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**VIEWPOINT**  
Arup Rajouria



**FORUM**  
Dr. Prabin Manandhar



**OPINION**  
Hemant Arjyal

# NEW SPOTLIGHT

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August 21, 2026

FORTNIGHTLY

## SHER BAHADUR DEUBA A Defiant Return

### INSIDE



**PM BALEN'S POWER PLAY**  
Rattles Nepal's Banking Sector



**INDIAN COAS SETH'S VISIT**  
Reaffirms Historic Bilateral Ties



**LUMBINI DEVELOPMENT TRUST**  
Caught in Controversy, Falling Behind on Development

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**Notes From The Editor**



With Prime Minister Balendra Shah failing to address key challenges—including economic stagnation and governance reforms—disenchantment with the government is growing across all sectors. Concerns are further heightened by reports that PM Shah's secretariat is exercising extra-constitutional authority to pressure the Nepal Police into filing cases against bankers and business leaders, worsening the country's economic instability. Given PM Shah's current approach to governance, Nepal appears to be heading toward another phase of political uncertainty.

Learning from past missteps, former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba returned to Nepal after a five-month stay in Hong Kong, invoking the slogan of National Reconciliation famously propounded by BP Koirala. Deuba received widespread attention for adopting a position that supports declaring Nepal a Hindu state and leaves room for the restoration of a constitutional monarchy.

After losing significant ground and popular support over recent years due to strategic alliances with communist parties in support of secularism and a republican system, this shifted stance could help reposition the Nepali Congress back toward its traditional democratic roots. Furthermore, it places pressure on the current leadership led by Gagan Thapa to clarify its direction—whether to remain aligned with CPN (Maoist Centre) leader Prachanda or align with the traditional faction represented by Deuba.

This week's cover story details Deuba's high-profile return to Nepali politics. Additionally, this issue covers the strategic significance of the Indian Army Chief's visit to Nepal, as well as an investigation into allegations surrounding PM Shah's secretariat and its actions regarding the NIMB board members.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor

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## KOICA Holds KOV Handover Ceremony

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) organized a Korea Overseas Volunteer (KOV) Handover Ceremony in Lalitpur on August 14, 2026. The event brought together representatives from KOICA, the recipient school, and the newly arrived volunteer.

Following a four-week adaptation training program after her arrival on Eunsil Park has been assigned to Kirtipur Secondary School in Kathmandu as an Early Childhood Development (ECD) volunteer. She will officially begin her one-year service on August 17, 2026.



During the ceremony, Mooheon Kong, Country Director of the KOICA Nepal Office, thanked Kirtipur Secondary School for its warm welcome. He noted that this milestone marks the start of a lasting partnership, expressing hope for a sustainable and impactful collaboration that benefits the school and its students. He also extended his best wishes to Ms. Park for a fulfilling tenure.

The KOV Program aims to share Korean expertise at the grassroots level, improve the quality of life in partner countries, and foster mutual understanding while supporting global development goals.

Since 1990, KOICA has dispatched 500 volunteers to Nepal in response to government requests, contributing to sectors such as education, health, agriculture, IT, and tourism. Currently, 9 volunteers are serving in government institutions across the Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Ilam, Kailali, Kaski, Baglung, and Rupandehi districts.

KOICA reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring all health and safety protocols are strictly followed during the implementation of the KOV program.

## Expansion of Nepal-China Partnership Over Seven Decades : Foreign Secretary Rai

Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai has reiterated Nepal's firm commitment to the One-China principle and its pledge not to allow Nepali territory to be used against China's interests. He said Nepal-China diplomatic relations are based on the principles of Panchsheel, good-neighborliness, mutual partnership and cooperation, equality, and respect for each other's sentiments and sensitivities.

Speaking at a program held here on Thursday to mark the 71st anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and China and the award ceremony of the 2026 Nepal-China Friendship Short Video Competition, Foreign Secretary Rai said the anniversary was "not merely another event on our diplomatic calendar, but a testament to

an enduring relationship."

Over the past seven decades, he said, bilateral relations have evolved from traditional ties and cultural exchanges into a broad partnership aimed at shared prosperity.

According to Rai, high-level visits and exchanges at various levels have added dynamism and vitality to all aspects of Nepal-China relations and further strengthened friendship. He also noted that, alongside bilateral relations, Nepal and China have demonstrated a firm commitment to multilateralism and a rules-based global order, cooperating on matters of common interest through various multilateral forums.

As a good friend and close neighbor, Nepal takes pride in China's remarkable economic development, he said, adding that Nepal wishes to learn from China's experience and deepen its economic cooperation with the growing Chinese economy.

Noting that trade, investment, infrastructure development, tourism, education, culture, and people-to-people relations between Nepal and China have expanded significantly over the past seven decades, Foreign Secretary Rai said Nepal attaches importance to the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network and its swift implementation.

On the occasion, Chinese Ambassador Dr. Zhang Maoming said that since the establishment of diplomatic relations



between the two countries, Nepal and China have continued to respect, trust, and support each other regardless of changes in the international landscape. He described the two countries as good neighbors, good friends, and good partners who stand by each other in both good times and difficult times.

The Chinese ambassador said political mutual trust between Nepal and China has deepened since the formation of Nepal's new government, while high-level Belt and Road cooperation has been moving forward with tangible results.

Ambassador Maoming recalled that Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Nepal in 2019 elevated bilateral relations to the level of a "long-term strategic partnership for development and prosperity."

During the program, prizes and certificates of recognition were presented to the winners of the Nepal-China Friendship Short Video Competition. Dipesh Syangtan won the first prize along with a cash award of Rs. 50,000. Leaders of various political parties, diplomats, businesspeople, and representatives from other sectors were present at the event.

## India Provides Grants for Eight Infrastructure Projects

## NEWSNOTES

### in Nepal

MoUs have been signed for eight High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) in Nepal, covering education, health, and agriculture, funded by grant assistance from the Government of India.

According to a press release from the Embassy of India, the embassy—alongside Nepal's Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, Federal Affairs, and General Administration, and various project implementing agencies—signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) today. The eight projects carry an estimated total cost of NPR 803 million.

The local authorities and institutions of the Government of Nepal will implement the following eight projects:

Digitalization of B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS) in Dharan, Sunsari District (Koshi Province)

Construction of Krishi Utpadan Sankalan Tatha Bikri Kendra in Temkemaityung Rural Municipality-9, Bhojpur District (Koshi Province)

Construction of the Municipal Agricultural and Livestock Center Building in Jwalamukhi Rural Municipality-6, Dhading District (Bagmati Province)

Construction of the Belbari Multiple Campus Building in Belbari Municipality-3, Morang District (Koshi Province)



Construction of a 10-bed hospital in Dungeshwor Rural Municipality-5, Dailekh District (Karnali Province)

Construction of an Agriculture Promotion Centre in Sarkegad Rural Municipality-4,

Humla District (Karnali Province)

Construction of a cold storage facility in Kaligandaki Rural Municipality-4, Syangja District (Gandaki Province)

Construction of a 15-bed hospital building in Barju Rural Municipality, Sunsari District (Koshi Province).

### Prime Minister Shah Holds One-on-One Meeting with Chinese Ambassador Zhang

Prime Minister Balendra Shah held a meeting with Zhang Maoming, the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, on Monday.

Prime Minister Shah met Ambassador Zhang Maoming on Monday afternoon at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers in Singha Durbar.

“Honoured to call on Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Balendra Shah this afternoon. We exchanged views on our bilateral relations and practical cooperation, and the topics of shared

interests in a friendly atmosphere. We agreed to deepen our win-win cooperation, and bring more benefits to the people of Nepal and China,” ambassador Maoming writes in X.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to further strengthen Nepal-China relations, promote cooperation in various areas, and enhance development partnerships.

Prime Minister Shah emphasized the need to deepen the historic relationship between Nepal and China and to work together in areas of mutual interest.

It was only after four months of becoming prime minister that Shah finally began holding one-on-one meetings with foreign diplomats.

Previously, he had maintained that he would not meet foreign diplomats privately. His refusal to grant a meeting had led to the postponement of Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri’s visit to Nepal.

Prime Minister Shah is scheduled to meet Scott Urbom, the Chargé d’Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Nepal, on Tuesday.

### PM Shah And Indian Ambassador Srivastava Discussed Matter Related To Mutual Interest

Naveen Srivastava, Ambassador of India to Nepal paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister Balendra Shah at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers.

“Honoured to call on Prime Minister of Nepal this morning. Conveyed warm greetings from Prime Minister Modi ji. Had an engaging & productive exchange of views on further deepening robust, multi-faceted India Nepal partnership,” writes ambassador Naveen Srivastava in X.

The meeting provided an opportunity to exchange views on matters of mutual interest and to reaffirm the commitment of both sides to further deepening the close, cordial, and multifaceted relations between Nepal and India, founded on longstanding ties of friendship, mutual respect, and cooperation.

### Nepal Government Moves to Close Five Diplomatic Missions

The government has initiated the process of closing five Nepali diplomatic missions abroad.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the offices would be fully shut down only after reliable alternative arrangements had been ensured for the services currently provided by those missions.



At a regular press briefing held at the ministry on Friday, spokesperson Lok Bahadur Paudel Chhetri said preparations were underway to close Nepali embassies in Brazil, Denmark, and South Africa, as well as the Nepali Consulates General in San Francisco, United States, and Chengdu, China.

According to spokesperson Chhetri, arrangements are being made to ensure that services, including consular services provided to Nepali citizens and foreign nationals in those areas, are not disrupted. Although the government decided to reduce the number of diplomatic missions in view of economic constraints and workload, the ministry said the measure is only temporary.

Spokesperson Chhetri clarified that Nepal's diplomatic presence would be expanded again in the future as necessary, once the country's economic capacity improves.

He said, "The government has decided to close the Nepali embassies in



Brazil, Denmark, and South Africa, as well as the Nepali Consulates General in San Francisco and Chengdu. However, before closing these missions, work is underway to ensure effective and reliable

alternative arrangements for Nepali citizens, other service recipients, and countries where Nepal has concurrent accreditation in the respective regions."

### **Korea-Nepal Have excellent bilateral relations: Ambassador Park**

Park Taeyoung, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea (RoK) to Nepal, stated that his tenure in Nepal will always remain memorable. Highlighted by over 60 years of diplomatic ties, he noted that Korea and Nepal have maintained excellent bilateral relations since establishing official relations.

During his tenure, Ambassador Park traveled extensively across various parts of Nepal, meeting returned Nepali migrant workers from Korea and supporting them in establishing small and medium enterprises (SMEs).



Known for his gentle and warm demeanor, the Korean envoy won the hearts of the Nepali public while significantly contributing to strengthening relations between the two coun-

tries.

Ambassador Park Taeyoung and his spouse jointly hosted a farewell reception in Kathmandu. The event was attended by Kathmandu-based diplomats, senior government officials, business leaders, and members of the Korean diaspora in Nepal. During the reception, the ambassador's spouse shared her thoughts, thanking Nepalis for their warm hospitality.

As part of his concluding engagements, Ambassador Park paid farewell calls on President Ram Chandra Poudel, Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal, and Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai.

During the meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Khanal and Secretary Rai praised Ambassador Park's role in deepening Nepal-Korea relations during his term. Foreign Secretary Rai extended his best wishes for Ambassador Park's upcoming assignment and future responsibilities.

President Paudel also praised the ambassador's contribution to solidifying bilateral ties, marking his tenure in Nepal as particularly impactful.

### **Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu Observes July Mass Uprising Day**

The Embassy of Bangladesh in Kathmandu observed July Mass Uprising Day on the embassy premises with solemnity and fervor, marking the second anniversary of the historic movement.

Professor Dr. A. S. M. Amanullah, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Bangladesh, attended the event as the Chief Guest, while



SAARC Secretary-General Ambassador Md. Golam Sarwar joined as the Special Guest. The event brought together members of the Bangladeshi community in Nepal, officials from regional organizations such as the SAARC Secretariat and ICIMOD, representatives of civil society and think tanks, and members of Nepal's Gen-Z youth.

The program began with a minute of silence to pay tribute to the martyrs of the uprising. Official messages from the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh were read out, followed by a documentary screening and a special prayer for the martyrs.

