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36.6° C 14.5° C
Simara Jomsom

Iran's president says US memorandum best path out of war

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AUG 23

Iran's president on Sunday defended a memorandum of understanding with the United States as the best way out of a stalled war while the new head of the Islamic Republic's top security body took a more defiant stance, warning of retaliation if neighbours support US threats to further sanction Tehran.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday is expected to announce new economic measures against Iran after the US vowed to impose an "unprecedented" level of economic warfare and isolation.

Meanwhile, an Israeli settler beat a Palestinian man outside his home, and Israel's military said it was pursuing a stabbing suspect in a separate attack, in the latest violence in the occupied West Bank. An Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed a child, according to a local hospital. "There is not a single provision in this agreement that amounts to capitulation," Pezeshkian said in a speech published by state-run IRNA early Sunday.

"The supreme leader sets the policies, and we will follow that path."

The memorandum of understanding opened a 60-day period for talks aimed at ending the war and reaching an accord on Iran's nuclear programme. That period ended last week, but no signs of compromise have emerged, especially on the crucial issue of reopening the Strait of Hormuz, vital to global shipping.

Pezeshkian linked the agreement to Iran's economic prospects, saying the country can't attract investment in this stalled phase.

Nearly six months into the war, Iran's economy is suffering under sanctions and a US naval blockade.

The hard-line leader of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, in his most extensive public comments since being named to the post earlier this month, warned Tehran's neighbours against joining the new US effort to hurt Iran's economy and said they would be considered enemies.

"If [Trump] wants to do something, we will retaliate in a seismic manner," Mohsen Rezaei told the state broadcaster in an interview that aired late Saturday. He said Iran would target oil-shipping routes out of the Persian Gulf—alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz—if neighbours join in. Rezaei, a former Revolutionary Guard commander and military adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, was part of senior appointments widely seen as hardening Tehran's political and military stance.

There were no confirmed attacks in the Strait of Hormuz over the past 48 hours, a multinational coalition overseen by the US Navy said on Sunday, with shipping traffic still at reduced levels.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Field Marshal Asim Munir will lead a delegation to Tehran on Monday, Iranian state television reported, citing Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baghaei.

Nepal must lock in India's power market before the window closes

India's electricity demand is projected to double over the next decade, but its expansion of solar, wind and nuclear power means Nepal cannot always rely on cross-border trade.



POST FILE PHOTO

The 456MW Upper Tamakoshi in Dolakha currently stands as Nepal's biggest hydroelectricity project.

GOKARNA AWASTHI & SEEMA TAMANG
KATHMANDU, AUG 23

India's electricity demand is projected to more than double over the next decade as the country pursues its ambition of becoming a developed nation and a leading global economic power by 2047.

The Central Electricity Authority's National Generation Adequacy Plan (2026-27 to 2035-36), which maps India's power sector transition over the next 10 years, projects peak electricity demand to reach 458.7 GW by 2035-36. To meet that demand, India's total installed capacity is expected to more than double from 520.5 GW to 1,121 GW.

On August 15, marking India's 80th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that his government was moving ahead with a target of 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047, describing nuclear energy as an important component of the country's energy security.

These developments point to a potentially huge market for Nepali electricity in India. But energy experts warn that Nepal cannot take the Indian market for granted.

India is not only expanding its own generation capacity to meet rising demand, but is also rapidly investing in solar, wind, hydropower, battery storage, pumped-storage projects and nuclear energy. Its push towards a diversified energy mix could eventually make Indian buyers more selective about the electricity they purchase from Nepal.

The nuclear power expansion, in particular, could become another factor that Nepal needs to consider while

planning its hydropower strategy.

"Now we need to focus on agreements of five, 15 and 25 years with India or Bangladesh for individual projects," said Kulman Ghising, former energy minister. "For that, the government must move seriously to ensure the market for electricity, from developing hydropower projects to expanding cross-border transmission lines and exporting power."

India's latest energy projections suggest that it will increasingly need electricity that is available when required, reliable and competitively priced—not just surplus power generated by Nepal during the monsoon.

There are also worries about geopolitical risk of depending heavily on a single market.

That makes long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) increasingly important, stakeholders say.

Some also worry about the geopolitical risks of depending heavily on a single market. Nepal-India relations have at times deteriorated sharply, with India imposing major economic blockades or trade restrictions on Nepal in 1969, 1988-89 and 2015-16 amid geopolitical tensions and disagreements over Nepal's domestic or foreign policies.

If bilateral relations sour in the future, India's expanding domestic generation capacity could give it greater flexibility in deciding whether

and when to purchase electricity from Nepal, say experts.

As India expands its solar, wind, hydropower and energy-storage capacity, it will increasingly be able to assess Nepal's electricity on the basis of price, reliability and availability.

That is why experts say Nepal needs to lock in markets through long-term agreements while also diversifying beyond India.

>> Continued on page 2

RSP yet to clear way for anti-graft scrutiny of Cabinet decisions

Despite its pledge to tackle corruption, the government has yet to amend the CIAA Act to define 'policy decisions'.

