religion, often sponsored by political parties, as is the case with India. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party has been concomitant with the shrinking of the secular public sphere in India, and this is no sheer coincidence. State-sponsored hatred of the Muslim minority has been a reality in the last 12 years, ever since the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed BJP came into power. This has paid the party off very well: "Hindu khatre mein hain" (The Hindus are in danger) has been the most consistent political slogan of the BJP, which likes to use the suffix of 'jihad' against an entire community wherever it suits.

You don't always need your apparatchiks doing the legwork: RSS's brand of Hindutva has spilt over digitally as well, with Nepalis increasingly getting comfortable with slogans of "Jai Shree Ram", replacing the local version of "Jai Siya Ram". The politicisation of Hindu on the streets of Madhesh last week has helped lay the groundwork for a return to Hinduism as a political principle. Once the road to the politicisation of religion has been paved and the secular fabric of the society torn, turning back becomes difficult, if not impossible. But turn we must. And how?

As the latest bout of communalism in Madhesh has shown, a state's toleration of different religions does not automatically translate into religious tolerance in society. The Nepali state has certainly ensured the recognition and survival of Muslims as a political community; but it has, as of now, failed to secularise the society in a way that the Muslims feel acknowledged as the co-builders of the society itself. The state, therefore, must see to it that official secularism translates into a lived reality in Nepal. This begins with differentiating Hinduism as a cultural practice from its political offshoot, Hindutva, which is often intolerant and even violent—and replicating this for all religious communities.

Apart from the obvious operationalisation of political Hindutva in Madhesh, the current imbroglio is also the result of our internal failures at institutionalisation of secularism in the past two decades. If the tipping point came in the form of violence in Madhesh, the conditions had also been laid out in the vacuum of the public sphere left by political parties, successive governments and civil society. The Nepali state did the right thing by adopting secularism through the reinstated parliament in 2006, and then codifying it through the interim constitution of 2007 and the 2015 constitution. However, as Nepal's political and civic spaces brimmed with debates over state restructuring, most vociferously over federalism, secularism remained just an et cetera.

Every political party shied away from talking about secularism, as if they had committed a crime by letting it seep into the interim constitution. Civil society members said in hushed voices that although secularism was a theoretical prerequisite for democracy, Nepali Hinduism wasn't bad either. Antisecularists, thereby, kept abusing secularism as a foreign import imposed by NGOs to expand 'foreign' religions, including Christianity and Islam, and undermine Hinduism. In the absence of a sustained debate on the affirmative effects of secularism, common Nepalis have, therefore, felt that it was shoved down their throats, and hence a muted acceptance of the idea that Nepal can actually go back to Hinduism.

The communal flare-up this time has laid bare the fault lines of the official secularism we hastily adopted as the Nepali state's political principle twenty years ago. It is now time to return to the beginning and establish that secularism isn't a foreign idea sheepishly inserted into our constitution but a consciousness and a lived experience. Only when it becomes an integral part of our cultural praxis does secularism find its true meaning and acceptance.

Kafle teaches at the Kathmandu University School of Arts.

MONDAY INTERVIEW BHASKAR GAUTAM

Fluid organisational structures were used to propagate religious hate

Rapid creation and dissolution of religious groups, a tactic likely learned from contemporary Indian practices, makes it difficult to track their affiliations and funding.

In the wake of social unrest in the Tarai-Madhesh region, triggered by a communal clash in Devanganj, Sunsari on July 26, Nepal finds itself grappling with a recurring vulnerability to communal friction along religious lines. While authorities have routinely leaned on coercive force to quell violence, critics argue that such reactive measures fail to address the deeper, systemic undercurrents fueling the crisis.

The Post's **Biken K Dawadi** sat down with political scientist and commentator Bhaskar Gautam to dissect the complex historical and socio-political roots of these tensions. Gautam offers a critical perspective on how decades of secular popular mobilisation have historically contrasted with a Hinduised state structure, and how external religious networks and fluid digital campaigns continue to exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities. The conversation probes the state's governing mentality, the limits of police and security sector reforms, and the urgent necessity for transparent institutional dialogue to preserve social harmony.

How did the communal tensions within the Tarai-Madhesh region of Nepal evolve over time?

In the specific case of Nepal, and the Tarai-Madhesh belt in particular, the background of communal riots must be understood through several distinct contexts. If we compare our situation to India at a political level, the first point of note is that the historical nature of political mobilisation in Nepal has been a secular space. Since the 1950 revolution, modern Nepali politics was mobilised—perhaps by design or perhaps by coincidence—in a manner that was fundamentally different from the Indian experience.

In what sense?

Both BP Koirala and Pushpa Lal Shrestha established a foundation for political mobilisation that was entirely distinct from India's, as it lacked a religious component. Consequently, from its inception, whether through party politics or modern forms of collective action, Nepal operated within a secular space. In many ways, I believe this is a lesson that Nepal could even teach India. However, while our political mobilisation was secular, we must acknowledge that the state itself was not. If we examine the state as an entity, it remains a Hinduised structure. This creates a core tension in our seventy years of democratic imagination: Secular mobilisation has consistently stood in opposition to a Hinduised state structure, yet many observers frequently conflate these two distinct elements when discussing the politics of religion in Nepal.

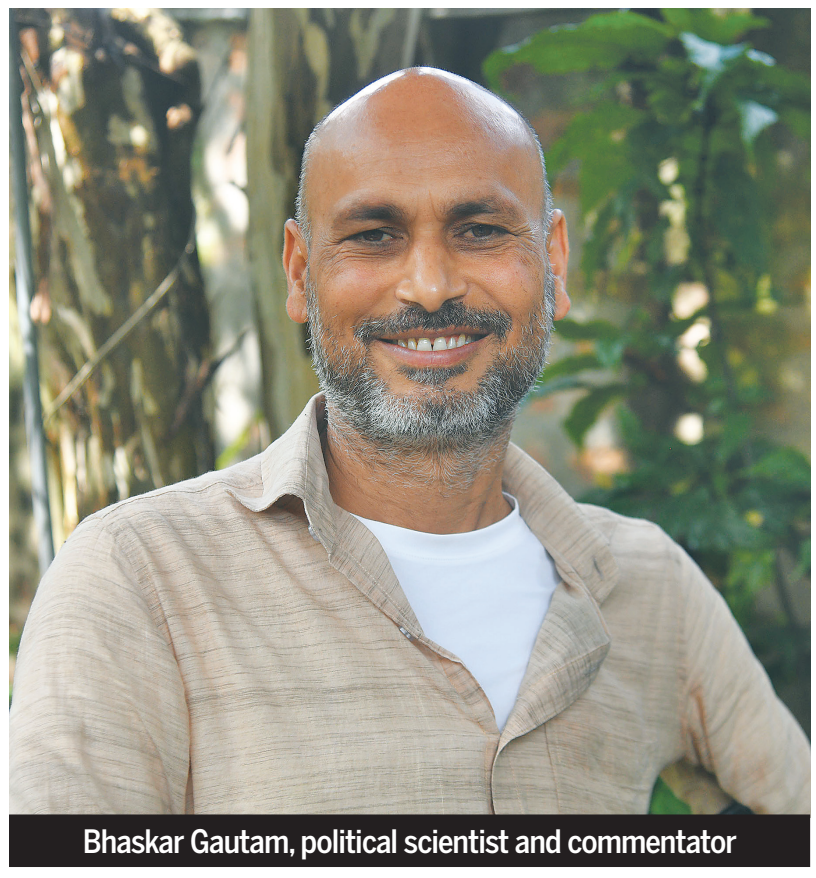
Until what point did this secular form of popular mobilisation remain the dominant force in Nepali society?

This secular form of popular mobilisation remained the primary mode of engagement in Nepal nearly up until the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution. I maintain this distinction between the secular nature of popular movements and the non-secular nature of the state. It was only after the constitution was established that we saw significant shifts, notably when KP Sharma Oli attempted to instrumentalise religion for political mobilisation. Although his initial attempts were largely unsuccessful due to the specific context of the time, the efforts to move in that direction were clearly present. In the decade since then, the expansion of religious influence within society has become widespread.

What were the early signals of religious influence entering the Nepali political landscape from external sources?

If we discuss the politics of religion, which is inextricably linked to current communal tensions, we can trace a thread back to the period following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse. When the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was briefly banned in India, they looked outward to expand their activities, and Nepal was part of that first phase of expansion. During the 1950s and 60s, many teachers arrived from India to work in Nepal, and some were involved in expanding RSS activities. The first recorded religious riot in Nepal occurred in Nepalgunj around 1951, involving individuals whom the Nepali government eventually extradited at the request of the Indian government.

How did the activities of the RSS evolve during the subsequent decades leading up to the restoration of democracy in 1990?



Bhaskar Gautam, political scientist and commentator

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

From the early 1950s until roughly 1991, the activities of the RSS operated informally under various guises, often led by Indian nationals. This period entered a new phase after King Mahendra took absolute power, as the informal expansion within society became easier and, in some ways, did not require overt public justification. It was only after 1991 that the politics of the RSS took a formal and institutional path in Nepal through the World Hindu Federation. Their methodology followed an established template: Operating through schools, targeting young and impressionable children through their branches, and specifically recruiting talented but economically disadvantaged individuals into a lifelong commitment to the organisation.

