

# Monthly Bulletin



**RIGHTS Nepal**

Digital Transformation | Human Security |  
Good Governance | Strategic Engagements

# Monthly Bulletin

RIGHTS Nepal is a think tank founded in 2020, based in Kathmandu with the mission of focusing on nationwide policies, decisions, plans, actions and their justified need, development and outcome.

This publication has been specifically designed to assess the important events of the past month on the basis of four major pillars: **Strategic Engagements, Good Governance, Digital Transformation and Human Security.**



## RIGHTS Nepal

The content of this report is validated as accurate news extracted and summarized at the time of publishing. The report in itself is to be viewed and treated as an unbiased and impartial source of information.

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# Digital Transformation

## Now the digital wallets and QR codes of Nepal and India will work in each other's countries

In a significant development aimed at enhancing financial connectivity and facilitating seamless transactions, Nepal and India have signed an international digital payment agreement. The agreement was formalized on Thursday, June 1, during the visit of Nepal's Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda,' to India. This landmark agreement enables Nepalese citizens to make digital payments in India, while Indian citizens can utilize digital wallets and mobile banking to make payments in Nepal by scanning QR codes. The agreement was exchanged between Nileshman Singh Pradhan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Nepal Clearing House Limited (NCHL), the operator of the government payment system in Nepal, and Ritesh Shukla, CEO of the National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI), representing India. With the implementation of this agreement, digital payments will be facilitated through NCHL in Nepal and NPCI-affiliated banks, financial institutions, and payment platforms in India. Previously, only card payment facilities were operational between Nepal and India.

## 50% exemption on income tax for five years for foreign exchange-earning IT companies

The Economic Bill 2080, recently presented to the Federal Parliament, includes a notable provision benefiting information technology (IT) companies that generate foreign exchange. According to the bill, companies engaged in information technology-based business processing, outsourcing, software programming, cloud computing, and related services in Nepal will receive a 50% income tax exemption for the next five years. The bill aims to promote and incentivize the growth of the IT sector by reducing the tax burden on companies operating in this industry. By granting a significant tax exemption, the government aims to attract foreign investment, stimulate innovation, and create a conducive environment for IT companies to thrive. Under this provision, eligible IT companies will enjoy a 50% discount on income tax for five years. This favourable tax treatment applies to earnings derived from foreign exchange transactions. By encouraging IT companies to expand their operations and boost their foreign exchange earnings, the government seeks to bolster Nepal's digital economy and enhance its global competitiveness in the technology sector.

## Technical Issues on Access to Government Services

A recent cyber-attack targeted the government's central data bank at the Government Integrated Data Centre (GIDC), highlighting the vulnerability of the gov. np domain. Hackers executed a Distributed Denial of Service attack, causing disruptions for at least four hours. Concerns have been raised regarding the security of sensitive government data and the potential compromise of personal information. The National Information Technology Centre (NITC) is investigating cyber-attacks to identify vulnerabilities and implement preventive measures. Although no data compromise has been reported, the incident emphasizes the need for robust security measures and contingency plans.

# Digital Transformation

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# Human Security

## Climate change, floods and diseases hitting this Monsoon

The Terai belt in Nepal is expected to experience a heat wave or loo during the next five days, prompting the Weather Forecasting Division to issue a warning and advise everyone to take safety precautions. The Terai belt's maximum and lowest temperatures have increased exponentially, according to a special report from the WFD under the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, which describes the heat wave.

Climate change has had a profound impact on Nepal and the broader South Asia region, particularly with regard to the monsoon season. The withdrawal of the monsoon has been consistently delayed over the past two decades, prompting experts to recommend shifting the paddy planting calendar by 10 days to two weeks to adapt to these changing conditions. Historical data from the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) reveals that the monsoon withdrawal, which used to occur in September, has now shifted to October. This shift has significantly affected paddy harvesting, prompting calls for rescheduling planting to better align with the altered climate patterns.

Taplejung district in Nepal has been severely affected by continuous rainfall, resulting in devastating floods. The overflowing Kabele River has caused significant damage to infrastructure and properties in the Sidingba and Sirijanga rural municipalities.

Reports indicate that a motorable bridge, a suspension bridge, a house, and multiple animal sheds have been washed away by the floodwaters.

The monsoon season in Nepal has brought about concerns regarding the outbreak of water- and vector-borne diseases. Heavy rainfall has already caused devastating landslides and flooding, resulting in loss of life and destruction in various parts of the country. The Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku has noticed a rise in cases of viral fevers and waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, food poisoning, and snake bites.