KUL CHANDRA NEUPANE
KATHMANDU, AUG 23

Nearly five months after taking office on a promise to deliver good governance, the Rastriya Swatantra Party-led government has yet to take forward a pending amendment that could bring corruption concealed as Cabinet "policy decisions" within the jurisdiction of Nepal's anti-graft agency.

Lawmakers frequently ask what actually constitutes a 'policy decision', Rabi Lamichhane, the RSP chair, told the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of Parliament on Thursday. "We must clarify this.

"Otherwise, how can the Cabinet function? Which prime minister can work effectively? If we are afraid of making policy decisions, how will the country move forward? How can we achieve good governance, development, and prosperity?"

Lamichhane's remarks came as lawmakers and officials discussed an amendment to the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Act, which would clarify the scope of Cabinet decisions that can be investigated for corruption.

The legal ambiguity has created a dilemma. While a broad definition could make ministers reluctant to take legitimate policy decisions, the lack of a clear definition has also allowed routine administrative decisions to be elevated to the Cabinet and potentially shielded from scrutiny.

"What is a policy decision? What matters fall under this category, and should they be subject to investiga-

tion? We must establish this in the law," Lamichhane said.

Prem Kumar Rai, chief commissioner of the CIAA, who attended the meeting, said the anti-graft body currently lacks legal authority to investigate corruption arising from Cabinet-level policy decisions. "Until we amend the provisions regarding policy decisions in Section 4 of the CIAA Act, Cabinet decisions will remain beyond our jurisdiction," Rai said. "Because the law is unclear, we cannot file cases against Cabinet decisions."

Critics point to a legal loophole that shields high-level wrongdoing from investigation.

Section 4(b) of the CIAA Act bars the commission from investigating or taking action against collective policy decisions made by the Cabinet or its committees, as well as judicial proceedings.

Officials and ministers, critics say, have exploited that provision by taking routine decisions, including those concerning public procurement and contracts, to the Cabinet even when they have the authority to make such decisions themselves. Such a practice can allow decisions involving conflicts of interest or potential corruption to be presented as "policy decisions".

>> Continued on page 2

Political meddling, outdated machinery push Udayapur Cement to the brink

With liabilities over Rs5 billion, factory has been unable to pay employees for 17 months.



POST PHOTO

The cement plant in Udayapur is no longer in operation.

BHOTRAJ RAI
UDAYAPUR, AUG 23

Shankar Thapa, a worker at the venerable Udayapur Cement factory in eastern Nepal, has been surviving for the past 17 months without a salary. "It has become extremely difficult to run

the household without a pay," Thapa told Kantipur recently. His children's education has been affected, and he has had to borrow money to meet household expenses. "We have survived on loans for all these months," he said. "Now we are struggling even to put food on the table."

Thapa's plight is shared by hundreds of workers at the state-owned factory, which is struggling to stay afloat amid mounting liabilities, ageing machinery and years of political interference.

According to Chakra Karki, secretary of the struggle committee, an ad hoc body formed to represent employees and workers, some workers have even died without being able to afford medical treatment after falling ill. Karki said 10 workers died while waiting for their salaries, while most of those still waiting for their pay have fallen deep into debt.

The industry has an approved staff strength of 580, but only 173 employees are currently working there.

They have also been deprived of provident fund contributions, insurance and other benefits. The 139 retired employees have yet to receive all the benefits due to them.

The factory said its liabilities towards employees alone have piled up to more than Rs1 billion, including 47 months of unpaid provident fund contributions, 37 months of contributions to the Citizen Investment Trust and three years of unpaid insurance premiums.

>> Continued on page 5

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Purano Baneshwor Oralo

OPINION



Stand against rape culture

The government must challenge the systems that allow social ills such as rape to persist.

Nepal has once again failed a girl child who should have been protected. The horrific sexual exploitation and killing of a three-year-old girl from Bara has sent shockwaves across the country. The girl, who went missing on August 16, was found lifeless two days later in an abandoned house near her home, following a delayed official search. Protests spread across the country, with the public demanding a fair investigation, the arrest of those responsible and the maximum punishment allowed by the law. In response, the government has promised to meet the family's demand and to review existing legal provisions concerning serious crimes.

Sadly, this case is just one of many that the country has witnessed over the years. Just as the public mourns one incident and calls for justice and governments promise that such cases will never recur, another heart-wrenching case surfaces within days. Recently, a 16-year-old boy was arrested in Palpa for sexually assaulting a 10-year-old girl.

Nepali society, fundamentally patriarchal, treats women as second-class citizens, giving men the freedom to treat women's dignity and autonomy as negotiable. No wonder the number of cases of domestic violence, including marital rape, is so high in the country. According to data from Nepal Police, in 2022 alone, the country reported more than 2,300 cases of marital rape. Young boys who grow up in environments where women are stripped of their dignity tend to think that it is acceptable to coerce young girls. Society often protects men and boys, excusing inappropriate behaviour—even harassment—as youthful or childhood indiscretion.