In his address, Chief Guest Professor Amanullah shared personal experiences from his participation in the uprising and discussed the societal factors across age, religion, and social standing that led to the fall of the previous regime. He condemned the systematic destruction of administrative,

## NEWSNOTES

academic, and financial institutions, emphasizing that political parties and societal stakeholders must learn from the youth-led movement. He underlined an uninterrupted democratic process as essential for building strong institutions under the leadership of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. Professor Amanullah also outlined recent initiatives by the National University to advance academic excellence and expressed a desire to strengthen regional collaboration with South Asian nations, including Nepal, through research and innovation exchanges.

Special Guest Ambassador Sarwar highlighted key lessons from the July–August 2024 uprising, stressing the need for good governance, human dignity, rights, and economic empowerment. He called for effective regional cooperation among SAARC member states to realize the movement's core aspirations.

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Rahman described the uprising as a defining moment in Bangladesh's democratic evolution, reflecting public demand for accountability, the rule of law, and equal opportunity. He noted that Bangladesh has entered a new phase of nation-building under the "Bangladesh First" policy, which places public welfare at the center of governance to foster a dignified, self-reliant nation. He expressed confidence that Bangladesh is making steady progress toward realizing the goals for which the martyrs sacrificed their lives.

### **Prof. Dr. KC Appointed Chairperson and Prof. Dr. Shrestha Appointed Secretary of the University Grants Commission**

The Government of Nepal has decided to appoint Prof. Dr. Khadga Bahadur KC (Parbat) as the Chairperson and Prof. Dr. Roji Shrestha (Bhojpur) as the Secretary of the University Grants Commission (UGC).



The decision was made during a Cabinet meeting held at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers in Singha Durbar.

The newly appointed Chairperson, Prof. Dr. KC, is the immediate past Rector of

Tribhuvan University. Following the resignation of the then Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Keshar Jung Baral, he also served for some time as the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the university. Born in Bajung, Ward No. 5 of Modi Rural Municipality in Parbat District, Dr. KC is widely recognized as an expert in international relations, geopolitics, and Nepal's foreign policy. He earned his Ph.D. in International Relations from Tribhuvan University and has more than three decades of experience in teaching, research, and academic leadership.

Similarly, Prof. Dr. Roji Shrestha, who has been appointed Secretary of the Commission, is the first Nepali to earn a Ph.D. in Nursing in Nepal. Before her appointment, she served as the Director of Nursing at B & B Hospital. She completed her Ph.D. at the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and obtained her Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Nursing from Christian Medical College (CMC), Ludhiana, India.

### **Nepali Nationals Deported From Cambodia along with 777 foreigners of 19 nationalities**

The Cambodian authorities have deported 777 foreign nationals including Nepali citizens. Those deported included 120 women, from 19 nationalities after they were found to be involved in various violations of Cambodian laws.

According to Khmer Times, the deportations were carried out over a 10-day period from July 21, according to the General Department of Immigration under the Ministry of Interior.

Following the directives of Deputy Prime Minister Sar Sokha, Minister of Interior, and the ministry's senior leadership, Lieu-

tenant General Sok Veasna, Director General of the General Department of Immigration, instructed the Department of Investigation and Legal Procedures to remove foreign nationals who violate immigration and other laws.

The media said among those deported were 158 Chinese nationals, including five women, for involvement in technology-based fraud crimes. They were deported on a special flight from Techo International Airport.

Other foreign nationals deported from Techo International Airport were found to be involved in various offences, including illegal border crossings, document forgery, overstaying or staying without valid passports, extortion, use of fake visas or QR codes, drug trafficking and use, illegal employment, and other criminal activities.

The deportation operation was carried out as part of the government's strict law enforcement measures under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Manet, who has repeatedly stated that Kingdom will not allow criminals or illegal groups to use Cambodian territory as a base for online scams or other activities that threaten regional and global security.



## Flag Hoisting And Various Programmes Mark 81st Independence Day Of The Republic Of Indonesia In Kathmandu

The Office of the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Indonesia in Nepal marked the 81st Independence Day of Indonesia with a flag hoisting ceremony and special programme at the IME Complex, Panipokhari.



At the event, Chandra Prasad Dhakal, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Indonesia in Nepal, who is also Chairman of IME Group and Immediate Past President of the Federation of Nepalese Cham-

bers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), unfurled Indonesia's national flag.

Speaking at the event, Dhakal reflected on the steadily growing friendship between Nepal and Indonesia since the two countries formally established diplomatic relations in 1960. He noted that bilateral ties have continued to strengthen, particularly in trade, tourism and cultural exchange.

The special programmes organised for Independence Day reflected Indonesia's economic, social and cultural significance, further highlighting the long-standing friendship and cooperation between Nepal and Indonesia.

Trade, tourism and investment between Nepal and Indonesia have been on the rise. Nepal imports edible oils, coal and petroleum products, and paper products from Indonesia, while exporting leather, tea, coffee and handicrafts, among other items, to Indonesia.

The Office of the Honorary Consul said continued joint efforts are needed to boost Nepal's exports and attract greater direct investment in order to narrow the trade imbalance between the two countries.

Dhakal thanked members of the Indonesian community in Nepal for their presence and reaffirmed the Office's commitment to expanding cooperation between the two countries in trade, investment and tourism.

The ceremony was attended by members of the Indonesian community in Nepal, staff of the Office of the Honorary Consul, senior leadership and representatives from various organisations under IME Group, well-wishers and other dignitaries.

## SKBBL and DDC Sign Cooperation Agreement

The Dairy Development Corporation (DDC), a fully government-owned entity, the National Agricultural Cooperative Central Federation Ltd. (NACCFL), the umbrella body of Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperatives, and Sana Kisan Bikas Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (SKBBL), a national-level wholesale credit provider, today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The agreement aims to drive the integrated development of the dairy sector, enhance market linkages for milk supply, protect the interests of producer farmers, and help the country achieve self-reliance in milk production.

Under the agreement, DDC will purchase milk directly from Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperatives and support capacity-building initiatives for local farmers.

Ensure that payment dues are not delayed for more than one month. Conduct field-level quality checks and accurately measure the weight of collected milk.

SKBBL will provide concessional loans to dairy farmers for livestock and dairy-related activities, aiding in the creation of robust dairy production zones ("milk pockets"). Subject to coordination and approval from the Government of Nepal and relevant authorities, SKBBL will also facilitate the processing of DDC's payments to farmers. Furthermore, in locations recommended by DDC, SKBBL will arrange concessional credit to promote livestock enterprises.



NACCFL, representing all Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperatives, will coordinate and collaborate with DDC as needed. It will also help mobilize support for farmer capacity-building and dairy-related infrastructure development across member cooperatives.

The agreement targets a daily milk trade volume of 60,000 liters during this fiscal year. It also includes provisions to begin efforts to secure representation for small farmers on DDC's Board of Directors.

It was further agreed that milk collection from small farmers will commence on the 1st of Bhadra (mid-August).

The agreement was signed by Dr. Sharan Kumar Pandey, Joint Secretary to the Government of Nepal and General Manager of DDC; Mr. Basu Adhikari, Chief Executive Officer of SKBBL; and Dr. Rudra Bahadur Shrestha, General Manager of NACCFL.

## BUSINESS BRIEF

### Energy Minister Shrestha Appointed Tiwari, Poudel and Karki As Advisors



Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Biraj Bhakta Shrestha has completed his team of advisors. The minister finalized his advisory team on Thursday by appointing three new

advisors.

Minister Shrestha appointed Ashutosh Tiwari as Planning and Investment Advisor, Ramesh Poudel as Policy Advisor, and Ganesh Karki as Advisor (Private Sector). Earlier, Minister Shrestha had already appointed Bibek Raj Kandel as Energy Advisor.

With the latest appointments, Minister Shrestha's advisory team now consists of four experts specializing in energy, policy, planning and investment, and the private sector. The advisors will provide necessary suggestions and consultations on policy formulation, planning, investment promotion, and coordination with the private sector in their respective areas.

The ministry said that all four advisors will serve in their positions on an honorary (unpaid) basis.

### Global IME Bank Offers Special NAIMA Auto Expo Deal, Auto Loans at Minimum 5.25% Interest



Global IME Bank Limited has announced a special discount scheme on personal vehicle loans on the occasion of the NAIMA Auto Expo.

Under the special scheme, customers purchasing new vehicles at the NAIMA Auto Expo will be eligible for loans at the bank's base rate plus a minimum premium of 0.5 percentage points.

Accordingly, based on the current base rate, the minimum interest rate for the loan will be 5.25%.

The interest rate on the loan will be automatically adjusted in line with any changes in the bank's base rate.

In addition, Global IME Bank has introduced a fixed interest rate of 5.99% for three years for customers purchasing new electric vehicles (EVs) at the NAIMA Auto Expo. After the three-year fixed-rate period, the interest rate on the loan will be the bank's base rate plus a maxi-

mum premium of 2 percentage points.

Global IME Bank has also set up a stall at the NAIMA Auto Expo where customers interested in purchasing vehicles can proceed with the loan process. Customers can apply for loans directly from the bank's stall at the expo.

Once customers complete the required documentation, the bank will provide a loan approval letter within a maximum of three days for the purchase of the vehicle.

Global IME Bank, which has received recognition in various national and international categories for its modern technology and excellent customer service over the years, has won the Bank of the Year 2014, Best Internet Bank 2016, and the Best Bank Nepal title consecutively in 2024, 2025, and 2026. The bank has also received prestigious awards including the Euromoney Awards for Excellence in 2022, 2024, and 2025, Best Bank ESG Nepal 2024, and Best Employer.

Global IME Bank is the first private-sector commercial bank in Nepal to expand its branch network to all 77 districts of the country. The bank currently provides services through more than 1,000 service points, including 341 branch offices, 366 ATMs, 147 branchless banking service centers, 69 extension and revenue collection counters, and three overseas representative offices.

In addition, the bank has been making a significant contribution to the national economy by bringing remittances into Nepal through formal channels from various countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and India.

### Tamakoshi V Project Gains Momentum

Despite delays in obtaining permission to use forest areas and public land, construction of the Tamakoshi V Hydropower Project appears to have gained momentum recently. The 99.8-megawatt project, which is being developed by Tamakoshi Hydropower Company Limited—the same company that built the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project—has achieved 21.68 percent overall physical progress as of the end of last Ashadh, according to the company.

According to the annual report published by the company, construction of the project was completely halted for around eight months due to delays in obtaining rights to use the forest areas and public land required for the project. The project is being constructed in Bigu Rural Municipality of Dolakha district.



Construction, which had been disrupted since Ashadh 2082 after the Gaurishankar Conservation Area wrote to the authorities calling for the project to be stopped, resumed in the final week of Falgun. The report states that physical progress, which stood at around 19 percent when construction was halted, increased by 2.68 percentage points to reach 21.68 percent within just four months of work resuming.

Included under the government's "People's Hydropower Programme," the project is a cascade hydropower project that will generate electricity by diverting the water discharged after power generation at the 456-megawatt Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project to its powerhouse. Since the project does not require the construction of structures such as a dam or a sedimentation basin, it is considered cost-effective and attractive.

The estimated project cost is Rs. 21.95 billion, including interest during the construction period. The Employees Provident Fund alone has provided a loan investment of Rs. 13.74 billion in the project.

### **Bangladesh Ambassador Urges Deeper Collaboration in Fisheries Sector at NFDA Convention in Chitwan**



Ambassador Shafiqur Rahman spoke as the Special Guest at the inaugural session of the First Annual General Assembly and Convention of the Nepal Fisheries Development Association (NFDA) in Chitwan today.

Gita Kumari Chaudhary, Minister for Agriculture, Forests, and Environment of Nepal, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

In his remarks during the session, the Ambassador highlighted Bangladesh's remarkable gains in the fisheries sector, stating that the country has emerged as one of the world's leading fisheries producers. He attributed this success to a coordinated policy approach, scientific research, private-sector collaboration, and the dedication of millions of fish farmers and fishers.

The Ambassador stressed that Bangladesh's achievements were driven by modern hatchery development, the expansion of aquaculture, community-based management of open-water fisheries, conservation initiatives, improved feed and disease management, technological innovation, and close cooperation among government, academia, and the private sector.

Highlighting the longstanding friendship and coopera-

tion between Bangladesh and Nepal, Ambassador Rahman noted that the two neighbouring countries are bound by a common ecological link, connected through river systems originating in the Himalayas, and share extensive opportunities for cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture. He expressed confidence that fisheries could become a key pillar of the growing Bangladesh-Nepal partnership under the leadership of both countries.