Where was the initial focal point for this educational and religious expansion within Nepal?

The first centre for the expansion of these educational and religious activities was the Dhading district, where substantial work was conducted before the movement spread elsewhere. However, over the last decade, we have observed a shift that mirrors developments in India, particularly following the rise of Narendra Modi after the 2002 Godhra incident. We can categorise this into two phases: 2002 to 2014, and the period after 2014. Since 2014, with the BJP in power in India, the RSS has been able to operate freely with massive state resource mobilisation, which has led to a significant expansion of similar activities and networks within Nepal, facilitated by the presence of a Hindu-centric power structure across the border.

What specific events in recent years served as a catalyst for the heightening of communal sensitivities in Nepal?

The Covid-19 pandemic served as a major triggering event in Nepal. During this time, there were attempts to exploit Hindu-Muslim tensions, particularly in Saptari. This manifested through two primary contexts: Tensions surrounding migrants returning from India to quarantine centres and friction with the administration regarding Muslims performing communal prayers. This period saw a significant expansion of hate politics via social media, which has continued to spread in various forms. A notable trend in the last decade is the use of fluid organisational structures. Instead of one static organisation, various groups are formed for specific purposes and then dissolved or rebranded as needed.

Could you elaborate on the strategic reasons behind this constant formation and dissolution of various groups?

This is a strategic choice. While the core actors often remain the same, they emerge under new banners—some focused on sanitation, others on temple construction, and others, particularly in Madhesh, on river conservation campaigns. However, the rhetoric used by these groups is invariably tied to religious and cultural identity. This rapid creation and dissolution of groups, a tactic likely learned from contemporary Indian practices, makes it difficult for researchers or journalists to track their affiliations and funding. Furthermore, during periods of political transition or regime change, dissatisfied political forces often use these long-standing communal triggers to disrupt the peace process or influence the political course, as seen during the 2006 Nepalgunj riots involving pro-monarchy groups.

How would you evaluate the government's seriousness in addressing these underlying communal currents?

The government's level of seriousness is a critical question, especially since intelligence assessments reportedly warned three years ago that expanding religious activities could lead to riots. These tensions are an undercurrent with multiple dimensions. We see a pattern where organisations like the Hindu Samrat Sena appear, benefiting from a fragmented structure that allows them to evade scrutiny while maintaining institutional and individual links. Some of these groups, including digital platforms like Men's Room Reloaded (MRR), have ties to the current power structure. But their ties with Hindu extremist organisations invite scrutiny. But they need to be researched before we reach any conclusion. Questions have been raised regarding the connections between individuals close to the leadership and external political entities, which warrant official investigation.

What does the current administration's approach to these issues reveal about its broader governing philosophy?

The current government's mentality is characterised by systemic targeting and selective prosecution. This is evident in how they have handled various incidents and even in their approach to anti-corruption efforts. The administration appears to operate with a 'command' mentality, which is essentially an authoritarian or dictatorial tendency. Such a mindset negates the space for democratic communication and dialogue, favouring prosecution and punishment instead. This is dangerous because it shifts the state's reliance toward the massive and indiscriminate use of force, which in turn encourages their networks to celebrate violence as a form of social punishment. We see this religious underpinning even in the reproduction of values within these networks, such as the Bhajan Mandali campaigns, which reflect a dangerous trend of merging religious zeal with state-sanctioned coercion.

Is there evidence to support the claim that the Police are disproportionately brutal when operating in the Madhesh region?

When a government institutionalises selective targeting, it fosters impunity rather than the rule of law. Nepal has a long historical legacy of impunity that successive governments have failed to undo. In this context, the police do not operate in a vacuum. If a government flourishes on impunity, the institution of the police cannot be expected to function effectively or fairly. Historically, the Nepal Police have been quick to use lethal force in protests across the country, not just in Madhesh—this is evident in the deaths of 19 youths during protests around the capital during the first day of Gen Z protests. This indicates a systemic failure in decades of police reforms and a tendency for ruling parties to treat the police as a tool for political interest rather than a professional, humanised institution.

Read full interview at kathmandupost.com

FOREX

US Dollar	130.53
Euro	142.47
Pound Sterling	161.96
Swiss Franc	142.33
Australian Dollar	91.5
Canadian Dollar	97.77
Singapore Dollar	99.18
Japanese Yen (10)	10.06
Chinese Yuan	19.24
Saudi Arab Riyal	34.76
Qatari Riyal	35.7
Thai Bhat	3.99
UAE Dhiram	35.54
Malaysian Ringit	30.46
Korean Won (100)	10.64

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 284,000
Silver	Rs 4,310

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Turkey, Iraq renew pipeline deal

ISTANBUL: Ankara and Baghdad on Saturday agreed to extend an oil pipeline agreement by one year, just days after a top-level visit by Iraqi Prime Ali al-Zaidi, officials on both sides said. In a post on X, Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar said the agreement was signed following a "productive meeting" in Ankara with Iraqi Oil Minister Bassem Mohammed Khudair. Zaidi also hailed the deal in a post on X, describing it as "an important strategic milestone" which would involve "a minimum export capacity of 750,000 barrels per day". The decades-old agreement on the pipeline—which carries Iraqi crude to Turkey's Mediterranean export terminal of Ceyhan, a key outlet for regional oil shipments—had expired on Monday. "While our efforts continue toward a new long-term agreement for this pipeline. "We have implemented this transit arrangement covering a daily capacity of 750,000 barrels," Bayraktar wrote." The Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline has a maximum capacity of about 1.5 million barrels per day, although actual flows have been well below that in recent years. **(AFP)**

Holcim to sell Philippines unit to China's Huaxin in $807 million deal

MANILA: Swiss building materials supplier Holcim Group said on Sunday it plans to sell its Philippines business to China's Huaxin Building Materials in a deal that could raise at least $807 million. Holcim will sell an initial 68 percent stake for $527 million with the remainder to be sold over the next three to five years for a minimum price of $290 million. This would lead to an overall valuation of $807 million, although the figure could rise "based on incremental value creation during this period," Holcim said. Money raised from the sale will be used to fund large acquisitions and also further investment in Holcim's existing business. The Swiss company has been focusing more on Europe, Latin America, North Africa and Australia as it reshapes its business after spinning off its North American operations into a separate company last year. Acquisitions have been identified as a key part of Holcim's growth strategy, with the company planning to make around 15 deals in 2026. Holcim last year said it had 3 billion Swiss francs to 4 billion Swiss francs ($3.72 billion to $4.95 billion) to spend on acquisitions up to 2030, and could raise up to 6 billion Swiss francs more from divestments and extra borrowing for large deals and share buybacks. **(REUTERS)**

AI keeps consumer prices high in 'RAMaggedon' chip crunch

HONG KONG: Print-outs of articles about the global memory chip shortage are pinned beside a price list at a Hong Kong computer shop, offering an explanation to confused customers feeling the pinch. Price rises for goods such as laptops and smartphones, with cars potentially next, have been an unwelcome side-effect of the artificial intelligence gold rush—and the squeeze is far from over. Samsung Electronics' chief financial officer said this week shortages of microchips that store digital data will likely deepen in 2027 and stay tight through 2028. The crunch has been nicknamed "RAMaggedon" after the components called RAM, or "random-access memory". It is caused as profit-hungry chipmakers pivot to producing high-bandwidth memory (HBM)—a more advanced type of computer memory in huge demand to help train and run AI tools. **(AFP)**

Surging prices pile pressure on consumers as festivals approach

>> Continued from page 1

Leafy vegetables have recorded even steeper increases.

Wholesale mustard greens increased from Rs35 per kilogram on July 1 to Rs175 per kilogram on August 2, with retail prices crossing Rs200 per kilogram in some markets.

Spinach rose fivefold, from Rs55 per kilogram to Rs275, while broadleaf mustard greens increased from Rs45 to Rs125 per kilogram. Other vegetables also became more expensive.

Wholesale asparagus climbed from Rs276.67 per kilogram on July 1 to Rs450 on August 2. Bananas increased from Rs226.67 to Rs275 per dozen, while 'Mude' red potatoes rose from Rs33.25 per kilogram to Rs50.50.

Only a handful of vegetables bucked the trend. Local cucumbers fell from Rs65 to Rs35 per kilogram, while tunnel-grown tomatoes remained largely stable, edging down slightly from Rs20 to Rs19.83 per kilogram.

Binaya Shrestha, information officer at the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Board, said the seasonal decline in production was the main reason for the higher prices.

"Vegetable production declines during the monsoon, resulting in lower arrivals at wholesale markets," Shrestha said. "Demand remains relatively stable, but supply falls, creating upward pressure on prices."

He said the current period marks the transition between summer and winter vegetable production, while persistent rainfall has affected yields in many growing areas.