Nepal does have laws that criminalise rape and sexual violence; they are strong on paper, but it is one thing to have strong laws and quite another to follow through. The way police handle reports of missing individuals, dismiss survivor testimony, delay filing FIRs and investigations in rape cases, involve themselves in settling cases of sexual violence, and mishandle and destroy evidence is only emboldening perpetrators. Their conduct in Nirmala Panta's case, including the handling of suspects and evidence, was heavily criticised. Even in the recent case, questions have been raised about police response. Women's rights activists are questioning why the police didn't consider a missing girl child a matter of urgency—and rightly so.

Just as the government summoned the victim's family to Kathmandu and promised legal reforms—including the pledge to fulfil their demands—it must introduce survivor/victim-friendly policies, implement the existing laws, ensure that perpetrators face punishment in accordance with the law, confront the culture of impunity and hold the police department accountable.

But these actions alone will fall short if people don't change their attitudes towards women. The government should therefore also challenge the systems that permit social ills such as rape to persist. It is important to dismantle deep-seated double standards that police women while excusing men of their wrongdoings through curricula that teach gender sensitivity, mutual respect, as well as comprehensive consent education early on. Still, textbooks will lose their persuasive power if families don't normalise mutual respect and gender equality. Community leaders and women's groups can be mobilised to encourage women-friendly households, environments and societies. The names of Nirmala Panta, Bhagirathi Bhatta, Rinku Kumari Sada, Inisha BK, and many other young women are etched in the memories of Nepalis. We cannot afford to add another name to the list.

MONIKA NIROULA



Following a recent sexual exploitation and murder of a three-year-old girl in Bara, the government on Saturday signed a three-point agreement with the victim's family, promising to form a committee for legislative reform. The committee is mandated to review current statutory provisions regarding offences and penalties for heinous crimes in accordance with 'citizens' expectations' and submit recommendations for legislative reform.

Amid widespread public outrage, demands for capital punishment for perpetrators in rape cases often resurface in Nepal. Just five months earlier, a similar case of a 16-year-old Dalit girl in Surkhet had also led to similar public outcry. In March, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs formed a committee to conduct a similar study; the committee submitted its report in May, and the law minister announced that an amendment bill would be presented in Parliament. Three months later, no such bill has been tabled. Instead, the government has promised yet another committee in response to another child's death.

Legal reform regarding punishment in rape cases, albeit necessary, addresses only part of the problem. Offences of rape and murder of a child attract the highest degree of punishment in Nepal allowed within constitutional limits—imprisonment for the remainder of the offender's natural life. Punishment decreases with the survivors' age; it is much more relaxed for the rape of adult women. There is an implicit assumption within the legal provision that an adult woman has some kind of agency in her rape. However, stricter punishment alone cannot solve all the problems within both the criminal justice system and the larger society with regard to cases of rape and sexual violence. Evidence shows that the failure of the system does not lie in a single point—the law—but within the entire chain a survivor navigates from reporting to conviction and survival.

The statute of limitations for reporting rape cases prevents many survivors from ever being able to pursue justice. On July 14, 2022, Nepal's National Assembly ratified amendments to the law concerning sexual violence, increasing the statute of limitations for the reporting of rape from one year to up to three years. Adult survivors can file a report within two years of the

Punishment is not protection

Legal reform regarding punishment in rape cases, albeit necessary, addresses only part of the problem.



POST FILE PHOTO

incident occurring, while survivors who are minors can file a case within three years of them turning 18. The amendment came after a 24-year-old model made revelations about repeated rape and sexual assault, and how Nepal's statute of limitations meant she had no way to access justice; however, the amendment still did not give her access to justice.

The amendment ignored widespread calls for the complete removal of the limitation, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee's recommendation to "repeal the statute of limitations provision on the registration of cases of sexual violence in all contexts to ensure effective access for women to justice for the crime of rape and other sexual offences." The statute of limitations fails to take into account the social stigma and the psychological trauma that survivors have to navigate and instead seeks the 'perfect' victim who can immediately report.

The police administration is itself a big hurdle for those seeking justice in cases of sexual violence; the lack of trust within the institution is one of the factors that drives the public demand for harsher punishment even in cases where the highest form of punishment constitutionally available is legally codified. As in this case, delays and outright refusal to file complaints by the police are frequently reported. Survivors are often subjected to intrusive questioning and victim-blaming as part of the investigation process. Police are also alleged to participate in negotiating out-of-court

settlements. Caste, class, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity often mediate access to justice and how the administration responds to victims and survivors, compounding barriers for victims from historically marginalised communities.

While disaggregated data for cases of rape is not readily available, according to a study conducted by Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) in 2019, of the total incidents of rape, 21 percent of the victims belonged to the Dalit community. Only 15 percent of the Dalit victims got justice. Alarming, the victims were killed in 80 percent of the cases. No such separate data is available for the Tharu community or other marginalised groups. On one hand, women from marginalised communities are more likely to be raped. On the other, they face heightened barriers in accessing justice or are less likely to receive justice. Barriers compound for gender and sexual minorities, with the gendered and binary nature of the law itself posing as a source of the problem, which does not even acknowledge adult males and trans, non-binary persons as victims of rape.