In this regard, he shared insights on expanding bilateral collaboration across several key areas, including: Adapting Bangladesh's successful open-water fisheries enhancement model to Nepal's wetlands and reservoirs

Cooperation in post-harvest fish processing and value addition Technical cooperation, knowledge exchange, joint research, and training programmes. Exchanges of researchers, scientists, and fisheries experts and Private-sector partnerships and investment and Institutional collaboration among universities, research institutes, and fisheries associations.

Referring to the growing challenges posed by climate change, the Ambassador emphasized the importance of promoting climate-smart and sustainable aquaculture to protect aquatic ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, and ensure the responsible management of fisheries resources for future generations.

Responding to the Ambassador, the Honorable Minister for Agriculture commended his vision regarding potential areas of cooperation and expressed Nepal's readiness to work closely with Bangladesh.

The Ambassador concluded his address by congratulating the Nepal Fisheries Development Association on its historic first convention and wishing the organization every success in its future endeavours.

### **Yangki Ukyaw Appointed CEO of the Investment Board**

The government has appointed Yangki Ukyaw as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Investment Board.



The decision was made during the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday. Ukyaw is an expert in development economics and public policy.

Her ancestral home is Olangchung Gola. She previously served as a Senior Policy Adviser at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Regional Of-

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She holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom and a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Missouri in the United States.

Earlier in her career, she also led the Economic and Financial Analysis Unit at the Investment Board.

A recommendation committee chaired by Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle had shortlisted three candidates for the position of CEO of the Investment Board. The Cabinet selected Yangki Ukyaw from among those three nominees.

The committee had recommended the names of Yangki Ukyaw, Manoj Paudel, and Suman Man Singh Basnet.

The recommendation committee also included National Planning Commission Vice-Chair Gunakar Bhatta and Prime Minister's Good Governance Adviser Sudip Dhakal as members.



**Dhakal Attended The Farewell Reception**

Chandra Prasad Dhakal, Immediate past president of the Federation of Nepalese

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and Chairman of the IME Group, attended the farewell reception organized in honor of Park Tae-Young, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal.

“I had the privilege of attending the farewell reception hosted by Mr. Kiran Prakash Sakhaju, President of the Nepal–Korea Chamber of Commerce, in honor of His Excellency Mr. Park Tae-Young, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal,” said Dhakal in his social media post.

“As the Immediate Past President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and Chairman of the IME Group, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency for his significant contribution to further strengthening Nepal–Korea relations and expanding trade, investment, and economic cooperation between our two countries.”

He said that the Nepali private sector will always remember his warmth, friendship, and unwavering support.

### **K-Connect: Empowering Nepal's Entrepreneurs**

Empowering Dreams at Home: KOICA's

K-Connect Sparks a New Wave of Entrepreneurship in Nepal

At a time when an overwhelming number of young Nepalis leave the country in search of foreign employment, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) is creating compelling reasons for them to stay. Through its innovative initiative, K-Connect: Promoting the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Nepal, KOICA is helping turn domestic challenges into local opportunities.

On August 6, KOICA hosted a flagship event in Kathmandu to bridge the gap between grassroots entrepreneurs, financial institutions, investors, and development partners. The goal was simple yet profound: build a collaborative platform that improves access to funding, knowledge, and mentorship, while fostering sustainable business growth and job creation where it matters most.



### **Real Stories, Real Impact**

The event brought together beneficiaries, government officials, mentors, and investors from across the country. Highlighted during the gathering were three KOICA-supported projects already transforming lives and communities across Nepal:

**K-HaMi Project (Korea Returnee Migrants Reintegration):** Designed to help returnee migrant workers put their foreign experience to work at home, this initiative has already provided technical, financial, and reintegration training to over 15,000 individuals, with 195 completing specialized entrepreneurship courses. To turn their ideas into reality, KOICA is providing \$2.5 million in interest subsidies to make business loans accessible for nearly 300 returning workers.

**Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA):** Operating in the vulnerable Terai flood plains, this project has established 109 climate-smart agribusinesses and created 343 green jobs. Over 5,300 individuals have received training and grants through the \$1.5 million Terai Agribusiness and Enterprise Challenge Fund (TAECF).

**Green Job Creation through Recycling and Upcycling (GCRU):** Based in Pokhara, this initiative has launched 115 recycling and upcycling enterprises, trained nearly 11,000 households in waste management, and equipped more than 1,300 people with entrepreneurial skills.

A Shared Vision for the Future

The gathering was graced by key leaders and policymakers. Park Tae-Young, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal, served as Chief Guest, alongside Special Guests Hem Raj Tamang, Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment, and Navaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary from the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers.

"Korea's own journey toward sustainable development was driven largely by investing in people, building strong institutions, and creating opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship," emphasized Ambassador Park, congratulating KOICA on bringing the ecosystem together.

In his welcome address, Mooheon Kong, Country Director of KOICA Nepal, reaffirmed the agency's long-term commitment to nurturing local talent. Joint Secretaries Dhakal and Tamang commended KOICA's contributions, stressing that local job creation, skill enhancement, and enterprise development are paramount for Nepal's economic future.

#### Connecting Ideas to Capital

Highlighting the vision behind the effort, KOICA Deputy Country Director Sujin Yeo noted that K-Connect is ultimately about human connection—linking ambition with the right resources, investors, and mentors to ensure long-term viability.

The event featured inspirational beneficiary success stories, pitch sessions for prospective investors and banks, and direct one-on-one consultations between entrepreneurs and business mentors. These interactive exchanges provided emerging founders with real-world feedback, strategic guidance, and vital connections for future capital investment.

Since 1991, the Republic of Korea, through KOICA, has invested over \$235 million in Nepal across key sectors including healthcare, education, agriculture, vocational training, IT, and tourism. By prioritizing human-centered growth and collaboration with civil society, universities, and private partners, initiatives like K-Connect continue to support Nepal's journey toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—one local entrepreneur at a time.

#### Finance Minister Dr. Wagle Commits to Reforming the Banking System

Finance Minister Dr. Swarnim Wagle has expressed the government's commitment to addressing the challenges facing Nepal's banking system. During a meeting with the chief executive officers (CEOs) of banks at the Ministry of Finance on Tuesday, he reaffirmed the government's determination to introduce the necessary legal and procedural reforms in the banking sector.

"Where legal reforms are needed, we will amend the laws. Where procedural problems exist, we will change the procedures. Where institutional coordination is required, we will strengthen coordination," he said. "And wherever government decisions are necessary, we will not hesitate to make them."

The Finance Minister also stated that the government would facilitate structural reforms needed to increase the flow of bank credit to productive sectors of the economy.

He further noted that the government is open to discussions on adopting a new approach to monetary policy where necessary. During the meeting, he sought the views of bank CEOs on measures to strengthen coordination among the Ministry of Finance, Nepal Rastra Bank, and the banking sector.

Dr. Wagle also questioned the CEOs about why demand for loans has remained weak despite historically low lending interest rates, and why businesses continue to hesitate to invest. "Why has the excess liquidity in the banking system not been transformed into productive investment? Is the solution to this challenge found in monetary policy, fiscal policy, or in restoring the confidence of the private sector?" he asked.

The Finance Minister described commercial banks as the most important hub of the country's economy. Since savers, entrepreneurs, farmers, industrialists, investors, and aspiring business owners all rely on banks, he said that bank leadership has the clearest understanding of the economy's real sentiment, market confidence, investor outlook, and expectations for the future.

Dr. Wagle noted that the government has already established a clear direction for economic transformation through the national budget and is now focused on implementation. He said the government's goal is to revitalize Nepal's economy, encourage greater investment, and expand production and employment opportunities. He also emphasized that the government aims to build an economy that is optimistic about the future.

"We want to build an economy that is not merely reactive, but one driven by confidence, decisive action, and optimism about the future," he said.

The Finance Minister added that the government is working to make Nepal's financial system a leading partner in the country's economic transformation.



# Balen Has The Fire. Nepal Needs A Compass

*The glacier crisis demands institutions that can govern beyond the news cycle*



BY: ARUP RAJOURIA

Prime Minister Balendra "Balen" Shah did not just win an election but he also channeled a country's exhaustion with its old politics into power. Four and a half months on, that goodwill has not disappeared, but it was never going to be permanent. The originality of a plain talking leader making quick calls is starting to run up against a tougher question: can you actually govern a country through Facebook posts, ordinances and a handful of trusted aides, or does real legitimacy still have to be earned the slower way i.e. through Parliament, through institutions, through people you did not necessarily choose to consult?

Youth has passion, speed and an extraordinary ability to make people feel seen. It identifies problems that older political establishments have normalized: corruption, delay, impunity, bureaucratic arrogance. Balen's rise reflected that national frustration, and to his credit, his government has moved on some of it by pursuing corruption cases against former leaders that many previous administrations avoided. For many Nepalis, he was a rejection of stale political habits, and that credibility has not evaporated.

But a government is not a protest movement, and even a popular mandate has to eventually translate into institutional practice, particularly for a country facing a slow-moving, irreversible crisis that punishes impatience and inexperience in equal measure, from whichever generation it comes.

The Balen government came to office promising rapid reform, riding a near two thirds majority that gave it unusual room to govern without needing coalition partners. That structural strength has not translated into political ease. Main opposition Nepali Congress, having pledged "constructive cooperation" at the outset, has now hardened its posture, accusing the government in early August of diplomatic failure and interfering with constitutional bodies. The shift matters less as a parliamentary threat, given the RSP's

majority, and more as a signal to a government that does not need opposition votes can still lose the benefit of the doubt that made governing easier in its first weeks.

None of this means Balen is failing, and it would be simplistic to treat every criticism of a young leader as proof that youth itself is the problem. The more useful question is whether a leader, despite the age, is building the habits that

let a government outlast its own popularity: consulting Parliament, engaging ministers, communicating clearly during crises, treating institutions as partners rather than friction. Recent observation has flagged concerns about a centralized decision making style and limited accessibility to ministers; these remain criticisms and allegations, not settled facts, but worth taking seriously because early habits tend to harden.

His shift from avoiding one to one meeting with foreign envoys

to engaging directly with the Indian and Chinese ambassadors is worth reading generously: less a retreat than a leader adapting once the demands of governing met the limits of an earlier, more insular approach. That kind of course correction is itself a sign of political maturity.

Nowhere is the need for that maturity more urgent than in Nepal's defining long-term emergency: the retreat of its glaciers. Nepal sits within the Hindu Kush Himalaya, the water tower of Asia. Its snow and ice feed over ten major transboundary river systems that include the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, the Yellow River and the Mekong, these basins provide water to over 1.9 billion people. But the wider Himalayan cryosphere shapes water, food, energy, culture and ecological security for over 2.5 billion people across Asia. Nepal's glaciated area shrank by roughly 24% between 1977 and 2010, and the country's total ice reserve has fallen by nearly 129 cubic kilometers over three decades. Scientists project Himalayan glaciers could lose 30-50% of remaining volume by 2100 under



moderate warming, and up to 75% in the eastern Himalaya under higher-emissions scenarios. This means more glacial lake outburst floods, more erratic river flows, rising risk to mountain communities. Nepal's glacial lakes are ticking time bombs: the country has already recorded 45 reported and unreported GLOF events from 39 glacial lakes, and scientists have identified dozens more as potentially dangerous.

A crisis on this timescale cannot be managed by any single administration, young or old, moving fast. It requires continuity across governments, technical expertise built over decades, patient regional diplomacy and institutional memory. This is where cross-generational government matters most: not as a rebuke to youthful leadership, but as its necessary complement.

Nepal's own politics makes this dilemma vivid in real time. Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Nepali Congress veteran who has led the country five times, returned to Kathmandu on August 13 after months away, his comeback alongside unresolved questions about his past conduct is a reminder that experience alone is not a credential, it must also be paired with accountability. But the answer to Balen's inexperience is not nostalgic deference to unaccountable seniority either.

Nepal should bend the knee to neither: not to an older political class simply because it has weathered decades in power, nor to a single popular leader simply because he arrived promising to sweep that class away. The task is a government that draws on both energy and expertise, while subjecting both, equally, to institutional scrutiny.

The world offers examples of talented young leaders whose early promise ran into the limits of governing alone. Italy's Matteo Renzi, prime minister at 39, personalized a constitutional referendum and resigned when voters rejected it in 2016. Britain's David Cameron, prime minister at 43, called the Brexit referendum partly to manage divisions inside his own party, lost the vote, and resigned. Austria's Sebastian Kurz, chancellor at 31, saw his government engulfed in

scandal and resigned in 2021 amid a corruption investigation, which he denied. These are not verdicts on youth but are reminders that charisma and momentum are no substitute for consultation and institutional patience.

