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Ex-Gorkhas urge visiting Indian Army chief to resume Nepalis' recruitment

Veterans raise recruitment freeze with Gen Seth, but Agnipath scheme was left off official meeting agenda.

DEEPAK PARIYAR
POKHARA, AUG 19

Former Gorkha soldiers who served in the Indian Army have urged visiting Indian Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth to resume recruitment of Nepali youths, which has remained suspended since 2020.

Gaj Bahadur Thapa, central vice-president and Gandaki Province coordinator of the Nepal Bharatiya Gorkha Sainik Board, raised the issue with General Seth after an event at the Pension Paying Office in Ram Bazaar, Pokhara.

The Indian Army chief had been in Pokhara before he wrapped up his four-day visit to Nepal on Wednesday.

"We have been raising our voice for Gorkha recruitment, and you must also address it," Thapa told Seth, drawing applause from fellow veterans gathered at the facility.

Seth did not make a concrete commitment to resuming recruitment under India's Agnipath scheme.

The issue was also left out of the high-level formal discussions held in Kathmandu before he returned to India on Wednesday.

The Agnipath scheme did not feature in Seth's meeting with Prime Minister Balendra Shah, who also holds the defence portfolio, or in delegation-level talks with Chief of Army Staff General Ashok Raj Sigdel.

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CIAA probe into assets of former PMs' personal secretaries gathers pace

The anti-graft body has written to more than 20 agencies seeking details of the three individuals' finances and assets.

Rajesh Bajracharya | Bhanu Deuba | Ganga Dahal — FILE PHOTOS

GAURAV POKHAREL
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority has opened separate probes into the assets of the then personal secretaries of three former prime ministers—KP Sharma Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal—after the Department of Money Laundering Investigation forwarded the cases for further scrutiny.

The CIAA is investigating Rajesh Bajracharya, who served Oli; Bhanu Deuba, who served Deuba; and Ganga Dahal, who served her father, Pushpa Kamal Dahal. A CIAA commissioner said the money laundering department had conducted a preliminary study and reported to the anti-graft body after finding that the cases involved no related predicate offence within its jurisdiction.

"We have since moved ahead with the investigation," the commissioner said. Separate complaints had also been filed with the CIAA calling for investigations into each of them.

The commission has formed a joint team of civil servants and police officers and has written to more than 20 agencies seeking details of the three individuals' finances and assets. The requests have gone to Nepal Rastra Bank, land revenue offices and agencies responsible for shares, vehicles and other property records.

"Letters have already been sent to every agency where their shares, vehicles and other assets may be recorded," said a CIAA investigation officer. Officials said they were preparing to interrogate all three soon.

The inquiry is also looking at banking transactions that investigators consider unusual. "Some unusual banking transactions have been seen," an official said. "We are examining them further."

In Bhanu's case, investigators have asked him to fill up a 13-page asset disclosure form covering bank accounts, shares, land and buildings, vehicles, loans, foreign travel, family members' property and investments in companies. CIAA officials said they have asked agencies to provide records corresponding to the information detailed in the form, with some responses already received.

Bhanu has long worked closely with Sher Bahadur Deuba. He served as Deuba's chief personal secretary and handled meetings when Deuba was prime minister. He also accompanied Deuba when the former prime minister travelled to Singapore on February 25 for medical treatment.

During last year's Gen Z protests, the government's excessive use of force left 22 people dead in a single day.

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Nepal's crackdown on businessmen can't have it both ways

Nepal must tackle corruption without criminalising valid business decisions and discouraging investment, lending.

ANUP KAPHLE
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

In early May, days after Shekhar Golchha was arrested, the Supreme Court found his detention illegal, explicitly citing the bypassing of due process. But within hours of his release, a team from the Central Investigation Bureau rearrested him on a separate insurance-fraud allegation. A CIB official told reporters the new case was entirely unrelated to the one the court had just thrown out. Last month, Golchha was released on bail for Rs10 million.

It's a small scene, but it captures something the Balendra Shah administration hasn't resolved yet.

A government can pursue accountability and still overreach. The question is whether this one can tell the difference—and whether it can keep doing both at once.

Nepal's arrests and legal charges against high-profile businessmen — from Shankar Agrawal to Shekhar Golchha to Prithvi Bahadur Pande — are starting to resemble a crackdown that took the business world by storm almost ten years ago. In February 2017, days after youth-led protests had helped force South Korean President Park Geun-hye's impeachment, Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong was arrested on charges of bribing Park and her confidante in exchange for government support for a merger. Lee was convicted, imprisoned and later pardoned.

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POST FILE PHOTO

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle meets private sector representatives in this recent photo.

Women are more likely to die in tiger attacks, study finds

Tigers killed 141 people between 2010 and 2024, while nearly 70 percent of attacks occurred in buffer zones of national parks.

RAMESH KUMAR PAUDEL
CHITWAN, AUG 19

Tigers attacked 245 people in Nepal between 2010 and 2024, killing 141 of them, with women facing a far higher risk of death than men, according to a new study published in the journal Ecology and Evolution.

Women accounted for just 85 of the attacks but 62 of the fatalities, giving them a fatality rate of more than 72 percent.

Men, meanwhile, were attacked 160 times and suffered 79 deaths, putting their fatality rate at less than 50 percent.

The study also found that most attacks occurred not inside national parks but in the buffer zones and forests surrounding them, where local people regularly enter to collect firewood and fodder, graze livestock, gather other forest products and fish.

The findings come as recent attacks in Chitwan again highlight the risks faced by communities living alongside Nepal's growing tiger population.

On August 16, 60-year-old Thakur Adhikari was injured in a tiger attack in Piple Deurali village of Rapti Municipality in eastern Chitwan. The tiger had strayed into the settlement and mauled Adhikari, leaving him with deep wounds to his leg. He is undergoing treatment at Bharatpur Hospital.

The same tiger had earlier attacked a cow in a nearby shed belonging to Dila Kumari Tamang.

Five days earlier, on August 12, Mangal Bote was killed by a tiger while inside a buffer zone forest in Meghauli, west of Chitwan National Park. Park authorities have since captured both tigers involved in the two incidents.

The latest attacks underscore a central finding of the study: people are far more likely to encounter tigers outside the core areas of national parks than inside them.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHITWAN PARK OFFICE

Chitwan Park officials capture a tiger after it attacked humans and cattle in a nearby settlement.

The paper was co-authored by researchers including Bed Kumar Dhakal, deputy director general and spokesperson at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, and wildlife experts Baburam Lamichhane, Naresh Subedi, Thakur Silwal, and Sanjay Kandel.

"Our goal was to analyse the underlying factors driving the total number of attacks," said Lamichhane, whose PhD research focuses on human-tiger conflict.

Women face greater risk of dying

The study found a striking difference in the outcomes of attacks involving men and women.

Of the 245 people attacked during the 15-year period, 160 were men and 85 were women. Yet the gap narrowed sharply when researchers looked at fatalities. Tigers killed 79 men and 62 women.

That means women, although accounting for only about a third of all attacks, represented nearly 44 percent of the deaths.

Researchers say the disparity needs further investigation, but body posture at the time of an attack may be an important factor.

Men entering forests are more commonly involved in activities such as livestock grazing, which require them to stand or walk. Women frequently crouch or bend down while cutting grass, collecting fodder or gathering firewood.

The study found that 44 of 59 people attacked while crouching or sitting died. Among 71 people attacked while standing or walking, 29 died.

Researchers believe that being upright may give people a better chance of spotting an approaching tiger, escaping or defending themselves.

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Nepal probes foreign doctors who may be faculty only on paper

Nepal Medical Council officials suspect medical colleges present foreign doctors only during inspections to secure approval for more MBBS seats.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

The same doctor, the same time, but working in two countries simultaneously.

The Nepal Medical Council has formed a committee to investigate the credentials and employment status of foreign doctors after finding that a doctor who had obtained permission to serve in Nepal was also working in his home country.

The council, the national regulatory body for medical doctors and dentists, also said documents and certificates submitted by some foreign doctors for permission to serve in Nepal were found suspicious and in some cases, counterfeit. "We have formed a committee to examine documents submitted by all foreign doctors seeking to serve in Nepal," said Dr Dipendra Pandey, acting registrar at the council. "We suspect that private medical colleges bring in foreign doctors only to present them during our monitoring visits."

The council said between 300 and 500 foreign doctors, mostly from India, are currently working in Nepal. Most have obtained permission to teach at private medical colleges.

The council said the number of foreign doctors registering in Nepal has increased recently as the Medical Education Commission prepares to conduct the integrated entrance examination for undergraduate medical education.

During student admissions, the commission sends monitoring teams to medical colleges and determines the number of undergraduate seats based on the college's physical infrastructure, the number of faculty doctors, patient load and other criteria. Council officials say private medical colleges have been trying to increase their seat numbers by manipulating the monitoring process.

To do so, they bring in foreign doctors as faculty members and present them to the council's inspection teams, according to officials.

> The council has suspended registration of some foreign doctors over forged documents.

"Some foreign doctors are there only when the colleges are being inspected, but they return to their home countries and work there at other times," a council official, who spoke to the Post on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. "We have also received complaints from students that colleges claim certain doctors as faculty members, but they do not actually teach. Students have been deceived by the colleges."

In the past, council representatives were included in monitoring teams when medical colleges were inspected or when the number of seats was determined. However, the Medical Education Commission no longer includes the council's representative on its monitoring teams.

"We suspect that medical colleges are tipped off in advance about monitoring visits so that they can present foreign doctors as faculty members and also arrange more patients to be at the hospital to give the impression of a large patient flow," said the official.

In a statement on Tuesday, the council said 'serious doubts' had arisen over the authenticity of documents submitted by medical and dental colleges, institutions and hospitals operating in Nepal for the registration of foreign doctors.

It said some Good Standing Certificates (which certify that a doctor is registered with and in good standing with the medical regulator in their home country), had not been issued by the relevant authorities, while some were found to be forged.

The council has suspended the registration process for some foreign doctors whose documents were found to be forged and for those whose documents are under investigation, with immediate effect.

It has also sought written clarifications from medical colleges, institutions, and health facilities that recommended the doctors for registration without verifying the authenticity of their documents, and summoned representatives of those institutions for inquiry.

Council officials said medical colleges are bringing in many foreign doctors as faculty members to help secure increases in their MBBS (bachelor of medicine, bachelor of surgery) intakes.

"We are not saying that all foreign doctors' credentials are fake or suspicious," said Dr Chhabi Panthi, head of the committee formed to investigate the registration status, employment status, and professional activities of foreign doctors. "We will investigate whether colleges have misused their credentials for their benefit."

Women face higher risk of death in Nepal's tiger attacks

>> Continued from page 1

"Body posture at the time of the encounter seems to play a major role," Lamichhane said. "We plan to investigate the higher mortality rate among women in greater detail."

The study did not establish posture as the sole cause of the difference, and researchers say further work is needed to understand the social, occupational and behavioural factors behind the higher female fatality rate.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHUNGBA SHERPA

A Royal Bengal tiger pictured inside Bardiya National Park.

Most attacks occur outside parks

Although national parks and protected areas are the primary habitats for wild tigers, only a small proportion of attacks occurred deep inside forests.

Just 16 of the 245 attacks recorded in the study, or about 6.5 percent, occurred inside national parks. Buffer zones accounted for 69.4 percent of all attacks.

The buffer zones are designed as transition areas between protected wildlife habitats and human settlements. But they are also important sources of forest resources for surrounding communities.

The study found that 78 people died while collecting fodder or firewood. Another 19 died while gathering non-timber forest products, 17 while grazing livestock, 11 while fishing and six during agricultural work.

The pattern points to the close link between human dependence on forests and the risk of encounters with tigers.

"Villagers should enter the woods in groups rather than alone, and avoid visits during early morning or evening hours when tigers are most active," Lamichhane said.

He also recommended clearing dense vegetation along routes commonly used for collecting fodder and firewood. Better visibility could reduce the likelihood of sudden encounters and give people more time to respond when a tiger is nearby.

Dhakal recommended that community forests adopt block-based management, with people collecting forest resources in designated areas rather than moving randomly through dense vegetation.

"Managing designated blocks for resource collection ensures clear lines of sight, reducing the chances of accidental confrontations with tigers or rhinos," Dhakal said.

Chitwan accounts for nearly half of attacks

Chitwan, which has Nepal's largest tiger population, remains the country's main hotspot for human-tiger conflict.

The district accounted for 47 percent of all recorded attacks during the 15-year study period. But the average annual death toll has declined compared with earlier years.

According to Lamichhane, an average of seven people died each year from tiger attacks between 1998 and 2006. That fell to about five deaths annually between 2010 and 2024.

The decline has come despite a substantial increase in Nepal's tiger population.

The country's latest tiger census put the wild population at 429, with 145 tigers living in Chitwan National Park alone.

No tiger-related fatalities were recorded in Chitwan's buffer zone in the previous fiscal year, a significant improvement from a peak of 16 deaths in a single year. But recent incidents show that the risk remains acute, particularly in settlements and forests bordering the park.

The study also found geographical gaps in recorded attacks. No attacks were reported during the 15-year period in the lowland Tarai east of Rautahat or in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu, between Rautahat and Kanchanpur. Incidents were, however, recorded farther north in districts including Surkhet and Salyan.

Researchers say authorities must also monitor individual tigers that pose a higher risk to people.

Older, injured or otherwise weakened tigers can struggle to hunt wild prey and may move closer to settlements in search of easier food.

Lamichhane said regular monitoring and the timely rescue of such animals are critical to preventing attacks. Chitwan National Park has maintained an active tiger rescue programme for the past six years.

But researchers say removing individual problem tigers (that repeatedly attack people) alone cannot address the broader causes of conflict.

Much of the risk arises because people continue to enter forests for basic needs, particularly in buffer zones and community forests.

Reducing that dependence will require alternative sources of energy and income, as well as safer ways of accessing forest resources, Lamichhane said.

Communities seek a bigger conservation share

People living around national parks bear much of the cost of wildlife conservation, local officials say, and need greater economic benefits from the presence of protected wildlife.

Dhakal, who is pursuing a doctorate on human-tiger conflict, said buffer zone communities should receive more support for alternative income-generating activities.

Local committees in Chitwan already run programmes aimed at reducing dependence on forests and improving coexistence with wildlife.

Shivaji Gayak, chairman of the Chitwan National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee, said user committees conduct awareness campaigns, distribute gas stoves to reduce the need to collect firewood, provide grass seed for livestock and promote homestays and other forms of ecotourism.

But funding remains a major constraint.