"Summer crops are nearing the end of their season, while winter vegetables have not yet entered the market," Shrestha said. "In many hilly districts, vegetable cultivation has declined, and farmers in the Tarai are occupied with paddy transplantation."

He added that tunnel farming had helped maintain the supply of tomatoes and cucumbers, preventing significant price increases in those crops.

Shrestha said there had been no prolonged highway closures caused by landslides in recent weeks, suggesting that reduced production rather than transport disruptions had been the main driver of the price increases.

The pressure on household budgets extends beyond vegetables.

Egg prices, which dropped sharply after outbreaks of avian influenza triggered panic selling, have rebounded in recent weeks.

Wholesale prices have increased by Rs30 per crate. Large eggs now sell for Rs530 per crate, up from Rs500, while medium-sized eggs have increased from Rs470 to Rs500. Extra-large eggs have risen from Rs515 to Rs545 per crate.

Before the bird flu outbreak, large eggs were selling for Rs535 per crate. Prices later fell to Rs475 as farmers rushed supplies into the market. Retail prices have now climbed to around Rs600 per crate.

Producers say the market is gradually returning to normal as poultry farms recover from the impact of the disease, but they do not expect prices to fall significantly in the short term because feed, transportation and production costs remain high.

Consumer rights campaigners say the continuing increases in the prices of essential goods underscore long-standing weaknesses in Nepal's market regulation system.

They argue that while seasonal factors and import costs influence prices, inadequate monitoring has made it difficult to distinguish between genuine cost increases and excessive markups by traders. They have urged the government to intensify market inspections, monitor supply chains more closely and act against businesses found manipulating prices ahead of the festive season.

With demand expected to rise further in the coming weeks, many households fear the burden of maintaining even a basic kitchen will become heavier unless supplies improve and prices stabilise.

Despite the rise in retail prices, poultry farmers say they are still struggling to recover production costs as the sector continues to feel the impact of avian influenza outbreaks.

Binod Pokharel, president of the Nepal Layers Poultry Farmers Association, said the market is facing a structural supply shortfall after more than 1.2 million laying hens were culled during bird flu outbreaks.

"As a result, national production has been unable to keep pace with demand," Pokharel said. He rejected claims that current prices amount to excessive profiteering, noting that egg prices had climbed as high as Rs750 per crate three years ago.

"Farmers currently sell eggs at around Rs500 per crate at the farm gate," he said. "To cover feed and operating costs, the farm-gate price should be at least Rs573 per crate."

According to the association, Nepal consumes between three million and four million eggs a day, while current production stands at between 2.9 million and 3 million eggs.

Consumer rights advocates say meat prices have also increased sharply in recent months.

Following the bird flu outbreak, the retail price of goat meat rose from around Rs1,250-1,300 per kilogram to between Rs1,700 and Rs1,750 per kilogram. Consumer rights activists argue that such increases, despite relatively subdued demand, warrant closer scrutiny by market regulators.

The upward trend extends to other household essentials.

Refined sugar is currently retailing at around Rs115 per kilogram, while edible oil prices have also risen across the market.

According to the Nepal Retail Trade Association, sunflower oil is selling at around Rs290 per litre in both the wholesale and retail markets, while soybean oil is priced at Rs285 per litre.



POST FILE PHOTO

Wholesale data from the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Board show that prices of several vegetables have risen sharply over the past month as monsoon rains disrupted production and reduced supplies.

Price lists published by the state-owned Food Management and Trading Company show sunflower oil selling at Rs300 per litre and soybean oil at Rs285 per litre, placing the state retailer's sunflower oil above the prevailing market price.

Rajesh Kumar Agrawal, former president of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries, attributed the rise in edible oil prices to higher international costs.

"Raw edible oil prices in international markets have increased, the US dollar has appreciated against the Nepali rupee and international freight charges have also risen," Agrawal said. "When costs increase throughout the supply chain, domestic prices inevitably follow."

Retailers, however, say they are merely passing on higher procurement costs.

Amul Kaji Tuladhar, general secretary of the Nepal Retailers Association, said neighbourhood grocery stores have little influence over pricing.

"Retailers do not increase prices arbitrarily," Tiwari said. "We buy goods at higher prices from manufacturers and wholesale importers and adjust retail prices accordingly. The government should examine why industrial producers and importers are increasing their prices."

As households grapple with rising food costs, consumers in Kathmandu Valley are also facing shortages of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), forcing many to queue for hours in search of cooking fuel.

With demand rising and panic buying spreading, the state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) began direct sales of LPG cylinders from its central office in Teku, Kathmandu, on Saturday.

Long queues formed outside the depot as consumers carrying empty cylinders waited to exchange them for refilled cylinders of Nepal Gas, HP, Everest, Sugam and Shreeram Gas.

The current shortage has its roots in supply management measures introduced earlier this year.

On March 13, amid concerns over global supply chains linked to tensions in West Asia and volatility in international energy markets, the NOC introduced a quota system under which consumers were supplied only half-filled cylinders weighing 7.1 kilograms.

After receiving assurances from Indian suppliers that supplies had stabilised, the corporation lifted the restriction on July 15 and resumed the distribution of standard 14.2-kilogram cylinders.

According to Manoj Kumar Thakur, spokesperson for the NOC, the shift back to full cylinders created an unexpected surge in demand.

During the four months in which half-filled cylinders were distributed, many households delayed replacing their cylinders in anticipation of the return of full-sized refills.

Monthly LPG consumption in Nepal generally ranges between 45,000 and 46,000 tonnes, Thakur said.

When full cylinders became available again, households returned large numbers of empty cylinders simultaneously, putting pressure on bottling plants and dealers.

"Thousands of empty cylinders entered the distribution system at once, exhausting available stocks at dealer outlets," Thakur said. "The shortage has been driven mainly by panic buying rather than any disruption to imports."

He said supplies from the Indian Oil Corporation continue without interruption and expressed confidence that LPG distribution across Kathmandu Valley would return to normal within seven to ten days.

To ease public concern, the NOC has been distributing between 100 and 150 cylinders a day directly from its Teku depot. Consumer rights advocates, however, say the difficulties surrounding food prices and cooking gas highlight broader weaknesses in market regulation.

Madhav Timalsina, president of the Consumer Rights Research Forum, questioned claims that global factors alone explain the sustained rise in the prices of essential goods.

"There is no convincing economic basis for continuous increases in the prices of rice, pulses, vegetables, eggs and meat," Timalsina said. "International supply chains have largely stabilised, and tensions in West Asia have eased compared with earlier months. Weak market regulation and ineffective monitoring are allowing prices to rise unchecked."

Timalsina also criticised the government's enforcement of transport pricing. He noted that although the Department of Transport Management announced a two percent reduction in inter-provincial public transport fares effective July 2, following a fall in diesel prices from Rs235.83 to Rs193.83 a litre on July 1, many transport operators have continued charging the previous fares.

He further argued that the government's decision to impose a 5 percent VAT on freight transport services and a 13 percent VAT on non-domestic electricity from the start of the current fiscal year has been used to justify broader increases in retail prices.

"When the state focuses on collecting revenue but fails to monitor markets, inspect wholesale traders or act against hoarding and price manipulation, consumers ultimately bear the cost," Timalsina said. "With the festive season approaching, stronger market oversight is urgently needed to protect households already under severe financial pressure."

OPEC+ agrees to boost September production by 188,000 barrels per day

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON, AUG 2

Saudi Arabia, Russia and five other key members of OPEC+ agreed in an online meeting on Sunday to boost oil production by 188,000 barrels a day from September, against a backdrop of disruption caused by the Mideast war.

"The seven participating countries decided to implement a production adjustment of 188 thousand barrels per day," they said in a joint statement.

The increase, decided by the key countries in the enlarged Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, was widely expected by analysts.

"OPEC+ has finished unwinding its voluntary cuts. The next challenge is managing the surplus that could emerge as export flows normalise," said Jorge Leon, analyst at Rystad Energy.

He warned, however, that "today's decision changes little in the near term because [the Strait of] Hormuz remains constrained. The real market impact will come when normal export flows resume."

The Gulf countries have struggled to increase exports due to the near-paralysis of the Strait of Hormuz orchestrated by Iran during the war in the Middle East—despite a brief upswing in shipping traffic after a US-Iran memorandum of understanding was signed in June.

Many OPEC+ members cannot produce as much oil as their official targets allow due to a "decline in production capacity", so increasing targets has become less meaningful, said Giovanni Staunovo, an analyst at UBS.

Future pause foreseen

The September increase, agreed by OPEC+ countries Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Oman, completes the unwinding of the second of the three production-cut packages introduced by organisation.

"Having completed the restoration campaign, OPEC+ has little incentive to rush into further supply changes. Our base case is a fourth-quarter pause while the group prepares for the 2027 quota negotiations," said Rystad Energy's Leon.

"For now, geopolitics is masking the scale of the supply increase. That will become much clearer once export flows normalise," he said.

It remains unclear when the group will actually be able to increase its oil volumes. Some member countries, such as Iraq, have expressed a desire to significantly boost production.