Unlike Indian law, Nepal's law is silent on the introduction of character evidence relating to the past sexual history of the victim, which in practice means that the victim's character is brought up in court. While courts have held that convictions in rape cases can be based on the sole testimony of the victim, in practice, courts often look for corroboration through medical evidence or other testimonies. Victims continue to report being subjected to

the horrifying non-scientific two-finger test.

Nepal's rape laws merit review and amendment. However, stricter punishment does not solve the problem. Often, Nepali society finds a 'perfect victim', who was wearing the 'right' clothes, was of the 'appropriate' age and was not just 'raped' but also 'murdered'. This leads to widespread popular demand for capital punishment. However, it does little to demand structural change. From broadening the definition of rape and consent to removing the statute of limitations, and reviewing the provisions for punishment, Nepal's rape laws need reform. But legislative reform does nothing to address the failure of institutions to effectively deliver justice for survivors.

The justice system fails survivors at multiple points. Society often holds the victim responsible. Implementation of the existing provisions and laws is one area the government should focus on to effectively deliver justice. Prevention of rape altogether is another area that requires much more rigorous investment, along with the complex work of social transformation that might not yield straightforward returns. None of these much-needed reforms might be as popular as amending laws to introduce the death penalty. It is worrisome that the public discourse around capital punishment completely over shadows the conversation about reforms in the implementation of existing laws to ensure effective administration of justice.

Monika is a queer feminist activist.

MONDAY INTERVIEW ANJALI SAH

Stricter punishment without dismantling rape culture is an incomplete solution

Minister's meeting with victim family is a PR stunt to project empathy while avoiding transparent, auditable accountability.

In a harrowing reflection of Nepali society, a three-year-old girl was recently subjected to brutal sexual exploitation and brutal murder after police callously dismissed her family's missing-person report for 24 hours. This systemic failure, compounded by deep-seated societal prejudices and delayed state intervention, has reignited nationwide outrage over child safety, accountability and the protection of vulnerable communities.

The Post's **Biken K Dawadi** sat down with intersectional feminist activist Anjali Sah to unpack the structural failures underpinning this tragedy and similar high-profile cases across the country. She critically examines widespread police negligence, the superficial handling of officer suspensions, and the class and identity-based double standards ingrained in public outrage and law enforcement. Sah also addresses the impracticality and dangers of capital punishment within a compromised justice system, the performative activism surrounding marginalised victims versus celebrity defendants, the ethics of media trials, and the coercive political dynamics that silence grieving families behind closed doors.

Is this dismissive attitude a broader issue across Nepal, or is it unique to Madhesh?

This is a systemic problem that you see everywhere in Nepal, not just in Madhesh, but even in Kathmandu. The general public and the law enforcement apparatus share a deeply naive, stereotyped mindset when it comes to missing children. If a young child goes missing, people in our society instantly assume they are just hiding nearby, playing around, eating ice cream, or visiting a relative's house. If a teenager goes missing, the police dismissively tell the family to wait, suggesting they have probably just run off with a partner. They simply do not see these situations as immediately serious.

Furthermore, police completely lack child-sensitive training. Without specialised guidelines, they do not handle reports with urgency. When my uncle's son went missing in Kathmandu, the police told us to wait, suggesting he was probably with a girlfriend. This cultural lack of seriousness is exactly what played out in the recent case. The police simply do not understand that in child disappearances, every minute is a matter of life and death.

Following the public backlash, the Police Headquarters recalled DSP Sandeep Chhetri and Inspector Prakash Thapa. Is this a genuine measure of accountability?

Absolutely not. Recalling officers is a superficial technique to soothe public outrage. The government is terrified that if public anger boils over, it could lead to a complete regime change, much like the recent Gen Z-led protests. They immediately recalled local officers to quiet the streets, avoiding true accountability.

Under the Police Act, there are clear guidelines for proper departmental action, including suspensions, demotions and inquiries. Yet, we rarely see



Anjali Sah, intersectional feminist

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

them enforced. Instead of facing prosecution or demotion, controversial officers often have a history of being promoted. For instance, the Kathmandu SSP during the Gen Z protests was promoted and is now a DIG. When the system rewards negligent behaviour with promotions, it sends a message that local lives do not matter. Recalling them is just a temporary PR stunt, not systemic accountability.

Why is there such a stark contrast in how the police handle child-sensitive issues compared to other offences?

It is highly questionable. If someone is smuggling drugs across the border, the police do not wait for a public outcry to act. Regardless of society's outrage, they will immediately coordinate, arrest the suspects, and throw them in jail. If police officers are found to be complicit in drug smuggling, the department takes immediate, strict action against them. Yet, when it comes to child-sensitive and gender-sensitive crimes, that same level of gravity, urgency, and institutional seriousness is absent from the police department.

We have to ask why drug trafficking is treated as a high-priority national

security threat, while the sexual exploitation and murder of a three-year-old child is treated like a routine administrative matter. The police's entire administrative mindset is reactive rather than proactive. They only move when the public outrage becomes so loud and brutal that it can no longer be ignored. This double standard is a direct reflection of a system that does not value child protection or gender sensitivity as core duties of the state.

One of the primary suspects is reportedly a minor. If he is convicted, is sending him to juvenile detention centres enough?