## Challenges Mounting: Nepal Confronts Stagflation and Threats to Food Security

Nepal is currently facing the possibility of stagflation, a challenging economic situation characterized by high inflation, low growth, and high unemployment, according to economists.

The burden of stagflation primarily affects the poor, as a significant portion of their income is spent on food. Nepal, along with other South Asian nations, is urged to address its food price system to alleviate the impact of high prices on the population. The Global Food Policy Report for 2023 highlights the challenges faced by South Asia in recovering and developing its food systems, including the region's vulnerability to global increases in food, fuel, and fertilizer prices. These factors have contributed to a rise in food insecurity in the region.

# Human Security

## Motorcycle Accidents Dominate Road Accident Statistics in Nepal

Nepal faces alarming motorcycle accidents, accounting for 68% of road accidents. The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey-2022 revealed that two-wheeler accidents were responsible for 68% of all casualties in road accidents. Males had a higher fatality rate than females, and the most vulnerable age group was individuals between 15 and 24 years. Urban areas had higher accident rates, with Bagmati Province having the highest incidence at 75%. Severe injuries from motorcycle accidents can result in limb function loss for one-fifth of individuals and brain damage for five per cent. Nepal has committed to reducing road traffic fatalities and injuries by 2030, requiring comprehensive measures like enhanced infrastructure, stricter enforcement of traffic regulations, and awareness campaigns to promote responsible driving behaviour.

## NHRC and Qatar's HR department sign contract for Nepalese migrant workers

The National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have inked an agreement that will last for three years. In Kathmandu on Thursday, the deal was inked. Currently, a complaint concerning the infringement of Nepalese human rights who have travelled to Qatar for employment may be made to the Human Rights Committee of Qatar. The Human Rights Committee of Qatar and the NHRC have a three-year Memorandum of Understanding, according to Murari Prasad Kharel, Secretary of the NHRC, who made the announcement following the agreement. According to him, the rights of Nepali employees in Qatar would be significantly protected by this agreement. Additionally, he stated that a Nepali desk will be established so that complaints could be made in Nepali if Nepalese living in Qatar had their human rights violated.

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# Good Governance

## Government prevails in the suit against Ncell's parent firm Axiata, which sought compensation of Rs. 66 billion

In the legal battle over the payment of capital gains tax, the government has prevailed in its lawsuit against Ncell's parent business, Axiata Group. A decision in favour of the Government of Nepal (GoN) was made on 9 June 2023, by the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a body established by the World Bank to resolve international investment disputes. Nepal would no longer be required to pay the company's demanding Rs 66 billion as a result of the ruling. The Axiata Group filed a lawsuit at the ICSID on May 20, 2019, seeking damages for \$500 million (about Rs 66 billion). The foreign group had accused the GoN of violating the bilateral agreement, levying unfair and unwarranted taxes on the enterprise.

## Launch of the \$275 million ACCESS project by the government and World Bank

The government of Nepal and the World Bank have jointly launched the Accelerating Nepal's Regional Transport and Trade Connectivity (ACCESS) project, which will help improve trade and connectivity by reducing trade and transport costs and transit time. The project will upgrade the 69-kilometre two-lane section of the Butwal-Gorusinghe-Chanauta road along the East-West Highway to a climate-resilient four-lane highway and construct market areas with internet and trade information facilities. It will also support advancing Nepal's preparedness and implementation of the Motor Vehicle Agreement.

## NEA provides free power meters to low-income homes

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has undertaken an initiative to provide free electricity meters to economically disadvantaged households. Kulman Ghising distributed complimentary meters to 68 households in the Gaushala region and 162 households in the Dhanushadham Distribution Centre region. As of April, the electricity leakage in distribution within Madhesh Province stood at 13.27 per cent. Munindra Thakur highlighted the demand for irrigation electrification in the Tarai-Madhesh region.

## Supreme Court grants the petition of nine former Maoist child soldiers

Lenin Bista is among the nine ex-Maoist child soldiers who filed a writ suit with the Supreme Court asking for the punishment of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and previous Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai for suspected war crimes. June 13 will be the first hearing in the case. The petitioners claimed that the CPN-Maoist Centre should bear responsibility for enlisting minors in its army, starting the people's war, and resulting in the loss of lives and property. They demanded that they be given adequate restitution and long-term assistance for the time they were forced to serve as child soldiers.