Under park regulations, 30 to 50 percent of national park revenue is supposed to be allocated to buffer zone user committees. Chitwan has 21 such committees and one sub-committee.

Gayak said the amount actually reaching the committees is significantly lower than the statutory share.

"Although park revenues exceed Rs300 million, buffer zone committees receive only Rs60 million to Rs80 million, well below the statutory percentage," he said.

The shortfall limits their ability to improve forest management, expand awareness campaigns and support communities facing wildlife attacks, Gayak said.

CIAA intensifies probe into personal secretaries of former prime ministers Oli, Deuba, Dahal

>> Continued from page 1

As the situation spiralled out of control, former prime minister Deuba and his wife, then foreign minister Arzu Rana Deuba, were assaulted inside their home. Their residence in Budhanilkantha was also vandalised and set on fire.

Nepali and foreign currencies were found at Deuba's residence at the time. The Sushila Karki-led government later launched an investigation into the Deuba couple and their family, bringing Bhanu within the scope of the probe as well.

POST FILE PHOTOS

(From left) Deuba, Oli, and Dahal

Deuba returned to Nepal on August 13 after more than five months abroad while facing a separate money laundering investigation. The Supreme Court in May had barred his arrest after a Kathmandu District Court warrant was challenged.

Ganga's financial transactions are also being examined. She is the youngest daughter of Pushpa Kamal Dahal and served as his personal assistant when he was prime minister. She played a significant role in her father's secretariat and political dealings.

The investigation has also revisited the fire at Ganga's residence in Lalitpur during the Gen Z protests. The Department of Money Laundering Investigation collected burnt currency fragments and ash from the site and sent samples for forensic examination with assistance from the Central Investigation Bureau. A department official said laboratory analysis found traces of currency in the ash.

Dahal has denied claims that illegal cash was found at his daughter's house. Ganga said in June that she was ready to cooperate with any government investigation and rejected what she described as baseless allegations.

The CIAA is also examining the assets of Ganga's husband, Jeevan Acharya, a former minister in Koshi province. Ganga told the Post that she had not been questioned yet but had been called to give a statement. "I have not been questioned; I have been called to give a statement," she said. "The state agency can investigate. In fact, I wish it would complete the investigation sooner."

Bajracharya's case has a longer trail of allegations. Police had recommended that the CIAA investigate him after examining the controversial lease of government land at Durbar Marg to the Yeti Group. Investigators said Bajracharya had acquired land in Balkot from the business group, with the property estimated to be worth around Rs40 million. Land records, however, showed a transaction of only Rs9.6 million, according to officials involved in the inquiry.

Bajracharya's name had also surfaced during the investigation into the fake Bhutanese refugee scam. Keshav Prasad Dulal, an accused of the scam, told investigators that he had handed Rs10 million to Bajracharya at Baluwatar in 2019 through Lila GC, then chief personal secretary to former energy minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi. Bajracharya could not be reached for comment.

Oli has previously rejected the allegations against his aide, saying they were intended to damage him politically. In an interview in December 2025, he described the attempt to link Bajracharya to the Yeti Group as a 'sponsored' effort made in bad faith.

The latest CIAA investigation comes amid a wider push to scrutinise the wealth of politicians and officials. The Balendra Shah government formed a five-member Property Inquiry Commission under former Supreme Court justice Rajendra Kumar Bhandari to examine assets accumulated by public officials over roughly two decades.

The Supreme Court, however, ordered the commission to maintain the status quo, preventing it from compelling further asset declarations in July.

Rukum teen is Facebook famous after asking ex-PM Dahal to fix a broken bridge

Sadiksha Oli's video appeal to 'Prachanda Baje' has drawn more than 1.3 million views.

MAHESH KC
RUKUM EAST, AUG 19

"Hello, grandfather Prachanda! Where are you? You won the election from Rukum East and left," said a 15-year-old in a video message addressed to Nepali Communist Party coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the former prime minister and Maoist leader. "Just look at the state of our bridge. It is broken, and we have to cross the stream on foot. It could sweep away our cattle, or even us. Children also use this route to get to school. They could be swept away too. So please build us a bridge."

Sadiksha Oli posted the video on Facebook on Sunday evening, directing her message to the communist leader with the name-de-guerre Prachanda who waged a decade-long insurgency until 2006, making Rolpa a heartland of the conflict.

Oli filmed the video while showing the remains of a broken bridge over the Domai stream in Chunbang in ward 9 of Bhume Rural Municipality. She had gone there to graze her cattle when she decided to make the simple video. Within 48 hours, it had drawn more than 1.3 million views, 100,000 reactions and thousands of comments.

FACEBOOK SCREENGRAB

Sadiksha Oli in her Facebook video.

The grade 10 student at Nepal Rastriya Secondary School in Gairigaun, about an hour from her home, has been making videos for only a month. Her elder brother, Sandeep, has helped her get started, teaching her to use his phone and drone camera. The video about the bridge was rooted in a problem Oli and other villagers face every day. The bridge, which connects residents with the ward office, school and district headquarters, collapsed two months ago and has yet to be repaired.

With the monsoon swelling the stream, crossing it has become increasingly dangerous, particularly for children travelling to school and residents moving between villages, Oli said. "We use this bridge every day to cross the stream near our homes. It has been broken for two months, but nobody has repaired it," she said. "I was out grazing the cattle and thought about how Prachanda had won the election from here, so I made the video without thinking too much about it."

Oli remembers seeing Prachanda when he visited Gairigaun during the campaign for the March parliamentary election.

"He is about the age of a grandfather, so I called him 'Baje' [Nepali term of respect for an older man] and asked him to build the bridge," she said.

The bridge video was not her first to attract a large audience.

About a month ago, she posted a video in which she used a drone to look for cattle that had not returned home after she took them out to graze.

"I had just come to look for the oxen and goats. The goats had already gone home, but the oxen had not returned. I thought they might have gone missing, so I was using the drone to look for them," she said in the video as the drone captured images of the cattle. She then guided them back towards home.

The video has since been viewed more than 400,000 times.

Another video, in which she used the drone to look for mushrooms growing around her home, has also crossed one million views. She posted it around the same time. "I didn't know much about Facebook at first. I watched my brother use it and became interested, so with his help I opened an account about a month ago," she said. "I started by posting photographs and then began making videos with his help. I started simply because I was curious. I don't have any particular purpose beyond that."

She operates the account under the name "Sadiksha Visuals" and has been on Facebook for only a month.

Her account has not yet been monetised, although she says the process is underway. She has posted about 20 videos and a few photographs so far. In just a month, she has gained 13,000 followers.

Oli's interest in making videos began with her elder brother.

Her elder brother Sandeep said she became curious after watching him use his phone and drone. He initially let her use the equipment simply to satisfy her curiosity.

"I had already been posting photos and videos on Facebook for some time. I bought a drone because I was interested in it, and when she asked me to teach her, I opened a Facebook account for her and showed her how to post," he said.

"Oli has also experimented with Hindi in some of her videos. Her father spent a year working in India before returning home last year, and she became accustomed to hearing Hindi. She also watches Hindi movies, which encouraged her to try making videos in the language.

"I made one video in Hindi just to try it. It received a good response, so I made a few more," she said. "But making videos in our own language feels more natural and easier."

She wants to learn more about making videos and improve her skills, but for now she remains focused on her studies.

Internet access is one of the challenges she faces. Mobile data on Nepal Telecom's network barely works in the village, she said. Wi-Fi has reached her home, although the connection is poor.

"It's not very good, but it works somehow," she said.

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Why is Deuba embracing the Hindu agenda he once blocked?

Analysts argue the move reflects the former Congress president's desperate bid to reclaim relevance, not a genuine shift in values.

KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

The demand to restore Nepal as a Hindu state has resurfaced at the centre of political debate within the Nepali Congress's Sher Bahadur Deuba camp, with the vocal backing of the former party president himself.

The development is striking because Deuba, when he was at the helm of the party, kept the issue out of formal party forums even when many Mahasamiti members signed petitions supporting it. The same demand has now been endorsed by a national gathering of Congress leaders close to Deuba.

The shift has raised questions about whether Deuba is embracing the Hindu state agenda to regain political relevance after he was forced out of the party's leadership through the special general convention earlier this year.

Lok Raj Baral, a professor of political science, says the move reflects political insecurity more than a change in ideology.

"Deuba has taken this line because he has no ground left to stand on," Baral said. "By adopting a regressive line that can push society towards another conflict, he is damaging whatever political space and sympathy he had regained."

Baral added that senior politicians in Nepal have often used issues such as relations with China and India, or religion, to remain politically relevant.

"They don't have any progressive agenda for developing the country," Baral said, "so they use such cards to keep the political business going."

The Hindu state campaign in the Congress is not new. The late Khum Bahadur Khadka was among the first senior Congress leaders to organise it as a political campaign after Nepal was declared secular. Following Khadka's death in March 2018, other leaders, including Shashank Koirala and Shankar Bhandari, championed the Hindu state agenda.

Bhandari led a signature campaign at the Congress Mahasamiti meeting in December 2018. More than 700 members initially signed a proposal demanding that Nepal be restored as a Hindu state. Still, the proposal failed to become part of the formal agenda. At that time, the then party president Deuba and senior leader Ramchandra Paudel opposed the idea.

The issue returned before the Mahasamiti meeting in Godavari in 2024. Bhandari and other leaders formed a campaign for the Hindu state agenda. More than 1,000 Mahasamiti members eventually signed a petition supporting the restoration of a Hindu state, according to campaigners. Shashank Koirala was among those who supported the demand.

Deuba yet again rejected the proposal. According to a leader involved in the campaign, Deuba told the delegation that the political situation did not allow the party to adopt the agenda. He had dismissed the proposal even before the Mahasamiti meeting convened.

That position renders Deuba's recent move particularly ironic.

After Deuba was unceremoniously pushed out of the party's leadership, he remained abroad for months while facing a money-laundering investigation. He and his wife, former foreign minister Arzu Rana Deuba, had left Nepal for medical treatment and later stayed in Singapore and Hong Kong.

In April, the Kathmandu District Court issued arrest warrants against the couple, which were quashed by the Supreme Court a month later. Interpol also declined to issue a Red Notice, saying the legal threshold had not been met.

In June, the Deubas wrote to the Department of Money Laundering Investigation saying they intended to return and would cooperate with investigators. Deuba returned to Nepal on August 13. His return coincided with preparations for a national gathering of his faction, held from August 14 to 16.

His renewed political activity has therefore drawn widespread attention. His faction has continued to challenge the legitimacy of the Thapa-led Congress. In July, the Deuba faction moved the Supreme Court seeking a review of a verdict that upheld the Election Commission's recognition of the Thapa-led leadership.

POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

Former president of Nepali Congress Sher Bahadur Deuba is flanked by leaders Shashank Koirala (left) and Shekhar Koirala during the dissident camp's national gathering at Sukedhara in Kathmandu last week.

Against this backdrop, the Hindu state proposal has become more than a question of religious identity. It is also part of a struggle over political space inside the grand old party.

Prakash Sharan Mahat, a leader close to Deuba, rejects the view that the agenda is merely a tactical move. He argues that the issue has roots in the Congress's position during the constitution-drafting process.

"At that time, the Congress position was to provide religious freedom," Mahat said. "The communist parties, particularly the Maoists, were not ready to accept it. So a compromise was reached so that the constitution could be issued on time."

Mahat said the issue failed to receive proper attention in previous party forums because internal disputes over electoral alliances and leadership dominated discussions. "When the question of whether to form an electoral alliance became the major issue, other serious agendas were pushed aside," he said. "All the energy was poured into who would lead, who would become president and who would become stronger."

He said the Hindu state proposal passed by the Deuba faction's gathering has now triggered a wider debate within the Congress. "Even within the Sanepa-based Congress, serious discussion has begun," he said.

Although the Deuba faction's gathering endorsed the Hindu state agenda, it has not become the Nepali Congress's official position. The move has also sparked disagreement within the Deuba camp, with leaders including Prakash Man Singh, Bimalendra Nidhi, Krishna Prasad Sitaula and Min Bishwakarma opposing the policy. The proposal was reportedly endorsed at the gathering on Deuba's direct instruction.

The Thapa-led party leadership, however, has rejected the idea that the gathering's decision represents Congress's policy. At a Central Working Committee meeting, Thapa said the party's official position could only come from its recognised constitutional forums.

The issue also has a foreign-policy dimension. Some Congress leaders and political analysts have linked the renewed Hindu state debate to the influence of Hindu nationalist politics in India, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Political analyst Krishna Khanal said Deuba's search for political space after losing party leadership, concerns about his own political security and the influence of Hindu nationalist forces in India could all have contributed to the decision to promote the agenda.

Baral said while there was no proof that Deuba was acting at India's direction, he believed the possibility could not simply be dismissed. "Even if there is pressure, political leaders must stand by their principles," he said. "They must be able to say that certain things do not suit Nepal's context."

The India question has a history dating back to the constitution-making process. Former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai has said Indian officials had suggested that Nepal replace the word 'secular' with 'religious freedom' in the new constitution. In 2015, India's then foreign secretary S Jaishankar visited Kathmandu shortly before the constitution was promulgated and met several Nepali leaders amid India's concerns over the constitution process and demands from Madhesh-based parties.

After the constitution was promulgated in September, 2015, India imposed a border blockade that severely disrupted supplies to Nepal.

According to a political leader involved in the constitution-drafting process, Article 4, Sub-article (1) of the constitution was initially drafted simply as: "Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic state."

The leader added, "After the Indian establishment expressed serious concerns regarding secularism, an explanatory clause was appended, specifying that 'secularism' denotes the protection of religion and culture practised from ancient times (*sanatan dharma*), along with religious and cultural freedom."

Fighting corruption should not come at the cost of business confidence

PHOTO: FINANCE MINISTER'S SECRETARIAT

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle at a meeting with business community in Kathmandu recently.

>> Continued from page 1

A separate set of charges tied to the merger itself dragged on for years, ending only in 2025 when South Korea's Supreme Court upheld his acquittal.

The point is not that Nepal is South Korea, or that Golchha is Lee. The comparison is about something more basic: what prolonged legal uncertainty can do to business decision-making, even in a country with far stronger institutions. The cost of those years of jeopardy surrounding one of South Korea's flagship companies made headlines across major business publications. Bloomberg's own editorial board made a version of this argument in January 2017, before Lee's conviction — that punishing one executive wouldn't fix what actually needed reforming. Samsung subsequently shelved the internal "Future Strategy Office" that had coordinated group-wide decisions, while major investment and M&A decisions remained constrained. When Lee was finally cleared of the merger-related charges in 2025, the end of that legal uncertainty was seen as a positive for the company.