We need a stronger legal approach, but we must also look beyond simple, reactive punishment. When horrific crimes occur, the public naturally demands matching violence. I respect that raw anger. Just today, my rideshare driver, noticing my lawyer's coat, asked me what the punishment for this crime is. When I told him it is life imprisonment, he was furious and asked why the state should feed such a criminal for the rest of their life. That anger is understandable when an infant is brutally killed. My own niece

is exactly three, and when I talk about the victim, I constantly think of her. But killing the offender would not bring her back; violence cannot cure violence.

Under Nepal's legal framework, children under ten face no punishment, those aged ten to twelve face up to six months, twelve to fourteen face half the adult sentence, and sixteen to eighteen face two-thirds. The law also outlines *disantar* (diversion), keeping minors out of court for rehabilitation. While this makes sense for juvenile delinquency, it feels entirely inadequate for heinous crimes like the sexual exploitation and murder of an infant.

But we must also ask: How does a sixteen-year-old develop such horrific criminal intent in the first place? This is where we must look at the pervasive rape culture actively fueled by unmonitored social media and mobile access. When children have unrestricted access to any website on their mobile phones, and when our entertainment industry continually objectifies women, it shapes their minds. A minor's criminal intent does not appear in a vacuum. It is cultivated by the toxic social fabric we allow to exist. Focusing on punishment alone without dismantling this culture is an incomplete solution.

There is a persistent demand for the death penalty in these cases. Is such a provision practical?

The demand for the death penalty is common on the streets, but it directly contradicts our constitutional framework. Nepal completely banned the death penalty in the 1990 Constitution. Furthermore, Nepal is a signatory to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which legally binds us to abolish capital punishment. We are a nation committed to Amnesty International principles and the fundamental right to live with dignity.

People protest demanding execution because they are unaware of what our actual laws are. Because governments have failed to build public awareness and enforce existing laws, people feel the only way to get justice is through retaliatory violence. But in our social reality, the criminal justice and investigation system is

deeply biased.

If we had the death penalty, who do you think would be executed? If you look at our prison system today, it is disproportionately filled with individuals from marginalised communities and the low-income class. If a wealthy, elite Brahmin person is accused of stealing Rs500,000, the social reality is that they can easily pay a Dalit person Rs100,000 to take the blame and go to jail for them. In a corrupt system with a deeply flawed investigation process, introducing the death penalty would simply mean executing the most vulnerable and voiceless members of society, while the wealthy and connected continue to buy their way out of trouble. True justice is about ensuring the right culprit is caught through a transparent investigation, not about satisfying public bloodlust.

Does this disparity extend to social media platforms where people select which victims to champion and which ones to ignore?

The double standards and selective activism on social media are quite apparent. We see a performative form of empathy where people only care about a case if it fits a certain trendy, socially acceptable narrative. Recently, two Nepali students died at KIIT University in India. For the first victim, there was massive public outrage. But for the second victim, there was almost complete silence. Why? Perhaps because the second victim carried a Madheshi identity.

When we went to protest for her at Maitighar, the police administration actively mocked us, sneering and asking, "Is this all the Madheshis you could gather?" Even within mainstream feminist circles, when we speak up for victims like Rinku Sada, we are dismissed and told, "Oh, you people are always crying, always bringing up your own issues."

During Sada's case, which was a horrific murder, the local police did not even want to register the FIR. It was only after exhausting protests and legal pressure that they finally accepted the registration and initiated an investigation.

Read full interview at kathmandupost.com

FOREX		
US Dollar		153.42
Euro		179.2
Pound Sterling		209.23
Swiss Franc		191.54
Australian Dollar		110.09
Canadian Dollar		111.44
Singapore Dollar		120.84
Japanese Yen (10)		9.65
Chinese Yuan		22.83
Saudi Arab Riyal		40.86
Qatari Riyal		42.09
Thai Bhat		4.69
UAE Dhiram		41.77
Malaysian Ringit		37.99
Korean Won (100)		11.07
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank		
BULLION		
	PRICE PER TOLA	
 Fine Gold		Rs 319,500
 Silver		Rs 4,975
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA		
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Tesla teases imminent launch of Cybercab ‘robotaxi’



NEW YORK: Electric vehicle-maker Tesla is teasing the upcoming debut of its self-driving robotaxi, dubbed “Cybercab,” to compete with the likes of Uber and Waymo. The Elon Musk-founded company shared a promotional image on social media late Friday promising “exclusive access” to Cybercabs at a September 3 event in Austin, Texas, where Tesla is head-quartered. “We’re celebrating the launch of our Cybercab robotaxi with an exclusive event in Austin—and you could be there,” the company said on its website, promoting a sweepstakes to win a chance to attend the event. First unveiled in October 2024, the gold-coloured vehicle can carry two passengers and marks the first Tesla car with no steering wheel or pedals. At the time, Musk said the company was planning to begin production of the self-driving cars before 2027 and sell them to private buyers for under \$30,000. US tech industry publication The Information reported this week that Tesla staffers have been told the rollout will begin with Cybercab rides for employees on public roads, followed by the vehicle being incorporated into the ranks of its Robotaxi service in Austin. **(AFP)**