Equally, Nepal should resist the opposite mistake of dismissing experience as irrelevant simply because it is not young. Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first democratically elected president at 75, bringing

a lifetime of political judgment to national reconciliation. Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad returned as prime minister at 92, a reminder, alongside his own contested legacy, that capability has no expiry date, but also demands ongoing accountability regardless of age.

The best version of Balen's government

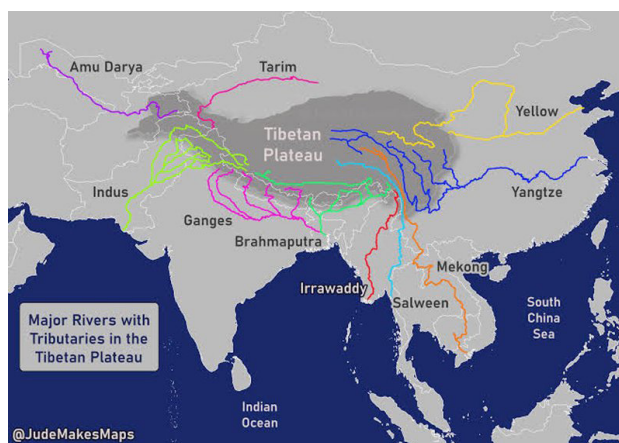
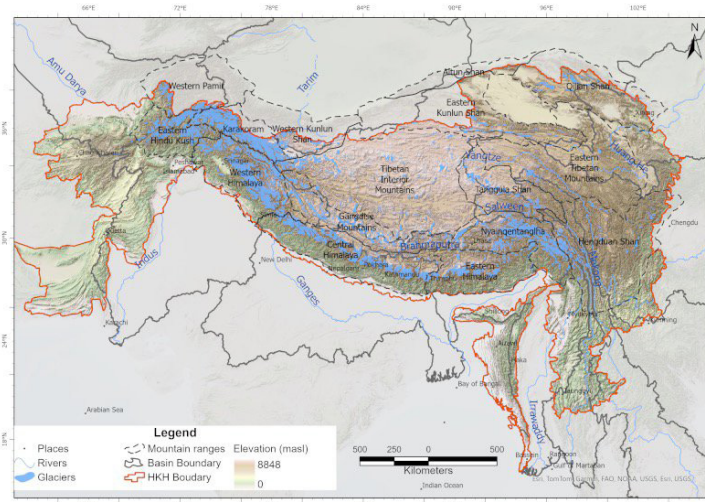
would combine the energy that brought him to power with institutional patience: young ministers with urgency and a refusal to normalize corruption, working alongside experienced administrators, diplomats, climate-governance strategists and civil servants who understand how the state functions over the long run.

That is not a compromise of his mandate but is how a mandate becomes a legacy.

Balen's biggest asset remains his credibility as a break from the old order. Protecting that credibility means showing that speed and consultation are not opposites but also that a government can move fast and still listen. The real test of any young leader is not

whether he can move quickly, but whether what he builds outlasts the news cycle, on a timescale as long as a glacier's retreat.

Youth can provide the fire. Experience helps make sure that fire becomes light, not smoke, and the two, working together, are what Nepal's moment actually calls for...



## Reaffirms Historic Bilateral Ties

*Indian Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth's visit to Nepal to receive the honorary rank of General of the Nepali Army is significant in deepening bilateral ties and Reaffirms Historic Bilateral Ties.*

By A CORRESPONDENT

By choosing Nepal for his first foreign trip, India's Chief of Army Staff (CoAS), General Dhiraj Seth, has highlighted the importance of a country with which India shares strong, warm, and traditional relations. Furthermore, the relationship between the Nepali and Indian armies remains exceptionally close and long-standing.

Visiting several key Nepali Army installations and interacting with top leadership, the Indian Army Chief spent four days in Nepal to further strengthen the warm, traditional ties between the two nations.

Experts note that General Seth's decision to begin the first foreign visit of his tenure in Kathmandu on Sunday, August 16, signals New Delhi's specific interest in the evolving geopolitical context in Nepal.

He is the highest-ranking official from a neighboring country to visit Nepal since Prime Minister Balendra Shah took office. General Seth held talks with Prime Minister Shah, who also serves as Defense Minister.

While the visit was part of a long-standing tradition in which the army chiefs of Nepal and India are appointed honorary generals of each other's armies, experts argue it should not be viewed merely as a continuation of protocol. Rather, it indicates that the Indian military is prioritizing the recent developments and "special circumstances" in Nepal.

Nepali Army Spokesperson Brigadier General Rajaram Basnet confirmed that bilateral discussions were held between Nepali Army Chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel and Indian Army Chief General Seth at the Army Headquarters.



CoAS General Seth Conferred Honorary Rank of General of the Nepali Army

Indian Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth was conferred the rank of Honorary General of the Nepali Army by President Ramchandra Paudel during an investiture ceremony at Sheetal Niwas in Kathmandu on August 16.

General Seth arrived in the country on Sunday for an official visit at the invitation of his counterpart, CoAS General Ashok Raj Sigdel.

The conferral of the honorary rank continues a tradition established in 1950, under which Nepal and India reciprocally bestow the honorary rank of general upon each other's army chiefs.

### Key Meetings

General Seth met with CoAS General Sigdel at the Nepali Army Headquarters, where the two leaders discussed matters of mutual interest and ways to enhance bilateral military relations. General Seth also met with Indian

Ambassador Srivastava at the Indian Embassy to discuss strengthening comprehensive relations between New Delhi and Kathmandu.

Indian Army Chief's Visit Enhances Military Ties with Nepal

General Seth also handed over military and medical equipment to the Nepali Army. During his visit, he planted a sapling at the Nepali Army Headquarters, received and inspected a guard of honour, and interacted with Nepal's top army leadership and generals.

Describing the visit as a regular one, Basnet added that both Chiefs of Army Staff discussed the relationship between the Nepali and Indian armies, including military exchanges, training, and exercises.

Seth, who joined the army through the Armoured Corps, assumed command of the Indian Army on June 30.

Experts consider it significant that General Seth—who possesses extensive experience commanding two In-

dian Army commands and working in strategic capability development and operational planning—chose Nepal for his first official foreign visit.

### **Traditional and Strategic Dimensions**

Retired Nepali Army Major General Binoj Basnyat noted that the visit carries two distinct dimensions:

"There are the changes taking place in Nepal's domestic politics, as well as the security concerns arising from the gaps that emerged during the Gen Z movement a year ago and the potential consequences those gaps could bring.

We are not isolated from global strategic competition, particularly the confrontation between the United States and China, because of the nature of our system. We have been drawn into it. This is his first foreign visit. Therefore, while the visit is traditional, it also has a strategic dimension."

Immediately after Prime Minister Shah was sworn in as head of government, India formally invited him to visit the country. Unlike previous heads of government, Prime Minister Shah has kept meetings with foreign diplomats limited. Only last week did he hold his first one-on-one meetings with the Indian and Chinese ambassadors.

Earlier reports indicated that a visit to Kathmandu by the Indian Foreign Secretary was postponed because Prime



Minister Shah had not fixed a meeting time, citing protocol-related considerations.

### **A Significant Visit**

The Nepali Army stated that the visit is expected to further strengthen mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries' armed forces.

The Indian Army noted that the honorary rank conferred on General Seth will further solidify the special bonds of friendship and cooperation between the Indian and Nepali armies.

Furthermore, the Army stated that this longstanding tradition represents

strategic continuity and reflects both sides' commitment to preserving their distinctive military relationship while expanding cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Several experts recalled that dialogue between the armies of Nepal and India has historically continued even when bilateral relations faced difficulties at the political or diplomatic levels, noting instances where high-level military exchanges helped resolve diplomatic obstacles.

Security affairs expert Indra Adhikari remarked that although this visit is routine, it takes place under unique circumstances:

"At present, international powers—and regional powers in particular—seem confused about Nepal's situation. They appear uncertain about where and how they can work with Nepal, which is also evident from our current diplomatic conduct."

Overall, the four-day visit to Nepal by India's COAS General Seth has helped warm existing relations between Nepal and India, particularly within the defense sector.





SHER BAHADUR DEUBA

## A Stunning Resurgence

*Returning to Nepal on August 13 after spending over five months in Hong Kong and Singapore for medical treatment, former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress (NC) leader Sher Bahadur Deuba made a grand return to party politics. Ousted from power following the Gen Z movement last September and the subsequent General Elections in March, Deuba led a Congress faction that has come out in favor of a Hindu state—also opening the door for the restoration of the monarchy. Deuba's statement at his faction's convention demonstrated that he has swiftly regained his political footing, pivoting sharply from the stance he held in 2005.*

By KESHAB POUDEL

Energized by a warm welcome from thousands of party cadres, the former NC President attended and addressed a national convention organized by the party's non-establishment faction. Sidelined by current NC President Gagan Thapa, many senior leaders now view Deuba's political stature as

a unifying force capable of challenging the current establishment and changing the course of Nepali politics.

The two-day convention concluded with closing remarks from convention coordinator Dr. Shashank Koirala, the younger son of B.P. Koirala, who urged members

to maintain solidarity in the days ahead. All presented proposals were passed with amendments.

### Deuba's Reconciliation Agenda

The faction led by former Nepali Congress president Deuba has openly come out in favor of a Hindu state. The Deuba faction also appears to indirectly support

the restoration of the monarchy. Following the election of a new party working committee through a special general convention, the Deuba faction currently lacks a formal party position.

The Deuba and Koirala (Shashank Koirala) factions, which have been holding separate gatherings across the country stating they do not recognize the leadership of Gagan Thapa, openly expressed support for a Hindu state at the two-day national gathering in Kathmandu. Likewise, by reaffirming their support for B.P. Koirala's policy of nationalism and reconciliation, they also appeared to align with a position favorable to the monarchy.

Even prior to this event, a faction led by Congress leader Shankar Bhandari had been raising the issues of the monarchy and a Hindu state within the party. Although their campaign had been gaining momentum, it had not yet established dominant influence within the party.

Following the Gen Z movement, the political direction of Nepal has shifted. The Deuba and Koirala factions—who had been pushed to the margins within the party—came out openly in favor of the monarchy and a Hindu state through their national gathering.

The gathering, which concluded

on Sunday (August 16), decided that the party would move forward according to B.P. Koirala's policy of reconciliation. Decision No. 2 states that, in accordance with this policy, the party will engage in dialogue with national and democratic forces to strengthen nationalism and democracy.

When B.P. Koirala returned to Nepal from India in December 1976, he adopted a policy calling for the monarchy and democratic forces to work together, arguing that failure to cooperate would

democracy."

The national gathering also adopted another significant stance by recognizing the religion practiced since ancient times as part of Nepal's national identity. In Decision No. 3, the Deuba faction stated that it would promote Sanatan Dharma as part of the nation's identity.

Nepal's 2015 Constitution (2072 BS) provides equal recognition to all religions. However, the Deuba faction stated in its resolution that it would promote Sanatan Dharma as the country's core identity, declaring:

"The religion and culture that have been practiced in Nepal since ancient times are also our national identity. Taking into consideration Nepal's long-standing religious tolerance, social harmony, and the religious freedom of every individual



allow foreign powers to gain greater influence in the country. The national gathering strongly revived that exact policy. Its decision states:

"In 2033 BS, the great leader BP Koirala returned to the country, keeping in mind the national crisis prevailing at the time and with the policy of national unity and reconciliation. The country is in a difficult situation today as well. In this situation, we will engage in dialogue with national and democratic forces and work to strengthen nationalism and de-

and religious community to practice their own faith, and recognizing the responsibility to protect the Hindu, Buddhist, Kirat, and indigenous religions that have been practiced here since ancient times, we are committed to moving the nation forward by promoting Sanatan Dharma as a national identity."

At the gathering, Deuba openly positioned himself in favor of Sanatan Hinduism, repeatedly declaring, "I am a Hindu, I am a Hindu, I am a Hindu."



However, during the closing session, a dispute arose between former vice-president Bimalendra Nidhi and outgoing spokesperson Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat over the wording concerning religion while the gathering's decisions were read aloud. The draft prepared by Mahat included the sentence: "Everyone shall be free to practice the religions that have been followed since ancient times." Nidhi disagreed with this phrasing, insisting that it should instead simply refer to "religious freedom."

