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Nepal stakes its claim to basmati rice

As India, Pakistan compete for geographical indication rights, Nepal drafts its first GI law to protect local products.



POST PHOTO: MANOJ PAULDEL

A farmer tends to his Kalanamak paddy crop in Ramtalaha, Kapilvastu, in this picture taken last year.

UPENDRA RAJ PANDEY

KATHMANDU, AUG 9

Across South Asia, basmati rice has long been associated with prestige. It is the mainstay of parties during special occasions—from weddings and religious ceremonies to Dashain, Tihaar and Eid celebrations. The fragrance of basmati—the word ‘basmati’ means ‘fragrant’ in Sanskrit—often defines dishes such as pulao and biryani, adding a sense of occasion to meals served at family kitchens, restaurants and five-star hotel buffets.

This famous aromatic rice is now

at the centre of a long-running dispute over its origins, geographical indication (GI) rights and ownership of its global identity.

India, Pakistan and, in recent years, Nepal have all entered the race to claim basmati as their own.

As the three countries continue their competing claims, Nepal is preparing to introduce its first standalone legal framework for geographical indications.

The government is moving ahead with an Industrial Property Bill that would provide legal recognition to GI products. The proposed law is expect-

ed to create a foundation for protecting Nepali products such as basmati rice, Ilam tea, Jumla beans and Bhaktapur's juju dhau—literally translating to ‘king of yoghurt’—in domestic and international markets.

Nepal currently has no dedicated law governing geographical indications. Article 25 of the constitution guarantees property rights, including intellectual property, while the Copyright Act 2002 provides some protection for intellectual creations.

However, the government is seeking to replace the outdated Patent, Design and Trademark Act 1965 with a broad-

er industrial property law. The bill was previously introduced in the House of Representatives on June 6, 2025, by then-industry minister Damodar Bhandari, but became inactive after Parliament was dissolved on September 12 following the Gen Z protests. The government has now revived the draft as part of its list of priority legislation to be enacted within a year.

The proposed law defines a geographical indication as “any sign or geographical name identifying goods produced or processed in a specific geographical location or region where those goods possess qualities, reputation or characteristics associated with that area.”

The bill outlines the criteria for granting GI protection and includes provisions allowing Nepal and other countries to recognise each other's GI-protected products through bilateral agreements. It also proposes a separate national symbol or logo for GI products.

The long-running basmati dispute

The international battle over basmati gained global attention in 1997, when the Texas-based company RiceTec registered a patent with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) for basmati rice and named it “Texmati.”

India contested the claim through the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), while over 50,000 people staged a protest outside the US Embassy in New Delhi. Environmentalist Vandana Shiva termed RiceTec's claim ‘absurd’.

Following India's challenge, RiceTec withdrew 15 of its original 20 claims. The remaining rights were limited to three specific hybrid varieties developed by the company itself: Basmati-867, RT-1117 and RT-1121.

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Judicial Council may bar lawyers from Supreme Court bench

With four top court vacancies and 25,000 pending cases, the Judicial Council is under pressure to fill the bench while rethinking its appointment practice.

DURGA DULAL

KATHMANDU, AUG 9

The Judicial Council is preparing to prioritise career judges from the district and high courts for upcoming Supreme Court appointments, potentially ending the long-standing practice of appointing private legal practitioners directly to the top court.

According to sources within the council, preparations are underway to ensure that no lawyers in private practice are directly appointed to the Supreme Court in the upcoming round of appointments. The council is discussing whether to institutionalise a system in which judges with experience at the district and high courts are given preference for selection to the country's highest court.

The appointment of Supreme Court justices has long been debated, drawing scrutiny from the public and the legal community. The Report on the Eradication of Malpractices and Anomalies in the Judiciary, 2021, prepared by then Supreme Court justice Hari Krishna Karki, identified deep-rooted problems in the judicial appointment process.

The report found that subjective, opaque and politically influenced considerations had often overshadowed the objective criteria set by the Constitution.

It recommended that appointments be based on a comprehensive assessment of constitutionally qualified candidates, including their seniority, practical experience, knowledge of law and the constitution, efficiency, integrity, impartiality, professional and moral conduct, and contribution to the field of law and justice.

The report also pointed to nepotism, favouritism, political patronage and political quota-sharing among major parties, as factors influencing judicial appointments.

In some cases, it found that individuals lacking the minimum qualifications required under the constitution and sufficient judicial experience had been recommended for appointment.

It is against this backdrop that the

council has begun discussing a change in its approach to apex court appointments.

“To ensure that the persistent questions and allegations of political manoeuvring and partisan influence do not surface this time around, we are actively discussing the implementation of an appointment style that is distinctly different and more transparent than past practices,” a current member of the council said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the deliberations.

The council member recalled an appointment made about seven years ago, when a large group of private legal practitioners were appointed directly as permanent justices of the Supreme Court.

After the appointments, a senior judicial colleague asked one of the newly appointed justices, who had come directly from the Bar, how he was finding the job.

Approach floated amid criticism of opaque and politically influenced judicial appointments.

“I am learning,” the justice replied, having spent barely a month on the top court bench, according to the council member.

“The Supreme Court is not a place to learn,” the senior justice responded.

The anecdote has resurfaced in the council's current discussions over whether judges should first gain experience in the lower courts before reaching the apex court.

The debate has also been fuelled by questions raised over the performance of some justices appointed directly from private practice, including concerns about their efficiency, judicial temperament and overall performance.

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New national framework eases university credit transfer

It could be useful especially for students whose education is disrupted by unforeseen circumstances, officials say.

SUDEEP KAINI

KATHMANDU, AUG 9

Students who have had to discontinue their studies or move to another university will now be able to transfer the academic credits they have earned and continue their education under a new system introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

The UGC has issued the Academic Credit Bank Establishment and Operation Directive 2026, setting common standards for storing and transferring credits earned at universities and other higher education institutions in Nepal and abroad.

The directive, made public on Friday, aims to make credit transfer more transparent and consistent among universities.

“Universities can carry out credit transfers. The directive has been issued to establish a credit bank, but much work remains before the bank can be fully operational,” said Kedar Prasad Acharya, director at the UGC. “It will take some time.”