Alibaba proposes \$10 billion share placement to fund global AI drive

HONG KONG: Chinese tech giant Alibaba said on Sunday that it plans to issue HK\$80billion (10.2 billion) in new shares in Hong Kong to fund its global artificial intelligence ambitions. The Hangzhou-based firm has been ploughing tens of billions of dollars into AI, with its shareholders eager to see how it will monetise the huge investments. “The Equity Placement is being undertaken to extend the Company’s global AI leadership,” Alibaba said in a statement. The company intends to use all of the net proceeds to invest in its “full stack AI capabilities, including to expand and enhance its AI infrastructure”, it said. Alibaba on Thursday announced nearly 269 billion yuan (\$40 billion) in revenue in its most recent quarter—a nine percent year-on-year increase—boosted by the global artificial intelligence frenzy driving demand for its products. The firm is known for its open-source “Qwen” AI models, which have gained popularity with developers worldwide.

Six EU countries urge windfall tax on energy firms

FRANKFURT: Six EU countries are stepping up calls for a bloc-wide windfall tax on oil companies as profits soar due to the Middle East war, according to a letter seen by AFP Saturday. The finance ministers of Germany, Italy, Austria, Poland and Portugal, along with Spain’s economy minister, sent the joint letter to Ireland’s finance minister. Ireland currently holds the EU’s rotating presidency, and the ministers urged the issue of a levy be put on the agenda at a meeting of the bloc’s finance chiefs in Dublin next month. “Oil companies are enjoying overall profitability and margins on refined products that exceed the rise in crude oil prices,” it read. “We are experiencing one of the biggest supply shocks in decades, and all over the world there is growing discontent about the rise in the cost of living.” **(AFP)**

Udayapur Cement, once Nepal’s pride, teeters on the brink of bankruptcy

>> Continued from page 1

Despite having access to high-quality limestone, an established “Gainda Chhap” brand and a nationwide market, Udayapur Cement has been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy, with total liabilities now exceeding Rs5 billion.

The factory’s financial troubles have been compounded by years of political meddling, frequent changes in management and outdated production machinery, leaving the once-important state-owned cement producer struggling to maintain operations.

A lack of working capital has brought production to a halt since last February. Once regarded as a symbol of pride in Nepal’s public industrial sector, Udayapur Cement is now struggling for survival.

The industry has been trapped for years in a cycle of financial crisis, managerial instability, outdated technology, political interference and labour problems.

Established in 1987 at Jaljale in Triyuga Municipality-6 of Udayapur, the industry was built with assistance from the Japanese government and began production in 1992. Its design was prepared by Onoda Engineering of Japan, while Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Tomen Corporation constructed the plant.

The industry is wholly owned by the Nepal government, and one of its biggest strengths is its own limestone mine. The mine at Sindhalidanda, about 27 kilometres from the factory, is estimated to contain 73-75 million tonnes of high-quality limestone, according to the factory.

Gopi Krishna Neupane, a former general manager of the factory, said the limestone contains less than 2 percent magnesium oxide and around 52 percent calcium oxide. A study he conducted for his doctoral research found that only around 4 million tonnes had been extracted so far. At the current rate of production, he said, the mine could support the industry for more than 300 years.

The industry has a daily production capacity of 800 tonnes. But with machinery and technology nearly four decades old, it can currently operate at only around 35 to 40 percent of capacity.

Mechanical engineers say that even with regular maintenance, four-decade-old technology makes it impossible to achieve the production efficiency and cost competitiveness of a modern cement plant. They have recom-



The entrance to the Udayapur Cement Factory at Jaljale in Triyuga Municipality, Udayapur.

mended modernising the kiln, coal mill, burner, conveyor and cement mill systems.

Neupane has suggested installing at least 10 megawatts of solar power, improving the ropeway and adding calciner technology. Such measures could reduce production costs and raise daily output to around 1,100 tonnes.

The factory’s financial crisis has continued to deepen.

Baijanath Jha, acting general manager of the factory, said its liabilities have exceeded Rs5 billion and are growing each passing day.

Almost all of the factory’s 30 bank accounts have been frozen. Some suppliers took legal action after the factory failed to make payments on time, resulting in the freezing of its accounts.

“This has directly affected the industry’s financial operations,” said Jha.

The factory does not have enough money to purchase raw materials, he said.

“Because suppliers have lost confidence in us, we have not been able to obtain coal, red soil, gypsum and other necessary materials on credit,” he said.

Jha said the industry also lacks skilled technical personnel as well as competent staff in administration, accounting and financial management.

According to him, investment in human resources is as important as

investment in machinery to revive the industry.

A lack of money to buy cement bags meant that around Rs60 million worth of finished cement and clinker remained stockpiled at the industry for nearly six months.

The factory recently resumed sales only after obtaining bags on credit. It purchased 53,187 bags from Ashirwad Poly Packs Pvt Ltd in Chitwan.

The bags were supplied on the condition that the supplier would be paid from the proceeds of cement sales, according to the factory. After the bags arrived, the industry sold around Rs1.3 million worth of cement and paid approximately Rs1.2 million to the supplier, Jha said.