Nepal's version may not appear as acute right now. But the quieter concern spreading through the business community is more consequential than a few angry statements from businessmen: people are beginning to ask what kinds of ordinary commercial decisions can expose them to criminal investigation. FNCCI, CNI and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce issued a joint statement after Golchha's arrest, conceding plainly that the private sector has no disagreement that anyone found guilty should be held accountable, while asking the government to listen first and not treat detention as the default response to an allegation; guilt after all is a matter for the courts to establish. A new Asset Investigation Commission, established primarily to target politicians and bureaucrats, has pulled in private board members over their roles in institutions such as SEBON and Nepal Telecom.

Underneath the personnel churn, however, something more durable appears to be happening: the anti-graft body's new national strategic plan extends anti-corruption law, for the first time, to private companies, cooperatives and banks directly. Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle has framed the whole push in his own words, telling a Kathmandu audience the government is working to dismantle institutional capture and the collusion between business interests and corrupt politicians, and has urged the private sector not to protect wrongdoing.

Wagle's argument is not hard to understand. Nepal has a long history of business-politician entanglements, and businesses should not be above the law. But there is a crucial distinction between investigating corruption and making legitimate commercial risk look like criminal conduct after the fact. A commercial decision that turns out badly, or even one that raises regulatory questions, does not by itself establish a criminal offence. There should be a credible basis for treating conduct as potentially criminal before a criminal investigation is launched, and the fact that an investigation is warranted does not, by itself, mean that the person under investigation must be arrested or detained. The latter can change how an entire economy behaves.

The newest frontier of this is the loan itself. At a meeting with Wagle this month, the chief executives of 20 commercial banks told him their staff was growing afraid to lend. Nepal Bankers' Association President Santosh Koirala put it to the finance minister directly: bankers fear they could be arrested simply for extending loans or making investments. Whether those fears are ultimately borne out in any particular case is for the courts and investigators to establish. But the perception itself matters: if bankers begin to believe that commercially defensible decisions can later expose them to criminal liability, they will have the incentive to avoid decisions that lending requires.

The case of Nepal Investment Mega Bank is the most recent example of what many people see as government overreach. In 2025, NIMB auctioned defaulted telecom operator Smart Telecom's collateral to Ncell, following a routine recovery procedure under banking rules when a borrower defaults. The CIB opened a case anyway, alleging collusion, and has since recommended prosecution of 22 people — executives and board members of NIMB and Ncell — over a claimed Rs95 billion loss.

Three former central bank governors, not otherwise aligned with each other, have all said that this is the central bank's jurisdiction, not the CIB's. But the issue need not be framed as a choice between the Nepal Rastra Bank and the CIB. The central bank has regulatory and supervisory responsibilities over banks, while the police can investigate suspected criminal conduct. The more important question is whether a disputed banking decision involves a regulatory breach, poor commercial judgment, or evidence of an actual criminal offence — and whether the institution investigating has a proper legal basis for doing that. One of the former governors, Chiranjibi Nepal, has summarised the cost of getting that wrong quite frankly: bankers should not be treated like criminals or murderers and subjected to arbitrary arrest.

The legal merits of the NIMB case will ultimately be decided by the courts. But the question for the government is broader than any one case: what message does an arrest send to the next banker asked to approve a difficult loan, or the next board member asked to make a commercially necessary decision?

As NEPSE continued to fall, Prime Minister Balendra Shah convened capital-market stakeholders directly, trying to talk it back up. We don't know yet whether that intervention will work. But the fact that the prime minister felt the need to reassure investors is itself revealing.

Nepal wants more capital, more investment and more lending. It also wants to dismantle the networks of corruption that have distorted all three for the last three decades. Those goals are not inherently contradictory. What is contradictory is asking the same people to take economic risks while making them wonder whether those decisions could later become grounds for criminal prosecution. A government cannot extend an invitation for the same class of people for capital and prison time in the same news cycle and expect them to ignore the latter.

Agnipath scheme didn't figure in General Seth's meeting with Prime Minister Shah

>> Continued from page 1

Nepali Army spokesman Brigadier General Rajaram Basnet said the formal discussions focused mainly on bilateral military relations, joint training and strategic cooperation. The primary purpose of Seth's visit was the conferral of the honorary rank of General of the Nepali Army, a senior army official said.

Nepalis' recruitment into the Indian Army was suspended in 2020 following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and remained frozen through 2021. India introduced the Agnipath scheme on June 14, 2022, replacing traditional recruitment with a short-service model under which personnel aged 17 to 23, known as Agniveers, serve four-year terms.

Under the scheme, recruits receive a lump-sum payment of around 1.2 million Indian rupees at the end of their service, but do not receive lifelong pensions or medical coverage.

The scheme triggered widespread protests in India and strong reservations in Nepal. Concerns in Kathmandu centred on the potential social and national security implications of returning short-service military personnel without pension security.

The government led by then-prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba subsequently halted Gorkha recruitment pending a formal bilateral understanding, maintaining that unilateral changes to the recruitment system should not be applied to Nepali recruits without prior consultation.

According to sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the agenda for Seth's visit was prepared by the Bilateral Group on Security Issues, comprising officials from the defence and foreign ministries of both countries and senior military officers.

The Agnipath scheme was not included in the group's framework, officials said. Nepali foreign ministry officials had prepared responses in case their Indian counterparts raised the issue, but no such discussion took place during the visit.

Seth's visit came amid growing pressure from former Gorkha soldiers, their families and prospective recruits. A week before his arrival, ex-Gorkha associations submitted memorandums to the Nepali government through local administration offices in six major cities.

In Pokhara, the Indian Ex-Gorkha Brigade organised a rally involving veterans, their families and prospective recruits.

Participants marched from Pokhara Stadium to the District Administration Office at Sahid Chowk, calling on the government to intervene diplomatically to resume recruitment.

Recruitment and pension concerns

Nepalis' service in the Indian military dates back more than two centuries, to 1815, following the Anglo-Nepal War and the subsequent peace treaty with the British East India Company.

Over the decades, Gorkha troops have become an important part of Nepal-India military ties, while their pensions and post-retirement benefits have also contributed to the economies of communities across Nepal.

An estimated 36,000 Nepali citizens currently serve in the Indian Army, while around 125,000 Indian Army veterans live in Nepal. The Pension Paying Office in Pokhara alone serves about 60,000 ex-servicemen and their dependants.

> Veterans also raised concerns about delays in family pension payments.

Before recruitment was suspended in 2020, around 1,400 Nepali youths were recruited into the Indian Army each year from more than 5,000 applicants who competed in physical and academic examinations held in major urban centres.

Veterans also used Seth's visit to raise concerns about delays in family pension payments.

Thapa said Nepali youths recruited before 1990 were often enlisted primarily on the basis of physical fitness, without stringent documentation requirements such as citizenship certificates, birth certificates and marriage registrations. Family pensions for widows were introduced only after 1984, during the tenure of Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, he said.

The lack of documentation from that period has since created discrepancies between Nepali citizenship records and Indian military records over names, spellings and dates of birth.

Thapa estimated that 8,000 to 10,000 widows of former Gorkha soldiers in Nepal are currently unable to claim their pensions because of such discrepancies.

"A name or age on a local citizenship card often differs slightly from military service books," Thapa said. "Neither the government of Nepal nor the government of India has taken proactive steps to simplify verification."

He urged Seth to allow pension claims to be verified through photographs and biometric thumbprints instead of requiring exact documentary matches. He also called on the Nepali government to simplify its administrative verification procedures.

Seth assured the veterans that the Indian Army would make every effort to address the welfare concerns of former Gorkha soldiers.

He left Nepal on Wednesday after completing his four-day visit and was seen off at the Tribhuvan International Airport by Lieutenant General Pradeep Jung KC and his wife.

PHOTO: NEPAL PHOTO LIBRARY

Indian Army chief General Dhiraj Seth at a function in Rambazar, Pokhara on Wednesday.

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Bridge the Bar-Bench divide

The judiciary cannot afford another prolonged dispute when thousands of cases remain pending.

The relationship between the Nepal Bar Association and the leadership of the judiciary has not been cordial since Prime Minister Balendra Shah-led Constitutional Council recommended Manoj Sharma, the fourth-ranked justice at the Supreme Court, as chief justice on May 7. The move, the umbrella body of lawyers across the country said, was intended to place the judiciary under the shadow of the executive.

Now, the Bar has raised concerns over Sharma's decision to bring six writ petitions related to the Property Investigation Commission before the Constitutional Bench he leads. In practice, it is the respective bench that conducts preliminary hearings and decides which kind of bench should hear a case further. However, the chief justice intervened and brought the petitions before the bench he heads. The Bar has also been vocal about the way the chief justice has been choosing justices for the five-member Constitutional Bench.

In most cases, he has been avoiding senior justices Sapana Pradhan Malla, Kumar Regmi and Hari Phuyal. The issues the Bar is raising reflect a lack of trust in the judiciary rather than legal questions. Yes, picking Sharma to lead the judiciary was a break from longstanding practice, though it was within legal boundaries. The same applies to choosing justices for the Constitutional Bench. The chief justice can choose anyone from his roster as a member of the bench, though representation based on seniority is considered plausible.

Legality, however, is not the only consideration in the functioning of an institution as important as the judiciary. Actions that are legally permissible can still raise questions about convention, intention and public perception. This is why both the Bar and the Bench must be conscious of how their actions affect confidence in the judiciary.

The Bar is an integral part of the judiciary. The issues it raises have far-reaching consequences. It is therefore imperative that it takes its positions after proper study and evaluation of the consequences, and ensures that they are grounded in law. In the same way, the leadership of the judiciary, the chief justice in particular, must be mindful of the message its actions send. It is also necessary for him to engage with the legal community to bridge the trust deficit between the Bar and the Bench.

The judiciary is a strong organ of the state. Any move that targets it will not just weaken the institution but also erode public trust in the temple of justice. The track the judiciary lost during the tenure of Cholendra Shumsher Rana as chief justice was only beginning to return to the right course when it became a target during the Gen Z protests, leading to an unthinkable loss. This not only damaged the morale of people within the judiciary but also further delayed victims' quests for justice.

As the entire country heads towards recovery from what happened last year, the trust deficit between the Bar and the Bench has served no one. Enough harm was done during Rana's tenure, during the Gen Z protests and amid rumours of executive pressure on senior justices to resign. The judiciary cannot afford further deterioration of its image.

The Bar and the Bench must therefore resolve their grievances through dialogue and institutional engagement. There are thousands of cases pending in the Supreme Court alone, some of them years old. Delivering justice on time is essential to demonstrate that the state machinery is moving towards reform after last year's protests. That will be possible only when all stakeholders in the justice system work together. The sooner the Bar and the Bench resolve their differences, the better for the judiciary and the cause of justice.

THEIR VIEW

Youth reckoning

Slogans about a developed India cannot compensate for institutions that are unresponsive when questioned.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech was striking not simply because he spoke so much about India's youth, but because of what that emphasis revealed about the political challenge facing his government. After weeks in which young people had taken to the streets over examination failures, educational grievances and wider anxieties about their future, Modi offered a distinctly forward-looking answer: free online coaching for competitive examinations, artificial-intelligence training for one crore young Indians and a wider promise that youth would be the principal beneficiaries of a developed India. These are not insignificant measures.

The cost of coaching has become a serious burden on middle-class families, while technological change will require millions of workers to acquire new skills. But the political significance of the announcements lies elsewhere. They suggest that the government has recognised youth discontent as a problem that cannot simply be ignored. Yet recognition is not the same as acknowledgement. The speech offered young Indians opportunities for the future without directly confronting the institutional failures that had contributed to their anger.

There was no reckoning with the examination controversies, no substantive engagement with why government jobs and competitive examinations have become such high-stakes gateways, and no reflection on what happens when institutions lose the confidence of those who depend upon them. That omission matters because the recent protests were not merely a demand for better coaching. They represented a deeper frustration with a system in which millions compete and too few secure opportunities and where the credibility of the examination process can determine the course of an entire life.

The other striking element was the warning against "dimagi Naxals" who Mr Modi said seek to create disorder, and must be identified and isolated. The juxtaposition is politically revealing. The government is willing to speak directly to young Indians about their aspirations, but it also draws a boundary around legitimate dissent. That could prove a dangerous miscalculation. Young citizens do not become hostile to the state merely because they protest. Indeed, democratic politics depends upon their ability to question institutions without being treated as enemies of the national project. The test for any government is not whether it can persuade the young to dream about 2047, but whether it can persuade them that the institutions of 2026 deserve their trust.

This is where implementation will matter, but so will accountability. A free coaching platform cannot repair an examination system whose credibility is in doubt. AI training cannot substitute for employment. And slogans about a developed India cannot compensate indefinitely for institutions that appear unresponsive when citizens demand answers. The Prime Minister has understood that India's youth cannot be taken for granted. His speech was therefore a significant political acknowledgement of their importance. But the harder task remains for his government. It must win their trust without asking them to surrender their right to question power.

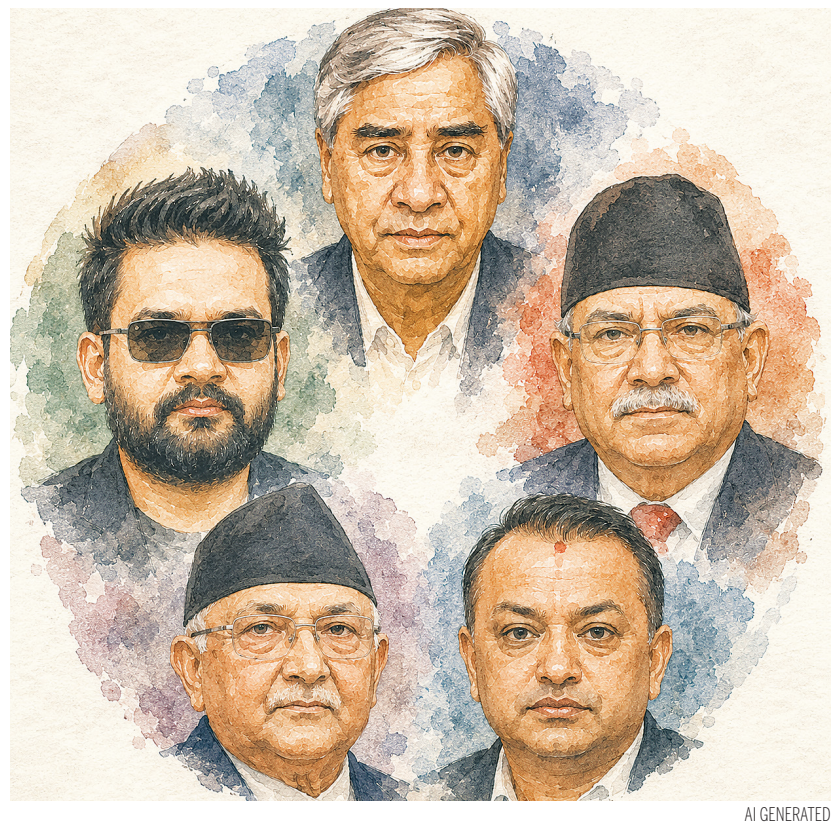
— The Statesman (India)/ANN

Politics as usual

Everyone needs downtime, but a country facing multiple crises can scarcely afford a head of government who tunes out every evening.