As the disagreement intensified, the two leaders tussled over the physical document containing the decision while on stage, prompting Deuba to intervene. Following Deuba's intervention, the clause prepared by Mahat was read out as written.

Supporters viewed the massive turnout at the airport as a significant political signal. Govinda Pariyar, Deuba's former press adviser, claimed no leader had ever received such a massive homecoming reception, adding that it sent a strong message of reconciliation across both the party and national politics.

Addressing the crowd, Deuba stated, "I have returned not as a

leader, but as a lifelong citizen of this great nation—ready to serve with humility, dedication, and love."

### Deuba's Opportunity

As Deuba returned home advocating for the broader cause of national reconciliation, he now faces a great opportunity to unite all political forces, including the monarchy.

In the early 1970s, BP Koirala took the lead in reconciling with the monarchy to establish liberal democracy. After the death of BP Koirala, NC leaders soon abandoned this vision of national reconciliation and formed a political alliance with communists to restore democracy.

NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala, who is the brother of BP, played

the most damaging role by leading the eight-party alliance—which included the Maoists—to overthrow the monarchy.

With the rise of the communists and Nepal declaring itself a republic and secular state, the NC lost its identity as a liberal centrist democratic party. During the recent Gen Z movement, the party suffered its worst blow yet, losing a significant number of seats.

Having closely observed the ongoing political drama, including the tragedy of last September and the downfall of his own party, Deuba has a prime opportunity to emerge as a true leader of national reconciliation.

Despite his modest stance, close allies aim to position him once again as a central power figure. Senior leader Mahat suggested that broader party unity could be achieved if the leadership elected by the 14th General Convention organizes the upcoming 15th General Convention alongside members from the special convention faction.

"Sher Bahadur-ji would not be seeking leadership again, making this the most appropriate path toward unity and renewed enthusiasm," Mahat noted, adding that recent Supreme Court decisions



to review the party's legal status further reinforce the need for a cohesive structure.

An insider highlighted three key factors driving Deuba's resurgence: the Supreme Court's recent order, growing public dissatisfaction with the current government, and the lack of experienced mentorship across both party factions.

"I have heard both the silent pain and the strong voice of the younger generation. The world has changed, and we accept the truth that we must move forward with the times. I have nothing left to gain politically, but it is my responsibility to share my experience with the next generation," said Deuba in his address.

### Deuba on Religious Identity

Addressing the gathering in Kathmandu, Deuba spoke openly about his personal faith, emphasizing his commitment to Hinduism while advocating for total religious freedom.

"I am a Hindu, but I am not opposed to any religion—whether Christian, Muslim, Kirat, Rai, or Limbu," Deuba affirmed. "If



Christians and Muslims can openly declare their faith, I should also have the right to call myself a Hindu. The decision regarding Nepal's religious character rests with its people, and the dignity of all faiths must be respected."

Recalling his marriage at Guhyeshwari Temple and his lifelong devotion to Pashupatinath, Deuba also praised Buddhism as a scientific faith, reiterating that personal religious expression and mutual respect are essential for national unity.

### Waiting on the Supreme

### Court's Decision

Statements from leaders close to Deuba indicate the dissatisfied faction is largely waiting for the Supreme Court's ruling before taking definitive political steps toward reunification:

**NP Saud:** Noted that achieving political unity will remain extremely difficult until the court issues a final decision on the review petition.

**Krishna Prasad Sitaula & Dr. Shekhar Koirala:** Expressed optimism that the court's review process would deliver justice and pave the path toward a unified party.

**Prakash Man Singh:** Suggested the court's recent ruling opens a path for the leadership elected during the 14th General Convention to guide the party forward into the 15th General Convention.

### Calls for Deuba's Statesmanship

While awaiting the legal verdict, several party figures are urging pre-court reconciliation. Bijay Kumar Gachhadar appealed directly to Sher Bahadur Deuba to rise above factionalism and stabi-





lize the country's turbulent political landscape. Similarly, Ramesh Lekhak suggested building on past compromise discussions to integrate the leadership bodies of the 14th General Convention and the recent special general convention.

As a hardline condition for reconciliation, the dissenting faction insists that the establishment faction step back from holding its general convention. Prakash Sharan Mahat argued that the committee elected at the 14th General Convention—representing both sides—should instead oversee the 15th General Convention under Deuba's leadership.

Echoing this view, Bimalendra Nidhi emphasized that Deuba remains the legitimate president of the Nepali Congress. A broad group of key leaders—including Convening Committee Coordinator Dr. Shashank Koirala, Purna Bahadur Khadka, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, Prakash Man Singh, and N.P. Saud—continue to address Deuba as party president.

Additionally, leader Pariyar noted that Deuba plans to pursue unity ahead of the court's final ruling, suggesting that an organizing committee under Shashank Koi-

rala could foster compromise and demonstrate cohesion. Conversely, non-establishment leaders interpret the court's order as resetting the party to its pre-special general convention status.

### Establishment Flexibility

The establishment faction maintains its political legitimacy until a final verdict is handed down, insisting that its convention process will proceed. Sources indicate that the establishment believes the opposing faction is trying to deny political recognition to the special general convention through compromise—a concession the establishment

finds unacceptable.

Previously, Dr. Shekhar Koirala proposed creating an organizing committee headed by senior figures like Taranath Ranabhat or Kul Bahadur Gurung to recognize the special general convention, though the proposal stalled. Recently, party president Gagan Thapa displayed more flexibility toward an organizing committee made up of 14th General Convention electees, a move General Secretary Gururaj Ghimire confirmed has been discussed informally. However, Mahat reiterated that holding the 15th General Convention under Deuba remains the primary option, noting that alternative arrangements have yet to gain serious traction.

As the Balen-led government fails to resolve key issues and continues to undermine parliamentary accountability, Nepali politics faces renewed uncertainty. In this volatile environment, Deuba's updated political stance could bring the Nepali Congress back to the forefront, repositioning him as a unifying figure capable of steering the nation forward.



# The Social Foundations Of Transformative Change



BY: DR. PRABIN MANANDHAR

Across the Global South, development actors increasingly call for transformative change to address persistent challenges such as poverty, inequality, exclusion, and vulnerability. Yet transformation is often approached as a technical challenge requiring better policies, stronger institutions, and greater investment. While these interventions are important, they are insufficient on their own.

Transformation is fundamentally a social and political process. It requires people to challenge established ways of thinking, build new alliances, negotiate competing interests, and reshape power relations. This is why social capital matters. It provides relationships, trust, and collective capacity through which transformative change occurs.

Transformative change is not simply about improving existing systems. It seeks to address the structural factors that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Whether the goal is strengthening governance, advancing gender equality, building climate resilience, or creating more inclusive economies, transformation requires changes in how people interact, collaborate, and influence decisions. Technical solutions alone rarely achieve this.

Many development initiatives fail not because the solutions are wrong, but because the social conditions necessary for change are weak. Farmers may have access to climate-smart technologies but lack the networks needed to share knowledge and coordinate action. Communities may be invited to participate in local planning, but without trust in institutions, engagement remains limited. Governments may launch ambitious reforms, but if citizens do not feel heard or represented, implementation often stalls.

The same pattern can be observed across sectors. In humanitarian response, assistance is often most effective when it builds on trusted community networks and local leadership. In enterprise development, entrepreneurs may receive training, finance, and technology, yet struggle to grow without business networks, market connections, and mentoring relationships. In market systems development, stronger value chains depend not only on investment and productivity but also on trust among producers, traders, financial institutions, and regulators. Without these relationships, opportunities for inclusive growth remain constrained.

These examples point to a common lesson that development outcomes are shaped not only by resources and insti-

tutions but also by the quality of relationships that connect people to one

another and to systems of power. Social capital, understood as the networks, trust, and norms that enable collective action, helps communities solve problems, build coalitions, and pursue shared goals.

Most importantly, transformative change depends on the relationship between people and power. Many development challenges persist not because resources are absent, but because those most affected by decisions often have the least influence over them. Exclusion is frequently rooted in unequal access to participation, representation, and decision-making. Social capital helps address these imbalances by creating pathways for dialogue, accountability, and citizen engagement. In this sense, it is not only about cooperation; it is also about agency.

If social capital is fundamental to transformative change, it should no longer be treated as a secondary outcome of development interventions. It should be intentionally integrated throughout the project cycle. During project design, practitioners should assess relationships, trust levels, local networks, and power dynamics alongside technical and economic analyses. During implementation, investments should be made in participation, collaboration, and coalition-building. Monitoring and reporting should capture not only outputs and outcomes but also changes in trust, inclusion, collective action, and relationships between communities and institutions.

Ultimately, social capital is not a by-product of transformation; it is one of its foundations. Lasting transformation occurs when trust, relationships, and collective action empower people to reshape the systems and power structures that define their lives.

*Dr. Prabin Manandhar is an international development expert with experience across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. He is the Country Director of Helvetas Myanmar, former Chair of the Association of International NGOs Nepal, former Convenor of ACT Alliance in Nepal and Iraq, and an International Editorial Board Member for the Journal of South Asian Cultural Studies, UK. He also teaches at Kathmandu University. The opinions expressed are his own.*

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## Rattles Nepal's Banking Sector

*Prime Minister Balendra Shah came to power on promises of job creation, good governance, and the rule of law. However, recent actions by his secretariat using excessive executive power against the Nepal Investment Mega Bank Ltd (NIMB) board and officials suggest a troubling departure from those ideals.*

By A CORRESPONDENT

As Karl Marx famously observed, history repeats itself—first as tragedy, second as farce. Prithvi Bahadur Pande, a direct descendant of Damodar Pande—the great 18th-century Nepali patriot executed following a royal palace conspiracy—now finds himself facing a remarkably similar plot orchestrated by the current government.

In the late 18th century, Damodar Pande—son of Kazi Kalu Pande, the legendary commander of the Gorkha Army chosen by Nepal's founder, Prithvi Narayan Shah—was executed due to palace intrigues. His crime had been serving his country honorably: negotiating a trade deal with British India to safeguard Nepal's sovereignty and leading military forces against the Chinese invasion of 1788–1792.

Now, over 240 years later, conspiratorial efforts backed by the Prime Minister's Office are allegedly attempting to tear down NIMB, an internationally reputed commercial bank founded by Prithvi Bahadur Pande, Damodar Pande's great-great-grandson.

Under the leadership of Pande—who served initially as Chief Executive Officer and now as Chairman—Nepal Investment Mega Bank Ltd (originally established as a joint-venture bank with a French institution) has achieved remark-



able success over the last 15 years, establishing itself as one of Nepal's most credible commercial banks.

### An Example of Unlawful Act

The ongoing controversy has now put the general public's trust—particularly that of depositors—and the credibility of Nepal's banking system itself at risk. In the Smart Telecom case, the government is pursuing the entire board of directors of Nepal Investment Mega Bank over the auction of collateralized assets carried out by the bank while recovering a loan owed to it. Nepal Rastra Bank considers the action to be in accordance with the law, but the government and police have turned against the bank. The Finance Minister remains silent.

When a bank seeks to recover a loan, whose claim should take precedence over the collateral held by the bank—the bank's claim or the government's? This ambiguity is an issue that must be addressed through legislation.

### A Betrayal of Promises

Although elected on promises of job creation, good governance, and upholding the rule of law, Prime Minister Balendra Shah's secretariat is acting in direct opposition to these commitments. The recent decision to use police forces to target NIMB and its senior officers lays bare the administration's true intentions.

When a government openly violates legal norms and the rule of law, ordinary citizens and institutions are left with few defenses against severe consequences.

This is precisely the reality currently facing NIMB officials. Police forces—acting under heavy pressure from the Prime Minister's secretariat—have been instructed to submit a case to the District Attorney General's Office in Kathmandu. The suit demands bail amounts five hundred times higher than the actual financial recovery sought from the individuals involved.

This excessive demand highlights the government's true objective: keeping bank officials behind bars indefinitely. It echoes the personal vendettas of the 18th century, when the Thapa clan systematically eliminated the Pande clan from political power.

#### Resistance Within the Legal System

Recovering defaulted loans by auctioning collateral and securing public deposits is standard banking practice, not a crime. Loans issued by banks consist of money entrusted



ed by depositors. Yet, operating through the CIB, the government has charged senior bankers with criminal offenses for performing these standard duties.