The commission plans to establish

the Academic Credit Bank itself. Under the directive, credits earned by students will be stored on a single digital platform and can later be transferred, at their request, to another institution or another programme within the same institution.

UGC decided in April to introduce a framework for credit transfer. A directive followed.

Nepali universities have been allowing credit transfers through their own arrangements, but there has been no common standard or formal system recognised across institutions.

The UGC decided in April to introduce a national framework for credit transfer and subsequently prepared the directive.

Former UGC chair Devaraj Adhikari said the absence of clear and

uniform rules had made credit transfers difficult in Nepal.

“Standards have been set to make credit transfer easier by bringing uniformity,” he said. “Universities can work according to the directive.”

Adhikari said the system would particularly benefit students who return to Nepal after having to stop their studies abroad, those who need to change universities for various reasons and people who leave or resume higher education while working.

The need for a common system gained attention after the death of a Nepali student at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology in Odisha, India, in February 2025. Following the incident, Nepali students studying there announced plans to discontinue their studies. Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University and Purbanchal University subsequently offered to admit affected students through credit transfer, but each institution followed different criteria.

Acharya said the new directive was intended to remove such inconsistencies. “The directive provides a uni-

form basis for credit transfer, which universities can implement through their own academic rules,” he said.

The proposed Academic Credit Bank will serve as a digital, virtual and online repository of academic credits earned at higher education institutions. Students will have to apply to deposit their credits in the system. The credits can then be transferred after the receiving institution determines that the subjects and academic fields are sufficiently equivalent.

The system will also apply to students who studied at institutions established under the laws of foreign countries, including those who interrupted their studies midway.

However, there are limits. Credits earned for a bachelor's degree can be transferred and used only within seven years, while those for a master's degree can be transferred within five years. The amount transferred cannot exceed 50 percent of the total credits required for the programme in which a student seeks admission.

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POST FILE PHOTO

The appointment of justices has long been debated, drawing public and legal scrutiny.

Poor preparation leaves people vulnerable to Japanese encephalitis

Six deaths were reported in Koshi province, two in Madhesh and one in Lumbini in less than a month.

ARJUN POUDEL

KATHMANDU, AUG 9

At least nine people have died and 37 others have been infected with Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus in less than a month, and health officials warn that the toll could rise as the peak season for the mosquito-borne disease approaches.

What has particularly concerned immunisation officials is the death of a person in Nawalparasi East, where authorities had launched a JE vaccination campaign a few months ago.

“Our surveillance and investigation show that the person who died of JE infection was unvaccinated,” said Dr Abhiyan Gautam, chief of Immunisation Section at the Family Welfare Division under the Department of Health Services. “Coverage of JE vaccination in Nawalparasi East was only 77 percent and the recent death shows that unvaccinated people are at risk of getting seriously ill or dying from the infection.”

JE is a viral brain infection endemic to Asia and parts of the Western Pacific. It is transmitted by mosquitoes and belongs to the same flavivirus family as dengue, Zika, yellow fever, and West Nile viruses.

The virus kills about one-third of those who develop severe illness, while up to half of sur-

vivors are left with severe lifelong disabilities, according to the World Health Organisation.

Six of the nine deaths were reported in Koshi province, two in Madhesh and one in Lumbini. Health authorities are probing other reported deaths and infections.

Last year, 41 people died and 141 others were infected with JE, which spread to over 117 local units across 45 districts. The case fatality rate was around 23 percent.

In 2024, 23 people, including one person in Kathmandu Valley, died of JE, while at least 80 were infected.

Around 20 percent of the cases reported this year have resulted in deaths. Officials say unvaccinated people are at serious risk of getting severe and dying from the infection. The disease can cause permanent injuries to the brain and the nervous system, and there is no specific treatment. Care focuses on managing symptoms and complications.

Immunisation experts and members of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, have recommended a single dose of the JE vaccine for all unvaccinated people, saying they remain at high risk of infection, severe illness, and death.

Last year's data show that 76 percent of those who died from JE were over 40 years old, while around 70 percent of those infected were older than 15. The figures indicate that the



SHUTTERSTOCK

Culex mosquito transmits JE.

disease is affecting a large number of people beyond the age group coerced by routine childhood vaccination.

Asked why authorities have not taken broader preventive measures after 41 people died of JE last year, officials say vaccination was the only effective measure to prevent infection and deaths, but the government did not have the budget to vaccinate all vulnerable populations.

“We know that vaccination is a safe and proven method to prevent deaths, permanent disabilities and infection from JE,” said Gautam. “We know that we can save our population by a single dose of vaccine.

But the government did not have the budget to

vaccinate the entire population at once, he said. “We only managed to launch vaccination in Nawalparasi East and some wards of Chitwan districts, where infection rate was too high.”

The government has allocated Rs460 million to vaccinate people in 11 districts with a high JE burden. Chitwan, Kailali, Tanahun, Dang, Jhapa, Kapilvastu, Morang, Rupandehi, Sunsari, Rautahat and Sarlahi districts have been selected for the campaign based on their high morbidity and mortality rates.

However, the vaccination programme will not start before April next year, because vaccine procurement and supply will take time, according to officials. JE has long been a major public health problem in Nepal. The virus killed nearly 2,000 people in Nepal in 2005, mostly children in the Tarai districts.

Nepal started administering the JE vaccine in 2006, eight years before the WHO officially issued prequalification certification, due to high rates of infection and deaths. The programme was later expanded with support from donors and global health partners.

Experts say everyone who remains unvaccinated should receive at least one dose of the JE vaccine, which is effective in preventing severe illness and death.

“As JE infection causes high mortality and disability, authorities concerned must arrange the vaccine for the unvaccinated population,”

said Dr Shyam Raj Upreti, former director general at the Department of Health Services.

Upreti, who is also an immunisation expert, said vaccination is the only effective way to prevent further deaths and disabilities from JE.

Along with vaccination, awareness drives and promotion of sanitation and hygiene and behavioural change are also crucial in preventing the spread of the deadly viral disease.