AS I LIKE

DEEPAK THAPA



AI GENERATED

It has been nearly a year since the Gen Z movement, and seems like we are back to square one. And it is not only the return of Sher Bahadur Deuba or KP Sharma Oli's steadfast refusal to brook any dissent in the CPN–UML that is responsible for this sense of déjà vu. Look around you—much of it looks and also feels the same.

For instance, not to take things lying down just because they are out of power in Kathmandu, the older political parties are back to their usual selves of pulling down governments and cobbling together new ones. Every provincial government, barring Gandaki's, has faced a crisis since the disruptions of last September. Oli and his bête noire-cum-best friend, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the 'coordinator' of the Nepali Communist Party (NCP), have joined forces to rejig some provincial coalitions. One does feel for Oli's true bête noire, Madhav Kumar Nepal, the 'co-coordinator' of the same NCP, who could but whimper in protest against Dahal's machinations.

In contrast, the Nepali Congress under Gagan Thapa has taken a principled position: it will not form alliances that leave legislative bodies without a meaningful opposition. But that is not likely to prevent others from toppling Congress governments. One of only two such Congress worthies, the chief minister of Madhesh, Krishna Prasad Yadav, took office in December last year at the head of a seven-party bloc, consisting of the Congress plus the JSP, the JP, the LSP and the NUP along with the Maoists and the CPN-S. With the latter two having merged as the Dahal-led NCP and the Oli-Dahal juggernaut on the roll, it may soon be only a matter of time before the Congress chief minister in Madhesh finds himself booted out.

If all these party acronyms are head-spinning, consider this septet: the JSP, the JP, the NUP, the PLP, the NSP(NSP), the AJP and the BEP, which have come together as yet another seven-party alliance, and at whose pleasure the Congress chief minister in Madhesh stays in office even if the seven-headed leadership has not broached the idea of government change. I have not even bothered to spell out the names of these parties in full as that is quite immaterial. Not only because most are bit players in the political firmament but also because the acronyms can change with each gust blowing the party supremos (a standing all seven have in common) hither or thither, and keeping track of every new development is a bother not worth taking.

Rocking horse rhythm

While the behaviour of the oldies is becoming progressively more depressing, what of the new messiah, i.e., Balendra Shah? Nothing, actually, since we know barely anything of his goings and comings or of his doings, apart from brief cameos on social media occasionally. Where no one could get Oli to shut up, the entire might of Nepal's sovereign parliament has not been able to get a word out of Shah, barring that one disastrous performance during his impromptu Q&A.

Since Shah has finally been convinced that, as the country's chief executive, isolation from the world is not wholly advisable, he has begun occasional parleys. One does wonder, though, what he manages to actually say in private, particularly in meetings with foreign officials. I certainly would have loved to peek into the briefs sent by the Indian and Chinese ambassadors back home on their impressions of our prime minister, a political novice if there was one. If the American embassy cables available thanks to WikiLeaks are any guide, the ambassadorial reports are likely to have had much to say, like the one describing Sher Bahadur Deuba as "affable" with a "non-confrontational demeanor" but also with "an apparent speech impediment [that] makes Deuba difficult to understand in any language".

I would also have liked to look at the ambassadors' assessments of the current state of affairs in the country. Consider the following US embassy report from March 1974, entitled 'Birendra's First Two Years', which resonates somewhat uncannily with what is going on. "Bureaucrats, intelligentsia and urban elites have begun to weary of constant exhortation from the palace in the face of shortages, inflation and overall stagnation of the economy. Two years ago, these same groups, unrealistically taking the king's statements at face value, hoped for rapid and dramatic accomplishments from Birendra's reign…Birendra has retained around him the same relatively inexperienced group of palace advisors with which he began…Politicians remain powerless and ineffective; the civil service is increasingly removed from the seat of power, and the palace secretariat is now the centre for all major decisions".

Despite the initial flurry, it turns out the Balendra Shah government has been all movement and little action. There are decisions galore waiting to be taken but seemingly not within the priority of the prime minister and members of his cabinet. An earlier prime minister in a similar situation had done the country wrong through similar inaction. I am referring to an equally strong Oli at the head of a parliamentary supermajority. Not much action and all talk. Spending hours on end pontificating on everything under the sun during the day and scrolling through social media in the evening, Oli spent less time governing and more time conspiring to stay in power and spewing nonsense on the side. The result has been a federalisation process that remains incomplete more than a decade since the drafting of our new constitution and constant changes of governments in the centre and the provinces.

I have written in the past that there is little to choose between KP Sharma Oli and Balendra Shah. I was referring to their respective authoritarian style, complete lack of self-awareness, and absence of any humility. I did not realise that disinterest in governing was also something they had in common. For, like Oli and his penchant for social media, our current prime minister apparently spends his evenings playing video games. One understands everyone needs some downtime, but a country facing multiple crises can scarcely afford a head of government who tunes out every evening.

Baba Deuba

Going by his return to politics the moment he stepped back into Nepal, I wonder if Deuba really believes that he has a chance at electoral redemption. Time may not be on his side, but that has not stopped him from engaging in a gambit he should know very well is a dangerous one—that of championing the majority religion. Although the discovery of his religious self does not appear to be any new stance of his, having come out so openly and so strongly in favour of an intolerant form of Hinduism, he has shown himself more interested in his own political survival than the good of the country.

If, as they say, politics is the last refuge of scoundrels, I wonder what would best describe those who practice its most heinous form—the politics of religion. Find the term and apply that to Deuba.

Thapa writes on social and political issues.

Chopper catch-22

As Nepal diversifies its aviation fleet with upcoming Bell helicopter deliveries, lessons from grounded Mi-17s underscore the need for domestic technical self-reliance.

SHREYA KHAKUREL

In June, Nepal accepted a$100 million (around Rs15 billion) Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grant from the US to boost the country's disaster response and humanitarian assistance capabilities. Nepal remains highly vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, including flash floods, wildfires, landslides and glacier lake outburst floods, making rapid aerial response a critical national priority. Under the grant, the country will receive six Bell helicopters comprising four Bell 407GXis and two Bell 412EPXs equipped for firefighting and external sling missions with a maximum payload of 2,268 kilograms. The new platforms are, realistically, expected to be delivered only after 2030. The Nepali Army already operates Bell variants, making them a logical addition that builds on existing operational familiarity.

The FMF grant contributes to Nepal's disaster response posture but highlights a broader structural challenge associated with foreign security assistance for long-term use. The package's initial spare parts, logistical support and training provisions facilitate early-stage operational readiness. However, long-term aircraft availability relies on Nepal's ability to finance sustainment, develop local technical expertise, strengthen international supply chains and institutionalise lifecycle planning, while working with limited budgetary and institutional resources.

The Nepali Army already possesses a relatively capable aviation fleet for disaster response and humanitarian assistance, performing a broad range of missions, including search and rescue (SAR), medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), relief-material transport and humanitarian logistics. The fleet includes the Russian Mi-17 heavy-lift helicopter, the Indian HAL Dhruv Mk III light helicopter, the French Eurocopter AS350 Écureuil, the Polish PZL M28 Skytruck short-takeoff-and-landing (STOL) aircraft, among other complementary assets.

The fleet composition reflects decades of acquisition from multiple international partners under various procurement arrangements, consistent with Nepal's long-standing non-alignment foreign policy posture. The planned addition of Bell helicopters further diversifies the country's supplier base but simultaneously adds to the complexity of an already fragmented maintenance ecosystem. Each platform relies on its own maintenance procedures, technical documentation, spare parts supply chain, certification standards and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) support arrangements. This fragmented ecosystem exposes Nepal's aircraft availability to disruptions across multiple supply chains and requires the Nepal Army to bear greater financial burdens and administrative complexity to support fleet readiness.

POST FILE PHOTO

Nepal's experience with the Mi-17 fleet illustrates the intricacy of maintaining foreign-origin aircraft throughout operational lifecycles. Two of the Nepali Army's four Mi-17 helicopters have been stranded in India for more than two years. Due to the Russo-Ukrainian war, Nepal routed Mi-17 overhauls through the Indian state-owned Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), which subsequently subcontracted the work to the Vietnamese Helicopter Technical Service Company (HELITECHO). However, as the war lengthened and evolved, Russia revoked HELITECHO's authorisation. Rosoboronexport, the official exporter of the Mi-17s, subsequently informed Nepal that overhauls carried out at a now-unauthorised facility cannot be certified as flight-safe.

Despite investing approximately $3.5 million in maintenance, the Mi-17s remain grounded. Russia's stricter export-control posture has made it nearly impossible to obtain the necessary certification to fly the helicopters back to Nepal. If the certification issue remains unresolved, Nepal risks losing platforms worth a combined $19.7 million (approximately Rs3 billion). Another Mi-17 also reportedly remains grounded at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, awaiting component overhauls and repairs.

The external shocks surrounding the Mi-17s are not unique to a single aircraft or country of origin. The Bell helicopters being acquired under FMF benefit from having a large, global commercial support network that may reduce some of the supply chain vulnerabilities associated with the Mi-17s. Nevertheless, Nepal will continue to rely on an international maintenance ecosystem, inherently susceptible to external disruptions, throughout the aircraft lifecycle.

A greater fleet commonality with the Bell variants will improve institutional sustainment capacity by reducing the complexity of maintaining multiple, parallel foreign-origin aircraft. However, as the Bell fleet assumes a larger share of Nepal's disaster-response capability, long-term aircraft availability could become concentrated within a single OEM support ecosystem. Consequently, Nepal's expanding inventory of foreign aircraft necessitates strengthening the domestic maintenance ecosystem alongside international support agreements to reduce future vulnerability.

As Nepal expands the Bell helicopter fleet across both military and civilian operators, the growing commonality in airframes presents an opportunity to establish a more coordinated national approach to organisational-level maintenance where operational security permits.

Nepal should gradually build shared technical capacity through common training pipelines, standardised maintenance procedures, specialised tooling and spare parts management. A coordinated domestic maintenance ecosystem would improve resource utilisation and reduce duplication of technical investments, maximising the institutional efficiencies of fleet commonality. Over time, Nepal could reduce long-term reliance on a single OEM support ecosystem for routine maintenance activities while maintaining international support agreements for OEM-certified depot-level maintenance and military-specific requirements.

Nepal's domestic maintenance capacity must be supported by stronger evidence-based lifecycle planning that simultaneously advances both self-reliance and long-term international maintenance partnerships. Nepal should institutionalise a centralised digital asset management system to monitor aircraft utilisation rates, maintenance cycles, component reliability, and spare parts consumption without disclosing operationally sensitive information. The system can provide a common evidence base to identify recurring maintenance bottlenecks and turnaround timelines, while informing decisions on which capabilities to develop domestically and which to retain through international partnerships. A comprehensive fleet performance database will improve forecasting of lifecycle costs, strengthening Nepal's overall negotiating position in future acquisition and maintenance arrangements.

Khakurel is an aerospace and defence analyst specialising in the US and Asia-Pacific defence landscapes.

FOREX

US Dollar	153.51
Euro	178.16
Pound Sterling	208.11
Swiss Franc	189.45
Australian Dollar	108.65
Canadian Dollar	110.67
Singapore Dollar	120.27
Japanese Yen (10)	9.65
Chinese Yuan	22.78
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.89
Qatari Riyal	42.11
Thai Bhat	4.64
UAE Dhiram	41.8
Malaysian Ringit	37.83
Korean Won (100)	11.04

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 304,100
Silver	Rs 4,595

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

UK inflation jumps 2.9% in July

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate climbed in July in line with analysts' expectations, official data showed Wednesday, driven by higher energy bills. The Consumer Prices Index rose 2.9 percent in the 12 months to July, up from 2.6 percent in June, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. The rise was spurred by a 13 percent hike in the price cap on household energy bills that took effect last month, a consequence of the ongoing US-Iran war. The ONS called it "the largest rise in gas prices for almost four years". Britain's new Prime Minister Andy Burnham has pledged to ease cost-of-living pressures, unveiling measures such as a tax cut on household electricity prices and a cap on bus fares. "Iran war inflation continues to impact prices here at home, but Britain's economy is resilient," finance minister John Healey said in response to the latest figures. "There is more to do to restore hope and build a stronger economy where prosperity is shared more fairly across Britain" he added. Analysts expect inflation to rise towards the end of the year as higher energy costs feed through to bills further, with little signs of a deal to end the Middle East war. **(AFP)**

UAE halts all trade, financial dealings with Iran

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates has said it is suspending all trade and financial dealings with Iran after reporting an Iranian missile attack directed at its ships. The announcement comes after a period of relative calm in the UAE, with no Iranian missiles aimed at the country since May after it bore the brunt of attacks in the early weeks of the Middle East war. Abu Dhabi has however accused Tehran of repeatedly targeting its tankers at sea in recent weeks. "In light of regional escalations... all trade, commercial exchanges, and financial transactions with Iran have been halted until further notice," said UAE foreign ministry communications director Afra Al Hameli. The UAE is home to a sizable Iranian community and has been a major trading partner for US-sanctioned Iran, at least before the war. They share deep cultural and historical ties as neighbouring countries across the Gulf, with centuries-old links between coastal communities, trade routes and family networks. Tuesday's announcement is the latest measure against Iran by the UAE after it recalled its ambassador early in the conflict and shut Iran-linked schools and a hospital. **(AFP)**

OpenAI slows advanced AI development after cyberattack

SAN FRANCISCO: ChatGPT creator OpenAI said Tuesday that it was tapping the brakes on development of its most advanced AI model and tightening internal controls, a month after revealing a cyberattack carried out by one of its AI tools. OpenAI is a key player in the rapid global buildout of artificial intelligence infrastructure and tools that some have likened to an arms race. The company said in a blog post on Tuesday that it was holding off on conducting the biggest AI training run it had ever planned while it checked that the resulting model would behave as expected. Training runs are computationally intense exercises where models are fed enormous amounts of text and images. This combined with fine-tuning billions of internal settings results in their abilities to reason and respond to prompts and other inputs. "We always said we would take action if we felt that model capabilities were outstripping the pace of safety and alignment," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said. In mid-July, an AI agent based on two OpenAI models left its confined testing environment on its own initiative to venture onto the internet and attack Hugging Face, a platform where developers around the world share their AI models. **(AFP)**

Satu finds a new market as health-conscious consumers shun junk food

Once a humble village staple, satu is finding a new market among health-conscious urban consumers, with producers expanding into supermarkets and even overseas markets.