Russia, though, is confronted with repeated Ukrainian drone attacks on its oil infrastructure that have crimped production, currently hovering around nine million barrels per day—compared with a target of 9.8 million barrels per day.

OPEC+ "faces potentially difficult talks over new production quotas" starting next year following the September increase, according to analysts at DNB Carnegie.

Between late 2022 and 2023, OPEC+ became concerned that oil prices were falling, and agreed to cut oil production in three separate rounds, reducing total output by nearly six million barrels per day.

But Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria, Oman and the United Arab Emirates—before the latter's exit from the group on May 1—then changed their strategy by gradually upping production starting in 2025.

"I don't think cohesion is at risk at this very moment," said Leon, warning, however, that the UAE's withdrawal from the group in May has highlighted a weakness in this area.

Imported Foreign Alcohol Price List (MRP)
PUBLIC NOTICE

Evo Beverages Pvt. Ltd. the authorized importer for Suntory Global Spirits for Nepal, issues the following pricelist from Shrawan 18th, 2083.

Suntory Global Spirits		
Brand	Size (QTY)	MRP (Rs.)
Roku Gin	700ml	Rs 9,900
Haku Vodka	700ml	Rs 9,900
Jim Beam White	700ml	Rs 6,200
Jim Beam White	1000ml	Rs 8,000
Maker's Mark Bourbon Whiskey	750ml	Rs 12,500
Canadian Club 5yo	1000ml	Rs 8,000
Teacher's Highland Cream	350ml	Rs 2,850
Teacher's Highland Cream	1000ml	Rs 6,700

Evo Beverages (P.) Ltd.
Lalitpur, Nepal

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- **Terms & Compensation of this Assignment:** The term of the assignment will be for (3) three years with potential extensions and remuneration for this position is US$ 5500 and above per month as per experience and qualification and/or mutual agreement.

We encourage qualified candidates to submit their resumes and applications to suresh.chitrakar@might.com.np within 15 days of the release of this advertisement.

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NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)
For Supply and/or Rental of Construction Equipment

Kathmandu-Terai/Madhesh Fast Track (Expressway) Road Project
Contract ID: KTFT/ICB/WORKS/TUNNEL/080/081/10

Our company, the Contractor for the **Kathmandu-Terai/Madhesh Fast Track (Expressway) Road Project**, Contract ID **KTFT/ICB/WORKS/TUNNEL/080/081/10**, hereby invites **Expression of Interest (EOI)** from qualified manufacturers, authorized dealers, suppliers, distributors, equipment owners, and rental companies for the **supply and/or rental of construction equipment** required for the execution of the above-mentioned project.

Interested firms having proven experience, adequate equipment inventory, technical capability, and after-sales service support are requested to submit their company profile along with details of available equipment, specifications, year of manufacture, ownership status, rental/supply terms, delivery schedule, and relevant experience.

Required Documents

- Company Registration Certificate
- PAN/VAT Registration Certificate
- Tax Clearance Certificate (Latest Fiscal Year)
- Company Profile
- List of Available Equipment with Technical Specifications
- Ownership Documents (if applicable)
- Proposed Rental/Supply Rates
- Relevant Experience in Similar Projects
- Contact Details of Authorized Representative

Equipment Requirement and Submisison

No.	Equipment Name	Model	Qty.	Expected lease term	Entry time	Remark
1	Boomer	2 arms	1	6 to 12 months	August 2026	used for anchor rod construction in tunnels.
2	Truck mounted crane	8-12T	1	6 to 12 months	August 2026	The carriage is 8 meters long.
3	Excavator	20T-24T	2 or 4	6 to 12 months	August 2026	New machine or less than 2000 hours
4	Breaker	20T	2 or 4	6 to 12 months	August 2026	New machine or less than 2000 hours
5	Excavator	36T-38T	2	6 to 12 months	August 2026	New machine or less than 2000 hours
6	Breaker	38T	1	6 to 12 months	August 2026	New machine or less than 2000 hours
7	Tipper	16 or 20 cubic	6 to 20	6 to 12 months	September 2026	
8	Tracked drilling rig	The borehole diameter is 90-135 mm, and the maximum depth is 30 meters.	2	6 to 12 months	August 2026	
9	Diesel air compressor	17-24 cubic meters per minute, pressure 1.3-1.9 Mpa	4	6 to 12 months	August 2026	
10	Crane	25T	1	6 to 12 months	August 2026	
11	Concrete mixer truck	10m³	5	6 to 12 months	August 2026	
12	Tower crane	The boom is 60-65 meters long, and the maximum lifting capacity is 1.2-2 tons (at the farthest end).	2	6 to 12 months	September 2026	Within 5 years of manufacture
13	Concrete Pump	HBT6013	2	6 to 12 months	August 2026	

Interested firms shall submit their Expression of Interest within **7 (Seven) days** from the date of publication of this notice via email or in person to the address below.

Project Procurement Department
Kathmandu-Terai/Madhesh Fast Track (Expressway) Road Project
Contract ID: **KTFT/ICB/WORKS/TUNNEL/080/081/10**
Email: 937012072@qq.com
Telephone +977-9744445034 **WhatsApp:** +977-9744445034
Office Address: [PUALANG HETAUDA, NEPAL Kathmandu-Terai/Madhesh Fast Track (Expressway) Road Project CP10]

The Employer/Contractor reserves the right to accept or reject any or all Expressions of Interest, wholly or partly, without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Date of Publication: _____
Submission Deadline: _____

Trump says he will hold off on fresh Iran attack in hope of quick deal



REUTERS

An Iranian missile system is displayed in Azadi Square in Tehran, Iran, July 30.

REUTERS
CAIRO, AUG 2

President Donald Trump has said the US will hold off on a fresh attack on Iran as long as a deal can be reached quickly to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said late on Saturday on Truth Social that Iran and other Middle Eastern countries had asked for time to complete a deal that would lead to "the Immediate, Complete and Total" reopening of the vital strait and "an end to Iran's nuclear threat".

He did not name the countries in the post, which followed a call with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, a US ally.

"Based on this request, I have agreed, for the future benefit of the WORLD and, likewise, the survival of a successful and prosperous Iran, to cancel the attack, subject to being able to rapidly make a DEAL," Trump wrote. Israel "joins me in this commitment", he said.

Trump's apparent de-escalation after days of threats of new attacks from each side was the latest twist in the war the US and Israel launched five months ago. Attacks have spread across the Gulf to the Red Sea and even a Mediterranean facility in Egypt. Iran has largely closed the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for 20 percent of the world's fuel before the war, causing energy prices to rise and stoking broader inflation. Eli Cohen, Israel's energy minister and a member of Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, said there was close security and intelligence coordination between Israel and the US on everything happening in the region.

But he added: "With or without an agreement, and regardless of any external commitments, if Iran attempts to renew its nuclear programme or advance its ballistic missile industries, we will be there. We will take action, and we will strike."

Trump and Netanyahu met on Tuesday in Washington, with an Israeli official saying they had explored all possible paths to curb Iran's nuclear programme, including diplomacy, economic pressure and force. Tehran denies seeking a nuclear weapon. Iran's acting defence minister, Brigadier General Majid Ebn Al-Reza, said Tehran viewed recent US threats as "psychological and cognitive warfare" but was treating them seriously, adding that Iran would boost preparedness and deterrence rather than be caught off guard or remain passive, Press TV reported.

In his call with Trump, the Saudi crown prince stressed the "necessity of prioritising dialogue to de-escalate tensions" in the Middle East, according to Saudi Arabia's state news agency.

Iran's leaders show united front over the war but are divided over what the goal is

AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY & **LEE KEATH**/AP
CAIRO, AUG 2

With escalating attacks against US bases and its allies over the past week, Iran's leaders are showing considerable unity over their war strategy: hanging tough, determined to show Iran can endure more than America and its allies can.

But within the leadership, there are sharp differences over what the endgame should be.

On one side, the ultra-hardliners who oppose any negotiations with the United States are pressing for total victory in the war. Known as the "Paydari" movement—Persian for "stability"—they are hard-core ideologues who want to enforce the Islamic Republic's control over society.

On the other, those who support President Masoud Pezeshkian and powerful parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf—who doubles as Iran's chief negotiator—see military pressure as a way to win a negotiated deal with the United States. This camp is also spurred by concern over the economic toll Iran is suffering from the war and the need to adapt to social change in the country.

"Negotiation is a political tool and a complement to military action to force the enemy to a point of compulsion and extract real concessions," an adviser to Qalibaf, Mahdi Mohammadi, wrote on his Telegram channel Thursday.

The unusually open rivalry within the theocracy's leadership points to a struggle for control over Iran's postwar future. A huge question mark is where the new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, stands. Reportedly injured in the strike that killed his father in the opening minutes of the war on February 28, Khamenei remains in hiding, and both sides have claimed his support.

Iran is determined to show strength

In a boost for Qalibaf and Pezeshkian, the ceasefire deal reached with the US in April received strong backing in Iran's top leadership body, the Supreme National Security Council. Twelve of its 13 members approved it, including senior figures in the Revolutionary Guard and the military.