The case has triggered strong internal pushback. After being pressured to pursue an unviable, unlawful case regarding Smart Telecom Pvt. Ltd.—a filing prepared by the CIB that ignores fundamental legal principles—several government attorneys have requested transfers.

Government lawyers have reportedly argued that it is legally impossible to prosecute the case in the form prepared by the CIB, refusing to participate in what they view as

a politically driven prosecution.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police—which initiated an inquiry following a directive from the Prime Minister's Office—has submitted its final investigation report to the District Government Attorney's Office. The investigation reportedly centers on the auction of assets valued at approximately Rs. 5 billion, while demanding Rs. 96 billion in damages.

Government lawyers are reportedly facing heavy pressure to file the case exactly as presented in the CIB's report. However, prosecutors have resisted moving forward unchanged, pointing out critical shortcomings in the investigation and arguing that the CIB's claims lack sufficient supporting evidence. Following this pushback, the government has already reassigned the official responsible for handling the case.

Friction between the two offices was evident early on. Government lawyers expressed dissatisfaction during the initial phases when extensions for detention were requested, during which several investigating officers were also rotated



ed. When arrests were first made, Mohan Khanal was assigned to manage the extension requests; responsibility was later handed over to Shreeram Ojha for several days.

On Friday, August 7, the CIB officially submitted its report to the District Government Attorney's Office, naming 22 individuals as defendants and claiming Rs. 96 billion in damages. The report is currently under review by government attorneys.

"There should not be pressure on the prosecution in the same way there was pressure during the investigation. But we have faced immense pressure from the moment the case reached this stage," one government lawyer stated. Prosecutors report reaching a breaking point where ongoing demands from the CIB to file the case unchanged have made their work nearly unmanageable.

In the midst of this standoff, administrative changes have raised further questions. Typically, the head of the District Government Attorney's Office (an Assistant District Attorney) is not transferred within a single year. However, Shobhakant Bhandari, who took charge at the end of Chaitra (after previously serving from Poush 1, 2081, to Chaitra 26, 2082, following a transfer from the Butwal High Court), was transferred to the Office of the Attorney General after just four months. Assistant Attorney General Santosh Sharma has since been appointed to lead the district office, while

several other prosecutors in Kathmandu are actively seeking transfers out of the district.

"I would also be relieved if they transferred me. It has become extremely difficult to work here lately," another district government lawyer admitted. Staff members noted that Bhandari was reluctant to handle cases under the intense external influence surrounding high-profile matters, expressing frustration over operating under direct political pressure.

Sources allege that following the



formation of the new government, the CIB itself came under intense pressure to push the case forward at all costs. To demonstrate that it is executing its directives, the CIB has reportedly pressured prosecutors, with sources claiming that calls were placed directly from the Prime Minister's Office to exert leverage.

For the Pande-led NIMB, history seems to be repeating itself. Although the current administration champions the rule of law, transparency, and accountability, its operational methods resemble the political maneuvering of centuries

past—where executive power was manipulated behind closed doors to target specific individuals and institutions. In light of these developments, citizens are placing their remaining hopes in the judiciary and the Supreme Court, which continue to demonstrate the independence required to uphold constitutional rights.

Perhaps the government is trying to take advantage of a situation created by the absence of law or policy. It appears determined to bring down the bank. However, this criminal approach could undermine not only NIMBL but the entire private commercial banking system and its institutional framework. The risk is growing that Nepal's financial institutions, as well as international confidence in the country's financial policies, could suffer serious damage, resulting in a loss of trust among international stakeholders and investors.

Jyoti Prakash Pandey, the Chief Executive Officer who already faced unlawful detention last month for carrying out a lawful act, is also a target of the PM's Secretariat.

For NIMB—a financial institution built over decades into a pillar of Nepal's commercial sector—the situation mirrors historical struggles against arbitrary authority. As pressure mounts on administrative bodies, honest citizens and business leaders are turning their hopes toward the judiciary as the ultimate defender of fairness and the rule of law.

# System Breakdown

## *System Breakdown Halts National ID Process, Leaving Citizens Stranded*

By A CORRESPONDENT

For the past month, the technology and software underpinning Nepal's National Identity Card (NID) system—from processing new applications to printing physical cards—has completely ground to a halt. The blackout has left hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens stranded in bureaucratic limbo, unable to access essential services ranging from passport issuance to banking and social security.

The collapse hit service seekers like Sabin Rana at the worst possible time. Planning to go abroad for employment under the Employment Permit System (EPS), Rana spent days shuttling between government offices in frustration.

"I was bounced from one office to another until I was completely exhausted," Rana shared. "Luckily, the Department of Passports eventually set up a manual verification desk, which allowed me to finally get my paperwork validated and submit my passport application."

### The Human Toll of Administrative Mandates

The system malfunction, which began in mid-June (mid-Asar), hit those who were not yet entered into the digital registry hardest. Over the past few years, the government made the National ID mandatory for a wide array of public and private services, including property transactions, revenue clearance, telecommunications, banking, social security allowances, and

passport applications.

As long queues and public outcry grew, the Department of National ID and Civil Registration issued a circular advising government agencies to temporarily suspend the mandatory NID requirement. However, enforcing the temporary fix proved chaotic.

According to Deepak Banjade, spokesperson for the Department of Passports, the lack of seamless inter-agency coordination led to days

was originally established in 2018 (2075 B.S.) by the French security technology firm IDEMIA. When the vendor contract expired two years ago, physical card printing stopped, but local Nepali technicians managed to keep the digital registration system running on temporary patches to issue NID numbers.

Without an active maintenance contract or technical support agreement in place, the local technical team was unable to recover the system when the

software experienced a total failure last month.

"For two years, efforts were made to reach an agreement—either to extend with IDEMIA or onboard a new technology vendor—but no contract was finalized," Shrestha explained. "Because our contractual relationship with

the vendor ended, we can no longer request their technical support."

Despite political shifts—including the transition to Prime Minister Balendra Shah's administration—the government failed to issue a timely tender or secure a vendor, leaving the digital infrastructure vulnerable to this eventual breakdown.

To date, the department has printed and distributed 4 million physical National Identity Cards and generated NID numbers for over 20 million citizens. Until the government secures a permanent technical partner to restore the database software, millions of Nepalis remain caught between mandatory digital identity requirements and a non-functional system.



of tension and confusion for service seekers before a temporary help desk could be established.

Nirajan Shrestha, Director of the Department, acknowledged the severe distress caused to the public: "After the Department of Passports asked us to set up a verification desk at their office, our team began issuing manual verification letters on-site. We have urged all other line agencies to process public requests without insisting on the National ID for the time being."

### Technical Neglect and Contractual Deadlocks

The current crisis stems from years of unresolved technical and contractual dependencies. The NID infrastructure

# In My Own Handwriting



BY: HEMANT ARJYAL

It was a sweet coincidence to have come across some new facts about Nepal aviation history recently through the social media. Surely, bits of such information are scattered at unassuming spots and all such discoveries bring back euphoria as like finding long lost gold. Having witnessed the early years of Nepal aviation, as a child, it has been my endeavour to pen what little I know about those events based on my own perception, even if, there are not many who are interested in the topic.

The first part of this piece is made up of few bits and pieces of those instances as found, the second part talks about RA/(R) NAC and ways to go. Things are looking different under the dispensation of the new government. Feel the most basic thing that needs to be done at RA, is to earn back the pax confidence first, before attempting anything spectacular.

Happen to go through a book in Nepali titled “Alpha Sierra Mike” by an ex ATC Mohanchandra Singh. The “Alpha” part deals with aviation aspects in his memoir. There were couple of things related aviation history here that were not known like that it was a H-295 Helio Courier used by USAID in its works that air lifted Queen Ratna when she was injured by a stray bullet during KM’s Suklaphata hunting expedition (Jan 30, ’71). A single engine Helio under chief pilot Jim Burrel made a heroic night time flight from Kathmandu to Mahendra-nagar and back when there were no night

time landing aids nor en-route nav aids or even rules that governed such flights. It was an uncommon example that showed the spirit of true airmanship.

While, at the other extreme, the claim that Ellsworth Bunker, US Ambassador to Vietnam then, flew to

Kathmandu from Saigon abroad an US Air Force “fighter jet” is not palatable at all. It also stated that, at times, Bunker even sent it to pick up Amb. Carol C. Laise, when he himself could not make it. Even if the author was in a position to see it all happen, it is not easy to take it at its face value. Surely, the rumour in Kathmandu would have been louder



Still from “Up to his ears”

than the fighter jet noise, if such was the case. Strange that even pilots in active flying then were unaware of such happenings. It names the fighter as Lockheed F-104C Star fighter and also carries its image. As like the proof of Lufthansa’s B707 landing at Kathmandu is provided by an image of Gorkhapatra clipping with date scribbled in “my own handwriting”, the author might as well come with a more convincing proof. It is immaterial if Bunker flew regularly in a four engine DC6 or a supersonic Concorde, for that matter, but rather than finding fault; I am more interested in establishing the hard fact related to Nepal aviation.

It was another surprise to have come across an extremely important historic movie clip that showed HelioH-500 Twin-Courier/(TC) landing at Pokhara.

It happened to be from the 1965 French film about the farcical adventures of an unhappy billionaire in Hong Kong and the Himalayas titled “Up to his ears”. Quite unaware about the background of the TC then, I had totally forgotten that I had watched the full movie long during engineering college years in Bangalore. The clip is important in the sense that a Twin Courier was based in Kathmandu by CIA long ago and I had written in more detail in my earlier write-ups.

Now coming to RA, it is good that the current government seems to desire to make a clean departure from the way the flag carrier was literally mauled by the successive governments in power. It called for experienced individuals to apply for the top management position by briefing about their vision by explaining the plan as how they intended to make RA turn around. So far so good, but the selection was immediately challenged and the court found that it was not “merit” based the way the final selection list was sequenced. It now has a board of directors and also named a person with past RA affiliation as its CEO. As rumoured, a newly appointed directors too has resigned. Only wish that the dispute gets settled quickly so that RA can climb higher and cruise away smoothly to its destination.

Airlines in our neighbourhood are seen to be encountering patch of one bad weather to another. Air India in the news, most of the time, for all the wrong reasons and is constantly hounded by the hyper active Indian media. Spice Jet is flying erratically with a depleted fleet. Loss making Pakistan’s PIA has finally been sold to a private business house and the new owner had selected Ethiopian airlines veteran Tewolde Gebremariam to lead it. But he got snatched away by Air India before he was confirmed. It is rather strange that both were after the same Ethiopian. And, as usual, the Indian media is bent of projecting it as a great achievement, probably because of having clev-

erly won him from the arch adversary. But we may not have to wait long before the media goes after his jugular at the slightest hint of error under his leadership. But even with home grown talent, RA still has mountains of obstacle to climb, before some semblance of stability.

Tremendous market is there for picking, if only RA is willing to grab the opportunity. Talking about the new PIA there was an interesting piece of news that stated it had approved the immediate induction of two aircraft on a six-months wet lease to support and restart operations to European routes starting coming October. May be RA needs to follow that path to earn back the pax confidence that it has lost since long. PIA was also under EASA’s watch list but had successfully come off it not long ago. The above suggestion of wet leasing is important as Nepal can bypass EASA watch

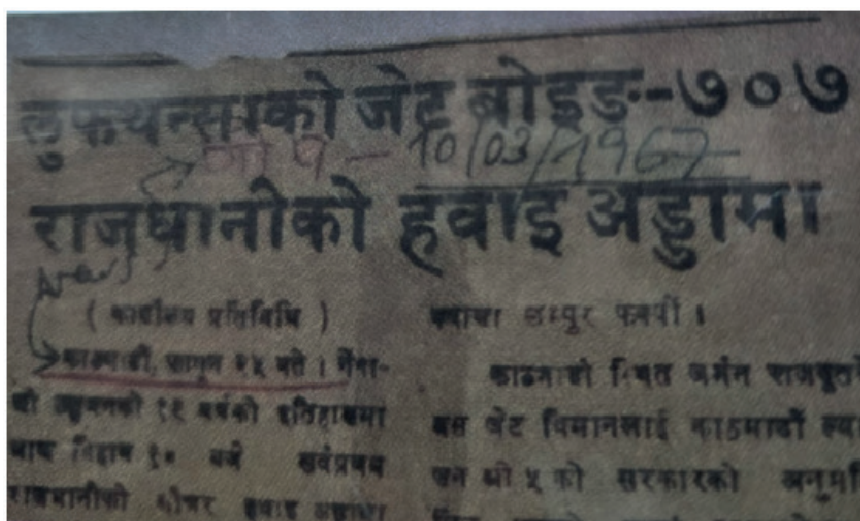
list, as there exists such provision that allows wet leased aircraft to run Europe flights. And there will be no need to lament about the B- list if we can pursue this channel with a short term objective while CAAN works relentlessly to address the

pending non-compliance issues that has been bedveiling Nepal aviation

since long.