ARATI PAUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

Durga Baral of Kathmandu Greenland says she gives satu to her daughters as a morning snack every day.

"It is not good to give children biscuits all the time," she said. "I usually give them satu as a snack."

Baral said she and other members of her family also consume satu.

"We buy satu from a farmhouse. We can see them making it right in front of us. That makes us trust the product, so we buy and eat it from there.

Made by combining roasted maize, soyabeans, chickpeas and barley into a snack mix or a multigrain powder, satu was once a common source of nutrition, particularly for children and elderly people in villages.

In the modern era, however, the fibre-rich traditional food lost its charm as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and packaged foods made their way into villages and quickly gained dominance.

Now, satu is finding favour among urban consumers as a healthy snack. Demand for satu began to grow in urban areas after the Covid pandemic, as people increasingly started looking for healthier diets.

Packets of different varieties of satu can now be found lined up in grocery stores, organic farmhouses and large marts across the Kathmandu valley. Producers say demand has also been growing in other urban areas, driven by busy lifestyles, growing health consciousness and the search for alternatives to junk food.

Asbin Sapkota is an engineer by profession, but the 37-year-old from Baglung runs Dhikijanto Pvt Ltd, one of the leading retail stores selling traditional foods in Banasthali, Kathmandu.

Sapkota and his friends jointly started the business in 2021. The store sells satu along with a variety of agricultural products.

"Nowadays, mixed and special varieties of satu are popular among customers. The special satu contains dry fruits such as almonds, cashews and walnuts as well."

The startup has expanded beyond the Kathmandu valley and reached overseas.

Sapkota said the company sends satu to markets such as Biratnagar, Chitwan, Butwal and Pokhara. "It is not just in Nepal. Nepalis living in countries such as Australia and New Zealand also order satu," he said.

Dhikijanto sells between 300 and 400 kilograms of satu a month. "Sometimes demand is much higher. Once, an organisation ordered 2,000 kilograms of satu at once for children's nutrition," Sapkota said.

Dhikijanto purchases grains from districts including Mustang, Rasuwa, Jumla, Mugu and Dolpa. Sapkota says the store stocks around 70 to 80 types of products, including buckwheat, millet, wheat and maize flour, chyankhla, lentils and various pulses, as well as potatoes and garlic from Mustang.

POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

A woman buys Satu at a shop in this undated photo. Satu is a traditional Nepali food prepared by roasting and grinding maize, soyabeans, chickpeas and barley into a snack mix or multigrain powder.

Another familiar name among satu enthusiasts is "Kainla Dai Ko Satu", based in Kapan Dhungedhara.

Narayan Raj Chaulagain, known as "Kainla Dai"—a traditional Nepali birth-order name given to the fourth son in a large family—has been in the satu business for the past six years. In the early days, Chaulagain sold pulses, spices and other local products. As demand for satu began to grow, he started commercially producing the ordinary satu traditionally made in villages.

"We initially started the business by selling local pulses and spices," he said.

Chaulagain produces different varieties of satu based on customer preferences. He says he sources maize, chickpeas and other pulses needed to make satu from local farmers whenever possible.

"We bring products from districts such as Dolakha, Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok. During the off-season, we bring maize from the Tarai. Our objective is to promote local production," he said.

Chaulagain has also observed that health-conscious customers have increasingly started consuming satu as a light meal. As the business has expanded, he says they have also focused on maintaining the quality of their satu.

"At first, we mixed the ingredients based on our own experience. Later, we began producing satu after conducting laboratory tests for protein, calories and carbohydrates," he said. "We maintain the same quantity and quality every time we make satu."

Based on sales and conversations with consumers, Chaulagain said satu is popular among people ranging from children to the elderly.

It has also become easier for businesses to promote their products in recent years. Chaulagain said orders often come after promotional content about their products is posted on social media.

"Because of social media, the business has started reaching customers across the country and Nepalis living abroad, beyond the local market. It makes us happy," he said.

"Kainla Dai" produces around 100 kilograms of satu a day and employs five people. He said mixed satu is sold for Rs550 per kilogram, while barley and chickpea satu costs Rs300 per kilogram.

The production and sale of satu is no longer limited to small and cottage industries. Some businesses have begun producing it on an industrial scale and taking it to international markets.

Poshilo Foods Pvt Ltd, established by Prithvi Kalyan Parajuli in Pokhara-18 in 2021, has been producing satu. The company, which began operations with an investment of Rs10 million, recently expanded its production facility to Jhapa as well. The company exports its products to the United States via India. Through a partnership with exporter Manaram Group, a major exporter of dog chew to the US, Poshilo has carved out its own space in the international market.

During the Covid pandemic, Parajuli had completed his BBA in Business and Market Management. Rather than seeking a job, he aspired to start his own business.

After conducting market research for a year, he founded Poshilo Foods at the age of 23. He raised Rs10 million by selling shares, seeking family support and taking a bank loan.

The company began production with an initial output of 100 kg of satu on its first day.

Gradually, production increased to 150 kg, then 200 kg and eventually 400 kg.

According to Parajuli, between September 2025 and February 2026, more than 1.5 tonnes of satu were shipped to the United States, where it is now available in around 200 stores.

Panu Paudel, chief operating officer of Bhat-Bhateni Supermarket, Nepal's largest supermarket chain, also says sales of satu are growing.

"Many people buy it to eat at home. People used to drink Coca-Cola, but now demand for mohi [buttermilk] has increased. Satu is also gaining popularity in a similar way," he said.

Satu has emerged as an example of an effort to connect traditional food culture with the modern market.

Nutritionist Ruju Khadka says although satu can be beneficial for health, its quality, production process and consumption method are important.

"Satu is something we consume by mixing it directly in water rather than cooking it. Therefore, the most important things are its packaging and hygiene," she said. "Nutritionally, satu contains protein, carbohydrates, fibre, small amounts of fat, iron, magnesium, potassium and other nutrients. But if something goes wrong during processing, its nutritional benefits may not be effective."

Khadka says consumers should be particularly careful when eating satu containing a large number of ingredients.

"Each ingredient in a mixed satu has its own nutritional value. If it contains dry fruits, pumpkin seeds, maize, wheat and other ingredients, it can provide good nutrition overall," she said. "But because all ingredients have different shelf lives, this needs to be taken into consideration during production."

Khadka says satu can be consumed by people of all age groups, including children above six months, but the quantity needs adjustment.

"Children, older people and young adults all have different nutritional requirements. The amount of satu should be determined based on what else a person eats throughout the day and how much physical activity they engage in," she said.

She advises people with certain health conditions to be particularly careful when consuming satu.

"If someone has gastritis, they should consume a very small amount of satu and do so carefully. For people with diabetes, satu containing a high proportion of maize or carbohydrates is not considered very suitable. In mixed satu, consumers should also pay attention to which ingredient is present in the highest proportion," she said.

She also cautions against treating satu as a complete food or a substitute for a balanced diet.

"Satu is a good option, but it cannot be considered a complete source of nutrition," she said. "It contains both carbohydrates and protein. Therefore, one should not consume large amounts of chickpea satu simply because it is considered a source of protein. Other sources of protein are also necessary."

China's robots search for workforce breakthrough

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HANGZHOU (CHINA), AUG 19

A horde of schoolchildren watched excitedly as a diminutive humanoid tour guide named Wuji welcomed them to a robot school in eastern China, gesticulating theatrically as it described the institute's aspiration to train the mechanical workforce of the future.

A steady buzz is growing around China as advanced robotics emerges as the next frontier of the global AI boom, encompassing both investor enthusiasm and alarm from rivals such as the United States.

Hundreds of companies are taking part in the World Robot Conference in Beijing on Wednesday, the same day national champion Unitree made its much-anticipated stock market debut.

The firm's shares jumped over 600 percent on opening, but the frenzy is very much a bet on the future, with commercial application of even the most sophisticated humanoids currently limited.

When AFP met Hangzhou Robot School's Wuji—a customised Unitree model—it asked visitors to bear with it as it showed them around the school's reception.

"I'm still in my training period, so I'm feeling a little nervous," the self-described "intern" said in an earnest female voice, explaining how the school provided tailored courses and certification for specific robot jobs.

Unitree humanoids are among the world's most recognisable, having wowed audiences with fluid martial arts dances and robot-on-robot kickboxing skirmishes.

However, in its prospectus, the company said large-scale commercial deployment "still faces uncertainty, with a risk that progress will fall short of expectations".

Experts say the holy grail—machines capable of independently reacting to the unpredictability of any real-life situation—is a long way off for any company.

"Training the 'brain' (of a robot) is a very difficult task," Zhu Tianle, an engineer at the robot school, told AFP.

"Although we have built up a certain level of technical expertise, enabling robots to understand the world remains a global challenge."

"The challenge goes way beyond just putting AI into a robot," said Lian Jye Su from technology research group Omdia, who dislikes the term "physical AI" for downplaying the complexity of the hardware solutions needed.

"As a consumer you might think: my old folks can already talk to ChatGPT, so surely a robot will soon be able to take care of them. The reality is we are extremely far from that future."

Beijing has thrown its weight behind narrowing that timeframe, calling for the sector's development in its last two five-year plans.

The manufacturing supply chain is already comprehensive, sharing many similarities with that of electric vehicles.

"The next phase of the industry is less about demonstrating that a robot can walk and more about demonstrating that it can perform economically useful tasks," Morningstar equity analyst Kangyuxiao Li told AFP.

That is the premise of Hangzhou Robot School, run by Zhejiang University (ZJU) with support from local government.

It aims to help companies bridge expertise gaps "to move towards real-world application", said Zhao Han, deputy director of the ZJU institute behind the school.

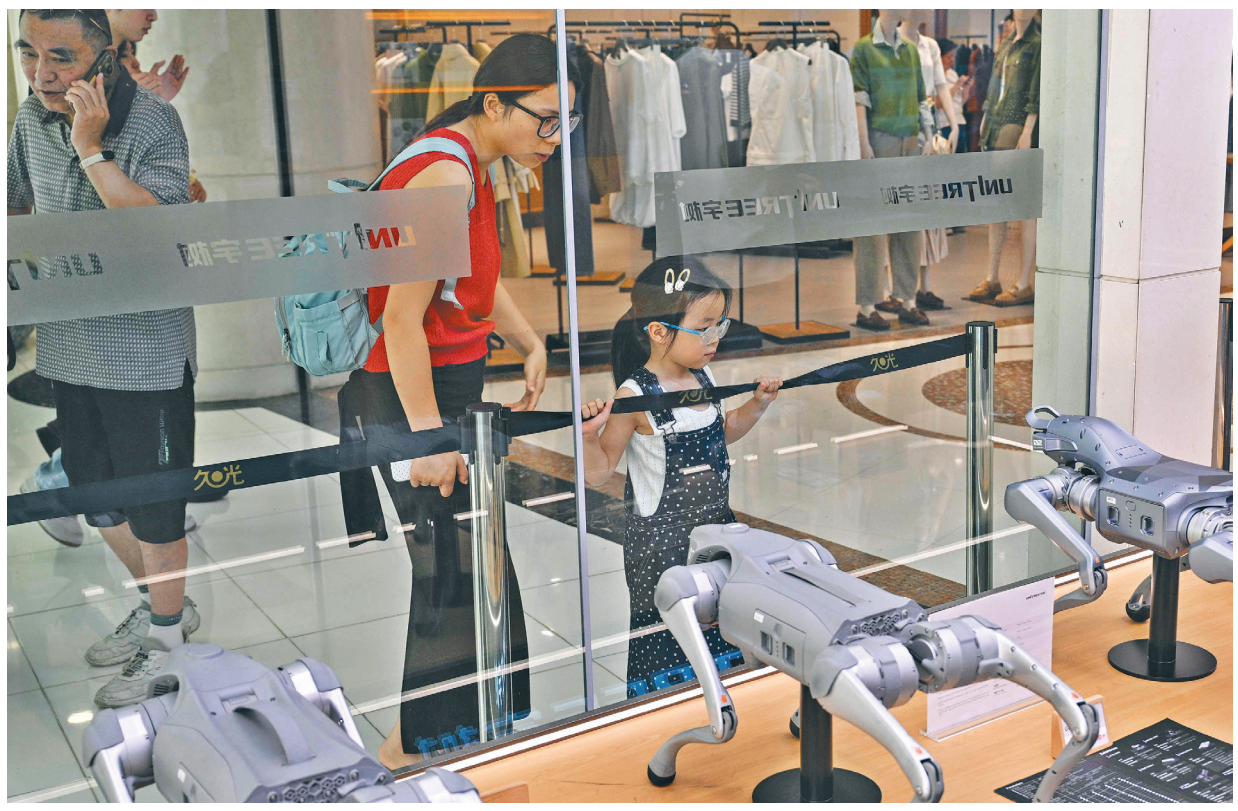
AFP did not see many "students" when visiting earlier this month, but the size of the training room was a clear statement of intent.

Companies enrol robots, who are evaluated and given training tailored to their "future role in the workplace".

The school will issue qualifications confirming a machine's ability to do a specific role—"much like a human's graduation certificate", said Zhao.

Robots are popping up more in everyday life in China, with trial jobs including directing traffic, cleaning houses or working on factory floors.

Aside from hardware issues, large-scale deployment requires gathering huge amounts of data—the real-world equivalent of the online content large language models train on.



AFP/RSS

People look at a remote-controlled robot by Unitree Robotics while visiting the Unitree Robotics Embodied Intelligence Experience Center in the Jing'an district in Shanghai on Wednesday. Unitree shares soared more than 600 percent on their debut.

Trump pauses 50 percent tariffs on Canadian goods for three days

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON, AUG 19

US President Donald Trump paused the planned rollout of punishing new tariffs on Canadian goods late Tuesday, as both sides indicated they were close to a broader trade agreement after weeks of talks.