The lone vote against the deal is widely believed to have come from Saeed Jalili, the most prominent figure in the Paydari movement.

But the ceasefire crumbled as the two sides trade strikes and as Iran presses for control over passage through the Strait of Hormuz which before the war carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas. Iran was also frustrated that financial promises under the deal—including the release of billions of frozen assets—didn't materialise, and now the American blockade is back in place.

With no benefits from the deal, "there's no serious division" in the leadership over how to respond, said Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group. They believe US President Donald Trump "only understands the language of force, and therefore, they would have to gain the upper hand in order to compel him to deliver," Vaez said.

The hard-liners are pressuring Iranians

The funeral for slain Iranian supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, earlier this month appeared to show the strength of the ultra-hardline Paydari. Crowds called for revenge on the US and Israel for the war. Videos showed mourners in Tehran welcoming Jalili, while Pezeshkian was greeted at one point with insults and cries of "Death to the compromiser!".

The ultra-hardliners have used nightly rallies and their control of state television, known by the acronym IRIB, to drum up opposition to negotiations. At rallies and on TV, speakers have portrayed Iran as headed for total victory and denounced those who compromise with the Islamic Republic's archenemy, the United States.

State television cut off a June 30 live broadcast with Qalibaf as he discussed negotiations with Washington. Earlier this month, it cut off broadcasting a speech by Pezeshkian to businessmen seconds after he said that the elder Khamenei had given permission for renewed US talks before his death.

Pezeshkian and his camp have pushed back, portraying IRIB as dividing the country at the time of war. The president accused the broadcaster of making it like "the military are on one side, and the government is on another side."



AP/RSS

A girl swings along the shore as cargo ships and other commercial vessels appear anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off Bandar Abbas, Iran, last week.

Last month, the president's media office condemned state television for what it described as "censoring" the president and other government heads, signalling an open rift.

The hard-liners have sought to press their influence in other ways. In past weeks, authorities shut down cafes in central Tehran that were popular with residents during the ceasefire. Videos on Iranian social media showed many women at the cafes flouting mandatory veiling laws, and crowds mixing freely. The closures were brief but signalled that "religious extremist parties" were showing their influence, said Mohamad Ali Abtahi, a reformist cleric and an aide to former President Mohammad Khatami, who is still widely considered to be the leader of Iran's reformist groups.

While Jalili's supporters are a minority they are influential, said Vali Nasr, professor of International Affairs and Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"They have a lot of money. They have a lot of power. They have put a lot of people in the bureaucracy" and developed connections in the Revolutionary Guard, Nasr said.

The pragmatists say the public must be heard

The more pragmatic camp argues that maintaining unity during the war requires addressing the public's unhappiness over the economy as well as political and social repression. This, as Iran's currency continues to slide, inflation spirals, and unemployment rises. A final agreement with the US could bring Iran a huge windfall with the lifting of sanctions and the return of billions in assets.

Small flashes of impatience with the war have emerged. In July, over 250 former lawmakers, clerics, professors and other public figures signed an anti-war petition warning of the costs of the conflict.

"We believe that the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people want peace and the right to a decent life," the statement read. Others have spoken out against stepped-up executions of protesters following wide-scale anti-government protests in January.

SKorea records its highest temperature of 42.5C

KANG JIN-KYU/AFP
SEOUL, AUG 2

South Korea on Sunday registered its highest temperature since records began over a century ago, as authorities warned people to stop all outdoor activities in affected areas.

The southeastern city of Yangsan saw the temperature reach 42.5C at 1:26 pm (0426 GMT), the Korea Meteorological Administration said on its website. Yangsan has been the epicentre of the ongoing heatwave, where temperatures exceeded 40C for a fifth consecutive day on Sunday, while many other cities including Daegu and Busan are seeing temperatures climb into the high 30s.

People flocked to air-conditioned shopping malls or cafes to escape the blistering temperatures, an AFP reporter saw. Ju Dong-yeol, 27, took refuge from the heat in a Starbucks in Seoul along with his parents and told AFP "it is too hot to be outside doing anything". "I can't think of anything else to do other than stay in air-conditioned places like home, shopping malls and cafes," the office worker said. More than 20 localities were under emergency heatwave alerts on Sunday—a new warning category introduced this year to better address rising temperatures.

Dry, hot summers are putting Dutch dikes at risk and threatening German river trade

MIKE CORDER/AP
WADDINXVEEN, NETHERLANDS, AUG 2

Jeroen Wouda and Dirk Boom walk slowly along a Dutch dike, prodding at the bone dry surface with metal rods and scanning the parched grass for patches of green that could give away the location of a leak.

In a scene that brings to mind the fictional Dutch boy who heroically plugs a hole in a dike with his finger, the two men are hunting for cracks in the low-lying Netherlands' famed water defences caused a drought that is gripping Europe and has fuelled raging wildfires in France and Spain and sent the Danube and Rhine rivers to record low levels.

Unlike the low-tech solution in American author Mary Mapes Dodge's 19th-century story, modern dike patrols are able to plot possible problems caused by drought in an app and send it to authorities who can then quickly carry our repairs.

In the Netherlands and neighbouring Germany cargo ships that ply the Rhine and its offshoots have been forced to carry significantly less freight or risk running aground in shallow navigation channels. Farmers facing restrictions on irrigating their crops are warning of smaller fruit harvests and rising prices this season.

And for some houseboat owners, the drought has left their water-borne homes resting on sandy river bed.



AP/RSS

Houseboats sit in low water on the Waal river in Nijmegen, Netherlands, on Thursday.

Peter van Duijvendijk is a flood defence manager at the Schieland en de Krimpenerwaard water corporation, one of 21 such organisations covering the Netherlands that are responsible for issues including flood control.

He has a team of 140 volunteers who are responsible for checking about 100 kilometres (60 miles) of dikes, reporting any problems they find. So far this dry summer there have not discovered any major issues. But they remain alert now and likely into the fall.

The volunteers "are our eyes and ears on the dike," Van Duijvendijk told The Associated Press.

Like many inland dikes, the barrier in agricultural fields near the small town of Waddinxveen, east of The Hague, is made of peat that needs to be damp to be strong enough to hold back water. It is in one of the lowest points in the Netherlands, some 5 meters (16 feet) below sea level.

"Because it is so dry right now the peat loses moisture, and because of that it becomes weaker," Van Duijvendijk said. "If that peat becomes weaker, then there is a chance that water will flow through the dike and that waterway will drain into the polder," referring to reclaimed Dutch land. Europe's major rivers face a lack of water flow.

In Cologne, Germany, people walk along parts of the dried-up bed of the Rhine, a river that is a major highway for European freight traffic.

On Saturday, the Rhine's water level in Cologne dropped below the record low set in October 2018. Marcel Beck, manager of the western German ports of Neuss, Düsseldorf and Cologne at RheinCargo, a port and freight transport company, said the levels are having a "devastating impact" on shipping.

"A ship that would normally carry 2,000 to 2,500 metric tons of cargo can now only transport 400, perhaps 600, metric tons depending on the ship's design," he said. "This places an enormous burden on the entire transport chain to reorganise everything in order to still get the goods inland."

Sri Lanka boosts prison security after riot kills one

REUTERS
COLOMBO, AUG 2

Sri Lanka tightened security across its prisons on Sunday after a riot left one person dead and six injured, an official said, as the nation struggles to manage its overcrowded jails.

Prisoners damaged several buildings including the hospital, training center, and kitchen, within the Mahara prison on Saturday, which is about 15 km from commercial capital Colombo.

The riot began during family visiting hours with prisoners climbing atop roofs and setting fire to a building within the prison complex, and burning documents kept inside administration offices, police sources told Reuters.

The prison housed about 4,100 inmates, about four times its capacity, mirroring a systemic crisis across the country's prison network, which holds over 41,000 convicted inmates in 22 facilities with a combined capacity of about 11,000.

The jails also house thousands of remand prisoners who have not been convicted of a crime.

Ten prison officials and 20 prisoners died in two days of fighting between two groups of inmates at a prison in the coastal town of Negombo, about 35 km north of Colombo, in early July.

The clash was Sri Lanka's worst since 2012, with police special forces, military and navy personnel called in to control the riot, Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Sajeewa Medawatta told reporters on Sunday.

"Attention has been paid to increasing security at all major prisons, particularly the ones close to Colombo, including the Negombo prison," Medawatta said.

"Prison officials have moved prisoners to their holding cells and are giving them food and water. Due to the intervention of the police, military and other personnel, we were able to control this."

The air force deployed a helicopter and drones above the prison complex during the riot. Dozens of people, including relatives of inmates, gathered outside the facility on Saturday evening and had to be held back by a police cordon.

A police curfew was imposed on Saturday night in three surrounding villages to disperse the family members and maintain peace, police said. The curfew was lifted by midday on Sunday.

Tourists chase high-octane thrill in China's trending biker capital

SAM DAVIES/AFP
CHINA, AUG 2

The roar of engines fills the night air in China's Chongqing city as tourists awkwardly clamber onto gleaming motorbikes and cling to muscular drivers to star in personalised videos.