Officials say the responsibility for public awareness drives lies with the local governments. However, poor coordination among the three tiers of government — federal, provincial and local — has hampered other preventive measures. Many local governments say they do not even receive timely information about JE outbreaks.

Nepal has included the JE vaccine in its routine immunisation programme and administers it free of charge to children at state-run health facilities.

An estimated 12.5 million people are thought to be at high risk of JE infection in Nepal.

The vaccine is also available at pharmacies, but it is costly, meaning that many vulnerable people cannot afford to pay out of pocket.

JE is transmitted to humans through the bite of infected Culex mosquitoes. Pigs and ducks are considered natural reservoirs of the virus. Pig farmers and those residing near the paddy fields are at particularly high risk.

Hetauda textile factory’s looms whir again after 24 years

A Nepali Army-led test run has revived the state-owned factory, but restarting commercial production will require major investment and modern machinery.

○ PRATAP BISTA
HETAUDA, AUG 9

The clatter of weaving looms returned to the grounds of Hetauda Textile Industry on Saturday morning, as the historic state-owned factory conducted its first preliminary test production after nearly two and a half decades of closure.

The trial followed the government’s decision to task the Nepali Army with repairing the dilapidated factory and restoring its production capacity.

A technical team from the Army’s Directorate of Military Material Production in Kathmandu has spent the past 40 days at the industrial complex. About 40 technicians and soldiers of various ranks were deployed to clear the neglected premises, overhaul the ageing power supply system and service mechanical looms that had remained idle for years.

“The initial test run was successful, although significant work remains before full-scale commercial operations can resume,” said a senior military officer involved in the operation. “The successful trial confirms that the factory can indeed be brought back to life.”

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies had given the military team two months to carry out initial maintenance and conduct test production.

Ram Bandhu Subedi, joint secretary at the ministry, said the Army completed the work ahead of schedule.

ration process in motion. The Ministry of Industry released Rs3 million from an emergency budget of Rs3.3 million requested for immediate repairs. “The ministry has established a strategic partnership with the Army’s production directorate to reactivate the enterprise,” Subedi said. “A fully operational textile factory will significantly advance Nepal’s path towards self-reliance in garment production.”

Long-term feasibility and investment

The successful test run is only an initial step. Military engineers say a sustainable restart will require substantial capital investment, structural improvements and modern machinery.

A detailed feasibility study conducted by the Nepali Army under state policies for the 2023-24 fiscal year estimated that fully reviving the factory would require an initial capital investment of Rs1.93 billion. Annual operating costs were projected at Rs780 million.

The study concluded that the factory could reach break-even and become profitable within nine years of continuous operation.

The factory owns 166 ropanis of land and retains basic infrastructure that could be used for the revived operation. The feasibility study also identified steady demand for uniforms from the Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and civil service, while key raw materials are available domestically.

These factors, according to the study, mean the factory faces minimal market risk. The broader revival project could be financed through the Army Welfare Fund.

The military had originally proposed a three-year implementation plan beginning in the 2023-24 fiscal year. The plan envisaged transferring management of the factory to the Army, preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR), procuring modern machinery in 2024-25 and expanding production capacity alongside the Butwal Yarn Factory in 2025-26.

Political changes, however, delayed the plan.

From industrial success to closure Hetauda Textile Industry was established in 1975 with financial and technical assistance from the Chinese government and capital investment from the Nepal government. It began commercial production in 1978.

For two decades, the factory was a major pillar of Nepal’s manufacturing sector. But persistent political interference, weak management, load-shedding, overstaffing and failure to modernise its technology gradually undermined its financial viability.

Production stopped completely in 1999, and the factory was formally closed in 2000.

The government decided to liquidate the enterprise in 2002, leaving the factory and its machinery abandoned for years.

Now, after 24 years of silence, the return of the looms has provided the first tangible sign that one of Nepal’s most prominent state-owned industrial enterprises could once again become a functioning factory.

But the successful trial has also exposed the scale of the challenge ahead: bringing the machines back to life is one thing; making the factory commercially sustainable is another.



A woman weeds a paddy field in Khokana, Lalitpur on Thursday.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Overseas jobs for Bangladeshis fall to five-year low amid Middle East uncertainty

According to Bangladesh’s Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) more than 969,000 people left Bangladesh for overseas jobs during the last fiscal year, down 5 percent from the previous year.

○ THE DAILY STAR
DHAKA, AUG 9

The number of Bangladeshis leaving for overseas jobs fell to a five-year low in the recently concluded fiscal year 2025-26 as demand from the Middle East weakened amid uncertainty following the US-Israel war on Iran.

More than 9.69 lakh people left Bangladesh for overseas jobs during the last fiscal year, down 5 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

The number of Bangladeshis taking up jobs overseas has been declining over the past two years. The weak outlook for the current fiscal year has also raised concerns about a slowdown in remittance inflows, which have helped shield the economy from external shocks in recent years.

“We have been seeing a slowdown in the outflow since March because of the war and the disruption of flights to Middle Eastern destinations,” said Shariful Hasan, associate director of the migration programme and youth platform at BRAC.

He said around 1 lakh people had been going abroad for jobs each month in recent years. That flow has now been affected. Between FY2015 and FY2025, more than 86 lakh people left Bangladesh for overseas jobs. The Middle East accounted for three-quarters of all overseas employment during that period.

In FY2024, Bangladesh sent nearly 12 lakh people abroad for work, the highest number on record.

“The region has been the main source of jobs for Bangladesh’s migrant workers and of remittance inflows for the last four decades,” said Shariful. “However, the war-induced uncertainty has affected investment and employment in the major destination countries — Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.”

There are 60-70 lakh Bangladeshi nationals working in the region, and a large proportion of them do not have permanent jobs, he added.

“The Iran war has shaken the confidence of many foreign investors in Qatar and Dubai,” he said. “What we are seeing is that many workers are returning. If the war continues, the impact will be more visible.”



Migrant workers and activists holding placards shout slogans during a protest demanding the implementation of a six-point charter, including safer and lower migration costs, in Dhaka on June 17.

AFP

“So, if we cannot make a breakthrough in creating alternative employment destinations, there will be an impact on remittance,” he said.