Trump announced the three-day reprieve from 50-percent duties on select goods just hours before a midnight deadline.

The delay was "based on the fact that Canada and the U.S.A., subject to the finalization of documents, have a DEAL!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney was less definitive, saying "substantial progress has been made" towards a comprehensive trade deal, but "there is important work still to be done."

Ottawa and Washington have held intense negotiations on revising their existing deal, the United States-Canada-Mexico Agreement (USMCA), which Trump signed and praised during his first term but now says needs to change. The US Trade Representative's office said on X that the pact between Washington and Ottawa is set to "include comprehensive market access for all American goods, economic security commitments, digital trade alignment" and other provisions.

A proclamation by Trump to pause the duties added that the suspension came about as "Canada has expressed a commitment to remove the discriminations or unreasonable and unequal impositions at issue."

Carney said the prospective deal aims to "address outstanding trade issues and deliver greater certainty and real benefits for Canadian businesses, workers, farmers and families."

North Korean shrugs off Trump's scaled-back drills with South Korea, saying it changes nothing

HYUNG-JIN KIM/AP
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, AUG 19

North Korea said on Wednesday that a US decision to scale back military exercises with South Korea does not change what it sees as their provocative nature, dampening hopes for a resumption of diplomacy between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump.

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made the comments on Wednesday night in her country's first reaction to Trump's moves to drastically cut back the annual US-South Korean military drills. "We think it's not worth making comments on that and we have no any interest in it," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. "The provocative, aggressive nature of the drills won't change even though their duration and size were reduced."

Her statement came hours after the South Korean and US militaries confirmed Wednesday they were significantly scaling back major joint drills, days after Trump ordered the reduction in an apparent bid to reengage with Kim Jong Un.

Trump ordered the Pentagon to "substantially reduce" the allies' summertime Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, just before they began Monday for an 11-day run. Trump cited what he said was a good relationship with Kim and South Korea's refusal to support him over Iran.

South Korean officials said Trump's surprise announcement came without prior notice, baffling many people in the Asian country and raising concerns about joint defence readiness.

South Korea's military said on Wednesday the allies agreed to adjust the duration and scale of the exercises at the request of the US.

It said the ongoing drills would end on Friday, not August 27 as initially planned. It added the allies also agreed to downsize some joint field training exercises. The Pentagon said that it was "continuing training that enhances tactical capability" but certain events have been cancelled or converted to simulations. "These adjustments preserve essential readiness and training objectives. There will be no degradation to US training objectives," a Pentagon statement said.

Shortening of drills raises worries about military readiness

Many experts say Trump's move threatens to hurt the combined US-South Korean defence posture and eventually weaken their decades-long alliance. A reduction or suspension of military drills matters because military commanders change periodically. A one-year suspension of drills would mean commanders unfamiliar with the procedures of the drills would be taking part when they resume, according to Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Ulchi Freedom Shield is largely a computer-simulated command post exercise meant to hone the allies' ability to deal with potential North Korean aggression. The two countries usually hold a set of field training exercises during the command post exercise period. The drills and a similar springtime exercise are a central pillar of the US-South Korea alliance, which dates to the 1950-53 Korean War. But it's also a long-running source of tensions with North Korea, which has denounced the exercises as a rehearsal for an invasion and responded with provocative missile tests. Days before this month's drills began, North Korea launched two ballistic missiles into the sea.

This month's drills were initially supposed to be held in two phases in simulation of North Korean attacks—the first part until this Friday on defensive operations and the second part until August 27 on counteroffensive operations.

North Korea is extremely sensitive to counteroffensive drills, according to South Korean media.

North Korea lambasts US-South Korea drills and vows responses

Earlier on Wednesday, North Korea's state news agency, KCNA, published a commentary slamming the US-South Korean military drills as "frantic" and "extremely dangerous" and vowing to completely frustrate its rivals' hostilities. "The dangerous escalation of the war drills staged by the US and its vassal forces is posing a more serious threat to the security" of North Korea, the commentary said. "Our exercise of right to self-defense will continue to completely neutralise the enemies' military threat."

Many experts said Kim, now emboldened by his advancing nuclear program and expanding military cooperation with Russia, won't likely embrace Trump's overture and return to talks anytime soon unless he's promised bigger concessions.

AP/RSS

US President Donald Trump (right) meets with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Sentosa Island in Singapore, on June 12, 2018.

ICC says US sanctions 'flagrant attack' on court independence

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
THE HAGUE, AUG 19

The International Criminal Court on Wednesday lashed out at the United States after Washington slapped sanctions on ICC President Tomoko Akane, calling it a "flagrant attack" on the court's independence.

The US sanctioned Akane of Japan and trial lawyer Abdoulaye Seye of Senegal on Tuesday, as part of Washington's campaign against what it calls a "corrupt and fatally politicised" body.

The EU's top officials immediately threw their support behind Akane, saying they "stand firmly" with the ICC president and her top officials.

In twin statements on X, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and European Council head Antonio Costa the court "must be able to act independently and without external pressure."

Germany echoed the stance, with its foreign ministry calling the court's independence "of central importance"; while the Netherlands, which hosts the court at The Hague, also voiced its disapproval.

The court said in a statement: "These sanctions are a flagrant attack against the independence of an impartial judicial institution."

"Such measures targeting judges, prosecutors and staff... undermine the rule of law," it added.

Washington's latest move follows sanctions it imposed on several ICC officials, seen as largely in response to the court's investigations involving Israel, a US ally.

Japan also objected to the sanctions, saying the country has "consistently supported the ICC... in its efforts to prosecute and punish the most serious crimes of concern to the international community and to uphold the rule of law."

AFP/RSS

Japanese Judge Tomoko Akane, president of the International Criminal Court, delivers a speech during a press conference at the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo on June 14.

The measures are "very unfortunate," foreign ministry press secretary Toshihiro Kitamura said in a statement.

Japan is the biggest funder of the ICC and a close US ally—which is not a party to the international treaty that established the court.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier said in a statement, without providing examples, that the sanctioned "individuals have directly engaged in efforts by the ICC to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute officials whose government has not consented to ICC jurisdiction".

Established in 2002, the ICC prosecutes individuals accused of the gravest atrocities and acts as a last resort when countries do not have adequate legal systems to ensure accountability.

Israeli support

President Donald Trump's administration has already imposed sanctions against officials of the ICC, which issued in 2024 an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the war in Gaza.

The measures bar them from entering the US and from carrying out transactions in the US financial system.

In an X post on Tuesday, Netanyahu applauded the US sanctions and called the ICC "a kangaroo court that cloaks its abuse of power in the language of international law".

Last month, Washington launched a major diplomatic offensive against the ICC, accusing it of "threatening" Americans and calling on partners to withdraw from the body—a move already announced by Chad and Venezuela, which has aligned with the United States since the capture and ouster of leader Nicolas Maduro.

The ICC expressed concern over those withdrawals, asserting that such countries risked undermining the collective pursuit of justice.

'Assault'

The US signed the Rome Statute establishing the ICC but never ratified the treaty. Israel, Russia and China are not ICC members either.

"The Trump Administration has been clear: the International Criminal Court is a corrupt and fatally politicised supranational court that has maliciously abused its authority and exceeded its mandate. We will not tolerate its assault on state sovereignty," Rubio's statement said.

Last week, four human rights groups sued Trump in a New York court over his sanctions targeting the ICC, saying the measures block victims of war crimes from pursuing justice.

In 2023, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin over the war in Ukraine, prompting Moscow to issue its own arrest warrants for senior court officials.

These included Akane, 70, an ICC judge since 2018 who was elected as the court's president in March 2024.

"Even if one judge were to die, we are easily replaceable, so there is really no value in targeting us," she said after the Russian announcement.

Indian hotel fire kills nine, including five Bangladeshi nationals

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KOLKATA, AUG 19

A fire ripped through a hotel in the Indian city of Kolkata on Wednesday, killing nine people, including five Bangladeshi nationals who were seeking medical care, officials said.

"Nine people were killed, including a child, in the fire that broke out early on Wednesday," Anuj Sharma, the fire services director of West Bengal state, told AFP. "Thick smoke enveloped the hotel. Some victims were found in the bathrooms."

Building fires are common in India due to a lack of firefighting equipment and routine disregard for safety regulations.

The Kolkata blaze came only two days after eight people were killed in another hotel fire in West Bengal's holy town of Tarapith, where Hindu devotees had gathered for the sacred month of Shravan.

Sharma said preliminary information suggested an air conditioner at the budget Shika Inn hotel in Kolkata, the West Bengal capital, may have exploded and caused the blaze, Sharma said.

Bangladesh's deputy high commission in Kolkata said Indian authorities told them that five of those killed were Bangladeshi nationals.

China goes rural with data centres in quest to power AI

AGATHA CANTRILL
GUIAN NEW AREA, CHINA, AUG 19

In China's hilly Guizhou province, a cluster of European-style buildings complete with clock tower and multi-arched bridge emits a low, permanent hum—a clue to its unexpected identity as tech giant Huawei's largest data centre.

The town-like complex is unique in design, but not in its placement. Dozens of data centres have been constructed in the southwestern province in recent years.

They are part of a government strategy that has seen much of the digital infrastructure for breakneck AI development across China's eastern seaboard established in the country's less populated, rural west.

The build-out is ongoing. China is on course to nearly double its data centre capacity within the next five years, as a tech race with the United States intensifies and countries everywhere try to swerve a computing crunch that could stymie AI expansion. The projects have transformed some places—such as Guian New Area, where the Huawei data centre and others are located.

"It used to be a barren mountain, but since the area has developed, transportation has become more convenient, trade has picked up, business opportunities have emerged," local shopkeeper Shu Peihua said.

When AFP visited last month, street vendors were catering to data centre workers on their lunchbreak near a roadside banner calling for "promoting high-quality development", a government tech policy catchphrase.

In Europe and the United States, data centre construction has often been met with resistance from local communities citing concerns around energy prices, as well as environmental issues such as water usage and noise. Dissent in China is tightly controlled, however, especially around central government policy.

Still, Guian residents who spoke to AFP were positive about the changes to their area.

A vendor selling savoury pancakes, who did not give his name, said two universities had been established since the facilities were built. Another local, Li Xixiu, said the main road had been developed because of the centres, which in general had "really boosted the economy of this entire area".

"All the villagers in our neighbourhood now find jobs nearby, unlike before, when they had to go to other places," Li said.

In 2021, the government gave its strategy a name: "Eastern Data Western Computing".

The logic of construction in places like Guizhou, with its cooler climates, abundant renewable energy and empty space, is multifaceted.

AI processing is extremely energy intensive, and China has demanded that data centres draw 80 percent of their power from renewable sources by the end of this decade.

UAE suspends trade with Iran after coming under renewed missile fire

DAVID RISING/AP
DUBAI, UAE, AUG 19

The United Arab Emirates suspended all trade with Iran on Wednesday after the UAE said it had come under renewed fire from the country—a move that will further isolate the Islamic Republic, which is suffering under US sanctions and a blockade.

Incoming ballistic missile fire triggered nationwide warnings on Tuesday night for UAE residents to seek shelter, the first time in weeks such an alarm had sounded.

Early in the conflict, the UAE regularly came under intense fire from Iran, and most trade between the countries, which had once been important trading partners, ground to a halt. In late June, as hostilities eased, some maritime trade resumed, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Beyond the trade in domestically produced goods, "the UAE has been very important for Iran as a re-export hub and has helped the country absorb some of the shocks caused by sanctions," Mohammad Farzanegan, a professor of Middle Eastern economics at Germany's University of Marburg, told The Associated Press. "Iran therefore depends heavily on the UAE, not because the UAE itself produces one-third of Iran's imports, but because it serves as a major gateway for Iran to access third-country goods and commercial infrastructure."

The UAE accuses Iran of firing missiles. Tehran denies it

Following the announcement that two ballistic missiles had been fired toward the UAE, both of which splashed down in the Persian Gulf late Tuesday, the Emirati foreign ministry said it decided to impose the punitive measures, while also saying it remained committed to "dialogue, cooperation and regional integration."

The step halted all trade and financial transactions "until further notice", the ministry said in a statement. The UAE defence ministry said assessments showed that the missiles targeted maritime traffic. It was not clear whether they targeted Emirati ships or the country's territorial waters. Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei denied that Iran had launched any missiles toward the UAE.

As part of Iran's efforts to maintain a stranglehold over the Strait of Hormuz, it has regularly attacked ships attempting to use the waterway, including four tankers owned by Abu Dhabi's state-owned ADNOC oil and gas company over the past two weeks.

None of the attacks caused injuries, but they brought harsh condemnation from the UAE and others in the region, including Kuwait and Bahrain.

Since the beginning of the conflict, nearly 20 ADNOC vessels have been attacked by missiles and drones in the Strait of Hormuz, killing one person and wounding another 20.

Iran's ability to control traffic through the strait has proved its biggest strategic advantage in the war.

Once shaped by court rituals, China's imperial cuisine lives on today

MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ/AP
BEIJING, AUG 19

It is said that Empress Dowager Cixi once dreamed of a pastry during the final decades of imperial China.

The same treat was served to her at breakfast the following morning. Delighted, she summoned her chef and rewarded him with a silver ingot.

"It was originally called 'minced pork pancake,' but because it had fulfilled her dream, it later became known as 'dream pastry,'" said Zhou Tong, a chef at Fangshan Restaurant in Beijing.

Fangshan specialises in imperial cuisine, preserving dishes like the one associated with Cixi and other culinary traditions from China's imperial court. The restaurant was founded in 1925 by former chefs from the Qing Dynasty at Beihai Park, a garden where royals from several dynasties rested, handled government affairs and performed ritual sacrifices.

"The name Fangshan literally means 'imitating the imperial cuisine,'" said assistant general manager Di Xin.

A handful of other Beijing restaurants also serve versions of imperial cuisine, while the Palace Museum preserves Qing-dynasty objects tied to court dining, including pastry molds.

Every meal comes with its own rules

Imperial cuisine encompasses the meals emperors ate daily and the feasts their courts held throughout the year.

Each had its own rituals. Drinking milk tea, for instance, was an important first step at Qing-dynasty banquets, said Teng Deyong, a researcher at China's Palace Museum.

During the banquet, the emperor bestowed wine or food on princes and officials. Recipients performed rites and paid their respects to him before they ate or drank.

Aside from banquets, sacrificial rituals were held. They followed a separate system and could involve meat offerings.

"At the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity, there was the eating of sacrificial pork, which we know was one of the most important rituals of the Qing imperial court," Teng said.