## The election commission will begin assembling a list of Nepali voters overseas

A list of Nepali people who are qualified to vote overseas is being compiled by the Election Commission. Dinesh Thapaliya, the chief election commissioner, declared that the commission will begin gathering names of Nepalis living abroad on July 17 and on. They want to implement an online registration system, where users will be required to provide their citizenship information as well as their permanent addresses in Nepal, to accomplish this. The commission has specified how it intends to get the biometric data and pictures of Nepali



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people living abroad via embassies in those nations. According to Thapaliya, the commission's initial focus would be on nations with sizable populations of migrant workers, such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Malaysia.

## The construction of two petroleum pipelines will ensure a steady supply of petroleum products

During Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's current tour to India, a deal has been signed between Nepal and India for the building of two significant pipelines. The amount of funding from India would be about Rs 17 billion. While Nepal must pay its own money to build a storage facility, two petroleum pipeline projects will be built. It is planned to build two petroleum pipelines: one from Siliguri, India, to Jhapa, Nepal, and the other from Amalekhgunj, Bara, to Lothar, Chitwan, to facilitate the simple and efficient supply of petroleum products. In Jhapa, a storage facility would be built similarly. The Amalekhgunj-Lothar pipeline is 62 kilometres long, while the Siliguri-Jhapa pipeline is 50 kilometres, according to Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC). Jhapa's storage facility would have a 42,000-kiloliter capacity, while Lothar's terminal would have a 103,150-kiloliter capacity.

## The government recognized creating a team and repairing border post 53-1 between Nepal and China

The 53-1 border pillar between China and Nepal will be repaired by the government. Rekha Sharma, the minister of communication and IT, said that the cabinet meeting on June 20 resolved to create a team to work together to rebuild boundary marking pillar 53-1 at Jhangmoma in Tatopani. Representatives from the Survey Department, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and Border Experts will be on the new committee. It will be established in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs' Joint Secretary. According to government officials, the committee will provide the Home Ministry with the report. The report's submission to the committee has no deadline, though.

## The government continues to prohibit strikes in the delivery of basic goods and services

With effect from June 15, the government has continued to prohibit strikes in the manufacture, distribution, and supply of necessities. Each order for a strike ban on vital services is valid for six months before being renewed. Previously, in January, the administration had enacted the prohibition. 25 important products and services, such as consular services, passports, the internet, the postal service, telegrams, transportation, and aeroplane repair and maintenance are all exempt from the government's ban on strikes. Additionally, strikes are not permitted in government or mint press, defence, or other services. Water supply, tourism, petroleum products, medical services, ambulances, drug manufacture, waste management, banking, insurance, power, and consumer goods are some of the other sectors that are impacted. If someone organizes or supports strikes in certain locations, they risk jail time or monetary penalties.



# Good Governance

## A \$500 million loan from the World Bank to Upper Arun

The 1061 MW Upper Arun, which the government established as a transformational project, has received a \$500 million commitment from the World Bank. In a similar vein, efforts will be made to secure funding for the remaining \$500 million loan. Before other donor organizations like OPEC, the Asian Development Bank, the European Funding Bank, etc., the World Bank will take the initiative to raise the remaining funding. This is valued at 1750 million US dollars (or \$2 trillion, 30 billion). The Upper Arun Authority will be building its biggest project to date. The project can run at maximum capacity for 6 hours a day during the six months of winter when the power demand is at its highest and will produce 4.53 billion units of energy yearly. Additionally, the Authority has advanced the 30 MW Ikhuwa hydropower project to become a component of the Upper Arun.

## Citizenship Act not to be implemented

The short-term temporary order given to stop the Citizenship Act's implementation has been ruled not to be continued by a joint bench of Justices Anand Mohan Bhattarai and Kumar Regmi. On May 21, the President passed the Citizenship Bill, and Supreme Court Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma had given a temporary restraining order not to carry it out. The Citizenship Victims' Struggle Committee's protest has come to an end after 18 days. After the Supreme Court decided in the protestors' favour, the demonstration was over.

## 700 beds at Bir Hospital are free starting June 25

The Bir Hospital has decided to convert its 700 ordinary beds into "free beds" as of this Friday (25 June 2023). The hospital used to charge Rs 200 per bed per day for the general category before to this. Patients can now use these beds for no cost. According to Dr Santosh Poudel, the hospital director, the National Academy of Medical Sciences' executive council (NAMS) made the decision. The choice was made in response to the specific measures taken by Mohan Bahadur Basnet, Minister of Health and Population.