Bangladesh received a record of more than \$35 billion in remittances in FY2025-26. In July, remittance inflows rose 15 percent from a year earlier but remained below \$3 billion for the second consecutive month, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Ali Haider Chowdhury, a former secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), said Saudi Arabia is the only market currently recruiting Bangladeshi workers.

“The rest of the destinations are virtually closed,” he said. “Good news is that the opportunity for migrant workers in Malaysia is going to open. If that happens, more jobs will be created.”

Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, proprietor of recruiting agency Sadia International, said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman’s recent visit has created an opportunity to reopen the Malaysian labour market. There is a demand for 2-3 lakh workers in the Southeast Asian country. Recruitment could begin as early as September, he added.

Noman, a former secretary general of Baira, said there is also demand for workers in Eastern Europe, but Bangladesh faces problems with visa processing.

“It takes up to five months for visa issuance. The foreign affairs ministry should look into this. Jobs for migrant workers will increase if the visa process is made easy,” he said.

“The Middle East as a traditional market will remain. We need to explore Eastern Europe, Far East and Pacific countries such as New Zealand,” he said. “We have plenty of job markets. But we should create quality workers. We have to modernise training facilities and establish labs so that workers can learn practically.”

He urged the government to invest in the sector:

– Asia News Network

Judicial Council to bar lawyers from direct appointment as Supreme Court justices

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There is currently no justice on the Supreme Court who has followed an uninterrupted career path from the district courts through the high courts to the apex court. The bench comprises justices appointed directly from private practice as well as those elevated from high courts.

The council believes the Supreme Court’s role as the country’s final court of appeal and a court of record, whose precedents bind lower courts, makes extensive judicial experience particularly important.

The council is chaired by Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma. Its members are Sapana Pradhan Malla, the senior-most justice of the Supreme Court; Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs Sobita Gautam; Mahesh Kumar Nepal, appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister; and Damodar Khadka, appointed on the recommendation of the Nepal Bar Association.

Asked about the forthcoming appointments, Chief Justice Sharma confirmed that preparations were under way but said the council had not reached any final decision on the candidates or their professional backgrounds.

He said the recommendations would be based on constitutional qualifications, experience and professional efficiency.

The proposed shift has already caused concern within the legal fraternity, particularly the Nepal Bar Association, which has long argued that appointments should include both

experienced career judges and qualified lawyers from private practice.

Bijaya Prasad Mishra, president of the Nepal Bar Association (NBA), said the organisation had formally urged the council to maintain such a balance.

“We have explicitly told the Judicial Council and its chair to appoint judges of high integrity from both the ranks of career judges and the NBA,” Mishra said. “The NBA remains hopeful that this balanced approach will be followed. However, if this established practice is disregarded and the NBA is deliberately excluded, we will be forced to take a firm position against it.”

The constitution sets out several routes to appointment to the Supreme Court. Article 129 provides for up to 20 justices in addition to the Chief Justice. A person is eligible if they have served as a chief judge or judge of a high court for at least five years, or practised continuously as a senior advocate or advocate for at least 15 years.

The constitution also allows the appointment of someone who has worked continuously in the field of justice or law for at least 15 years and has gained a reputation as a distinguished jurist, or someone who has served in a gazetted first-class or higher post in the Judicial Service for at least 12 years.

The constitutional framework therefore does not exclude lawyers in private practice from the Supreme Court. The council, however, is considering giving priority to career judges for

the current round of appointments.

The move comes as a shortage of judges has put growing pressure on the top court. Of the constitutionally prescribed 21 positions, including the Chief Justice, only 17 judges are currently active in regular hearings. Justice Til Prasad Shrestha has been away from the bench for an extended period while receiving cancer treatment in India, and a formal letter notifying him of his impending retirement has already been sent.

The remaining judges are dealing with about 25,000 pending cases, or roughly 1,470 cases per judge. Four positions at the apex court are currently vacant, a situation that has been exacerbated by the council’s practice of delaying appointments and leaving positions unfilled.

Chief Justice Sharma has acknowledged the problem. During his parliamentary confirmation hearing on May 19, he pledged to establish a system under which judicial appointments would be completed before vacancies occurred.

More than a month after his endorsement by the parliamentary hearing committee and appointment as Chief Justice, however, the formal process for appointing new judges had yet to begin.

Asked about the delay, Sharma said appointments at all levels of the judiciary would begin soon.

“The appointment of judges will take place soon. The council and I are making the necessary preparations,” he said. “The appoint-

ments will begin with the Supreme Court.”

The Judicial Council Act, 2016, sets out specific deadlines for appointments. Section 4 requires the council to recommend a Supreme Court justice at least one month before a position falls vacant because of mandatory retirement. If a vacancy occurs for another reason, the recommendation must be made within one month of the position becoming vacant.

Council has routinely failed to follow these deadlines. A council member, however, said there is now a push to comply with the statutory timeframe, beginning with the current appointments.

Nine High Court judges are currently being considered for the four vacant positions at the Supreme Court. The council is preparing a list of potential candidates that includes five current chief judges and other senior high court judges.

Those being considered include high court chief judges Rajan Prasad Bhattarai, Lal Bahadur Kunwar, Ratna Bahadur Bagchand, Hari Prasad Bhandari, and Rajeshwar Tiwari.

High court judges Dinesh Prasad Yadav, Krishna Lal Bhattarai, Yamuna Bhattarai, Tek Narayan Kunwar and Chandra Bahadur Saru are also being discussed. Yadav and Kunwar are serving as acting chief judges of the Dipayal and Janakpur High Courts, respectively, while Bhattarai is serving at the High Court, Dhankuta.

Appointments to the Supreme Court would, however, create further vacancies in the lower

courts. The high courts currently have seven vacancies, including two chief judge positions and five judge positions. If four high court judges are elevated to the Supreme Court, the number of vacancies in the high courts would rise to 11.

The Constitution also sets eligibility criteria for high court chief judges. Candidates must have served as a district judge for at least five years or practised continuously as a senior advocate or advocate for at least 10 years. Those who have continuously worked in teaching, research or the practice of law and justice for at least 10 years are also eligible.