Wet leasing may not offer a cheap solution but it is the only doable option for the interim. Feel at least one wet leased wide-body and two dry leased narrow bodies should be enough to negate most complaints regarding RA’s perennial unreliability blemish. The wet leased aircraft should help start at least one weekly flights to UK, Australia and even Korea. The dry leased ones should help increasing frequency of flights to current destination in the surrounding neighbourhood and, above all, it will help provide some “reliability cushion” for pax comfort.

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**Gorkhapatra 10/03/1967**

## JICA PRESIDENT VISIT

# Reinforcing a Strong Partnership

*JICA President Dr. TANAKA Akihiko Visits Nepal, Reinforcing a Strong Partnership for Sustainable Development*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**D**r. TANAKA Akihiko, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), visited Nepal from 26 to 29 July 2026, reaffirming Japan's continued commitment to supporting the country's development aspirations and strengthening the longstanding partnership between the two nations.

Dr. Tanaka last visited Nepal in 2015, shortly after the devastating Gorkha Earthquake, when Japan stood alongside Nepal during its recovery and reconstruction efforts. His return over a decade later provided an opportunity to witness Nepal's remarkable progress in rebuilding and advancing its development agenda.

The visit comes at a pivotal moment in Nepal's development trajectory. With a focus on infrastructure development, economic transformation, and public welfare, Nepal is entering a critical phase in its pursuit of sustainable and inclusive growth. Against this backdrop, Dr. Tanaka's visit underscores the enduring partnership between Nepal and Japan, highlighting JICA's key role in supporting national priorities. It also served to deepen bilateral cooperation and identify new avenues for collaboration to support long-term prosperity, resilience, and social progress.

The timing holds special significance as 2026 marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan. Built on decades of mutual trust and friendship, the partnership has delivered transformative results across multiple sectors. Beyond celebrating these achievements, the visit



reaffirmed a shared commitment to building a more resilient, prosperous, and sustainable future for both nations.

During his trip, Dr. Tanaka met with Hon. Dr. Swarnim Wagle, Minister of Finance; Hon. Mr. Biraj Bhakta Shrestha, Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation; and Hon. Mr. Sunil Lamsal, Minister for Infrastructure Development. Discussions focused on strengthening cooperation in key sectors, reviewing ongoing initiatives, and exploring new opportunities aligned with Nepal's national priorities.

Dr. Tanaka also attended the signing ceremony for the Grant Agreement for the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS) at the Ministry of Finance. The agreement reconfirmed the shared commitment of

both governments to enhancing the capacity of Nepal's civil service through advanced education, leadership development, and professional training.

A key highlight of the visit was his participation in the inauguration ceremony of the Nagdhunga Tunnel Construction Project on 27 July 2026. As Nepal's first road tunnel, the project represents a historic milestone in the country's infrastructure. The tunnel is expected to significantly improve connectivity between the Kathmandu Valley, Pokhara, western Nepal, and the Indian border—ensuring safer, faster, and more efficient transport while boosting economic growth and regional integration.

Dr. Tanaka also visited Patan Secondary School, which was rebuilt under JICA's Emergency School Recon-

struction Project following the 2015 earthquake. During his visit, he interacted with students and teachers, observed Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers in action, and toured the new facilities. The visit highlighted the lasting impact of Nepal-Japan cooperation in education and its role in creating a safer learning environment for future generations.

In addition, Dr. Tanaka toured JICA-supported civil aviation safety facilities at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) and inspected the proposed site for a new Air Traffic Control Tower. On the occasion, Mr. Mukesh Dangol, Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), expressed deep appreciation for JICA's support—specifically the installation of radar systems at TIA and Bhattdanda, alongside ongoing capacity-building efforts for CAAN and TIA staff—describing it as vital to the development of Nepal's aviation sector.

Reflecting on Nepal's development journey, Dr. Tanaka commended the country's progress and resilience. He noted that it was inspiring to witness Nepal moving forward with confidence while investing in infrastructure and human capital for long-term growth. He reaffirmed JICA's dedication to supporting Nepal's priorities and extended his warm wishes for the continued prosperity of the Nepali people.

As a trusted, longstanding partner, JICA continues to play a vital role in Nepal's infrastructure, education, health, and disaster resilience sectors. Dr. Tanaka's visit reflects both the successes of past cooperation and a joint vision for a stronger future.

## Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation

### Minister Biraj Bhakta Shrestha Meets JICA President

Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Biraj Bhakta Shrestha held a meeting with Tanaka Akihiko, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

During the meeting at the ministry on Tuesday, the two sides discussed bilateral cooperation in the development of Nepal's energy, water resources, and irrigation infrastructure.

Minister Shrestha thanked the JICA delegation for its continued support and investment in Nepal's energy and irrigation sectors. He also highlighted the Kankai and Chandranahar irrigation

on the global stage. He also informed the JICA President that a master plan for river basin management is currently being prepared.

At the meeting, President Tanaka requested assistance in resolving the issues affecting the Tanahun Hydropower Project. Minister Shrestha expressed his commitment to addressing the project's challenges.

Minister Shrestha also stated that the government's current budget has given priority to expanding the country's transmission line network and that a master plan for this expansion is under preparation. He added that efforts

are also underway to strengthen the electricity distribution system. Emphasizing that renewable energy is one of the foundations of Nepal's prosperity, he said the government has prioritized it in its development plans.

The minister praised the Kulekhani Hydropower Project, noting that it incorporates advanced Japanese technology capable of withstanding various risks. He also invited JICA to collaborate on

the Nalgad Hydropower Project. Recalling JICA's support during Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquake, Minister Shrestha expressed his sincere gratitude.

JICA President Tanaka Akihiko reaffirmed the agency's interest in expanding cooperation in Nepal's energy sector and expressed interest in new development projects. He stated that JICA is ready to contribute innovative technologies, expertise, and investment to Nepal's infrastructure development.



tion projects, which were built with JICA's assistance, and expressed hope that the partnership would continue in the future.

The minister also congratulated and thanked JICA for its support and cooperation in the construction of the Nagdhunga Tunnel Road. JICA President Tanaka Akihiko is currently in Nepal to attend the inauguration of the tunnel project. During his visit, he met with Minister Shrestha to discuss matters of mutual interest and future cooperation.

During the discussion, Minister Shrestha requested JICA's support in promoting Nepal's clean and green energy

## LUMBINI DEVELOPMENT TRUST

# Caught in Controversy, Falling Behind on Development

*Although the Lumbini Development Trust's (LDC) goal is to develop Lumbini—the birthplace of Lord Buddha—its actions continue to generate more controversy than progress. From attempts to seize monastery land to abandoning core elements of the master plan, the Trust's management has drawn fierce criticism, including accusations of harassing monks who advocate for proper plan implementation.*

By A CORRESPONDENT

In Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and a global symbol of peace, disputes and counter-accusations are fast overshadowing development. Key stakeholders report that various monasteries and viharas—designed to spread messages of peace and non-violence—face constant administrative hurdles created by officials and employees of the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT).

To establish Lumbini as a premier global Buddhist destination, organizations from around the world have invested in constructing monastic complexes. However, project representatives allege that Trust officials routinely disrupt construction work on flimsy pretexts, forcing multiple projects past their scheduled completion dates.

Established in 1985 to oversee the region's overall growth, the Trust has instead become mired in political infighting, administrative irregularities, and management disputes. Local residents and stakeholders attribute this stagnation to political appointees and staff hired through patronage rather than merit.



Under a United Nations initiative, renowned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange was commissioned in 1972 to design a master plan transforming Lumbini into an international center for peace. Tange submitted his comprehensive design in 1978, which was promptly approved by the Nepal government for implementation.

While the initial targets set completion of Phase I for 1985 and Phase II for 1995, the master plan remains incomplete nearly five decades later. Local scholars and community leaders express frustration that a project

designed to guide Lumbini's long-term development—divided into the Sacred Garden, the International Monastic Zone, and the New Lumbini Village—remains unrealized 48 years after its inception.

Compounding these delays are severe allegations of extortion. Monks and representatives building in the International Monastic Zone state that Trust officials demand unauthorized payments for land allocation and ongoing construction on leased plots, actively obstructing work if demands are not met.

A primary example involves the World Peace Dham, constructed by Rang Rik SK Inc. In 2013, the Trust signed a 99-year lease agreement with the organization for Plot No. WB-5. When the plot proved insufficient, the organization requested additional space; however, Trust delays in granting the request halted construction for nearly three years. In 2017, the Trust finally leased two adjacent plots—WB-14 and WB-18—under matching 99-year terms.

Despite regaining momentum, construction was again delayed by the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. When Rang Rik SK Inc. formally requested a timeline extension, Trust officials reportedly refused to register the application for months.

According to organization representatives, former Member Secretary Sanuraja Shakya and senior official Gyanin Rai threatened to cancel the 99-year lease entirely due to the delays. During the fallout, the Trust unilaterally revoked the agreement for Plot No. WB-14 and reallocated it to the Tukche Choling Monastery. While Plot No. WB-18 was eventually restored to Rang Rik SK Inc. after intense disputes, WB-14 remained contested.

Rang Rik SK Inc. subsequently took legal action against the Trust. Both the Rupandehi District Court and the Butwal High Court ruled in favor of Rang Rik SK Inc., ordering the LDT to return Plot No. WB-14. To date, representatives report that Trust officials have failed to enforce the court

orders.

The organization's representatives have also accused the Trust of creating disputes by changing the designation of the land. According to them, land originally provided to them as Plot No. WB-14 was later identified as WC-14 when it was allocated to Tukche Choling Monastery.

Rang Rik SK Inc. claims that it invested more than 50 million rupees to construct an underground facility on Plot No. WB-18 for mechanical,



electrical, ventilation, and plumbing (MEVP) infrastructure. The organization alleges that the Trust sent correspondence indicating that the structure should be demolished on the grounds that it was not necessary for parking.

The developers argue that it is inappropriate to pressure them to demolish the structure on various pretexts when the detailed project report (DPR) had already been approved before the land was allocated and the structure was constructed accordingly.

Locals allege that although some monasteries that began construction under agreements in Lumbini have failed to complete their projects for many years, the Trust has not paid sufficient attention to them and has instead continuously pressured Rang Rik SK Inc.

Acting Member Secretary of the Trust Gyanin Rai, however, says that Plot No. WB-14 was allocated to another organization because the work was not carried out according to the agreement. He says the organization

was required to have only one plot, and therefore two of the three plots allocated to it were taken back.

However, an employee of the Trust, speaking on condition of anonymity, claims that three large plots were allocated to a Chinese temple, while Thai and Burmese monasteries were each given three plots. The employee further alleges that, recently, another monastery

was also provided with two large plots in violation of the rules.

Acting Member Secretary Rai says Rang Rik SK Inc. constructed structures by encroaching on 15 meters of public land, and that the Trust sent a letter instructing the organization to clear the encroached area and the parking area.

The organization's representatives, however, claim that a compound already existed in the area before the land agreement was signed. They allege that they constructed the structures entirely within the boundaries



of the land provided by the Trust and that various excuses have been used to obstruct their work.

Representatives of the organization say they have become frustrated because of the Trust's conduct.

There are also a number of monasteries in Lumbini that have failed to complete construction within the timeframe specified in their agreements. The Korean Monastery, Bhutanese Monastery, Thousand Monastery, Vietnamese Monastery, and several other organizations are reportedly among those that have been unable to complete construction for a long time.

However, locals allege that these organizations have not been subjected to similar action, while Rang Rik SK Inc. has been pressured on various pretexts. They say this has raised questions about the Trust's working methods and decision-making process.

The land lease agreement between the Lumbini Development Trust and Rang Rik SK Inc. reportedly contains a provision that disputes should first be resolved through negotiation and, if negotiations fail, through ar-

bitration. Legal experts say the Trust does not have the authority to unilaterally terminate the lease agreement without completing the required legal process.