## The top court grants compensation to victims of torture and sexual assault during conflicts

The government has been ordered by the Supreme Court to include the victims of sexual assault and torture from the ten-year Maoist insurgency in its temporary redress program. Monday, a division of justices Sapana Pradhan Malla and Hari Prasad Phuyal decided that the victims of the insurgency's torture and sexual violence should not be excluded from the relief package after ruling on two separate writ petitions that contested the "discriminatory provisions" in the working procedure for relief distribution. The victims of torture and sexual assault at the hands of the state security forces or Maoist rebels have not gotten any assistance from the government, even though succeeding administrations have occasionally introduced different compensation packages for war victims.

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## \$50 million loan to boost logistics and customs

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has authorized a \$50 million loan to assist the government of Nepal in implementing policy changes to enhance both domestic and international commerce. To encourage more effective transportation of commodities among producers, distributors, sellers, and purchasers, the ADB project would broaden the government's trade facilitation efforts to the logistics sector. Supported initiatives include creating a one-stop logistics information portal and integrating logistics infrastructure to enable multimodal transportation and last-mile connectivity. To facilitate commerce with the nation's major trading partners, including India and Bangladesh, the initiative would create and unify technical standards for logistical infrastructure and equipment.

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# Strategic Engagements

## Project to build Lower Arun hydropower by Satluj Company

The Lower Arun hydropower project in Nepal is being built by Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, an Indian hydropower generation firm. During Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit here today, a bilateral agreement in this respect was reached. In the presence of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the project development agreement (PDA) between the two countries was signed in New Delhi. The project's entire output of electricity will be exported, which is expected to help the nation's economy grow. The Investment Board had authorized an investment of Rs 92.68 billion for the project with a 669 MW capacity.

## Nepal and India reach a long-term power trade agreement

According to a long-term power trade agreement between Nepal and India, which was announced today in New Delhi by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, India would import 10,000 MW of power from Nepal for the following ten years. PM Modi said the agreement was a significant development in increasing collaboration in this sector based on the Joint Vision Statement that the two prime ministers issued in April 2022 while speaking at a joint press conference in Hyderabad House in the Indian Capital.

## Nepal and the UAE will hold labour JWC negotiations

To make decisions about the extension of the labour agreement between the two nations, the Nepal-UAE Joint Working Committee (JWC) is convening in Kathmandu. While the UAE is proposing to enhance social security and make admission for domestic workers easier, Nepal is proposing to raise the minimum salary. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Nepal Joint Working Committee's third meeting decided to automatically extend their labour agreement for another four years.

## To implement MCC projects, around Rs11 billion has been allotted

To conduct MCC projects in the upcoming fiscal year 2023–2024, the Nepalese government has allotted Rs10.84 billion to the Millennium Challenge Account–Nepal (MCA–Nepal). Along with an upgraded stretch of the East-West Highway, this also contains a 315 km high-capacity transmission line. Only Rs1.54 billion is anticipated to be spent by the conclusion of the current fiscal year 2022–2023, which the MCA–Nepal has put aside for Rs9.27 billion. However, according to MCA–Nepal officials, building might begin in the upcoming fiscal year, and they anticipate spending more.

## France's aviation agency will assist Nepal in enhancing its flight safety

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) and the Civil Aviation Authority of France have agreed on the goal of upgrading Nepal's air safety system. In the French capital of Paris, representatives from the two nations' aviation regulatory organizations signed a four-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) for technical and human resource management and development. To represent the French civil aviation authority, Damien Caze and CAAN Director General Pradeep Adhikari signed the MoU. According to the agreement, action will be done to increase the standard of air safety, including technical capacity building and training.

# Strategic Engagements

## Diplomatic ties are established between Nepal and Cameroon

On June 22, 2023, diplomatic ties between Nepal and the Republic of Cameroon were established. With this, Nepal now has diplomatic ties with 180 nations. In a brief ceremony held on Thursday, June 22, afternoon at the UN Headquarters in New York, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN Amrit Bahadur Rai and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cameroon to the UN Michel Tommo Monthe signed a Joint Communiqué to that effect. Additionally, the two ambassadors penned a joint letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres alerting him of the two nations' establishment of diplomatic ties.

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