‘Gainda Chhap’ cement was once a well-established and highly regarded brand in the Nepali market. But its reputation alone has proved insufficient to withstand today’s competitive market.

Numerous private cement brands have entered the market with attractive advertising campaigns.

Traders say Gainda Chhap has struggled to compete with private brands that use modern technology, higher production capacity and aggressive marketing strategies.

Private cement manufacturers have been offering cement at comparatively lower prices, while Udayapur Cement has become less competitive because of its high production costs.

The factory currently sells cement at around Rs725 per bag. According to

Bangladesh’s gas crisis hits factories, homes and transport

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRAHMANBARIA (BANGLADESH), AUG 23

The giant structures of Bangladesh’s Ashuganj fertiliser factory have stood silent for more than a year, as a natural gas crisis shuts industries, triggers power cuts and sparks protests over fuel shortages.

Machinery once ran round the clock, using natural gas to produce urea that farmers depended on to grow crops for the country’s 170 million people.

Now the state-owned factory, which once employed more than 1,200 people and produced more than 1,000 tonnes of fertiliser a day, is a rusting shell.

Ashuganj closed in March 2025, with the country battered by a gas shortage sparked by a plunge in production owing to underinvestment in ageing fields and exploration, while the US-Iran war has choked imports from the Middle East.

“Only the skeleton of the factory

remains,” said Md Bazlur Rashid, 59, who spent his entire working life at Ashuganj, built near the eastern Titas gas field. “It has lost its life”.

The factory is one of six major urea fertiliser plants that have been forced to close down or restrict operations because of gas shortages.

Trade union leader Md Abu Kawsar said the shutdowns had cost workers their jobs while threatening an industry linked to food security.

“You cannot simply let these factories sit idle and allow them to deteriorate,” he told AFP. “Reviving them could also help save foreign currency.”

But the consequences of the gas shortage extend far beyond fertiliser production. Hundreds of factories, including textile plants, are cutting production or shutting.

Bangladesh is the world’s second-largest garment exporter, which accounts for about 80 percent of the country’s export earnings.

At home, domestic piped gas is often

cut. Power plants turning gas into electricity are struggling to meet demand, creating regular blackouts.

The government issued electricity-saving measures in August, including ordering shopping malls to close an hour earlier.

Electricity generation, industry and captive power plants account for more than three-quarters of Bangladesh’s gas consumption.

Households, which account for just over a tenth of the country’s gas consumption, have also been hit.

“We don’t get a drop of gas overnight,” said housewife Nargis Begum, 50, who lives close to the Ashuganj factory.

“Then sometimes the pressure is too low. We can’t turn on two burners at the same time.”

Many households, particularly in rural areas, have switched to wood-burning stoves, while electricity cuts leave residents without fans in the sweltering humidity.

the factory, sales have declined because its product is around Rs100 more expensive than those of private manufacturers.

Local trader Bharat Rai said consumers who understand quality still choose Gainda Chhap, while those who prioritise price opt for other brands.

“Producing a quality product alone is not enough,” Rai said. “The product should be brought to the market at a competitive price.”

Another major problem facing the industry is managerial instability.

Twenty-nine general managers have been appointed to the industry in the past 33 years. Employees accuse successive governments of changing leadership based on political interference and power-sharing arrangements, making it difficult for the industry to formulate long-term strategies.

They say the industry has been hollowed out because successive governments failed to treat a national industry as an institution above the interests of individual parties, leaders and groups.

Jha said the lack of sufficient authority for management and overly complicated procedures for everything from procurement to financial decisions have compounded the problems.

Various complaints related to financial and administrative issues have also reached the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. The anti-graft body has reportedly warned the factory to control unproductive spending amid its weak financial condition.

The CIAA has also filed a case over the disappearance of clinker worth Rs460 million and the misappropriation of public property.

Eight senior officials—including former general manager Surendra Kumar Poudel, former acting general manager Nawal Kishor Sah, former deputy general manager Mahesh Prasad Kafle and other former department chiefs—are facing trial at the Special Court in Kathmandu.

A team from the Prime Minister’s Office has conducted an assessment of the industry, and the government is expected to take steps to restart operations, according to Jha.

Pravesh Khadka, secretary of the Industry Rescue and Vigilance Committee, said local residents have repeatedly urged the government to save the industry.

The committee was formed several

months ago after citizens became concerned about the possible collapse of an industry regarded as a source of national pride. At a time when new industries are not being established while existing ones are closing, local residents have begun efforts to save the plant.

Following pressure from locals, a government team assigned to assess state property studied the industry, its land and limestone mine, and submitted a report to the government. The report includes several options for operating the industry.

Khadka said locals have suggested operating the industry under a public-private partnership model.

He said the industry’s existing machinery could be upgraded immediately to increase production capacity. In the long term, however, a modern plant could be established in the Sukura area near the limestone mine on around 550 ropanis of land, with a daily clinker production capacity of 10,000 metric tonnes.

Under the proposed model, the federal government, provincial government, local government, residents of the mining area and employees would jointly hold a 45 percent stake, while the private sector would contribute the remaining 55 percent.