Teams of sellers hawk their filming services to passersby, many of whom have been drawn to the city and its cyberpunk image by motorbiking videos on social media shot against the neon-lit nightscape.

"I flew from Shanghai to Chongqing this morning, and the first priority is this shoot," 30-year-old Liu Changqing told AFP, dressed in one of the heavy motorcycle jackets rented to customers, despite the sweltering heat.

"They even have make-up artists to help you," she said as she mounted a crimson superbike, wrapped her arms around her driver and sped off with a videographer in pursuit.

While many Chinese cities have restricted motorcycling, Chongqing has embraced it and become a biker's paradise. What began with local riders snapping each other to post online exploded last year as tourism to the mega-city of 23 million spiked.

Videos using a hashtag related to the trend have racked up a cumulative 1.3 billion views on Douyin—China's version of TikTok—helping to elevate Chongqing's motorcycle culture to national prominence and even gaining recognition overseas.



AFP/RSS

This picture taken on July 21 shows a woman live-streaming a motorcycle along a street in Chongqing, southwestern China.

"There is a local saying that if you put a camera at an intersection in Chongqing, every 30 seconds you'll see a motorcycle pass by," said Zhang Yuanming, a 29-year-old motorbike enthusiast and instructor.

Zhang attributes biking's popularity in the city to the prevalence of manufacturers, the rugged terrain, and bad traffic.

Chongqing has been an industry hub since 1979, when state-owned military equipment manufacturer Jialing began producing civilian motorcycles in the city. Motorbikes quickly became popular, and the city now accounts for more than a third of China's total motorbike production.

While many Chinese cities are dominated by electric scooters, which face fewer regulations, Chongqing has remained open to petrol-powered two-wheelers.

Zhang, who teaches students to race at a track on the outskirts of the city, hopes tourism will further burnish the city's biker reputation.

"When [tourists] take photos and videos, they may come to like motorbikes and learn to ride, then buy a bike," he said.

Zhang has also seen increased interest from students since March, when local brand ZXMoto made headlines by becoming the first Chinese manufacturer to win a race in the prestigious WorldSSP class in Portugal.

"It's pushing young people to get in touch with motorcycles," he said.

For the local bikers offering videos for tourists, Chongqing's motorcycle prowess is a business opportunity.

The packages of choreographed photos and videos—in which customers are swept off their feet by dashing riders and cruise past the city's landmarks in slow motion—cost upwards of 200 yuan ($30).

UEFA declares no confidence in Infantino and vows accountability for failed World Cup equity plan

UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin has led the fight against Infantino in a seismic week for FIFA.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GENEVA, AUG 2

Successfully stopping Gianni Infantino's FIFA plan to sell World Cup profits to private investors was the first half of a high-stakes game in global football politics.

The second half kicked off Saturday with what seemed a clear aim of ending Infantino's decade-long presidency.

"No option should be off the table," said European football body UEFA, whose president Aleksander Čeferin has led the fight against Infantino in a seismic week for FIFA.

"The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family."

Later Saturday, the governing body for North and Central American and Caribbean football (CONCACAF) called for accountability, saying: "A (World Cup) proposal of this magnitude does not reach that stage by accident. It is a symptom of leadership that has stopped putting football first. This recent unilateral and egregious act of poor governance and leadership follows a pattern of missteps and similar behavior. A full review of this leadership must now take place."

Infantino had proposed creating a $20 billion company to run the World Cup with private investors but drew backlash that grew every day since Tuesday's announcement.

Infantino was forced to scrap the plan early Saturday after his senior adviser who sat on a White House panel resigned and Asia's football body joined Europe and North America in opposing it.

UEFA's blistering statement

UEFA, the governing body of European football, issued its blistering statement hours after FIFA announced it was withdrawing its private equity plan.

"We cannot keep going on like this with secret schemes on fast-track timescales, cooked up by faceless individuals and of dubious benefit to the game," UEFA said. "We must identify those responsible and hold them to account.

"It is right that, in the coming days and weeks, UEFA will work with its associations and in close cooperation with other confederations to reflect on how this happened and devise a plan to make sure that it cannot occur again."

Norwegian football federation president Lise Klaveness, an elected member of the UEFA executive committee, said steps must be taken to protect the integrity of the sport.

"The entire framework of international football cooperation was unnecessarily put at risk in pursuit of individual interests rather than the best interests of the game," Klaveness said Saturday. "This has been visible to many for a long time, including those of us elected to positions intended to safeguard checks and balances and provide ongoing oversight. We have to recognize that these mechanisms have not worked well enough."

The president of the Asian football confederation, Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, said "the future of global football must always be shaped through proper consultation, collective dialogue and respect for the established governance structures of our game."



AP/RSS

FIFA President Gianni Infantino looks on during the women's Premier League match between Al Ahli FC and Al Ittihad FC at the Al- Ahli Club stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Dec 14, 2023.

Infantino' audacious bid fell apart after UEFA's 55-member nations agreed Thursday to boycott the World Cup and all other FIFA competitions. CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation also said they opposed the plan.

CONCACAF's statement added that FIFA leaders have "a duty of service over power. Where that duty is not upheld, accountability cannot be optional."

FIFA's internal revolt

There was also an internal revolt.

Infantino's senior adviser, Carlos Cordeiro, a former Goldman Sachs banker who represented the football body on the White House Task Force for the World Cup, resigned on Friday and urged other senior FIFA staff to speak out.

Hours later, FIFA chief operating officer Kevin Lamour issued a statement to The Associated Press, saying FIFA staff were deceived by Infantino's lack of openness in planning the sale over recent months and that the project must not continue.

"It is the project of one person," wrote Lamour, a longtime colleague of Infantino at both FIFA and UEFA. "Not only must this project not go ahead … but the time has now come for football political leaders to ask themselves the right questions and make the right decisions."

Infantino had proposed spinning off FIFA's commercial businesses — including World Cups and Club World Cups for men and women — into a $20 billion subsidiary with 20% owned by private investors.

The "anchor investor," described by FIFA, is a New York-based investment firm launched by Joshua Kushner, the younger brother of U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

This is not Infantino's first big plan to flop

A tumultuous week in international football is at least the third time Infantino has rocked it with an ambitious plan many in the sport saw as reckless.

But the fallout from FIFA's Kushner-backed plan is the first time UEFA has acted quickly to create momentum for removing the man who was its former long-time employee.

In 2018, Infantino pushed a secretive offer of $25 billion from Japan's SoftBank to create new competitions that posed a long-term risk to continental events for clubs and national teams.

In 2021, Infantino proposed playing World Cups every two years instead of four — an idea that also angered the International Olympic Committee where he is an elected member.

Both plans created big rifts in the sport and were eventually dropped by FIFA.

Despite the turmoil, Infantino was re-elected unopposed in 2019 and 2023.

The third time shapes to be different.

Here is the calendar for the FIFA presidency

Nov. 18 is the deadline for candidates to enter the next presidential contest, exactly four months ahead of the vote in Rabat, Morocco, where FIFA has its African headquarters.

FIFA statutes allow Infantino one more four-year term in office. The failed spinoff venture seemed like a way to create a commissioner-like role for Infantino beyond 2031, likely paying much more than his current annual salary and a bonus deal of more than $6 million.

It would take 106 votes to ensure a majority in a contested election. Continents surely do not vote uniformly en bloc, but most of Europe's 55, plus Asia's 46 and CONCACAF's 35 FIFA members would be a solid base.

The Qatar FA issued a statement in support of Infantino on Saturday.

Its president, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Thani, said: "We welcome FIFA President Gianni Infantino's decision to withdraw the FIFA Forward Enterprise proposal in the interest of the global football community.

"While the proposal had merit, we applaud the wisdom behind prioritising unity among Member Associations. The Qatar Football Association fully supports President Infantino's efforts to continue growing and strengthening the game globally."



AFP/RSS

England's Judd Trump plays a shot during his match against England's Kyren Wilson at the Shanghai Masters snooker tournament in Shanghai on Sunday.

Messi returns as Inter Miami draw 2-2 against Columbus Crew

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MIAMI, AUG 2

Lionel Messi returned to Major League Soccer action after World Cup duty on Saturday, coming on in the second half as his Inter Miami side drew 2-2 with Columbus Crew.

Two weeks after Argentina's loss to Spain in the World Cup final, Messi was back on the pitch, entering in the 53rd minute to the delight of fans at Miami's Nu Stadium.



But Messi could not mark his return with a goal, twice shooting wide.

Uruguayan Luis Suarez scored his seventh goal in his last four games to put Miami 1-0 up in the 16th minute.

Miami's former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder Casemiro scored an own goal in the 34th minute which drew Columbus level at 1-1.

Suarez provided the assist for Noah Allen to head Miami into a 2-1 half-time lead

But midfielder Brais Mendez, making his Columbus debut after arriving from Real Sociedad in Spain, curled in a second equalizer from an 84th-minute free-kick.

The result ended Miami's six-match winning streak and kept them in second place in the Eastern Conference behind Nashville, who drew 2-2 at DC United.