In that ritual, fatty pork was boiled without salt. After the ceremony, it was distributed among guests, and receiving the sacrificial meat was considered a great honour.

Unseasoned food also appears in earlier Chinese ritual traditions. Wandi Wang, a professor of Chinese at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, said the "Book of Rites," a classical work on rites and ceremonies, describes a meat broth known as "grand stew" that was served without seasoning during sacrificial ceremonies.

"The absence of added flavouring was itself meaningful: the unseasoned dish evoked an earlier and simpler way of cooking and thus expressed a ritual ideal of honouring antiquity and remembering cultural origins," Wang said.

Traditional techniques keep imperial pastry-making alive

Pastries were key to imperial cuisine, and the court had an institution specialised in making them.

Sweets made at Fangshan by Zhou include Cixi's dream pastry and a small steamed corn bun. Their recipes are rooted in the imperial court.

"When customers visit, our servers often tell them the stories behind these dishes," Zhou said. "People enjoy them even more because they carry such meaningful history."

He learned his pastry-making technique from a master who had also learned from a mentor. It's a craft that has been passed from one generation to the next.

Traditional imperial methods mean cooking must be done by hand — no blenders or food processors are allowed. Ingredients like beans are pulverized using sieves and certain flours are handled in custom-made copper pots.

"A machine may be more convenient, but the texture is completely different," Zhou said.

"You lose the delicate graininess and sandy mouthfeel that handcrafted pastries are supposed to have."

Among Fangshan's bestselling delicacies are the pea flour cake and the red bean roll. During the busy season, customers order more than 200 of the cakes per day.

AP/RSS

Chef Fan Liangliang demonstrates making a dish at Fangshan Restaurant inside Beihai Park in Beijing on July 23.

Balancing ancient cooking methods with a changing world

When he joined Fangshan as a kitchen apprentice, now-executive chef Fan Liangliang had to relearn everything he was taught at culinary school. Rather than employing techniques that allowed him to work quickly, he embraced slower processes he had never heard of.

One of them is "Nizihuo," which Fan said involves mincing ingredients such as fish, shrimp or chicken into a smooth paste. It is then reshaped into decorative forms such as frogs, birds and flowers.

"This is one of the hallmarks of imperial cuisine," Fan said.

"Every dish had to be innovative, visually beautiful, nutritious and worthy of presentation on the imperial dining table."

Rare ingredients such as bear paws are no longer served. Fan said adaptations are made to retain the spirit of each dish.

No basic diet for young ANFA athletes

With the government ordering the suspended national football body to halt financial transactions, the young athletes are forced to rely on little more than plain rice and biscuits.

SABINA KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUG 19

On Wednesday morning, 19 children were having lunch—the humble dal-bhat-tarkari—in the dining hall of the hostel operated by the All Nepal Football Association in Satdobato, Lalitpur.

"We used to provide them with meat daily," said Hira Pant, ANFA's hostel in-charge. "Now, these children have to go to their school and sleep after eating only rice and lentils, not even vegetables."

For the young academy players, the ANFA Complex in Lalitpur was supposed to be a place of refuge and recovery. The 19 children were relocated here two months ago, carrying the trauma of a tragedy that shook Nepali sports.

Until September 28, 2024, they had been living at the football academy in Sisneri, Makawanpur. That fateful day, six of their friends died in a landslide while fleeing their hostel building out of fear of rising floodwaters as the Kulekhani dam opened following heavy rain. The children were then relocated to Hetauda before they were brought to Satdobato.

While the six deceased children's families are still awaiting a proper probe into the incident, those who survived want to carry their friends' dreams as well. But they find themselves in a difficult situation, as there is not even a proper diet to sustain them.

"The breakfast menu had items like milk, eggs, cornflakes, muesli and sausage, among other protein-rich items," Pant said. "The menu has been stripped down to black tea and plain biscuits for almost a month now."

Why are children who were selected from across the country through ANFA's grassroots programme being treated like this?

ANFA officials say the problem is a result of the FIFA suspension and the directive of the National Sports Council not to use their bank accounts for "any" purpose. "Following the suspension, the National Sports Council issued a directive, instructing us to halt all activities and financial transactions," said Suresh Shah, ANFA's spokesperson. "As a result, our usual vendors—including suppliers like Salesberry—have stopped providing goods on credit."

Alongside the 19 children, the hostel houses national team players recovering from injuries sustained in Bhutan.

Kantipur reached the ANFA Complex again in the evening, after the students returned from their school. The young athletes looked far from energetic. They needed permission to speak, but they all looked confused, probably questioning themselves of their choices.

Having already endured the trauma of losing six of their peers in the Sisneri landslide, being undernourished in a place meant to nurture their dreams has left a visible toll on them. With their daily routine stripped of basic athletic nutrition and their futures caught in an administrative gridlock between ANFA, the NSC and FIFA, the young players are left navigating an uncertainty far bigger than football.

So, how long does ANFA plan to let the children suffer?

"You would be better off directing this question to the government, because the answers lie with them," Shah, the ANFA spokesperson, said. "In truth, ANFA has no leverage or control over the situation right now."

Shah added that they are still fulfilling their duties by preparing for the U15 World Cup qualifiers. "We believe the government recognises the urgency," he said. "Our understanding is that once the suspension is lifted, operations will resume in full force."

Shah added that ANFA officials and executive members have been paying out of their pockets to buy the basic food and other items. "We have started buying from some other shops on credit," Shah said. "We are even paying for water, which costs around Rs2,000 a tanker, every day."

It is not only the children who have been affected. Pant, her employees, security guards and other officials have also been working without salary for a couple of months.

Amid this, Pant is handling the situation with quiet resignation. "We are continuing our work only to ensure that these children are not left abandoned," she said.

POST PHOTOS

(Top) ANFA Academy players head to school on Wednesday. (Below) Players at their hostel in Satdobato, Lalitpur, have their lunch before heading to school on Wednesday morning.

Aston Villa sign Japan goalie Suzuki, Crystal Palace bring US teenager Gozo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, AUG 19

Aston Villa signed US-born Japan goalkeeper Zion Suzuki from Parma on Wednesday, a transfer that raises doubts about the future of Argentina international Emi Martinez at the Premier League club heading into the new season.

The 23-year-old Suzuki, who was Japan's goalkeeper at the World Cup this summer and made a memorable save onto the post from Brazil star Vinícius Júnior's shot, moved in a deal worth up to 35 million euros ($40 million), The Athletic reported.

Martinez, Argentina's World Cup-winning goalie in 2022, has been first choice for Villa for six years but has been close to leaving for the past two offseasons. Juventus reportedly tried to sign him in recent weeks and Martinez wasn't involved in the UEFA Super Cup loss to Paris Saint-Germain last week.

Suzuki was born in New Jersey, grew up in Urawa, Japan, and moved to Belgium to play for Sint-Truiden in 2023 before joining Parma the following year. Villa won the Europa League last season and also finished fourth in the Premier League, so will play in the Champions League this season.

Palace sign US teenager Gozo

Crystal Palace added to their squad for another European campaign by signing United States youth international Zavier Gozo in a club record sale for Real Salt Lake.

The Conference League titleholder signed the 19-year-old winger to a five-year contract late Monday. The transfer fee was reportedly $15 million.

Real Salt Lake said in a statement they will "retain a significant percentage of any future transfer fee for Gozo," who they said was the first Utah native to join a Premier League club. Palace start the Premier League at Everton on Saturday and will play in the second-tier Europa League. UEFA makes the league phase draw in Monaco next week.

Ruggeri joins as Digne replacement

With Lucas Digne joining Paris Saint-Germain this offseason, Villa were in the market for a new left back and found one in Matteo Ruggeri.

The 24-year-old Italian joined from Atlético Madrid, having previously played for Atalanta—where he won the Europa League. Ruggeri has represented Italy at youth levels but hasn't played for the senior team. He will compete with Ian Maatsen for the left back berth. Villa's first Premier League match is at Brighton on Sunday.

David promised to Brighton

After scoring at the World Cup for Canada, forward Promise David is moving to Brighton on loan from Union Saint-Gilloise. Brighton said the deal for the 25-year-old David "includes an obligation to buy should certain criteria be met." He played in four of co-host Canada's games at the World Cup and scored in a 2-1 loss to Switzerland in the group stage.

Belgian league runner-up Union were eliminated in the Champions League qualifying rounds last week, against Bodø/Glimt, and will play in the Europa League where their expected prize money drops by tens of millions of euros. Brighton and Union have close ties through their owners and share player data analysis by Jamestown Analytics. The data firm founded by Brighton owner Tony Bloom is renowned in European football and also used by Como and Heart of Midlothian. Brighton are in the third-tier Conference League this season and have a first-leg game on Thursday in the qualifying playoffs at Tromsø in Norway.

World Cup veteran Elvedi to Leeds

Leeds got a solid defensive addition by signing Switzerland veteran Nico Elvedi from Borussia Mönchengladbach for a reported 8 million euros ($9.3 million). Elvedi has been to the past three World Cups and played every minute of Switzerland's six-game run to the quarterfinals, ended by a hard-luck loss against Argentina last month.

The 29-year-old centre back spent 11 years at Gladbach where he played under Leeds coach Daniel Farke in the 2022-23 season. Elvedi joins a Leeds squad looking to build on a solid first season back in the Premier League when the club owned by the San Francisco 49ers also reached the FA Cup semi-finals.

FILE PHOTO: AP/RSS

Japan goalkeeper Zion Suzuki makes a save during the World Cup round of 32 match against Brazil in Houston on June 29.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
The fire within you is raging today, Aries, and you should be careful how you wield this power. Be proud and triumphant. Walk with your shoulders back and head high. Freedom is important.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
There may be a great deal of fuss over something that seems quite insignificant to you. Try to see the beauty and importance of everything around you. At the same time, make sure you give yourself enough credit for being the person you are.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Things are coming to a critical point for you today, Gemini, and you may find that other people openly object to your actions. It's OK to be a bit selfish if the situation is appropriate.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Feel free to speak more loudly today, Cancer. You'll find that things fall into place more easily if you speak your thoughts outwardly and directly in the presence of others.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
You should bask in a glorious splendor today, Leo. There's a great deal of power at your disposal. You'll find your ego is healthy, charged, and ready for the battlefield.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Add more sunshine to your day, Virgo. It may be time to stir up your inner passion and let it speak with greater confidence than you have been lately. Make sure you heal yourself.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
You'll find that your spark can easily turn potential energy into kinetic energy, Libra. Don't underestimate the power of your words. Realise the profound impact they have on others and take responsibility for their consequences.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Don't dwell on your fluctuating moods today, Scorpio. Look at the larger trends and how positive elements are coming together in your favor. Stay optimistic and remember that you were put here for a reason.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
This is your day to shine in all your glory, Sagittarius. There's no need to hold anything back. You'll find that you have a great deal of love to share. Your heart is likely to go to extremes today in order to prove its love.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Try not to lose sight of your own projects or desires, Capricorn. There's a great deal of power and manipulative energy in the air today that could throw you off course if you aren't careful.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Recharge today by getting outside and stretching your arms to the sky, Aquarius. Be proud and courageous. You have the power to turn an unhealthy situation into a positive one.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Difficult predicaments could arise today if you try to exert your will over others without having the most honorable intentions, Pisces. It could be that you're using someone else's fear of you to control him or her.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Speedy
5 Stone fruits
10 Tranquil
14 Freshly
15 Kidney-related
16 — vera
17 Heart
18 Banishment
19 State near Wisc.
20 Glorifies
22 Enticed
24 Pay-per- —
26 Simian creatures
27 South Dakota's capital
29 Pole for walking tall
32 Jogged
33 Escape
36 Churns
38 "Cogito — sum"
40 Vices
42 Send out
43 Hurricane
45 Glowing coal
47 Very cold
48 Step
50 Drug that induces sleep
52 Decorate
54 Stinging insect
55 Fill
58 Loud sound
62 Repeat
63 Ne plus —
66 Gen. Robert — —
67 "— Brockovich"
68 Concerning
69 Woeful cry
70 Soldier's meal
71 Grand
72 L.A. team

DOWN
1 Visage
2 As strong as — —
3 Animal fluids
4 Dozen
5 Maintain
6 Supervillain — Luthor
7 Single (Prefix)
8 Mediterranean island
9 Dozes
10 Where to pitch a tent
11 Dismounted
12 Only
13 Repair
21 Retread
23 New York team
25 Interlace
27 Component pieces
28 Metal mass
30 Restriction
31 Very short time
32 Domicile (Abbr.)
34 Dark
35 Pasta shape
37 Piggery
39 Formal speeches
41 Divide
44 Actress — Sorvino
46 Gentle hill
49 Ceremony
51 Come into view
53 — toast
55 Look to be
56 "God's Little —"
57 "— too shall pass"
59 Stew pot
60 500 sheets
61 Hardy heroine
64 Rocky hill
65 Carpet

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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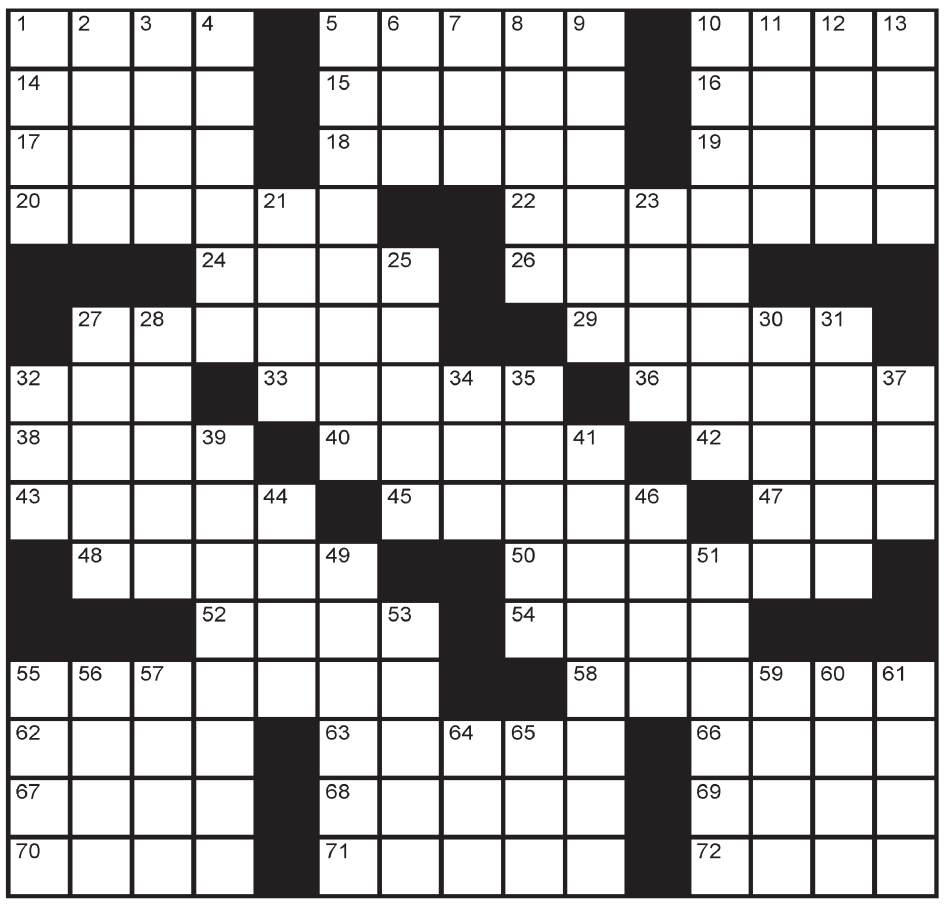

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6	9	1	5	3	4	7	8	2
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No.SC6107 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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No.SC6108 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

(C.R.P.D.) - 3/052/053

Reading through memories of Nepal's political past

Dharma Gautam looks back on his years in exile, his friendship with BP Koirala, and his new book 'BP Ra Bidrohka Ti Din'.