For district judge appointments, the Constitution requires a broader assessment of candidates. This includes their caseload, the extent to which their decisions have been upheld, quashed or reversed by higher courts, as well as seniority, academic qualifications and professional performance.

Candidates from outside the judicial service are to be assessed on the continuity of their professional practice, integrity, professional conduct and contributions to law and justice.

The debate over the current Supreme Court appointments therefore extends beyond the four vacancies. It could determine whether the council moves towards a more structured career-judge system, in which judges gain experience through the lower courts before reaching the apex court, or retains the existing practice of appointing lawyers directly from private practice.

OPINION



Rescue the failing digital state

Requiring citizens to access public services digitally also means ensuring reliable platforms.

Delivering seamless digital governance was one of the Rastriya Swatantra Party’s ambitious election agendas. After winning the election and assuming office in March, it set out a 100-point good governance plan that promised reforms in taxes, healthcare, agriculture and accountability to enable seamless public service delivery. Initially, it upgraded the Hello Sarkar grievance platform to operate 24 hours a day. It introduced paperless processing for passports, citizenship certificates and driving licences through the Nagarik App and cleared the backlog of smart driving licences. The emphasis on technology and digital governance in the reform agenda, along with the actions taken since assuming office in the sector, is commendable. Still, it is not doing enough to resolve the long-standing issues that hinder the country’s digital governance ambition, without which that ambition will remain a distant dream for Nepalis.

Frequent server crashes, operational bottlenecks and prolonged service outages are forcing people to navigate a complex bureaucratic maze, stand in long queues, and leave without completing essential administrative work. For instance, the Nepal Rastra Bank requires citizens to obtain a National Identity Card to open bank accounts. The government has a basic obligation to ensure that the platform to apply for it works. Yet, the underlying database frequently collapses under peak traffic, creating bottlenecks nationwide. Other services that frequently go down include immigration services, passport issuance, land registration, transport management, licence renewals and tax payments.

The problem has long been ailing the public, but the urgency to tackle it is lacking. Successive governments have failed to make digital platforms work because of flawed planning and a weak system. Once installed, digital technologies require constant investment in maintenance, upgrades, patching and technical expertise and IT professionals, but governments haven’t put in the effort to keep them running, rendering them useless after a few years. Additionally, officials heavily rely on foreign technology firms for critical government systems. While there is nothing wrong with using that expertise, local workers often cannot resolve the problem independently when the system goes down. Procurement committees constantly buying cheap, short-lived systems that require long, bureaucratic delays to maintain is also creating a massive backlog for citizens. Concomitantly, with the focus on purchasing physical assets, software issues, such as their maintenance, are sidelined, leading to security vulnerabilities.

Given the widespread server crashes, it’s high time Nepal overhauls its digital systems. The government cannot continue to disregard maintenance to the point that the system completely breaks down and fails to serve the public. Any serious investment in a digital system must involve maintaining and upgrading it from the outset. The procurement process also warrants reform in line with rapidly changing technology. Moreover, rather than fully depending on foreign expertise, the government must utilise and retain the country’s young talent in the engineering and IT sector to manage critical government systems independently.

This government carries the immense trust of a public eager for reforms, which presents both a great opportunity and a responsibility to address the problems and take digital governance to a better level. It cannot afford to waste this chance.

BIPIN ADHIKARI



Many people have heard about antibiotics, but do not precisely know what this medicine is and how it works, let alone what antimicrobial resistance (AMR) means. Yet, many have wondered why some infections become difficult to treat, even when antimicrobials are available. Do antimicrobials always work against infections? The fact remains that infectious agents, such as bacteria, do spontaneously develop resistance over time. But this process can be accelerated when bacteria are repeatedly exposed to antimicrobials, including through unnecessary or inappropriate use.

For the past several years, studies have consistently shown that Nepal, like other South Asian countries, experiences excessive and inappropriate use of antimicrobials. In urban areas, one can easily walk into a drug shop, explain symptoms and buy antibiotics, often without a prescription. A patient with a common cold may demand antibiotics even though antibiotics do not work against viruses.

But this is only one side of Nepal’s story. Travel to remote areas, and the problem may be the opposite. For populations in far-flung villages, access to even basic and essential antimicrobials can be difficult. A bacterial infection that could have been treated relatively easily could become severe and complicated. By the time the patient reaches a hospital, treatment can be more complicated and much more expensive.

This is the tension between access and excess. In one place, antimicrobials are easily available and consumed unnecessarily; in another, people who genuinely need them struggle to obtain them. Here lies the unsettling heterogeneity of who becomes vulnerable and who does not, and who needs attention and who, relatively, does not. This is the first premise where community engagement can offer solutions.

Such contradictions in Nepal’s supply side and demand side cannot simply be fixed by bombarding people with recommendations about ‘appropriate antibiotic use’. In such scenarios, stakeholder analysis allows one to



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explore a multitude of interests and their interactions, understand why people behave as they do, and analyse how health systems, pharmacies, patients, farmers and communities function within their own circumstances and in relation to each other. This is the second premise where community engagement can help resolve the puzzle.

Yet, engagement strategies have sometimes been given unequal weight, particularly with a preference for participatory and dialogue-based activities over approaches that prioritise breadth of engagement. In practice, however, both approaches can and need to coexist, often complementing each other.

Historically, experts developed recommendations at the centre, bureaucracies converted them into programmes, and instructions travelled downward through the health system until they eventually reached communities. Nepal is familiar with this model where a guideline is prepared in Kathmandu, training is provided at the provincial or district level, posters reach health facilities, and communities are told what behaviour should change. Inadequate community buy-in as such can undermine the entire effort.

The one-way nature of vertical engagement has also been rightly criticised. Experts and bureaucrats may prescribe solutions for communities

whose everyday experiences are radically different from their own. Recommendations can be technically sound and well-intentioned but also poorly grounded and unrealistic. Imagine telling a person in a remote village that antibiotics must only be taken after consulting a qualified doctor when reaching that doctor requires a day’s walk and considerable expense. Or telling a small poultry farmer to simply reduce antimicrobial use without discussing veterinary access, disease prevention and the possibility that losing chickens may mean losing the household’s income.