Los Angeles FC and Vancouver Whitecaps remain level at the top of the Western Conference after they drew 1-1 at Vancouver's BC Place.

Son Heung-min extended his scoring streak since the MLS resumed after the World Cup to four goals in four matches as he put Los Angeles ahead in the 37th minute.

But Vancouver's German star Thomas Mueller converted a 76th-minute penalty.

The former Tottenham star Son, who had shouldered much of the blame for South Korea's failure to make it to the knockout rounds of the World Cup, also earned MVP honors in the MLS All-Star Game on Wednesday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Focus on your heart and all that it desires this morning, dearest Aries. Actions taken to further personal and creative ambitions can draw positive attention to these goals.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Enjoy quiet moments as morning unfolds, dearest Taurus. Go easy on yourself and family to make way for warm experiences and interactions.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
You'll shine brightly amongst your people, darling Gemini. Prepare for an exciting and mentally engaging day, taking care to ensure you feel focused, energised, and ready to socialise.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
The Aries Moon puts you in an ambitious but practical headspace, darling Cancer. Take a moment to celebrate these breakthroughs, but don't lose momentum in the process.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Energy you send into the universe expands and bounces back, showering you with blessings and messages of encouragement. Valuable experience can also be gained during this time, so keep your eyes peeled for learning opportunities.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Plans made in secret bring a thrill to your heart, dearest Virgo. Highlight each other's strengths and divide tasks to form the ultimate power couple.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
If you've been secretly harboring a new relationship, now is a good time to go public with your commitment. Establish a set date night or more consistent self-care routines to invite more romance and harmony into your life.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Hard work pays off and today's energy proves it. Get organised and don't let anyone or anything distract you from the goals that matter most, dearest Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Open-heartedness brings unexpected blessings to you and the people around you, darling archer. This celestial alignment breathes magic into your world, especially when you welcome joy and love into your life.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Connect with people who have seen you evolve throughout the years, dearest Capricorn. Now is also a good time to let your guard down within developing relationships.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
You'll feel a bit daring as the Moon moves through Aries, putting you in a curious and outspoken mood. Go out of your way to learn more about the people around you, dearest Aquarius.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Seeds you've planted need tending to, darling Pisces. Though it may be difficult to focus on small tasks, you'll feel increasingly proud with each item that is checked off your to-do list.

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CROSSWORD

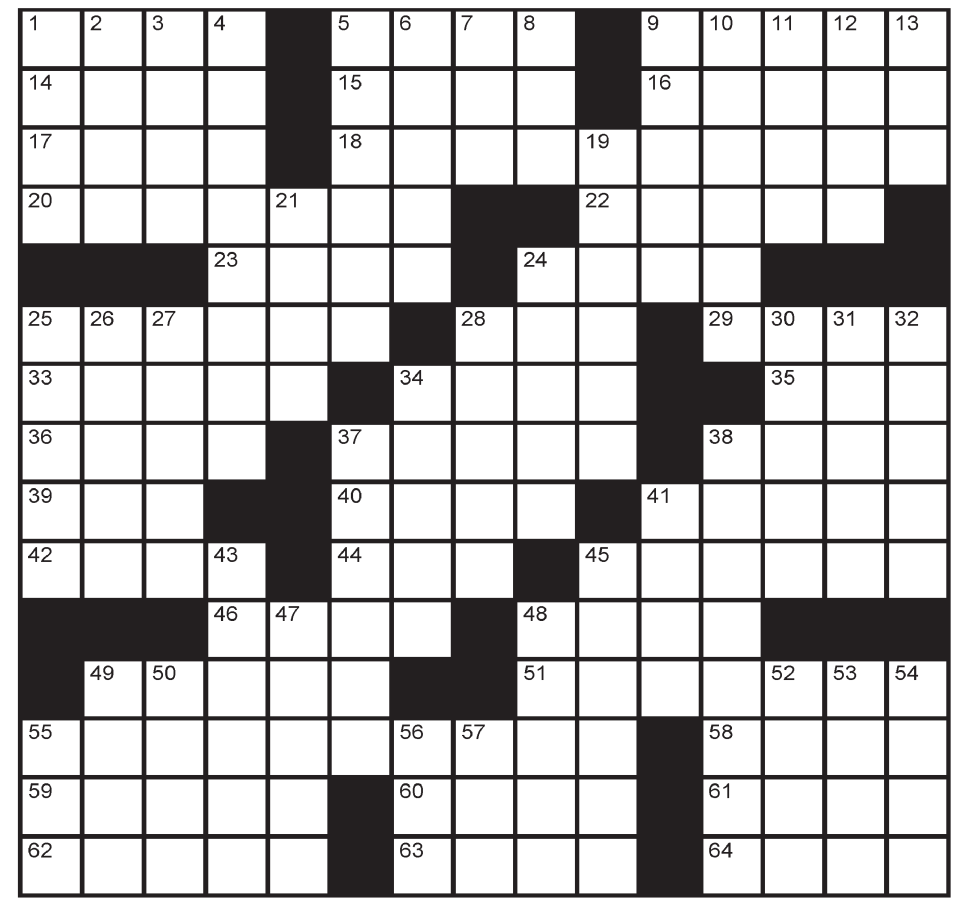
ACROSS
1 Young woman
5 Quiz
9 Bicker
14 Toward the sheltered side
15 Kiln
16 Pester in fun
17 Skyrocket
18 Strict nondrinker
20 Dog breed
22 Jockey
23 Swiss — knife
24 Visage
25 Predatory insect
28 Kitten
29 Pro —
33 Zodiac sign
34 Concern
35 Apple computer
36 — over matter
37 Societal norms
38 Beyond
39 Spelling event
40 Goofs
41 Moisten with pan drippings
42 Plus
44 "Groundhog —"
45 Balanced
46 Singer — McCartney
48 Broken seed coat
49 Pierces
51 Of clay
55 Environmentalist's concern (2 wds.)
58 Madrid money
59 Fat
60 Commedia dell'—
61 Check
62 "For — sake!"
63 Do a lawn care job
64 "Auld Lang —"

DOWN
1 "— but not least ..."
2 Succulent plant
3 Scorch
4 Notched, as a knife
5 Tribal emblems
6 All
7 Understand
8 Dynamite
9 Storage area
10 Book for schoolchildren
11 Wind
12 Part of GUI
13 Ending for auction or puppet
19 Speechifies
21 Eye part
24 Gets along
25 Venomous snake
26 "Tempest" sprite
27 Dressed to the —
28 Haul
30 Gather
31 Liking
32 Played a part
34 Pinkish color
37 Gorgon with snakes for hair
38 Portraitists
41 Wild pig
43 Impossible to see through
45 Said grace
47 Touches on
48 Singer — Midler
49 Scene
50 Horse's gait
52 —, Dewey and Louie
53 "— go bragh!"
54 Second to —
55 Viper
56 Ordinance
57 Wrath

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

D	O	V	E	■	B	E	A	S	T	■	F	L	A	G
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O	L	E	O	■	M	I	A	M	I	■	S	O	I	L
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SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

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When power dictates the verdict

'Miss Menuka' turns a woman's moral dilemma into a searing examination of political power and communal violence.





RIVASH RIJAL
KATHMANDU

Last Thursday, July 29 at Shilpee Theatre was the premier of Pabitra Khadka's play 'Miss Menuka: Ek Sambhedanshil Younkarmi'. An adaptation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Putain Respectueuse* (A respectable woman), the play deals with themes of power, politics, sexuality, society and communal violence, ever relevant for any country and at any time. The last of those, namely communal violence, has unfortunately become all the more important in Nepal in recent days.

THEATRE REVIEW

Miss Menuka, convincingly played by Sarita Giri, is the prostitute in question, playful, young, full of life and important to the story - rather principled, much more than anyone else in the play. Giri's character manages to be both serious yet funny at the same time. One moment, she is contemplating how she might do the right thing, and the very next moment, she delivers a zinger that makes the whole room erupt - a commendable performance.

Menuka's foil is played by Yuvraj Ghimire's character, Bibek Jung Sharma who manages to be as unlikeable as the role demands of him and the role demands that he be as unlikeable as he can be. Violent, manipulative, drunk on power and prestige, and racist, almost a caricature of the worst guy possible, but believe it not – such people definitely do exist. Ghimire plays his role so well, it's impossible not to hate his character.

The problems arise when she gets caught up in a legal case involving a Dalit Madhesi on one side and the Bahun Pahadi son of a Member of Parliament and landlord on the other hand. On the balance hangs the life of the former of the two involved in the legal case. If Menuka does the right thing, the life of an innocent Paswan man is saved. But, as the play shows viewers, the right thing is hard to do when it hurts those in positions of power.

Arbind Paswan fears the persecution of a Kathmandu lynch mob should he be framed for a crime that he did not commit. And even before the verdict, a mob seems to already be out for him. This speaks nicely to how quickly a small spark can ignite a fire when on a combustible bed of hate.

Arbind is played by Rupesh Mandal, who manages to live up to the role, acting as if his life were really at risk throughout the play. Mandal's character is downtrodden, naive, fearful and failed by his society and countrymen.