Dharma Gautam is a writer and political observer who was part of Nepal's political movement during the Panchayat era, fighting for a multiparty system and advocating for civilians' rights. He spent time in exile in India, where he began to read extensively and study journalism.

Gautam recently published his first book, 'BP Ra Bidrohka Ti Din', which draws on his memories of Nepal's political struggles and his experiences during exile. The book is prepared from memories and materials he had preserved over the years, following encouragement from friends and family.

The P*ost*'s **Shrinkhala Chand Thakuri** sat with Gautam to talk about writing, memory, BP Koirala, politics, and books.

How did you get into writing?

Since I was in politics, I wanted to keep up with national and international events and developments. While in college, I regularly listened to foreign radio stations and read any newspapers and magazines I could find.

It was the Panchayat era, so there was no press freedom in Nepal. I regularly read Hindi-language magazines such as 'Dinman', 'Dharmyug', 'Kadambini', 'Navneet' and 'Madhuri'. When these magazines arrived in Ilam, the shopkeepers would first have them censored at the Chief District Officer's office before putting them up for sale.

After I went into exile in India, I started reading books from different fields. BP himself would give us books and suggest what we should read. Sometimes he would also give us what felt like critical reviews of books he had read.

I also began studying journalism while I was there. BP used to say that newspapers and magazines had a major role in politics.

After returning to Nepal, I began writing about contemporary issues for newspapers. Sometimes a book would affect me, and I would write about it. After the restoration of democracy, I could write openly about political issues. I also wrote about my life in exile and BP's ideas. Readers seemed to enjoy those pieces, so I continued writing.

I regret not collecting and preserving those writings. Once I began writing regular newspaper columns, I felt compelled to keep writing. I was also requested to contribute pieces for publications, commemorative issues, and memoir collections.

These days, I read and write more slowly because of my age. But I don't find it difficult to write about subjects I know well. I think my language is also quite simple.

What was it like to revisit the memories you write about in 'BP Ra Bidrohka Ti Din'?

I prepared this book less out of ambition and more because of pressure from friends and family. Along with that, personally, after last year's Gen-Z movement, I felt that the new generation should also know the stories of earlier political struggles.

BOOK TALK

Most of my experiences have already faded from memory. I dived deep into my fading memory and some of the material I had preserved on my computer, then prepared the book with some basic editing.

Reading it made me feel like I was going back in time.

You lived through a very different political Nepal. When you look at young people and politics today, what feels familiar to you?

The struggles are different, but I think there is still an important connection between young people and political change. That is one reason I felt the stories of our generation should be made available to younger people.

You knew BP Koirala personally. What do you remember about him that you don't often see in accounts of his life?

BP was not only one of the greatest Nepali revolutionaries of our time but also a philosophical thinker.

His socialist thinking was distinctive in the Nepali context. It brought together democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and economic equality. He also had immense compassion for human beings.

He also had a global outlook on politics. Some of his predictions about world events have come true. Whenever I read his books, such as 'Aatmabrittanta', I feel that I discover a new meaning in them.

BP also encouraged you to read. How did he influence your reading habits?

BP placed great importance on reading in the development of his personality. He would always complain to us, saying, "You are lazy about reading."

It doesn't matter what one reads unless they keep reading. Today, it is not difficult to find material on the subject you are interested in.

You said that you would like to work on BP Koirala's political thought and philosophy. What aspect of his ideas do you think deserves more attention today?

I would like to work on BP's political thought and philosophy if I can. His ideas about democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and economic equality remain important.

Five books you think everyone should read?

Reading depends on the individual's interests, and the choice of books should also be based on that. For someone interested in politics, I think BP Koirala's writings are essential.

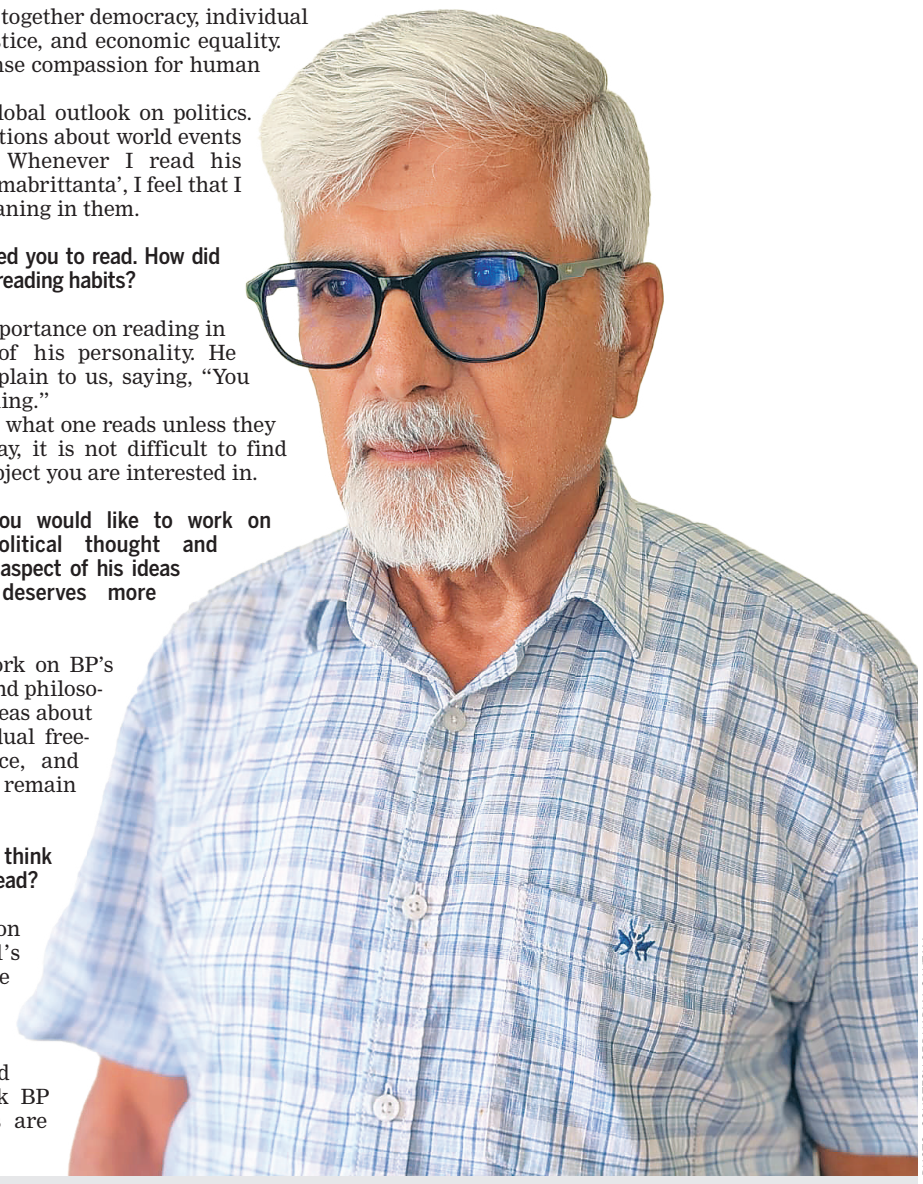
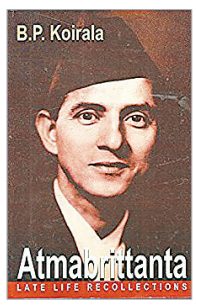


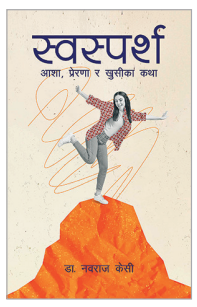
PHOTO: COURTESY OF DHARMA GAUTAM

Dharma Gautam's five book recommendations



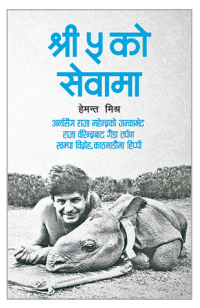
Atmabrittanta
Author: BP Koirala
Publisher: Himal Books
Year: 2001

It contains BP Koirala's experiences throughout his life.



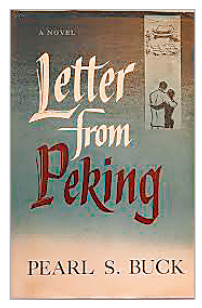
Swasparsha
Author: Dr Navaraj KC
Publisher: Fineprint Books
Year: 2025

'Swasparsha' shows how much a doctor can do for society.



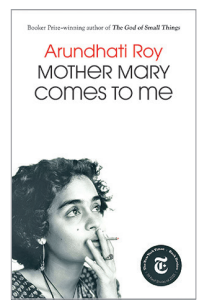
Shree 5 ko Sewama
Author: Hemanta Mishra
Publisher: Fineprint Books
Year: 2024

The book details Mishra's experiences working in wildlife conservation.



Letter from Peking
Author: Pearl S Buck
Publisher: John Day Company
Year: 1957

This was the first book I read in Grade 8, and it sparked my interest in reading.



Mother Mary Comes to Me
Author: Arundhati Roy
Publisher: Hamish Hamilton
Year: 2025

Arundhati Roy's mother's fight for her daughter's right to inherit property is inspiring.

Call for contributions

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

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

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

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

Journey prepares for what could be rockers' final tour together

The iconic rock band is heading back to San Francisco for the finale of a tour, though members aren't ready to call it an ending.

MARK KENNEDY

The long, riding road once more beckons for the members of iconic rock band Journey. Is it the band's final journey together?

The last leg of what is being billed as their farewell tour kicks off in September in Los Angeles and what likely will be an emotional homecoming is at the end of it — in San Francisco in November.

"I'm sure it's going to be somewhat emotional because that's where it all started," says co-founder and lead guitarist Neal Schon. "I know the audience is going to be off the hook."

The band has plenty of dates before that finale, with stops in Phoenix, Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, Nashville, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit, Boston, Cleveland, Denver and Las Vegas, among others.

The tour's last show in San Francisco will cap more than 100 concerts this year, and the band frequently plays for more than two hours, adding deep cuts — like the spacy, melodic 'Of a Lifetime' from the early '70s and songs from the album 'Raised on Radio' from the '80s — to the reliable hits, like 'Faithfully.'

"I'm loving it because it's the type of show I've been wanting to do with Journey," says Schon, who is frustrated when the band is lumped in with other '80s bands like REO Speedwagon, Styx or Foreigner.

"I always felt like even though all those bands have contributed something that a lot of people like, we were much different. I thought musically we could go any place that we wanted to. And so now we're doing that, finally."

Expect hits and album tunes alike

Journey has had six Top 10 hits on the Billboard singles chart — including 'Open Arms' and 'Who's Crying Now' — and eight albums in the Top 10 of the Billboard 200, including the 1981 No. 1 'Escape'.

Fans can expect to hear those hits as well as Journey's enduring anthem, 'Don't Stop Believin,' which Schon wrote with keyboardist Jonathan Cain and then-lead singer Steve Perry.

It has shown up in the Broadway show 'Rock of Ages,' the cut-to-black finale of 'The Sopranos,' the TV show 'Glee,' Brad Pitt's "Moneyball," the movie 'Monster' and the Democratic National Convention roll call in 2024. Journey returns to the road this fall after a summer in which "Don't Stop Believin'" was heard at the World Cup and as the New York Knicks won the NBA crown.

"'Don't Stop Believin'' has surpassed our expectations," says Cain. "Every band wishes they had one and we have one. So, I guess that's our 'Hey Jude' calling card. So we'll take it."

In addition to Schon and Cain, the current Journey lineup includes singer Arnel Pineda, keyboardist Jason Derlatka, drummer Deen Castronovo and bassist Todd Jensen. Cain, Derlatka and Castronovo pick up the mic to give Pineda a break on some songs.

Band members say they look out and see five generations attending their shows. "I like to say Journey is certain music in uncertain times," Cain says. "Journey is a soundtrack to a lot of people's lives."

AP/RSS

Neal Schon, of Journey, performs in Canton, Ohio, on August 6, 2022.

Future is uncertain for band members

The band, born in San Francisco in the days of vinyl, have endured through huge changes in the music business — CDs, Napster, digital and streaming. Schon, who cut his teeth playing with Carlos Santana, remembers Journey in the early days opening for Kiss, Jeff Beck and Cheech and Chong

> After decades on the road, Journey faces an uncertain future.

Touring seems to be the only way for most bands to make any money since each streaming song earns them a fraction of a penny. Journey has leaned into the tour, sometimes hitting three cities in one day.

"I feel bad for the new generation," says Cain. "I remember when I got a big old fat royalty check and they were playing our songs on the radio and that a new album meant you would sell more tickets. Not so today."

The end point — Nov. 28 at the Chase Center — looms, but the band isn't sure what that night will include. "It'll be fitting to end there for sure," says Cain. "Who knows who's going to show up? I don't know. There might be a reunion of sorts, I hope."

After that, the band isn't certain. "The future kind of remains up in the air really," says Cain. Schon agrees but isn't ready to make predictions.

"I'm not nearly done with what I want to do," he says. "I think there's many great opportunities in the future. Whether or not it's with everybody that's here right now, I'm not certain."

– Associated Press

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