Participatory engagement has enormous value. Community members can be involved from the outset, contribute to identifying problems, setting agendas, designing interventions, implementing activities, and evaluating results. Such involvement can garner trust, ownership and produce interventions grounded in local realities. Patients may explain why they avoid health facilities. Farmers may describe why antimicrobials are important for protecting their livestock. These conversations can reveal problems that an expert sitting in Kathmandu may never see.

But enthusiasm for deep participation should not lead us to undervalue another dimension of engagement—breadth. Nepal’s experience with vaccination, mass drug administration and

public health campaigns demonstrates the value of reaching hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of people. Radio, television, schools, social media, health facilities and community networks can carry simple messages about antibiotics across enormous populations.

Such breadth-based engagement may lack the depth of a small participatory meeting, but its scale is precisely the strength. A community dialogue involving 30 people can uncover why antibiotics are misused in one municipality. A nationwide radio campaign can make hundreds of thousands think twice before demanding antibiotics for a viral cold. Why must one be considered inherently superior to the other?

This is precisely where diagonal community engagement becomes useful. It combines vertical, population-wide strategies with bottom-up, participatory and dialogue-based engagement. This is particularly relevant for Nepal as it is efficient for low- and middle-income countries. AMR is a super-wicked problem. It involves human health, animal health, agriculture, food systems, pharmacies, hospitals, sanitation, environmental contamination, regulation, economics and human behaviour. There will never be one community, one message or one intervention capable of addressing all these dimensions.

Nepal therefore needs engagement that can travel in both directions. Scientific evidence, surveillance, regulation and national communication must move outward from institutions to communities. At the same time, experiences, constraints and solutions emerging from communities must travel back towards policymakers and researchers. Health governance, in other words, should re-orient the approach to reap benefits from a combination of conventional vertical and more recent participatory approaches.

For AMR control, while relevant to many other public health interventions, the idea is to blend these approaches to reach millions at scale and listen deeply to socio-cultural features while identifying and safeguarding vulnerabilities.

Adhikari is a senior scientist at the University of Oxford and the author of 'Diaries in Global Health: A Southern Perspective'.

MONDAY INTERVIEW RAKSHYA BAM

This government is on the wrong track

The fact that even PM Shah’s own party’s MPs are questioning him in Parliament suggests there is a problem with his way of working.

As Nepal approaches the first anniversary of the historic Gen Z protests, the political landscape remains fraught with tension, high expectations and mounting frustration. Born from the momentum of a movement that demanded sweeping reform, good governance and accountability, the current administration under Prime Minister Balendra Shah finds itself under intense scrutiny.

The Post’s **Biken K Dawadi** sat down with prominent social activist from the Gen Z age group, Rakshya Bam, in her first interview since the March elections, to discuss the state of the nation, dissecting the government’s response to recent communal clashes in Tarai-Madhes, the systemic shortcomings in police riot control, and a perceived absence of empathy in urban governance. From concerns over digital authoritarianism and shrinking spaces for civic dissent to deep-seated structural neglect in marginalised regions like Sudurpashchim, the discussion cuts to the heart of contemporary Nepali politics. As critics weigh the rhetoric of ‘clean intentions’ against administrative reality, the conversation explores whether the state is genuinely fulfilling the democratic mandate carved out by its citizens or if, as some fear, this government is veering dangerously off course.

address, but the priority should have been on minimising damage and resolving the crisis effectively.

Do you believe the government, which came to power with a significant mandate following the Gen Z protests, truly required five days to formulate a ‘national security strategy’ before the Home Minister visited the field?

What occurred in Sunsari was more than just an isolated problem. It was a full-blown crisis. In such situations, you don’t just solve the issue; you have to deal with it through immediate engagement. There was a desperate need for representatives to be on the ground, speaking with every community. If the presence of the Prime Minister or the Home Minister on the field could save even a single life, then why wouldn’t they go immediately? The Home Minister did eventually go, but only after five days. He mentioned in interviews with The Post and Kantipur that they were in Kathmandu for those five days developing a ‘national strategy’. But what exactly is this ‘national strategy’? He didn’t elaborate. If a strategy to simply go and talk to these groups takes five days to create, then I find that hard to believe. Such things should be clear within a single day. While we are relieved the riots stopped, there are many areas where the government’s approach needs great improvement for the future.

Given that the police response in Madhesh appeared to involve indiscriminate and disproportionate force, similar to what was seen during the Gen Z protests of September, do you feel the state has failed to learn any lessons regarding the protection of general lives?

I see this as a systemic failure rather than just the fault of individual officers. When we look back at the Gen Z movement, we saw the position the police were put in and the resulting distance and atmosphere of fear that developed between the youth and the security forces. I blame the system and those leading the institutions for this because the system isn’t providing the police with the necessary resources or clear criteria for riot control. In the Sunsari riots, all the public knows is that bullets were fired. We don’t know the actual process or criteria the police were supposed to



Rakshya Bam, social activist

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

follow. The state needs to invest in the police and ensure they understand their primary role is to save lives, not take them. There is a massive difference between a trained professional using a weapon and an untrained person. The state must invest in proper training and equipment.

Regarding the portrayal of these clashes as inter-religious conflict, what steps do you believe are necessary to foster genuine communal harmony in the Tarai-Madhes region?

While we should wait for the official reports before reaching definitive conclusions about who was behind the unrest, it is clear from the outside that religious tensions, particularly between Hindu and Muslim communities, are being stirred. Our society has a long history of living together in harmony. There is a saying that when you sleep on the same pillow, you might occasionally kick each other, and perhaps that is what is happening

now. But we must never forget the essence: We are all human beings. No religion teaches us to hate one another. In fact, the more diverse the religions, the more there is to learn from one another. I am reminded of something Javed Akhtar once quoted: “If I am only ‘I’, then what is ‘I’? If you are only ‘you’, then what is ‘you’?” This is the core philosophy of secularism—respecting all religions. It is not about insulting others or imposing your beliefs, but about finding a balance between ‘youness’ and ‘my-ness’.