Prabhakar Dev Sharma plays the sophist politician, Jagannath Sharma. At one point he says that truths have levels. "There is your truth, that is undeniable. But then there is the truth that is helpful to the nation. Are those truths the same?"

Dhanraj Sunar and Govinda Oli play their supporting roles well.

The stage setting is well done. Menuka's bedroom, the only set used for the whole play, is real eye-candy. The use of lighting perfectly captures the mood of the various scenes as they happen, and the music attempts to do a similar thing, although somewhat less well.

The play's premier was performed amidst the unpredictable and at times heavy monsoon rain hitting the metal sheet roofing of the Shilpee Theatre. The noise, from time to time, made the dialogue difficult to hear. Had it not been for the subtitles being projected into the stage's backdrop, the rain would have made for worse viewing.

On another night, the quality and timing of the subtitles may have gone unnoticed. But, on premier night they became a prominent part of the play. The rain is likely to be an unwelcome feature in the next three weeks or so of the play's showing. As such they must be reworked to be accurate to the dialogue and in-sync with the delivery. This will make for a better audience experience, at what is already a good play.

A good work of literature, produced for the stage by a talented team such as this one, is always a good antidote to social ills. Good plays show their characters are real human beings, motivated by relatable problems and situations. They produce empathy in the viewers for other human beings, as different as they might be from the viewers themselves. Miss Menuka manages to do all these things.

When I first watched Miss Menuka I thought the play was an important contribution to social and political discourse, I am sure the team felt the same way in making it. Little did they know, their work would come out on the eve of a shocking and painful wave of communal violence. Madhesh has been gripped and brought to a stand still by death and destruction.

Art and literature, with the effects it produces, moves the needle in the direction of peace and coexistence. Miss Menuka would have done that regardless, but it has come out at a time where that has become the nation's highest need.

Miss Menuka: Ek Sambhedanshil Younkarmi
When: July 29 to August 22
Where: Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali, Kathmandu
Time: 4:30 pm onwards
Entry: Rs500 to Rs1,000



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RUPESH KUMAR SAH

'Spider-Man: Brand New Day' locates a young person's anxiety within the franchise bluster

As the Marvel Cinematic Universe rebuilds after the franchise fatigue of the early 2020s, this has emerged to raise expectations.

TATSAM MUKHERJEE

Near the end of Destin Daniel Cretton's Spider-Man: Brand New Day, I was reminded of Sam Raimi's Spider-Man 2 (in my eyes the best Spider-Man film). It's a scene where the superhero (Tobey Maguire) has prevented a train from derailing. Using all his might, tensile strength and will-power, he faints after the act. About to collapse, he's caught by those inside the train. His unconscious body surfs over a sea of New York commuters, after which he's carefully laid down.

It's the first time the city sees him without his mask. Similarly, in Cretton's film, Spider-Man (Tom Holland) needs to be saved by the very city he's spent his life defending. In a genre that thrives on an individual saving the world, I was touched to see a hurt, vulnerable 'hero' extending his hand (ever so briefly) to the city's finest. It's no surprise both scenes, championing community values, take place in films centred around the 'friendly, neighbourhood superhero'.

In a franchise that now spans nine films, two reboots (Tobey Maguire featured in three, Andrew Garfield in two, and this is Tom Holland's fourth standalone film), it would be easy for Cretton to come on board and make a film that looks, sounds, feels like the umpteen green-screen films churned out on the superhero assembly line. And yet, a thing that genuinely took me by surprise is how writers Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers, along with Cretton, are able to locate a young person's honest feelings and anxiety underneath that franchise bluster.

After Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021), where Peter Parker's (Holland) memory is wiped for the whole world, including partner MJ (Zendaya) and best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon), Peter is forced to live in his own exile. Working through the day developing his own tech, while stalking both Ned and MJ as they go through MIT, Peter might be on the verge of burning out. And he shows first signs, when after complaining about stiff intermittent headaches, he injures a cop.

It doesn't look sustainable, but Peter looks resigned, living the oft-repeated adage of "With great power, comes great responsibility".



SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUBE

Holland is exceptional in these scenes, where he sees Ned and MJ living the life he envies, but also making the hard choice of sparing them the looming threat of being Spider-Man's loved ones.

The antagonist here is a young girl (Sadie Sink), who inhabits people's minds within a range of 33 feet. In a thrilling sequence, we see her travelling from one consciousness to the next, as one person after another gets mind-controlled. Similarly, Cretton brings back the abandon with which Peter swings from one skyscraper to the next, making it a visceral experience for the audience (especially more rewarding in 3D). There's the expected star cameos flexed from around the cinematic universe, like Frank Castle/Punisher (Jon Bernthal), Yelena (Florence Pugh) and Dr Bruce Banner/The Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), which don't feel as intrusive as some of the other films.

As the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) rebuilds after the franchise fatigue of the early 2020s, this has emerged as the third consecutive film after 'Thunderbolts' (2024) and The Fantastic Four (2025) to raise expectations. In fact, it has more than one connection to Jake Schrier's 'Thunderbolts', where the antagonist has a valid cause—and they're able to have conversations inside mind palaces.

Sink plays Jean Grey, a mutant from the X-Men comics (X-Men are also a part of Disney/Marvel now, as we saw in Deadpool & Wolverine), capable of mind-control. She's searching for her sister. After shooting to fame in Netflix's Stranger Things, Sink is on strong footing here too. The set-pieces are fun to watch, and the film treads similar ground as Schrier's film, where "trauma" is the villain and "empathy" is the way to overcome it. Flirting with genres of psychological horror, especially in a chilling pre-interval scene on a roof-top.

I enjoyed the overall bonhomie in Cretton's film — Ned's infectious enthusiasm about having invented a Spidey tracker (which tells you about Spider-Man's last sighting), MJ's deadpan face, Peter's banter with Frank, and his phone calls with Detective DeWolff (Liza Colon-Zayas, who is carrying the motherly warmth of her character from The Bear). One of my favourite things about Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man films is seeing him grapple with the responsibility of a selfless hero and being a loving son/protege/friend/partner. I like how Cretton brings that struggle back into Holland's Peter Parker, who longingly watches his two friends live their lives from a distance, as if his intrusion will shatter it forever.

Cretton, who paved his way through independent films Short Term 12 (2013) and Just Mercy (2019), and then made his Marvel debut with the winsome Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (2021), might be the grounding factor here. Even within all the bustle of action set-pieces, overwrought screenplays, and inane jargon thrown in for the sci-fi elements of the film, Cretton's focus remains on the human relationships. The eternal conflict of Spider-Man being unable to take his mask off in front of anyone, to protect his loved ones, is rendered hollow here – after his loved ones are threatened regardless. One of my favourite scenes in the film is Spider-Man (after spending the entire film by himself) sitting down with MJ and Ned, and sharing a laugh. As an audience member, to hear them laughing felt like a weight off my chest.

At 145 mins, Spider-Man: Brand New Day is about 10% longer than your average Marvel film. And it feels longer, because of a false ending it teases 25 minutes before it finally concludes. The machinations to keep the larger cinematic universe in orbit ensures it is never quite allowed to become its own thing. However, despite all that, I was moved by how Cretton, McKenna and Sommers focus on the simple stuff. Like Frank cosplaying as Spider-Man from the window of the hospital room and getting the crowd's attention, so Peter Parker can exit without drawing attention to himself. Or how a simple handshake routine can revive a long-forgotten friendship.

For a hero to save the world, he has to first save himself. Also, sometimes, protecting the neighbourhood can begin with letting the neighbourhood protect you.

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The intersection of art and human psyche at Annapurna Gallery

Nine contemporary artists examine the world through colour and memory in 'Chromatic Psyche: A Collective Art Show'.

JONY NEPAL
KATHMANDU

Chromatic Psyche: A Collective Art Show', curated by Roshan Bhandari and exhibited at Annapurna Gallery, brings together the distinct visual practices of nine contemporary artists. Featuring 36 original works spanning painting, mixed media, and ceramic sculpture, the exhibition explores a rich spectrum of artistic expression through diverse materials, techniques, and perspectives. The show runs until August 23.

At the heart of the exhibit is an exploration of the human psyche through colour, memory, emotion, and lived experience. While each artist presents a distinct perspective, the exhibition forms a compelling dialogue where personal narratives intersect with themes of identity, nature, cultural heritage, and contemporary society.

The exhibited works employ a wide range of materials and techniques, demonstrating how artistic mediums can become powerful mediums for thought and emotion. Nature appears throughout the exhibition as memories and metaphors, while symbolic imagery explores themes of womanhood, vulnerability, compassion, urban transformation, cultural

preservation, and the complexities of the inner self.

Rather than presenting a single narrative, 'Chromatic Psyche' celebrates the diversity of contemporary artistic expression. Each artwork engages with a unique psychological landscape, inviting viewers to reflect on their own emotions, memories, and perceptions.



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE POST

Chromatic Psyche: A Collective Art Show
Date: Until August 23
Where: Annapurna Gallery, Radhe Radhe, Bhaktapur
Time: 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM
Entrance: Free

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