The proposed plant would require an investment of around Rs20 billion. Its clinker could be supplied to cement factories across Nepal and potentially exported to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India.

According to the industry’s annual report for fiscal year 2021-22, the proposed plant could generate more than Rs3 billion in annual government revenue.

Ramesh Rasaili, president of the Triyuga Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Gaighat, said the crisis will deepen if the old cycle of political appointments, unstable leadership, opaque procurement and weak management continues.

He suggested bringing in new, skilled personnel to make the industry more effective.

“If professional and empowered leadership, a transparent procurement system, modern machinery, financial restructuring, skilled human resources and a long-term investment plan can be implemented, the industry can regain its glory,” he said.

“But if it again becomes trapped in power-sharing and political games, the crisis facing state-owned industries could become even deeper.”

Canada’s Carney retaliates against Trump’s tariffs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
OTTAWA, AUG 23

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced retaliatory tariffs on the US on Saturday, after walking away from a “bad deal” on trade in a deepening rift between the longtime allies.

Negotiations between the neighboring countries broke down Friday in Washington, putting into force new 50-percent US tariffs impacting about \$20 billion worth of goods, or 5.5 percent of Canadian exports to the US. Impacted products range from hockey sticks to cement. “You’re at war when you get attacked. We got attacked,” Carney said.

US President Donald Trump hit back at Canada on Sunday, saying, “Canada wants the benefits of being a State, without being one!!!”

“They have also charged our great farmers, for many years, massive amounts of Tariffs. No more!!!” Trump added in a post on Truth Social. New Canadian tariffs will notably target the US steel and dairy

industries and take effect on September 8. More details would come next week, Carney said.

Trump had previously said Washington “should be able to have a deal with Canada,” citing his “good relationship” with Carney.

But on Saturday, Canada’s prime minister said Trump set conditions that were ultimately unacceptable even though earlier talks had been positive.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told the New York Times on Saturday that the US had offered to reduce its tariffs on steel, aluminum and autos, as well as eliminate a recently imposed tariff on Canadian lumber.

Greer said those measures would have given Canada “the most preferential treatment of any trading partner,” according to the Times.

Greer told Fox News on Saturday that Washington was “moving forward with measures that respond to Canadian retaliation.” He said no new talks were planned with Canadian negotiators.

Robots can outrun humans, but can they plug in a cable?

REUTERS
BEIJING, AUG 23

China’s humanoid robots have shown they can run quicker than the fastest humans.

Now comes the real test: can they also handle packaging and warehouse operations while reliably performing precision tasks like connecting cables designed to evaluate their ability to work like humans in less flashy jobs?

The five-day World Humanoid Robot Games, which began Saturday in Beijing, combine events modelled on human sports with those designed to test the robots in simulated factories, restaurants, offices and in emergency situations.

The games, heavily promoted in Chinese state media, feature 51 events, including 30 sports competitions and 21 scenario-based contests. More than 40 percent require robots to operate fully autonomously, according to Huawei, a tech partner of the games.

On Saturday, two robots ran faster than Usain Bolt’s 9.58-second world record in the 100-meter sprint. That was a sharp improvement from 2025,



Spectators watch as Tiangong robots walk in formation during the opening ceremony for the second World Humanoid Robot Games at the National Speed Skating Oval in Beijing, Saturday.

when the winning robot’s time was more than 20 seconds. Braking was an issue, as the machines slammed into a thick mat that organizers placed sev-

eral metres after the finish line.

Another humanoid, the same model as the 100-meter champion, ran 400 metres in 39.7 seconds, faster than

South African Wayde van Niekerk’s world record of 43.03 seconds.

“The intensity is higher than last year, which places significant demands on the robot’s battery management and thermal dissipation capabilities,” said spectator and robotics investor Xu Qiaosheng.

“It holds huge significance for the development of China’s industrial sector.”

Robots will compete in tug-of-war and weightlifting, while Tai Chi and pitch-pot - in which contestants throw arrow-like sticks into a narrow-necked vase - will give traditional Chinese sports a futuristic twist.

Beyond the spectacle, the more revealing tests could come when robots encounter the small imperfections of the physical world: a cable at the wrong angle, an object just out of reach, a shifting package or a missed step.

That tests whether robots can identify objects, accurately position their hands and bodies, apply controlled force and recover from errors without human intervention.

Lumos Robotics Chief Executive Yu Chao said the games could help

improve hardware and provide a showcase for the industry. But Yu said the longer-term value will depend on real-world problem solving.

“Only when it can work in those end scenarios does it have real value,” Yu said. “Simply running and jumping does not improve efficiency.”

In addition to more familiar events drawn from human sports, robots will compete in EV charging, restaurant work, emergency incident handling and hand-dexterity contests. There are also industrial assembly and material loading events. A cable connection challenge is a test of vision, mechanical alignment and force control.

Beijing-based robotics startup Galbot said it would stage an autonomous humanoid tennis match, with robots attempting singles and doubles play, including ball tracking, serving and returning shots.

For Hua Rong, chief marketing officer at robotics firm Zeroth, the real test will come after the demonstrations end.

“The competition will be whether, after the product is sold, it can really solve users’ problems,” she said.