Let’s change track. How do you interpret the way in which some Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) MPs have started speaking out quite strongly against the very government they are part of?

This is a standard parliamentary process. An MP has every right to voice their concerns to the Prime Minister, the House, or the Speaker. We are often accused of wanting to topple this government or wishing for its failure,

but that is completely untrue. If this government fails, we—those of us who campaigned for change—will be the ones who face the most criticism. This government was formed on the momentum of our movement, with a mandate for change, good governance and reform. For the sake of public sentiment and the votes cast, this government must succeed. Our questions are not meant to harm the government. They are meant to make it successful, accountable and responsible. I believe the PM needs to be more wary of the people immediately surrounding him—his ‘team’—rather than our questions. The fact that even his own party’s MPs are protesting suggests there is a problem with his pattern of working.

When the PM claims he has ‘good intentions’ but admits he may not always follow the established processes, how do you evaluate such a narrative?

The narrative of ‘good intentions’ is something we hear a lot, even in his social media updates, but having clean intentions is not enough on its own. This must be demonstrated through actions. We have to ask: What are your intentions regarding the Constitution? What are your intentions regarding your attendance in the House? What about your intentions toward state institutions, the police, inclusivity and democracy itself? You cannot claim clean intentions while disregarding the process. What the public ultimately needs is a functioning system. If we don’t build a system now, what happens if the next PM doesn’t have ‘clean intentions’? You can distract the public with talk of intentions for a while, but it isn’t sustainable. We need results.

Is it appropriate for a PM to communicate vital national updates and responses to parliamentary questions primarily through Facebook posts?

It isn’t appropriate at all. We don’t always know what the Prime Minister is doing because the PMO’s information flow to the citizens is often ineffective. We have to ask if the information being provided is accessible to everyone. For instance, how does the government communicate with citizens who are visually impaired or those who are deaf? To truly connect with the people, there needs to be direct engagement, perhaps a weekly address where the

public is informed about the government’s work. The PM holds the highest political power; he should be making the public feel his presence as a guardian. Remaining silent and only posting on social media is not a healthy sign for a democracy.

As a prominent face of dissent outside of Parliament, how do you respond to the increasingly aggressive and negative reactions you face in digital spaces?

There is a concerted effort to shrink the space for dissent, but we shouldn’t allow it to happen. When we used to pose questions to previous governments, the response was never this irrational or irrelevant. Now, there is so much negativity, and chaos is spread to attack anyone who speaks up. However, it doesn’t matter to me if someone sitting in a room in Lalitpur writes a negative comment about me. What matters is my conviction. For younger activists, I would say you must anticipate that the path will be difficult. In Nepal today, activists are often viewed through a negative lens, despite the good work they have achieved. You must hold onto your convictions and, if faced with digital harassment, remember there are legal avenues like the Cyber Bureau.

Given the government’s handling of squatter settlements and the use of force without prior management, do you feel there is a fundamental lack of empathy in their governance?

There is zero empathy and no compassion. The way bulldozers were used in squatter settlements was unjustifiable, not just for today but for the future of Nepal’s history. Perhaps it would be different if the PM admitted it was a mistake, but displacing people without any prior management plan is a violation of their constitutional rights. This goes back to the ‘clean intentions’ issue—the PM might say his intentions are clean, but if he ignores the constitutional right of every citizen to live with dignity, then his intentions are irrelevant. Watching children, pregnant women, and the elderly crying while the settlements were destroyed was a spectacle of indignity. The government failed to maintain the dignity of its citizens and ignored the proper process.

Read full interview at kathmandupost.com

Indigenous voices unite for identity, rights and inclusion

Traditional dress, music and dance filled Kathmandu as indigenous communities came together to celebrate diversity and raise concerns over political representation and land rights.



○ JONY NEPAL
KATHMANDU

Marking the 32nd International Indigenous Peoples' Day on August 9, Sunday, several institutions and indigenous communities organised events across the country, celebrating indigenous identities, culture and unity. The official programme took place at Khullamanch, preceded by a rally which started from Bhrikutimandap.

The march included several indigenous groups of Nepal, including Tamang, Kirat, Jirel, Magar, Newa, Tharu, each marching in their own traditional attire, playing instruments, waving flags, holding banners of their individual institutions while dancing and singing all together.

Queer indigenous individuals and indigenous people with disabilities were in the same procession, depicting a remarkable message of intersectional identities.

Indigenous people encompass over 35 per cent of Nepal's population and 6.2 per cent globally. In 1994, the UN General Assembly had declared August 9 as the 'International Indigenous Peoples Day', marking the anniversary of the first session of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982. Ever since, communities from all over the world celebrate their indigenous culture, also as an advocacy for policy support, indigenous rights, and inclusive political dialogue.

With this year's theme 'Honouring Indigenous Midwives: Safeguarding Life and well-being', the event was inaugurated by the Vice President Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav. Organisers representing Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), the only umbrella organisation of all Indigenous peoples of Nepal, including Bimal Saru Magar, hosted the event throughout.

In his speech, VP Yadav focused on the practical implementation of constitutional rights for indigenous communities. "Inclusiveness should not remain limited to slogans but should be visible as equal access to the state's policies, plans, resources and means," he said.

Yadav also focused on the role of indigenous traditional knowledge and practices in promoting environmental balance and addressing climate change, calling it a model for the world. "This knowledge has today become exemplary for the whole world in addressing climate change and environmental balance," he said.

The march included several indigenous groups of Nepal, including Tamang, Kirat, Jirel, Magar, Newa and Tharu.

On the role of the new generation, he suggested moving forward through education, science and technology while preserving its language, culture and identity.

Presenting indigenous identity, language, culture and tradition with pride and as immeasurable property, the event opened with a welcome dance from the Sherpa community.

Acting Mayor of Kathmandu Sunita Dangol, Minister of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation of Nepal Biraj Bhakta Shrestha, and several Members of Parliament, including Bikram Timalsina, Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal, former MP Om Gharti Magar, were present at the event along with the chairperson of NEFIN, Nima Lama Hyolmo and UNESCO representative to Nepal Jaco du Toit.