Representatives of the organization claim that the decisions of the Rupandehi District Court and the Butwal High Court were also based on this issue. They allege that the Trust has been reluctant to implement the court's orders.

Although efforts have been underway for a long time to develop Lumbini as one of the world's leading Buddhist and peace destinations, stakeholders have expressed concern that the expected results have not been achieved.

There are growing calls to provide organizations constructing monasteries with a conducive environment and to make the administrative and management system of the Lumbini Development Trust more transparent. Locals have demanded an impartial investigation into allegations of commissions, irregularities, and pressure involving officials and employees, and action against anyone found responsible.

Recently, after employee Gyanin Rai assumed responsibility as acting Member Secretary of the Lumbini Development Trust, some monasteries and organizations have accused him of sending threatening letters pointing out alleged shortcomings in various monasteries. The Trust, however, maintains that it is operating in accordance with the rules and agreements.

Since Lumbini is a sacred center of faith for Buddhists around the world, locals and intellectuals emphasize that its development should be pursued above political interests and personal gain. They say the key priorities now should be completing the master plan that has remained unfinished for decades, resolving disputes surrounding monastery and vihara construction, and ensuring transparency in the activities of the Lumbini Development Trust.

The Lumbini Development Trust is facing sharp criticism over allegations of administrative bias, arbitrary land reassignments, and non-compliance with court orders regarding monastery construction in the UNESCO World Heritage site.

## Land Disputes and Demolition Demands

Representatives of the organization Rang Rik SK Inc. accuse the Trust of orchestrating land disputes through altered plot designations. According to representatives, land originally assigned to them as Plot No. WB-14 was later re-identified as WC-14 when reallocated to the Tukche Choling Monastery.

Rang Rik SK Inc. claims it invested over NPR 50 million to construct an underground mechanical, electrical, ventilation, and plumbing (MEVP) infrastructure on Plot No. WB-18. However, the Trust issued directives demanding the structure's demolition, deeming it unnecessary for parking.

"Pressuring us to demolish a structure built according to an already approved Detailed Project Report (DPR) is entirely inappropriate," developers argued.

### Allegations of Selective Enforcement

Locals and developers point out that while several international monasteries—including the Korean, Bhutanese, Thousand, and Vietnamese projects—have left construction incomplete for years without facing sanctions, the Trust has targeted Rang Rik SK Inc.

Acting Member Secretary of the Trust, Gyanin Rai, countered the allegations, stating that Plot WB-14 was revoked because the organization failed to comply with its agreement. He noted that policy restricts entities to a single plot, prompting the retrieval of two of the three original assignments.

However, an anonymous Trust em-

ployee disputed Rai's statement, revealing that rule-defying multi-plot allocations are common:

Chinese Temple: 3 large plots

Thai Monastery: 3 plots

Burmese Monastery: 3 plots

Recent allocations: 2 large plots awarded to another single monastery.

Rai further claimed Rang Rik SK



Inc. encroached on 15 meters of public space, prompting formal notices to clear the zone. Rang Rik SK Inc. denies this, maintaining that all construction remained strictly within the boundaries provided by the Trust, referencing existing compound structures predating the lease.

### Legal and Administrative Obstacles

Legal experts highlight that the lease agreement between the Trust and Rang Rik SK Inc. mandates dispute resolution through negotiation or formal arbitration. Consequently, the Trust lacks the authority to unilaterally terminate the lease.

Representatives of Rang Rik SK Inc. emphasize that rulings from both the Rupandehi District Court and the Butwal High Court support this clause, yet the Trust remains reluctant to enforce the judicial directives.

Additionally, multiple monastery administrators report receiving threatening letters from Acting Member Secretary Rai over alleged shortcomings—a claim the Trust denies, maintaining that all actions comply with institutional regulations.

### Calls for Transparency

Stakeholders emphasize that decades of administrative inefficiency have hindered Lumbini's development as a premier international Buddhist site.

### Locals and intellectuals are demanding:

An impartial investigation into claims of bribery, commission seeking, and administrative misconduct. Transparent operations within the Lumbini Development Trust.

Prioritizing the completion of the decades-old Master Plan over individual and political interests.

Political interference and back-room deals continue to hamper the development of Lumbini, a revered sacred site. However, residents and stakeholders hope the new government will drive meaningful reform and change.

## Farewell To Ambassador

### *Nepal Will Stay with Me Forever: Ambassador Lorenzo's Touching Farewell*

By A CORRESPONDENT

In a gathering of over 1,500 young people from different parts of Nepal, the European Union marked International Youth Day in Nepal with a day focused on opportunity, innovation, and youth leadership.

EU Ambassador to Nepal, Véronique Lorenzo, felicitated 42 Nepali students who secured the coveted Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree scholarship to study at universities across the European Union.

The scholarship recipients, including 22 women and 20 men, met with representatives of EU Member States, Erasmus alumni, and fellow scholars ahead of their studies. The students will pursue degrees in fields such as public health, cybersecurity, journalism, renewable energy, and sustainable construction.

The European Union has been providing scholarships to young Nepalis under the Erasmus Mundus program for the past two decades. A key feature of this year's International Youth Day celebration was the pre-departure orientation program held for the 42 newly selected scholars.

In a poetic coincidence, Ambassador Lorenzo is completing her three-year tenure as Head of the European Union Delegation to Nepal. Having started her career in Nepal three years ago by interacting with departing scholarship recipients, she delivered her farewell remarks to this year's cohort of 42 students.

Speaking from the heart, Ambassador Lorenzo hailed Nepal's young population for contributing to the nation's development, praising Nepal as a country of natural beauty with warm-hearted people.

"One of Nepal's greatest resources is its youth. Young people are dynamic, energetic, and full of potential. But this potential must be matched by in-

vestment in skills, opportunity, and employment. That is what the new EU initiatives are about. They aim to help bridge the digital divide and ensure that the benefits of technology reach those who have too often been left behind," Ambassador Lorenzo remarked.

During the program, Bandana Thapa, Program Officer at the European Union, briefed the scholars on the program logistics and arrangements in their respective destination countries.

Thapa, who has worked with the program for over 15 years, noted that



there are over 1,000 Erasmus fellows in Nepal, and highlighted that 22 females and 20 males were selected for this year's batch.

#### Youth Day and the EU

The Delegation of the European Union to Nepal marked International Youth Day 2026 with a full day of activities at Hotel Malla in Kathmandu, bringing together students, Erasmus scholars, alumni, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, innovators, private-sector partners, and youth leaders.

The day connected three main events: the Erasmus Mundus Pre-Departure Orientation, EU Youth Fest 2026, and EU Youth Alumni Day, showcasing opportunities for young people in digital skills, innovation, and entrepreneurship. More than 1,500 youth attended the EU Youth Fest 2026,

where they received guidance and mentorship from seasoned professionals. Attendees explored emerging industries—such as animation, robotics, and artificial intelligence—alongside hands-on experiences featuring 3D modeling and printing, drone simulations, and AI-powered games.

At the Youth Fest, the EU Delegation also marked the launch of two new grant initiatives worth a combined €1.91 million:

**CODE: Creating Opportunities for Youth in Digital Economy**

**UDAAN: Unleashing Digital Acceleration and Ambition of Nepali Youth**

The implementing partners for CODE are Swisscontact, Restless Development, and the Robotics Association of Nepal. UDAAN will be implemented by Youth Innovation Lab, Women in Animation, Heifer Project Nepal, and the Nepal Applied Mathematics and Informatics Institute for Research (NAAMII). These initiatives will engage young people across all seven provinces, focusing on digital skills, employability, entrepreneurship, and innovation—particularly for young women, rural communities, and marginalized groups.

Alongside the Youth Fest, the EU marked EU Youth Alumni Day, bringing together EU Youth Alumni, youth organizations, and partners to showcase youth-led initiatives across key EU focus areas, including the circular economy, green growth, quality education, climate action, and civic participation. The gathering offered alumni a platform to share success stories and discuss future collaboration.

Overall, the day reflected the EU's continued commitment to partnering with young people to shape Nepal's future across education, mobility, digital skills, innovation, and civic involvement.

## NEPAL- BANLADESH

# Sweetening Ties

## *A Taste of Friendship: Bangladesh Embassy Hosts "Mango Diplomacy" Event in Nepal showing "Mango Diplomacy" Is Connecting Nepal and Bangladesh*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Diplomats often employ creative means to build bridges, deepen bilateral ties, and foster warmth between nations. For Ambassador Md. Shafiqur Rahman, Bangladesh's envoy to Nepal, part of that diplomacy comes in a remarkably sweet package: the Bangladeshi mango.

For many people in Nepal's hilly regions, the word Maldah is synonymous with any mango. Yet, the world of mangoes is vast, and the famous Maldaha variety itself has deep roots in the fertile soils of Bangladesh and India. Hailing from a renowned mango-growing region of Bangladesh himself, Ambassador Rahman knows every nuance of the fruit. To share this vibrant heritage and foster closer bonds, the Embassy of Bangladesh in Kathmandu recently hosted a special festival titled "Bangladesh Mango Delicacy" at the UTSAV Kunja Banquet Hall in Kathmandu.

The event celebrated the rich cultural heritage, exceptional quality, and diverse flavors of Bangladeshi mangoes while highlighting the country's growing export potential in fresh fruits and processed agro-products.

### **A Confluence of Diplomacy and Culinary Heritage**

The gathering brought together diplomats, senior officials from the Government of Nepal, business leaders, importers, media representatives, and Bangladeshi citizens residing in Nepal. Ambassador Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary-General of the SAARC Secretariat, attended as the Guest of Honor, while Ambassador Gahendra Rajbhandari, Joint Secretary of the South Asia Division at Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, joined as the Special Guest on behalf of Nepal's Foreign Secretary.

In his welcome address, Ambassador Rahman highlighted Bangladesh's rapid strides in agriculture and agro-processing.

"In Bangladesh, a mango is far more than

just a fruit—it is an integral part of our culture, heritage, and agronomy," Ambassador Rahman noted.

Recalling historical anecdotes from the Mughal era, he explained how Bangladesh's fertile alluvial plains provide ideal conditions for growing some of the finest varieties in the world. Famous cultivars like Khirsapat (Himsagar), Haribhanga, Langra, Fazli, Gopalbhog, Amrapali, Ashwina, Banana Mango, Katimon, Gauramoti, and BARI are celebrated for their distinctive sweetness, rich aroma, and high

the agricultural sector.

Nepal's Joint Secretary, Ambassador Gahendra Rajbhandari, expressed appreciation to the Embassy for organizing an event that showcased both genuine hospitality and a practical way to connect people across sectors. Praising Ambassador Rahman's creative approach to "Mango Diplomacy," Rajbhandari emphasized the need for such engaging initiatives to maintain open channels of warmth and friendship amidst complex contemporary diplomatic landscapes.



### **From the Farm to the Banquet Table**

A highlight of the event was a presentation by Mr. Rofiqul Islam, a veteran mango farmer from Bangladesh with over 15 years of experience. He shared best practices in sustainable cultivation under the supervision of the Bangladesh Department of Agricultural Extension, demonstrating how Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) ensure high quality and safety.

Inside the exhibition hall, attendees explored displays of

late-season varieties from the Rajshahi region—including Fazli, Amrapali, BARI-4, Katimon, Gauramoti, and Ashina. Guests also sampled an array of processed goods from leading Bangladeshi brands, as well as handcrafted desserts like mango cakes, sticky-rice mango, and mango pudding. Documentaries highlighting mango cultivation, Bangladeshi culture, and the country's tourism appeal played throughout the venue.

The festival concluded with a spread of traditional Bangladeshi cuisine served to around 250 guests, including key fruit traders and chamber of commerce representatives. Beyond celebrating agricultural excellence, the event laid groundwork for future economic partnerships between Nepali importers and Bangladeshi exporters—proving that a shared love for good food remains one of diplomacy's most effective tools.

nutritional value.

Ambassador Rahman also lauded Bangladeshi agricultural scientists for developing high-yielding, late-season varieties like BARI, alongside adapting popular non-indigenous varieties. Furthermore, he commended Bangladesh's thriving food industry for producing global-standard value-added products, ranging from juices, pulps, and jams to dried mango bars, pickles, and chutneys.

### **Bridging Nations Through Shared Flavor**

Speaking at the event, SAARC Secretary-General Ambassador Golam Sarwar noted that despite South Asia's immense agricultural potential, international exports of mangoes and processed fruit products remain modest. He commended the Embassy for the initiative and urged regional member states to deepen collaboration in