Opposing the Government's attempt to

dissolve the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), this year's national slogan, 'Protecting the rights already gained is today's necessity. Our shared commitment is to build an inclusive and just Nepal with identity,' laid out two distinct political messages to the assembled crowd of thousands.

According to Magar, those were: unity among indigenous peoples despite internal diversity and safeguarding the achievements gained for indigenous peoples, regardless of which government is in power.

Diversity is inevitably a matter of immense pride for every Nepali. This annual programme, which brought together thousands of indigenous people on common ground, was palpable evidence of how indigenous communities together build the nation's cultural, traditional, and religious integrity along with ecological wisdom.

"With the recent dispute in Siraha, I had felt a surge of sadness over the country's divided unity," said Prakriti Rajbanshi from Rajbanshi Society Development Committee, Jhapa. "But coming here, watching all the people in their traditional attire, brought back the sense of unity altogether."

Rajbanshi also shared the challenges of keeping her community's identity alive in Kathmandu. While it has a strong, active presence in Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari, where Rajbanshis make up a significant share of the population, she said it is difficult to preserve the traditions in Kathmandu. "Roughly 15 to 30 members are here in Kathmandu, and we struggle with low turnout and engagement."

She also discussed the importance of indigenous knowledge and history, and more stressfully, while acknowledging the modern world, the need to keep the traditional attire *Patani* authentic. "When

people wear a modernised sari instead, I am simply not happy," she said. "We should wear what's passed down to us from one generation to the next, so that we can promote our culture."

With individual communities' struggle to preserve their attire, food and history, the broader indigenous rights movement in Nepal grapples with a shared set of urgent questions. "How do we bring youth back into language preservation and cultural transmission when migration and unemployment pull them away from home? How do indigenous land rights and ecological knowledge systems, built over generations, get formally recognised?"

These were the questions raised in the conversation with Sabnam Lama, President of Focus for Indigenous Girls (FIG). She explained her organisation's role in this year's rally, which was a joint mobilisation bringing together indigenous girls, youth and queer community under the intersectional banner.

"We wanted a diverse, intersectional message to go out collectively," she said. "Our main work has been promoting the event, disseminating it and bringing youth together."

"Besides that, we just want to enjoy it," she added.

Lama also spoke about intergenerational

collaboration, decolonial organising and how the conversation around AI cannot be separated from indigenous sovereignty itself.

She pointed to the global expansion of AI data centres, often built on indigenous land and using indigenous water resources, as a concern that ties directly into land rights.

"When people see indigenous people, I think they should see people who are sovereign, self-governing, and who protect their nature," she said. "When it comes to AI, we have to talk about data centres. Indigenous people need genuine, unbiased, meaningful, free, prior, and informed consent in that process."

At the same time, Lama acknowledged that AI has become a practical tool within grassroots organisations itself, even as she cautioned against uncritical use. "In grassroots activism, we do use AI a lot—it makes urgent work easier," she said. "Our approach is to engage critically. Ask whether it's genuinely representing us or not."

This historic depiction of indigenous unity, knowledge, identity and collective thought, carried through traditional rhythms, conversations, songs, dance steps, was, in the end, proof that diversity and unity are a shared fact rather than competing claims.



'Summer Love' to be staged at Kantipur Theatre from Friday

The stage adaptation turns Bhattarai's widely read novel into a live performance.

○ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

A stage adaptation of Subin Bhattarai's popular novel 'Summer Love' is set to open at Kantipur Theatre, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, from Friday, August 14.

Produced by Kantipur Film Academy and directed by Samrat Bhujel, the play will be staged twice daily at 1:15 pm and 5:15 pm, except on Wednesdays. The production has a runtime of one hour and 45 minutes.

Actor and filmmaker Arpan Thapa is also part of the cast and will appear in the role of the writer from the novel. The actors portraying the story's central characters, Atit and Saya, have not yet been revealed and are expected to be introduced during the premiere.

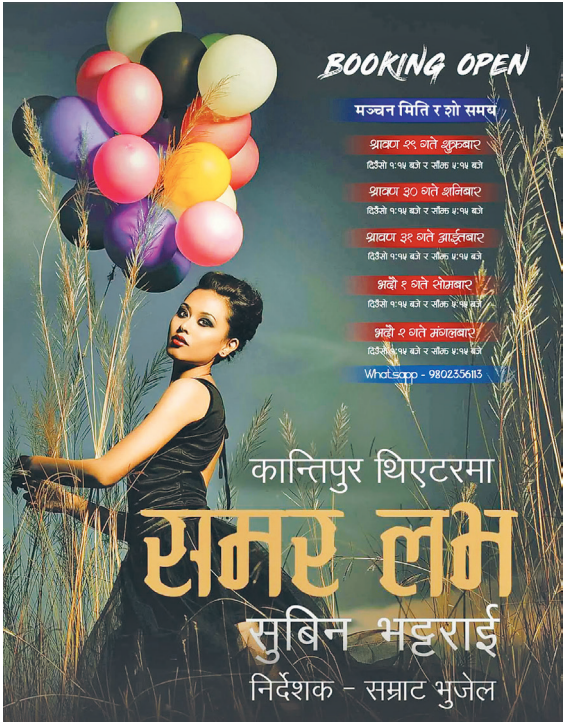
The production brings Bhattarai's widely read romantic novel to the stage, allowing readers to see how the characters and scenes they imagined while reading the book have been interpreted through theatre.

The play marks another literary

adaptation at the theatre, which previously staged a production based on Amar Neupane's novel Seto Dharti.

"We are incredibly grateful for the love and support audiences showed 'Seto Dharti'. We hope they will receive 'Summer Love' with the same warmth and enthusiasm," said Samrat Bhujel, the director.

According to Kantipur Theatre, student tickets are priced at Rs300, regular tickets at Rs500 and special tickets at Rs1,000. Audiences have been encouraged to book tickets in advance due to limited seating.



Summer Love
When: From August 14
Where: Kantipur Theatre, Gairidhara, Kathmandu
Time: 1:15 pm and 5:15 pm (except Wednesdays)
Entry: Rs300 for students, Rs500 regular, Rs1,000 special
Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes