



Balen walks political tightrope as PM

From corruption to jobs, from bureaucratic gridlock to foreign policy tightropes, his premiership will be defined not by rhetoric, but by action

KAMAL D BHATTARAI

Today, Balendra Shah takes the oath as the 42nd Prime Minister of Nepal. Shah enters Singha Durbar amid towering public expectations and daunting structural challenges. His party, the Rastriya Swatantra Party, emerged from the March 5 election with a near-two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives. From corruption to jobs, from bureaucratic gridlock to foreign policy tightropes, his premiership will be defined not by rhetoric, but by action. This marks the first time in Nepal's recent history that a new generation of leaders has reached the helm of power.

Corruption on trial

There is a widespread public perception that corruption has reached unprecedented levels over the past decades. Scandals involving public procurement, infrastructure projects, and state enterprises have long dominated headlines, public discourse, and popular anger. During the campaign, voters expected swift and decisive action on major corruption cases. However, many corruption networks span political parties, business interests, and the bureaucracy. Dismantling them will invite fierce opposition from multiple quarters. Anti-graft bodies are slow and politicized, and without structural reform, addressing corruption in any meaningful way will be extremely difficult.

Service delivery

Nepalis are frustrated. Slow service delivery—be it in citizenship processing, construction permits, tax administration, or infrastructure rollout—has become a symbol of state dysfunction. The prolonged delay in printing driving licenses is a case in point; many people have waited over

three years without receiving theirs. Passport delays tell a similar story. Both Shah and his party have promised rapid transformation in government services, but the bureaucratic machinery he inherits is rigid, hierarchical, politicized, and deeply resistant to change. Past prime ministers have struggled to push through such reforms.

Job creation

Unemployment was among the top issues driving voters in the March election. Nepal's youth unemployment rate of 20.6 percent is the highest in South and Southeast Asia. Shah's critics argue that job creation cannot happen overnight and requires structural reform, private

investment, and time. Yet the electorate wants immediate results. The RSP's election manifesto has promised 1.2m jobs annually.

According to data from Nepal Rastriya Bank, the national GDP at current prices has reached Rs 6,107.2bn, but the composition of this figure reveals a troubling reality. The service sector dominates at 62.01 percent, while agriculture and industry contribute a mere 25.16 percent and 12.82 percent, respectively, according to Kathmandu-based economist Laxman Neupane. This heavy reliance on services has failed to generate sufficient high-quality employ-

ment or meaningful value-added growth, placing immense pressure on the incoming RSP government to pivot toward aggressive industrial expansion, he adds.

A business-friendly Nepal

Nepal's economic potential is considerable—spanning hydropower, tourism, agriculture, and, more recently, information technology services. Realizing that potential requires systemic reform. Red tape remains a major obstacle, with business registration, licensing, land acquisition, and import-export approvals requiring multiple clearances across agencies.

Foreign assistance has declined in recent years, and major donor countries are increasingly signaling a shift toward facilitating private investment rather than direct aid. Every major power sees opportunity in Nepal, but all are calling for legislative reform, digitalization of services, and stronger investor protections. Foreign investors will be closely watching how Nepal balances openness with regulatory certainty. Failure to attract industrial investment means Nepali youth will have little choice but to continue relying on foreign labor markets, says US-based analyst Sushil Thapa. At the same time, instability in the Middle East and ongoing international conflicts are making those markets increasingly risky and uncertain, he adds.

Economic challenges

Nepal's economy presents a mix of apparent stability and deep structural fragility. Macroeconomic indicators, including low inflation and strong foreign exchange reserves of around Rs 3,200bn, paint a broadly positive picture. Yet domestic demand remains weak, banks face rising non-performing loans, and investor confidence is low. The economy is heavily dependent on remittances, which account for nearly 24 percent of GDP, while manufacturing and industry are shrinking and youth migration continues to rise. The RSP government fac-

es the task of translating electoral enthusiasm into tangible economic growth.

Its ambitious goals include doubling GDP to \$100bn within five years, raising per capita income to \$3,000, and creating 1.2m jobs annually. Key challenges include reforming import duties, broadening the tax base, attracting foreign investment without incurring debt traps, and managing potential labor crises stemming from Gulf instability ■

> continued on pg. 2



BASU
KSHITIZ //
2026

Nepal's economy presents a mix of apparent stability and deep structural fragility

The RSP's election manifesto has promised 1.2m jobs annually

Balen Shah elected RSP PP leader

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

Balendra Shah (Balen) has been elected as the Parliamentary Party leader of the Rastriya Swatantra Party. Spokesperson Manish Jha said that the Central Committee meeting held today unanimously passed the proposal of party President Rabi Lamichhane to appoint Shah as the Parliamentary Party leader.

Shah is set to become the Prime Minister from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which is going to form a single government after winning 182 seats in the House of Representative elections held on March 5. He is scheduled to take the oath of office and secrecy at 12:34 pm today.

Newly elected members of the House of Representatives took the oath of office and secrecy at the newly constructed multi-purpose hall in Singha Durbar on Thursday. Senior member of Parliament Arjun Narsingh KC administered the oath to the newly elected lawmakers.

President Ramchandra Paudel had administered the oath of office and secrecy to KC on Wednesday. Arrangements related to taking oath of office and secrecy are specified in the Article 99 and 91 (5) of the Nepal Constitution.

SPECIAL READ TODAY



Laxman Neupane
The roadmap to 2026-27 crusader budget

> pg. 6



NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

> pg. 2



COVER STORY READING NEPAL'S CHANGE FROM DELHI

> pg. 4-5



BIZNOMY TRADE IMBALANCE PERSISTS

> pg. 7

Economic empowerment and the foundation of stability

Nepal's young population, expanding connectivity, and integration with global markets offer enormous potential

PANKAJ BANSKOTA

Political debates in Nepal often revolve around constitutions, coalitions, and leadership changes. Yet one fundamental reality receives far less attention: political stability rarely precedes economic stability. In most successful societies, the sequence is reversed. Economic empowerment creates stability, and stability, in turn, reinforces good governance.

When citizens are able to earn, invest, build enterprises, and gradually improve their standard of living, they begin to value predictability, transparency, and the rule of law. A society where people feel economically secure tends to be calmer, more cooperative, and more invested in its institutions. Conversely, when economic opportunity is limited or concentrated among a few actors, politics becomes a contest over access to scarce resources.

This relationship between economic inclusion and political stability has been widely examined. In *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, Thomas Piketty shows how excessive concentration of wealth can destabilize societies. In *Why Nations Fail*, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson argue that nations prosper when institutions allow broad participation. In *Corruption and Government*, Susan Rose-Ackerman makes a more uncomfortable point: corruption is often not just a moral failure, but a consequence of limited economic access.

For Nepal, these are not abstract ideas. They reflect structural realities that continue to shape the country's economic trajectory.

Growth vs participation

A country does not become prosperous simply because its GDP increases. It becomes prosperous when its citizens have the opportunity to participate in that growth. An economy can expand while remaining narrow, concentrated, and exclusionary. In such cases, wealth accumulates, but opportunity does not spread. Over time, this imbalance creates both economic fragility and political tension.

Every resilient economy rests on a broad base of small and medium enterprises. In Nepal, SMEs contribute approximately 22 percent of GDP and employ around 1.8m people (Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2024). These businesses are not peripheral—they are central to inclusive growth.

This idea has long been established. In *Small Is Beautiful*, EF Schumacher argued that economies built around human-scale enterprises are more balanced and sustainable. In *The Mystery of Capital*, Hernando de Soto emphasized that the real wealth of developing countries lies in enabling ordinary citizens to convert their assets and ideas into productive capital.

The practical question, therefore, is simple: can an ordinary Nepali realistically build and grow a business?

The structural barriers

Balen...

While genuine prospects for reform and growth exist, political constraints and high public expectations make the path forward complex.

Managing multiple social groups

The Shah government faces a complex and delicate challenge in responding to the demands of multiple societal groups, each with distinct and pressing concerns. Cooperative victims, who have suffered financial losses due to mismanaged or failed cooperatives, seek justice and compensation, requiring careful legal and administrative han-



For many, the answer remains uncertain. Access to finance continues to be a primary constraint. The banking system, regulated by Nepal Rastra Bank, relies heavily on collateral-based lending. While this ensures financial discipline, it excludes individuals who lack property but possess viable ideas.

Nepal's import-driven economic structure further concentrates opportunity among those with capital, networks, and scale. Smaller entrepreneurs are often confined to the lower end of the value chain, with limited ability to expand.

Regulatory and compliance requirements add another layer of difficulty. What is routine for established firms can be overwhelming for new entrants. The result is not deliberate exclusion, but a system that consistently favors those already positioned to succeed.

When policy does not broaden opportunity

Governments often attempt to address these gaps through targeted incentives. Nepal has done the same, particularly in promoting industrial activity. Yet outcomes suggest that such measures do not always lead to broader participation.

Nepal has repeatedly attempted to stimulate industrial activity through targeted tax incentives. Yet several cases raise questions about their effectiveness. For example, vehicle assembly plants received over Rs 14bn in tax concessions in five years, but according to the Auditor General, the value added within Nepal did not match the revenue forgone, and consumers saw little meaningful price reduction. The issue is not the intent behind such policies, but their distribution. Firms with scale and capital are better positioned to capture these benefits, while smaller entrepreneurs remain largely excluded. Growth, in such cases, does not necessarily translate into wider economic participation.

Informal lenders may press for regulatory leniency, creating a difficult balance between formal financial governance and existing lending practices.

Teachers and other professional groups are likely to demand fair wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions, reflecting broader concerns about public sector reform and labor rights. Various other community and interest groups will also mobilize, making the public sphere a forum for multiple, often competing demands. Navigating all of this will require not only policy acumen but also strong negotiation skills, empathy, and the ability to pri-

For Nepal, these are not abstract ideas. They reflect structural realities that continue to shape the country's economic trajectory

Corruption as a structural outcome

This leads to a deeper issue. As Susan Rose-Ackerman argues, corruption often emerges from competition over limited economic access. When licenses, contracts, or economic gateways are scarce, businesses compete not only in markets, but for influence. In such environments, access becomes more valuable than efficiency, relationships begin to outweigh capability, and economic power concentrates. Corruption, in many cases, becomes a rational response to constrained opportunity. Reducing corruption, therefore, requires more than enforcement. It requires expanding the number of people who can participate in the economy.

The risk of concentration

Economic concentration also introduces systemic risks. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis demonstrated how large institutions can become "too big to fail." The collapse of Lehman Brothers and the rescue of institutions such as American International Group forced governments to deploy massive public resources to prevent wider collapse. For smaller economies like Nepal, such risks are even more significant. Limited fiscal capacity means that the failure of large economic actors can place disproportionate strain on the entire system. A diversified economy, supported by a broad base of enterprises, is inherently more resilient.

oritize solutions that uphold social harmony while addressing legitimate grievances.

Managing major powers

Relations with India, China, and the United States will remain one of the defining foreign policy challenges for Shah. All three countries are waiting to hear his strategic blueprint before making their next moves. They view RSP as a genuinely new political force and want to understand Balen's approach before offering commitments.

China has emerged as a key player in Nepal's foreign policy calculus. Beijing has signaled patience alongside clear

An untapped engine: Women entrepreneurs

One of Nepal's most significant opportunities lies in expanding the role of women in the economy.

Women contribute an estimated 36 percent of Nepal's GDP, yet only 22.5 percent of working-age women are formally employed (UN Women Nepal, 2023; World Bank Gender Data, 2024). This gap highlights not a lack of capability, but a lack of access and opportunity.

Women's economic contributions already span agriculture, small enterprises, services, and emerging sectors. Evidence globally shows that women reinvest a significantly higher proportion of their income into families and communities—up to 90 percent compared to around 40 percent for men (World Bank Gender Report, 2022). Studies such as those by EY (2023) also suggest that women-led enterprises often deliver stronger long-term value and sustainability. Countries such as India have recognized this and introduced targeted credit programs and policy frameworks to support women entrepreneurs.

For Nepal, this is not simply a matter of inclusion. It is one of the most immediate and scalable opportunities for economic expansion.

Rethinking the role of the state

A broader shift is required in how the state approaches the economy. Revenue generation cannot rely solely on taxation. In a developing economy like Nepal, excessive reliance on high and often punitive taxes can suppress consumption, discourage investment, and slow economic momentum. The state must evolve from being primarily a tax collector to becoming a strategic economic participant.

Nepal has significant untapped potential in sectors such as hydro-power, infrastructure, tourism cor-

ridors, cable transport systems, and mineral extraction. These are commercially viable opportunities that, if structured correctly, can generate sustained national income. A more effective approach lies in well-designed Public Private Partnership models.

Under such a framework, the government initiates projects using concessional or soft loans from development partners including governments and other bilateral agencies, projects are structured with clear revenue streams such as electricity exports, toll collections, user charges, or resource royalties, once operational and de-risked, these assets are partially or fully off-loaded in the capital markets

This model allows the government to build infrastructure without immediate fiscal strain, repay debt through project-generated income, and recover capital, often at a premium, through market participation. It also enables reinvestment into new projects, creating a continuous cycle of economic expansion. It is a model already proven globally across toll highways, energy infrastructure, ports, and transit systems.

For Nepal, the implications are significant. Hydropower exports, toll-based expressways, ropeways in difficult terrain, tourism infrastructure, and mineral development can all be structured in this manner. This approach reduces dependence on taxation, broadens the capital market, and allows citizens themselves to participate in national assets through equity ownership.

The direction ahead

Nepal stands at a crossroads. Its young population, expanding connectivity, and integration with global markets offer enormous potential. But prosperity cannot remain concentrated. A resilient future lies in empowering thousands of entrepreneurs - farmers, manufacturers, tourism operators, technology startups, and women leaders across every scale of the economy. When opportunity spreads, prosperity becomes inclusive and durable. And when prosperity is widespread, stability follows.

The foundations of a stable Nepal will not be built solely in parliament. They will be built in the countless enterprises where citizens take risks, create value, and transform ideas into opportunity. When people are able to thrive economically, peace and contentment follow. From that foundation, both economic and political stability naturally emerge. Nepal's new generation of lawmakers must now act with clarity. Expanding access to credit, dismantling structural barriers, reducing punitive tax regimes, and building an economy that rewards participation over proximity to power are not optional reforms, they are necessary corrections.

Because in the end, stability will not be delivered through politics alone. It will emerge when citizens believe they have a fair chance to succeed. And that belief is built not through promises, but through opportunity ■

expectations. It is willing to engage broadly with the new administration in areas such as artificial intelligence, rural digitization, infrastructure development through concessional loans, and cooperation in health, education, and agriculture.

At the same time, China has sent an unmistakable message about its security and strategic interests in Nepal. Shah's choices will determine whether Nepal can leverage China's willingness to invest without compromising its sovereignty or regional equilibrium.

India presents a more nuanced challenge. While it remains Nepal's most vital economic partner, New

Delhi is closely watching how the new government handles longstanding bilateral disputes. Economic cooperation will likely remain central, but Nepal must tread carefully to avoid straining this critical relationship. The United States, meanwhile, offers opportunities primarily in business and security cooperation. With USAID assistance having significantly declined, American private investors are looking for a favorable investment climate. Shah's administration will need to demonstrate political stability, regulatory clarity, and transparency to attract such investment while aligning with broader US interests in the region.



86TH NATIONAL DAY THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN



Message from Ambassador

H.E. Abrar H Hashmi

on 86th National Day of Pakistan



Pakistan has celebrated its 86th National Day on 23 March 2026. On this auspicious occasion, I extend heartiest greetings to fellow Pakistanis inside and across the globe and friends of Pakistan in Nepal. The nation proudly marks this day in remembrance of Pakistan Resolution adopted by our forefathers in Lahore in 1940. True to their resolve, the forefathers, under the leadership of father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, achieved Pakistan's independence within eight years on 14 August 1947 from the colonial subjugation. On the same day in 1956, the first Constitution declared Pakistan as an Islamic Republic.

Pakistan and Nepal established diplomatic relations in 1960. However, this relationship was not new and is embedded in the common civilizational moorings shaped by monks and wanderers who transversed Himalayan slopes. Our friendship is based on mutual respect and commonality of interests and same regional dynamics. Pakistan cherish its friendly relationship with Nepal reflecting aspirations of the two people. Nepal in the seat of the South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its role as current Chair is highly appreciated.

Pakistan and Nepal have deepened relations and concluded many agreements and MoUs in culture, education, health, agriculture, tourism, aviation, defence, forestry, energy and commerce. Professional training in medicine and technical fields, including banking, diplomacy, defence and agriculture, has brought many returns with 4000 Nepalese alumni of Pakistani institutions actively contributing to the development of Nepal. While bilateral trade is huge potential in trade and services through IT/ITeS, AI, alternate energy, medical services, organic food, e-commerce and tourism.

Music, Arts and Sports are shared passion of the two people. Pakistani artists are popular in Nepal. Last year, we supported a concert of famous Ghazal Maestro Ghulam Ali, and a year before (2024) Atif Aslam enthralled audiences in Kathmandu. Nepali film star Shiva Shrestha is renowned in Pakistan with his over two decades' association with our film industry. Food is another connector. The Embassy held Pakistan Food Festival in Kathmandu recently showcasing the rich and diverse culinary heritage of Pakistan, which received an enthusiastic response from both the local community and international guests.

We congratulate Nepali government and people on very successful elections and excited to work with the new and youthful leadership. Pakistan will continue to support the march of Nepal in its quest for socio-economic development and prosperity. I pray the region enjoys continued peace, tranquillity and progress. I hope the mutual cordiality turns into enhanced exchanges especially in trade and travel. The young population of both Pakistan and Nepal may enjoy the fruits of continued prosperity and achieve new heights as high as Mount Everest and K-2.

Art and Culture



On 22 Jul 2025, Pakistan Embassy organized poetry symposium, titled "Aalmi Mushaira: Urdu, Shairi Ki Zubaan" in Kathmandu in collaboration with Sahitya Academy, Nepal.



On 5 to 8 Feb 2026, Pakistan Embassy organized Pakistan Food Festival at Aloft Kathmandu in collaboration with Eleven Eleven Trade & Service Pvt. Ltd., PC Hotels & Resorts and Gul Ahmad Textiles were partners from Pakistan.

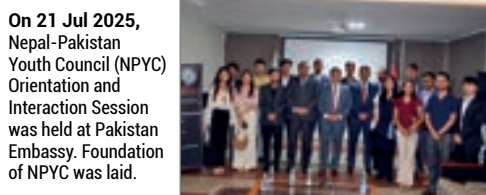


On 15 Mar 2025, Pride of Pakistan Ustad Ghulam Ali, left the Nepali friends, fans and followers spellbound with his magical melodies; ably accompanied by his son Amir Ali and grandson Nazir Ali.



On 9 Jul 2025, Pakistan Embassy organized launching ceremony of book on Pakistan's Buddhist heritage in Nepali language, titled (Pakistanka Boudha Sampadhaharu) authored by eminent scholar Mr. Om Charan Amatya.

Youth Engagement



On 21 Jul 2025, Nepal-Pakistan Youth Council (NPYC) Orientation and Interaction Session was held at Pakistan Embassy. Foundation of NPYC was laid.

Promotion of Tourism



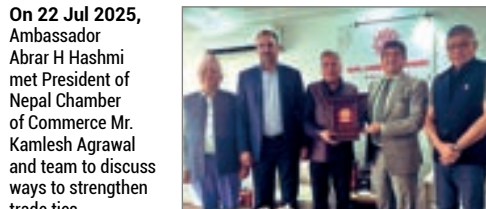
On 27 May 2025, Pakistan Embassy celebrated inspiring achievements of the elite mountaineers from Pakistan.

Women Empowerment



On 4 Jul 2025, Pakistan Embassy financially sponsored establishing of District Chapter of Federation of Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Nepal (FWEAN) in Syangja District.

Commerce and Trade



On 22 Jul 2025, Ambassador Abrar H Hashmi met President of Nepal Chamber of Commerce Mr. Kamlesh Agrawal and team to discuss ways to strengthen trade ties.

Sports Promotion



On 7 Feb 2026, 11th Edition of Pakistan-Nepal T20 Cricket Tournament was officially inaugurated in Kathmandu by Ambassador of Pakistan.



On 15 Feb 2026, the final match and closing ceremony of Cricket Tournament was held.

Community Engagement



On 21 Oct 2025, Pakistan Embassy, in collaboration with the Nepal-Pakistan Youth Council, distributed relief items to the flood-affected families in Ilam District (Eastern Nepal).

Defence Collaboration



On 7 May 2025, Pakistan Embassy organized Alumni gathering for Nepali Army officers trained in various institutions of Pakistan Armed Forces.



On 7 to 17 Feb 2026, NCC Delegation Pakistan, comprising 12 Cadets/officers visited Nepal on the invitation of NCC Nepal.

International Collaboration



Jul 2025, ICIMOD signed MoU's with Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination.

National Events



On 16 Apr 2025, Pakistan Embassy a reception to commemorate the 85th National Day of Pakistan.



On 14 Aug 2025, on the occasion of Marka-e-Haq 79th Independence Day of Pakistan, a flag hoisting ceremony was held at Chancery.

Pakistan-Nepal Bilateral Relations

On 28 Feb 2026, Ambassador of Pakistan paid a courtesy call on Rt Hon Prime Minister Sushila Karki; both sides expressed their commitments to further strengthening Nepal-Pakistan friendly relations.



On 29 Jul 2025, Rt Hon Speaker Mr Dev Raj Ghimire had a meeting with the Chairman of Senate of Pakistan H.E. Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the 6th World Conference of Speakers in Geneva.



On 11 Feb 2026, Hon. Foreign Minister Mr. Bala Nanda Sharma received Ambassador of Pakistan as they exchanged views on strengthening and deepening bilateral relations.



Cooperation in Healthcare

On 1 Dec 2025, Ambassador of Pakistan announced financial support for the Digitalization of Bharatpur Eye Hospital's Medical Records.



Socio-Economic Development

On 7 Dec 2025, Pakistan Embassy funded the renovation and furnishing of office space block at Maharajgunj Police Station, as gift from the people of Pakistan.



Supporting Education Sector

On 15 Nov 2025, Pakistan Embassy hosted its Annual Alumni Get-Together Gala and launched Pak-Nepal Alumni Network.



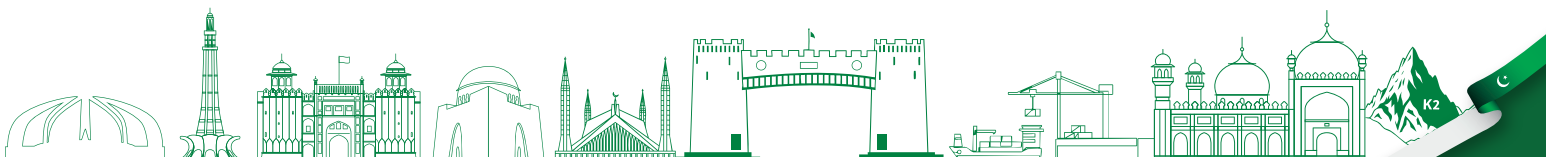
On 29 Nov 2025, Pakistan Embassy handed over a newly established computer laboratory at Gyanodaya Secondary School.



On 29 May 2025, Pakistan Embassy organized 12th Annual Ambassador of Pakistan Essay Writing Competition and 8th Annual Ambassador of Pakistan Speech Competition.



On 26 Jun 2025, 13th Ambassador of Pakistan Annual Scholarship Award Ceremony was organized by Pakistan Embassy.



Reading Nepal's political change from New Delhi

A government that is responsive to the "Youthquake" is more likely to prioritise connectivity, cross-border trade, and investment flows, all of which naturally strengthen ties with India

ADITI PAUL

The growing prominence of Balendra Shah, widely known as Balen, to the position of Prime Minister comes at a time when India-Nepal relations are steady but not without underlying tensions. The relationship has always been unique, shaped by an open border, deep cultural overlap, economic interdependence, and a shared civilizational space. Yet, it has been marked by phases of temporary mistrust, especially when internal politics, leadership struggle, or public dissatisfaction in Nepal shift outward and take a stronger anti-India stance. In this context, Balen's emergence is not just a political shift within Nepal but a moment that could potentially reshape how the two countries engage with each other.

What makes Balen different is the source of his political power. Unlike many leaders in Nepal who come from long-standing party structures, Balen represents a break from the traditional leaders. He rose as an independent, outsider figure. Unlike most politicians' dependence on party backing, networking, and support from senior leadership, he was never a party worker and his reputation and visibility was not tied to traditional political machinery. His popularity has been built on governance, efficiency, and a promise to clean up public institutions. This matters for India. One of the recurring difficulties in dealing with Nepal has been political instability and frequent changes in leadership, which slow down decision-making and delay bilateral projects.

For instance, Arun III Hydro-power Project has taken years due to approvals, renegotiations, and political uncertainty. That's why, a leader with a strong mandate and a focus on delivery rather than ideol-



ogy can bring a certain level of predictability. That alone can improve the policy continuity between New Delhi and Kathmandu.

There is also a noticeable shift in tone with Balen. He does not rely heavily on identity-based narratives or historical grievances like sovereignty or nationalism. Instead, his politics is grounded in practical concerns like urban planning and tackling waste management, improving business environ-

The urban voters, youth, and people frustrated with corruption and inefficiency see him as a welcome change

ment and creating local economic opportunities, and public services like roads and basic civic services.

Balen's focus on execution over rhetoric reduces the incentive to use anti-India sentiment, historical disputes, and ideological dialogues as a political tool, something that has surfaced in Nepal at different points in the past. If domestic legitimacy is tied to performance rather than nationalism, the room for stable and constructive engagement with India expands.

Another important factor is the generation he represents. Much of

Balen's support comes from younger voters who are less interested in geopolitical posturing and more focused on economic opportunities. In other words, Balen has entered a politics of economic desperation, not aspiration. Moreover, Balen uses social media for quick response to issues and has been building a perception of transparency. Undoubtedly, the urban voters, youth, and people frustrated with corruption and inefficiency

see him as a welcome change. For them, India is not just a neighbour but a major source of trade, education, employment, and mobility. India is Nepal's largest trading partner, a place for higher education in cities like Delhi and Bangalore, and a destination where millions of Nepali citizens live and work without visa restrictions.

Consequently, economic stability in Nepal is closely linked to access and cooperation with India. Therefore, a government that is responsive to the "Youthquake" is more likely to prioritise connectivity, cross-border trade, and investment flows, all of which naturally strengthen ties with India.

Balen's leadership could also bring a more balanced approach to Nepal's external relations. Nepal has always had to manage its position between India and China. It has been rightly described that Nepal is a "yam between two boulders". At times, this balancing act has turned into strategic signalling, with Kathmandu leaning towards one side to counter the other. The 2015 blockade made Nepal sign multiple agreements with China on transit and infrastructure to reduce dependency on Indian routes. Likewise, during the 2020 Kalapani border dispute with India, Nepal issued a new official map that included several disputed areas within Nepal's territory and followed this by a constitutional amendment to formalise the change. So, a leadership that is less tied to these legacy political alignments may approach the balancing act differently. Instead of sharp swings, there could be a steadier, more measured engagement with both neighbours.

For India, this kind of consistency is easier to work with. It reduces uncertainty and allows for long-term planning and policy continuity in areas like infrastructure, energy cooperation, and regional connectivity. It could mean continued hydropower cooperation with India alongside selective infrastructure projects with China without framing them as alternatives to India.

There is also a practical angle that often gets overlooked. Many India-Nepal agreements struggle not because of disagreement at the top, but because of slow implementation on the ground. Bureaucratic delays, regulatory hurdles, and lack of coordination have held back several projects. Take the cross-border railway projects like Jaynagar-Bardibas

Railway as an example, it took years to operationalize because of construction delays and procedural hurdles on the Nepali side. Other important initiatives like Integrated Check Posts at border points like Birgunj witnessed delays in expansion due to regulatory and logistical challenges. In this context, Balen's track record as a city administrator suggests a preference for speed and accountability. He is willing to cut through red tape, follow timelines, and hold officials accountable for delays. If that approach carries into national governance, it could improve execution. Faster project delivery in sectors like hydropower and transport would directly benefit both countries.

That said, none of this is automatic. Moving from municipal leadership to national governance is a significant jump. Unlike his role as a mayor, as a Prime Minister of Nepal, Balen requires a different level of institutional coordination and strategic thinking. He has to diplomatically manage relations with neighbours on sensitive matters of security and trade. Balen will need to rely on experienced advisors and build a capable team to handle complex regional dynamics. So, the actual test is not whether Balen can win elections, but whether he can expand the Nepal state's capacity and functionality. At the same time, India's approach will be just as important. A respectful and non-intrusive engagement style from New Delhi will go a long way in supporting a stable partnership. The relationship has always worked best when both sides show sensitivity to each other's concerns.

In many ways, this is less about one individual and more about a broader shift in Nepal's political landscape. Balen represents a demand for cleaner governance, economic focus, and a break from old patterns. These aspirations do not clash with India's interests. In fact, they align closely with what India seeks in its neighbourhood: stability, growth, and reliable cooperation.

If handled carefully, his leadership could move India-Nepal relations into a productive phase. That, in the long run, is often what sustains strong bilateral relationships ■

The author is an editor at Zebra Learn. She studied International Politics at JNU. Her research focuses on South Asian politics

Shifting ballot trends

The amalgamation of Balen and the Bell

While journalists and analysts had predicted RSP gains due to the GenZ movement and the negligence of old parties, the sheer scale of the landslide victory was unexpected



MIM BAHADUR PARIYAR

The 'One Man Army' of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Balendra 'Balen' Shah, has breathed new life and energy into both the party and its chairman, Rabi Lamichhane. The results and the popular vote in the March 5 election have once again proven the power of this 'magical' figure. While his popularity in Kathmandu was well-known—evidenced by the massive crowds that gathered whenever he appeared—few could have speculated that the 'Balen craze' would sweep the entire nation. By leaving traditional parties in a state of political turmoil, his popularity has fundamentally altered the political landscape and the status of the RSP.

The bitter truth is that before Balen's formal alignment with the RSP, the party's standing under Rabi Lamichhane was precarious. Critics claimed the RSP was facing its darkest hour. Lamichhane's alleged involvement in cooperative fraud, money laundering, and other legal issues had pushed the party onto the defensive. Even during the GenZ movement, the RSP chair was held in Nakhru prison, with several cases registered against him in various district courts. Despite these hurdles, RSP cadres and leaders leveraged the momentum of the GenZ movement to help Lamichhane secure his release. Following his exit from jail, Lamichhane and his supporters hoped the youth movement would propel him to the Prime Minister's office. Surprisingly, leading GenZ activists began criticizing his actions on social media, even starting trends against him. Amidst this friction, high-profile leaders Sumana Shrestha and Santosh Pariyar led the party, dealing a significant setback.

However, the tide turned suddenly. Sudan Gurung emerged to unite Balen, the RSP, and other forces. This strategic move revitalized the party and successfully captured public sentiment. Balen became the center of attraction; his 'face value' alone significantly enhanced the party's ability to

garner votes.

The election results proved the power of this alliance. Despite political fluctuations, the RSP led by Lamichhane secured nearly a two-thirds majority. While journalists and analysts had predicted RSP gains due to the GenZ movement and the negligence of old parties, the sheer scale of the landslide victory was unexpected. Even RSP leaders were surprised by the outcome. Beyond the victory itself, several crucial factors shifted the electoral scenario and the public's mentality toward traditional parties.

To maintain this favor, RSP must address public needs and navigate complex geopolitics

Had the RSP proposed any name other than Balen for the premiership, the strategy likely would have failed

The primary factor behind the shift was undoubtedly Balen. The public's trust in him is near-total. While some argue he hasn't yet achieved results that match the party's current standing, one cannot deny that Balen is the 'Midas' of Nepali politics. His charm and aura prove he is a man of the masses. His recent political campaigns silenced those who questioned his fame; everywhere he went, massive crowds gathered just to catch a glimpse of him. Human chains lined the roads to greet him, a spectacle that directly translated into votes for the 'Bell' (the RSP electoral symbol).

Another key driver was Balen's strategic alliance with the RSP. Although Balen presents as an individual, he is backed by a powerful network of GenZ activists, celebrities, content creators, and

influential social media groups like Routine of Nepal band (RONB) and Men's Room Reloaded (MRR). The names 'Balen' and 'Ganti' (the Bell) became synonymous. Even citizens not yet eligible to vote were swept up in the fervor. During the election, the common refrain was simply, 'Vote for the Bell'. Voters often prioritized the symbol and Balen's endorsement over the actual quality of individual candidates. Viral social media clips even showed voters outside Jhapa-5 claiming they 'voted for Balen and the Bell', cementing his role as the architect of this victory.

Furthermore, the RSP's tactical move to project Balen as the upcoming Prime Minister played a significant role in capturing the public's desire for youthful leadership. Had the RSP proposed any name other than Balen for the premiership, the strategy likely would have failed. Conversely, the repetitive rhetoric and perceived failures of veteran leaders paved the way for this 'Balen and Bell' victory. The election even transformed the Madhes region—traditionally a stronghold for regional Madhes-based parties. In a stunning shift, the RSP secured 30 out of 32 seats in the region. This was largely due to Balen's influence; the Madhesi community sought a representative who could lead the government, and the RSP's move to elevate a figure with Madhesi roots resonated deeply.

Despite this unbelievable victory, the RSP must remain alert. To maintain this favor, they must address public needs and navigate complex geopolitics. Balen and the RSP leadership must realize that this mandate is a cry for change from a public fed up with traditional politics. This is a golden opportunity for Balen and the RSP to succeed where old leaders failed—specifically in governance, economic development, and loyalty to the people. They must prioritize equality, equity, and social emancipation. If they fail, the Nepali electorate has shown time and again that they are not afraid to change their leaders once more.

Rethinking policy through causality

SAUGAT GAUTAM

Nepal has been captivated by cautious optimism following the electoral victory of Balendra Shah and the RSP, instilling a renewed sense of possibility in governance and the broader polity. However, this moment is a critical juncture: ensuring that this new era of alternative politics doesn't make the same mistakes as the past—as governance is ultimately guided by the policies this upcoming government chooses to pursue.

RSP's political campaign concentrated heavily on governance—drawing on citizen experiences with administrative staff, lapses in policy implementation, or overall vacuous policymaking. In the past, policy debates have centered around observable relationships—for example, how expedited transportation networks will lead to rapid economic growth. It's understandable how this is appealing, we're hardwired to identifying developed cities with

clean and wide roads. However, places with pre-existing growth trends consistently attract better infrastructure, and as a result—better developed road networks. This ambiguity in causality is rarely acknowledged as we've stopped at observational correlation to apply a temporary band-aid—disregarding underlying issues.

This isn't restricted to just road networks—policy debates have consistently centered around visible relationships—patterns that appear obvious but aren't structurally understood. In most cases, cause and effect move both ways—we can't isolate road networks from economic activity, nor the other way around. This ambiguity is further complicated by other underlying factors—affecting both transportation and economic networks. This form of misidentified causality ultimately fails to address policy targets and might even cause unintended negative externalities. This misidentification is not



strictly an individual or political problem at the core—it's simply about adjusting our approach

to policymaking. We need to be able to establish clear causality in complex systems where observable

relationships are not accounting for endogenous dynamics underneath. This can be done if policymaking is guided by thorough analysis: comparing regions with or without the policy, testing policies through randomized controlled trials (RCTs) before implementing broad scale reform and quantitatively tracking variance across implementation contexts. This will require recalibrating usual policymaking but will provide much higher returns on government effort and expenditure—resulting in effective outcomes and avoiding unintended harms.

This recalibrated policymaking can come into effect with our concerns over low exports—generally attributed to weak governance institutions or an unstable oversight mechanism. However, this relationship could very well run in the opposite direction—successful exporting industries or business communities could have instead led to the development of strong

Misidentified causality ultimately fails to address policy targets and might even cause unintended negative externalities

institutions and increased oversight to guarantee quality. Policymakers are challenged to distinguish between these explanations. Here is where government policies need to avoid blanket approaches and check for sectoral variation, difference-in-differences with policies already in place, and natural quasi-experimental variation with untreated regions. The results will allow policymakers to understand what actually drives exports, avoid allocating resources to unfocused reforms, and focus on interventions that actually improve export performance.

This strategy needs to expand well

Reading Nepal's political change from New Delhi

A government that is responsive to the "Youthquake" is more likely to prioritise connectivity, cross-border trade, and investment flows, all of which naturally strengthen ties with India

ADITI PAUL

The growing prominence of Balendra Shah, widely known as Balen, to the position of Prime Minister comes at a time when India-Nepal relations are steady but not without underlying tensions. The relationship has always been unique, shaped by an open border, deep cultural overlap, economic interdependence, and a shared civilizational space. Yet, it has been marked by phases of temporary mistrust, especially when internal politics, leadership struggle, or public dissatisfaction in Nepal shift outward and take a stronger anti-India stance. In this context, Balen's emergence is not just a political shift within Nepal but a moment that could potentially reshape how the two countries engage with each other.

What makes Balen different is the source of his political power. Unlike many leaders in Nepal who come from long-standing party structures, Balen represents a break from the traditional leaders. He rose as an independent, outsider figure. Unlike most politicians' dependence on party backing, networking, and support from senior leadership, he was never a party worker and his reputation and visibility was not tied to traditional political machinery. His popularity has been built on governance, efficiency, and a promise to clean up public institutions. This matters for India. One of the recurring difficulties in dealing with Nepal has been political instability and frequent changes in leadership, which slow down decision-making and delay bilateral projects.

For instance, Arun III Hydro-power Project has taken years due to approvals, renegotiations, and political uncertainty. That's why, a leader with a strong mandate and a focus on delivery rather than ideol-



ogy can bring a certain level of predictability. That alone can improve the policy continuity between New Delhi and Kathmandu.

There is also a noticeable shift in tone with Balen. He does not rely heavily on identity-based narratives or historical grievances like sovereignty or nationalism. Instead, his politics is grounded in practical concerns like urban planning and tackling waste management, improving business environ-

The urban voters, youth, and people frustrated with corruption and inefficiency see him as a welcome change

ment and creating local economic opportunities, and public services like roads and basic civic services.

Balen's focus on execution over rhetoric reduces the incentive to use anti-India sentiment, historical disputes, and ideological dialogues as a political tool, something that has surfaced in Nepal at different points in the past. If domestic legitimacy is tied to performance rather than nationalism, the room for stable and constructive engagement with India expands.

Another important factor is the generation he represents. Much of

Balen's support comes from younger voters who are less interested in geopolitical posturing and more focused on economic opportunities. In other words, Balen has entered a politics of economic desperation, not aspiration. Moreover, Balen uses social media for quick response to issues and has been building a perception of transparency. Undoubtedly, the urban voters, youth, and people frustrated with corruption and inefficiency

Rethinking policy through causality

SAUGAT GAUTAM

Nepal has been captivated by cautious optimism following the electoral victory of Balendra Shah and the RSP, instilling a renewed sense of possibility in governance and the broader polity. However, this moment is a critical juncture: ensuring that this new era of alternative politics doesn't make the same mistakes as the past—as governance is ultimately guided by the policies this upcoming government chooses to pursue.

RSP's political campaign concentrated heavily on governance—drawing on citizen experiences with administrative staff, lapses in policy implementation, or overall vacuous policymaking. In the past, policy debates have centered around observable relationships—for example, how expedited transportation networks will lead to rapid economic growth. It's understandable how this is appealing, we're hardwired to identifying developed cities with

clean and wide roads. However, places with pre-existing growth trends consistently attract better infrastructure, and as a result—better developed road networks. This ambiguity in causality is rarely acknowledged as we've stopped at observational correlation to apply a temporary band-aid—disregarding underlying issues.

This isn't restricted to just road networks—policy debates have consistently centered around visible relationships—patterns that appear obvious but aren't structurally understood. In most cases, cause and effect move both ways—we can't isolate road networks from economic activity, nor the other way around. This ambiguity is further complicated by other underlying factors—affecting both transportation and economic networks. This form of misidentified causality ultimately fails to address policy targets and might even cause unintended negative externalities. This misidentification is not



strictly an individual or political problem at the core—it's simply about adjusting our approach

to policymaking. We need to be able to establish clear causality in complex systems where observable

relationships are not accounting for endogenous dynamics underneath. This can be done if policymaking is guided by thorough analysis: comparing regions with or without the policy, testing policies through randomized controlled trials (RCTs) before implementing broad scale reform and quantitatively tracking variance across implementation contexts. This will require recalibrating usual policymaking but will provide much higher returns on government effort and expenditure—resulting in effective outcomes and avoiding unintended harms.

This recalibrated policymaking can come into effect with our concerns over low exports—generally attributed to weak governance institutions or an unstable oversight mechanism. However, this relationship could very well run in the opposite direction—successful exporting industries or business communities could have instead led to the development of strong

see him as a welcome change. For them, India is not just a neighbour but a major source of trade, education, employment, and mobility. India is Nepal's largest trading partner, a place for higher education in cities like Delhi and Bangalore, and a destination where millions of Nepali citizens live and work without visa restrictions.

Consequently, economic stability in Nepal is closely linked to access and cooperation with India. Therefore, a government that is responsive to the "Youthquake" is more likely to prioritise connectivity, cross-border trade, and investment flows, all of which naturally strengthen ties with India.

Balen's leadership could also bring a more balanced approach to Nepal's external relations. Nepal has always had to manage its position between India and China. It has been rightly described that Nepal is a "yam between two boulders". At times, this balancing act has turned into strategic signalling, with Kathmandu leaning towards one side to counter the other. The 2015 blockade made Nepal sign multiple agreements with China on transit and infrastructure to reduce dependency on Indian routes. Likewise, during the 2020 Kalapani border dispute with India, Nepal issued a new official map that included several disputed areas within Nepal's territory and followed this by a constitutional amendment to formalise the change. So, a leadership that is less tied to these legacy political alignments may approach the balancing act differently. Instead of sharp swings, there could be a steadier, more measured engagement with both neighbours.

For India, this kind of consistency is easier to work with. It reduces uncertainty and allows for long-term planning and policy continuity in areas like infrastructure, energy cooperation, and regional connectivity. It could mean continued hydropower cooperation with India alongside selective infrastructure projects with China without framing them as alternatives to India.

There is also a practical angle that often gets overlooked. Many India-Nepal agreements struggle not because of disagreement at the top, but because of slow implementation on the ground. Bureaucratic delays, regulatory hurdles, and lack of coordination have held back several projects. Take the cross-border railway projects like Jaynagar-Bardibas

Railway as an example, it took years to operationalize because of construction delays and procedural hurdles on the Nepali side. Other important initiatives like Integrated Check Posts at border points like Birgunj witnessed delays in expansion due to regulatory and logistical challenges. In this context, Balen's track record as a city administrator suggests a preference for speed and accountability. He is willing to cut through red tape, follow timelines, and hold officials accountable for delays. If that approach carries into national governance, it could improve execution. Faster project delivery in sectors like hydropower and transport would directly benefit both countries.

That said, none of this is automatic. Moving from municipal leadership to national governance is a significant jump. Unlike his role as a mayor, as a Prime Minister of Nepal, Balen requires a different level of institutional coordination and strategic thinking. He has to diplomatically manage relations with neighbours on sensitive matters of security and trade. Balen will need to rely on experienced advisors and build a capable team to handle complex regional dynamics. So, the actual test is not whether Balen can win elections, but whether he can expand the Nepal state's capacity and functionality. At the same time, India's approach will be just as important. A respectful and non-intrusive engagement style from New Delhi will go a long way in supporting a stable partnership. The relationship has always worked best when both sides show sensitivity to each other's concerns.

In many ways, this is less about one individual and more about a broader shift in Nepal's political landscape. Balen represents a demand for cleaner governance, economic focus, and a break from old patterns. These aspirations do not clash with India's interests. In fact, they align closely with what India seeks in its neighbourhood: stability, growth, and reliable cooperation.

If handled carefully, his leadership could move India-Nepal relations into a productive phase. That, in the long run, is often what sustains strong bilateral relationships ■

The author is an editor at Zebra Learn. She studied International Politics at JNU. Her research focuses on South Asian politics

beyond export policy—observable outcomes in society are a result of broader equilibria shaped by interacting forces, and bad policy has often reinforced these underlying equilibria. We have consistently chased after symptoms instead of addressing root causes—what we observe are outcomes, not explanations. This political moment provides us with an opportunity to change this approach—a critical juncture as to how we decide to move forward.

The RSP has made efficient governance and expert policymaking a core electoral tenet—raising both opportunity and expectations from these new political actors. Our policies have largely been concentrated around observable relationships and unclear causality—an issue that isn't fixed just by better policy design, but rather by a better understanding of what drives outcomes. The success of this electoral shift will depend not just on new policies, but rather on how carefully the outcomes of these new policies are understood.

ality

Misidentified causality ultimately fails to address policy targets and might even cause unintended negative externalities

institutions and increased oversight to guarantee quality. Policymakers are challenged to distinguish between these explanations. Here is where government policies need to avoid blanket approaches and check for sectoral variation, difference-in-differences with policies already in place, and natural quasi-experimental variation with untreated regions. The results will allow policymakers to understand what actually drives exports, avoid allocating resources to unfocused reforms, and focus on interventions that actually improve export performance.

This strategy needs to expand well

Shifting ballot trends

The amalgamation of Balen and the Bell

While journalists and analysts had predicted RSP gains due to the GenZ movement and the negligence of old parties, the sheer scale of the landslide victory was unexpected



MIM BAHADUR PARIYAR

The 'One Man Army' of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Balendra 'Balen' Shah, has breathed new life and energy into both the party and its chairman, Rabi Lamichhane. The results and the popular vote in the March 5 election have once again proven the power of this 'magical' figure. While his popularity in Kathmandu was well-known—evidenced by the massive crowds that gathered whenever he appeared—few could have speculated that the 'Balen craze' would sweep the entire nation. By leaving traditional parties in a state of political turmoil, his popularity has fundamentally altered the political landscape and the status of the RSP.

The bitter truth is that before Balen's formal alignment with the RSP, the party's standing under Rabi Lamichhane was precarious. Critics claimed the RSP was facing its darkest hour. Lamichhane's alleged involvement in cooperative fraud, money laundering, and other legal issues had pushed the party onto the defensive. Even during the GenZ movement, the RSP chair was held in Nakhu prison, with several cases registered against him in various district courts. Despite these hurdles, RSP cadres and leaders leveraged the momentum of the GenZ movement to help Lamichhane secure his release. Following his exit from jail, Lamichhane and his supporters hoped the youth movement would propel him to the Prime Minister's office. Surprisingly, leading GenZ activists began criticizing his actions on social media, even starting trends against him. Amidst this friction, high-profile leaders Sumana Shrestha and Santosh Pariyar left the party, dealing a significant setback.

However, the tide turned suddenly. Sudan Gurung emerged to unite Balen, the RSP, and other forces. This strategic move revitalized the party and successfully captured public sentiment. Balen became the center of attraction; his 'face value' alone significantly enhanced the party's ability to

garner votes.

The election results proved the power of this alliance. Despite political fluctuations, the RSP led by Lamichhane secured nearly a two-thirds majority. While journalists and analysts had predicted RSP gains due to the GenZ movement and the negligence of old parties, the sheer scale of the landslide victory was unexpected. Even RSP leaders were surprised by the outcome. Beyond the victory itself, several crucial factors shifted the electoral scenario and the public's mentality toward traditional parties.

To maintain this favor, RSP must address public needs and navigate complex geopolitics

Had the RSP proposed any name other than Balen for the premiership, the strategy likely would have failed

The primary factor behind the shift was undoubtedly Balen. The public's trust in him is near-total. While some argue he hasn't yet achieved results that match the party's current standing, one cannot deny that Balen is the 'Midas' of Nepali politics. His charm and aura prove he is a man of the masses. His recent political campaigns silenced those who questioned his fame; everywhere he went, massive crowds gathered just to catch a glimpse of him. Human chains lined the roads to greet him, a spectacle that directly translated into votes for the 'Bell' (the RSP electoral symbol).

Another key driver was Balen's strategic alliance with the RSP. Although Balen presents as an individual, he is backed by a powerful network of GenZ activists, celebrities, content creators, and

influential social media groups like Routine of Nepal band (RONB) and Men's Room Reloaded (MRR). The names 'Balen' and 'Ganti' (the Bell) became synonymous. Even citizens not yet eligible to vote were swept up in the fervor. During the election, the common refrain was simply, 'Vote for the Bell'. Voters often prioritized the symbol and Balen's endorsement over the actual quality of individual candidates. Viral social media clips even showed voters outside Jhapa-5 claiming they 'voted for Balen and the Bell', cementing his role as the architect of this victory.

Furthermore, the RSP's tactical move to project Balen as the upcoming Prime Minister played a significant role in capturing the public's desire for youthful leadership. Had the RSP proposed any name other than Balen for the premiership, the strategy likely would have failed. Conversely, the repetitive rhetoric and perceived failures of veteran leaders paved the way for this 'Balen and Bell' victory. The election even transformed the Madhes region—traditionally a stronghold for regional Madhes-based parties. In a stunning shift, the RSP secured 30 out of 32 seats in the region. This was largely due to Balen's influence; the Madhesi community sought a representative who could lead the government, and the RSP's move to elevate a figure with Madhesi roots resonated deeply.

Despite this unbelievable victory, the RSP must remain alert. To maintain this favor, they must address public needs and navigate complex geopolitics. Balen and the RSP leadership must realize that this mandate is a cry for change from a public fed up with traditional politics. This is a golden opportunity for Balen and the RSP to succeed where old leaders failed—specifically in governance, economic development, and loyalty to the people. They must prioritize equality, equity, and social emancipation. If they fail, the Nepali electorate has shown time and again that they are not afraid to change their leaders once more.

Rethinking education policy Inclusive, adaptive, future-ready

One of the reflections of how inclusion is understood in policy lies in the way language is treated within the curriculum. Nepal's classrooms are far more diverse than policy often acknowledges



Pravina
Thapa

In the wake of Nepal's youth-led political shift, there is a renewed sense of hope across the country, a belief that things can be done differently, that long-standing systems can be re-examined, and that policy can begin to reflect the realities of the people it serves. For educators, this moment feels deeply personal. Between my parents and myself, we have spent close to six decades in education, shaping classrooms, preparing teachers, and building institutions. From this vantage point, of experience, responsibility, and continued investment in Nepal's future, I often reflect on a crucial need: that the education policy we shape must be truly inclusive, adaptive, and reflective of the needs of a modern Nepali society.

A modern education policy must recognize that private schools are not merely optional institutions but an essential part of a diverse education ecosystem. Free education, as guaranteed by the Constitution, is vital, but so too is the right of communities to access schools that meet the specific needs of their children. These principles are not mutually exclusive. Private schools fill gaps, whether through higher accountability, specialized programs, or approaches that prioritize skills alongside academics. In a diverse society, no single system can serve every child and family equally; providing choice ensures that students have access to environments where they can meaningfully learn and grow.

The education policy we shape must be truly inclusive, adaptive, and reflective of the needs of a modern Nepali society



Full Article here

to engage with global resources, pedagogical practices, and academic collaborations creates the possibility of strengthening learning at home. Affiliations, teacher training, access to international content, and the ability to bring in expertise from outside Nepal are not departures from national identity. Rather, they are ways of ensuring that Nepali students are not learning in isolation and remain connected to the advancements shaping education globally. A more open system allows schools to evolve, innovate, and remain relevant and dynamic in a rapidly changing world.

One of the reflections of how inclusion is understood in policy lies in the way language is treated within the curriculum. Nepal's classrooms are far more diverse than policy often acknowledges. This diversity is not only diverse in terms of returning students or international learners, but also across communities within Nepal whose mother tongue is not Nepali. When proficiency in Nepali language and literature is assumed, and when subjects like Social Studies are taught exclusively in Nepali, the medium itself can become a barrier to learning.

Creating flexibility within this structure, whether through alternative Nepali language learner tracks in

place of standard language and literature, or more accessible approaches to teaching Social Studies in the language of comfort, allows students to engage with content more meaningfully. This adjustment would not only support Nepali returnees but also ensure that students from diverse linguistic communities within Nepal are not disadvantaged by a one-size-fits-all requirement. At the same time, it creates space for all learners to connect with Nepali language and culture in ways that are accessible and relevant. Inclusion, in this sense, is not about lowering standards, but about ensuring that language enables learning rather than limits it.

Diversity within the teaching community is equally essential. The ability to bring in educators from different backgrounds, including international faculty, strengthens cross-cultural understanding, enriches pedagogical practice, and exposes students to multiple perspectives.

The policy must also actively encourage international collaboration. Thousands of Nepali students leave the country each year in search of better educational opportunities. This is not only a reflection of aspiration, but also of gaps within our own system. An education policy that allows schools

The election of March 5 stands as a transformative milestone in Nepal's democratic evolution, effectively dismantling the long-standing narrative that the Constitution of Nepal 2015 created insurmountable structural barriers to a single-party mandate. For years, the prevailing wisdom among political analysts suggested that the country's mixed electoral framework, with its heavy emphasis on proportional representation, rendered a decisive majority nearly impossible for any nascent political force.

However, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) defied these theoretical constraints by securing an unprecedented number of parliamentary seats and over 5m proportional votes. This massive electoral 'signature' served as a powerful public referendum on the leadership of Rabi Lamichhane, functioning as a popular exoneration while he remained in legal custody facing allegations of cooperative finance fraud. This outcome suggests that a significant portion of the electorate viewed these judicial proceedings as politically motivated rather than purely legal, signaling a profound shift in the national psyche toward a collective aspiration for prosperity that transcends traditional partisan arithmetic.

By positioning itself as a disruptor of systemic corruption and administrative lethargy, the RSP has demonstrated that a platform centered on institutional integrity can overcome the perceived limitations of a fragmented multiparty system. Yet, this victory brings with it a complex set of challenges, particularly regarding the intersection of judicial process

and political will.

While the RSP successfully harnessed public frustration to secure power, it must now perform the difficult task of translating populist momentum into stable, rule-of-law-based governance. To satisfy the expectations of a diverse citizenry without further polarizing the nation's legal and political institutions, the party must convert its immense political capital into a coherent and functional fiscal pathway. The mandate is rooted in a fundamental public trust that the RSP can modernize the economy and restore ethical purity to state institutions; a goal that necessitates a radical departure from a status quo-ist fiscal policy.

A central pillar of this reform agenda involves a comprehensive overhaul of Nepal's Public Financial Management (PFM) to address deep-seated structural imbalances that have long stunted national economic development and growth. According to data from the Nepal Rastra Bank, the national GDP at current prices has reached Rs 6,107.2bn, but the composition of this figure reveals a concerning reality: the service sector dominates at 62.01 percent, while agriculture and industry contribute a mere 25.16 percent and 12.82 percent, respectively.

This heavy reliance on services has failed to generate sufficient high-quality employment or significant value-added economic growth, placing immense pressure on the incoming RSP government to pivot toward aggressive industrial expansion. Strengthening the industrial sector is not merely a fiscal preference but a structural

necessity for fostering meaningful job creation, setting up an export-oriented economy and achieving long-term, sustainable economic stability.

The existing national revenue architecture, though diverse, remains increasingly strained by its reliance on a complex but inefficient portfolio of instruments, including income taxes, VAT, and specialized levies for health and education. Even as the Inland Revenue Department reports a steady upward trajectory in total revenue from Rs 429.3bn in 2020-21 to Rs 583.82bn in 2024-25, these nominal gains mask significant underlying vulnerabilities.

Most especially, the Department of Customs highlights a precarious imbalance where import-related revenue reached Rs 478bn in the latest fiscal year, dwarfing export-related revenue of only Rs 277bn. This datapoint underscores a disproportionate and risky dependence on trade-based public revenue, which leaves the national budget highly susceptible to global market fluctuations and external shocks.

Despite rising revenue figures, the Ministry of Finance continues to face formidable challenges in meeting its fiscal targets due to systemic weaknesses within its primary institutions. These institutional bottlenecks include a chronic deficit of skilled human capital, substandard technological infrastructure, and the persistent threat of moral hazard within the PFM administration. Such vulnerabilities ensure that the modernization of PFM entities remains a critical but largely unfulfilled mandate ■

The roadmap to RSP's 2026-27 crusader budget

The mandate of the March 5 polls is rooted in a fundamental public trust that RSP can modernize the economy and restore ethical purity to state institutions



Laxman
Neupane

A radical departure from a status quo-ist fiscal policy is necessary to achieve this goal



Full Article here

i think | Letter to the Editor



theannapurnaexpress@gmail.com

Nepal's risky paracetamol habit

In many households, paracetamol is treated as a harmless staple, as easily accessible as everyday items. While it is safe when used correctly, its widespread and unsupervised use points to a concerning trend. Increasingly, people choose to self-medicate for fever and pain instead of consulting a healthcare professional.

Studies on self-medication

practices in Nepal suggest that many individuals rely on over-the-counter drugs without fully understanding their proper use. This is not just a matter of convenience, it can be risky. Globally, paracetamol is a leading cause of drug-induced liver injury when misused. In Nepal, where pharmacy regulations are not always strictly followed, the chances of accidental overuse are even higher. Many

people are also unaware that paracetamol is present in multiple cold and flu medications, increasing the risk of unintentional overdose.

Another concern is that self-medication can mask symptoms. Treating persistent fever at home may delay the diagnosis of serious illnesses such as dengue or typhoid, making treatment more difficult later on.

To address this issue, the Department of Drug Administration should strengthen regulations on over-the-counter sales. At the same time, public awareness campaigns are needed to encourage people to seek proper medical advice. A pill may relieve symptoms, but it does not always address the underlying problem.

Reeti KC
St Xavier's College



The costs of proximities to power in a bipolar world

The analysis in a nutshell, mirrors the persistent enduring human impulse for power as highlighted earlier, where proximity to power dictates false perceptions, false narratives and false strategic led behavior

SUSMITA ARYAL

There could hardly be a more compelling time to write and reflect on the world order, as nations remain deeply engaged in an ongoing contest of power and influence. Writing this feels more of a relatable environment of world order rather than a distant view and it also shapes the way we comprehend our own outlook of the world and human nature. If there's one thing that's unchanging attributes of humans, it's their consciousness for power that drives them restless and impulsive.

For power takes the shape of their desires, molding ambitions, igniting conflicts and competitions. This isn't the end here, as it rather scales up in a larger frame from individuals to states; and then the urge to gain power grows as a continuum; it manifests. Regardless of whether one believes it or not, there's a significant reality difference between being in actual power to being in proximity to that power.

In light of this idea comes Jo Inge Bekkevold's article "No, the World Is Not Multipolar" that provides a striking rebuttal and yet convincing critique to the increasingly popular narrative to one of the widely spread beliefs that the International system is an emerging multipolar.

The term 'multipolar' has been repeatedly invoked in academic debates, by diplomats, policy analysts and media commentators. Global leaders like Antonio Guterres, Olaf Scholz, Emmanuel Macron, Lula da Silva, and Vladimir Putin present multipolarity as an imminent reality



every now and then. Bakkevid argues that the narrative rests falsely on the concept of what an actual multipolarity is all about. In response, Bekkevold presents a carefully assembled series of empirical evidence that unfolds how great-power capabilities are distributed clarifying, what truly constitutes the great-power standing

Bekkevold's idea of multipolar means having at least three state variables as an imperative element such as enough military capacity, economic weight and global influence to shape international outcomes. In this scenario, according to him, only two countries at present fulfill this criteria: The United States and China. At its baseline, this essay roots with Neorealism theory where the diffusion of power is prominently present. Reviewing the commonly contested countries such as Russia, Brazil

Strategic systems motivate policymaking and when policies are made according to multipolarity, and it leads to policy failures

and India, he claims that each one of them does not meet the criteria. India, for instance, has been an emerging power in the last few years but possesses only a fraction of its economic budget in comparison to China's economic budget. Similarly, the European Union too, cannot function as a single unified pole because other European countries have very different national interests and their own approaches to foreign policy.

Japan and Germany might be wealthy but they still lack the global reach. Russia has nuclear weapons but its economy too, falls short. In that sense, the conclusion he draws in true sense, is that none of these countries can become as close as the United States and China are. His explanations are backed by concrete measurable data as he refers to SIPRI defense statistics, IMF GDP rankings, and naval deployment figures. These data gives an empirical weight to his argument which is based on political aspiration rather than a structural set of realities. The fact that the United States and China together account for half of global military expenditure, and that China's GDP counters the combined economies of countries in the world marks a significant scale of unmatched domination.

The most interesting part of the essay is when he mentions three reasons that challenge the popular beliefs of the multipolar world. The first reason being the idea of multipolarity as widely accepted because it is a normative concept which invites a fair international system where the fear of one power gaining momentum and outweighing the other do not exist. The second reason being, that the sense of multipolarity serves as a way of intellectual avoidance as it hints on the intention of such people who want to avoid the new form of Cold war. The third reason is that these things used in common, so as not to leave out the space for the USA to place their leverage.

Part of why these reasons come out is from the influence of political desire rather than an empirical reality. In such a scenario, the author's explanation showcases a gap between people's perspective and the functioning of the world order. While the author claims the fact confidently, he bases it around the idea of failed global power distribution and making policies rests around it, which can create serious strategic mistakes. The author's key point to be noted is around how countries' failed attempts to understand multipolarity in real sense leads to failed strategic mistakes.

Strategic systems motivate policymaking and when policies are made according to multipolarity, and it leads to policy failures. For instance, his example of Macron claiming Europe as a "third superpower" demonstrates how simple rhetoric confuses allies and creates unrealistic expectations, including Beijing. Similarly, investors who misread the global system risk making costly strategic errors ■

Trade imbalance persists despite faster export

Limited industrial capacity, high production costs, and low competitiveness have for long affected Nepal's ability to produce goods for both domestic consumption and export

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

Nepal's external trade is expanding at a healthy pace. The country's total foreign trade expanded by 13.55 percent to reach Rs 1,480.36bn over the first eight months of the current fiscal year. Figures released by the Department of Customs (DoC) show imports are rising strongly and exports are growing faster in percentage terms. However, the overall gap between the two remains stubbornly wide.

In the eight months of fiscal year 2025/26, trade deficit widened by 11.22 percent to Rs 1,098bn, up from Rs 987.39bn in the same period last year. Total imports surged by 12.54 percent to Rs 1,289.25bn, while exports by a notable 20.83 percent to Rs 191.11bn. On the surface, this suggests a positive shift—exports are growing faster than imports. But the reality is more complex.

Nepal's external trade is overwhelmingly tilted toward imports. Even after healthy exports growth in the review period, imports account for 87.09 percent of total trade, while exports make up just 12.91 percent. Over the past

decade, imports have nearly doubled, rising from Rs 984bn in fiscal year 2016/17 to Rs 1,804.12bn in the previous fiscal year. The trade deficit during the period remained at Rs 1527.09bn. Nepal imports fuel, vehicles, machinery, and a wide range of consumer goods, including food products, while exporting relatively little in comparison. This trend paints a picture of an economy driven largely by consumption rather than production.

A persistent trade deficit puts continuous pressure on foreign currency reserves. The country relies heavily on remittances sent by workers abroad to finance its import bill. When remittance inflows weaken or external conditions shift, such as rising global fuel prices or slowing demand, this model becomes vulnerable.

In 2022, Nepal faced a sharp decline in foreign exchange reserves, which fell by more than 16 percent within seven months. To arrest the slide, the government imposed restrictions on the import of non-essential goods such as cars, cosmetics, and gold to prevent a balance of payments crisis. While those measures provided temporary relief, they did not address the structural



A persistent trade deficit puts continuous pressure on foreign currency reserves

roots of the problem.

Nepal is highly dependent on imports, and the gap between what it buys and sells abroad is still vast. The modest rise in share of exports in total foreign trade indicates that exports are either growing faster than imports

or that import growth is beginning to slow slightly. However, the improvement is too small to significantly alter the macroeconomic picture. Also, a bulk of export receipts come from the export of processed edible oils like soybean and sunflower to neighboring India. Nepali importers import crude edible oil from countries as far as Argentina and export it to India after some value addition. If India increases crude import quota for its refineries, Nepal will lose a significant volume of its exports.

One of the major factors behind rising imports and widening trade deficit is Nepal's weak domestic production base. Limited industrial capacity, high production costs, and low competitiveness have for long affected Nepal's ability to produce goods for both domestic consumption and export. As a result, the country remains reliant on foreign products even for basic needs. Despite being an agricultural nation, Nepal imports a significant volume of farm products, especially from India. The country imported paddy and rice worth Rs 27.95bn in the first eight months of fiscal year 2025/26. Potato imports also rose to reach Rs 5.73bn during the period.

Experts say traditional export sectors such as carpets, garments, and certain agro-products can perform better. However, this will be only possible if there is policy support aimed at boosting production, diversifying exports, and improving competitiveness. The political leadership should realize that encouraging industrial growth, investing in export-oriented sectors, and reducing reliance on imports are no longer optional—they are essential for long-term stability.

A failed attempt

Much of the underwhelming nature of "They Will Kill You" is its lack of ambition

MARK KENNEDY

If you're looking for some killer real estate, might we suggest The Virgil, an exclusive, well-appointed building in New York City? It's one of those century-old hotel-condos with great bones and spacious apartments, fully furnished. One drawback they might not mention on Zillow is all the murderous satanists.

The Virgil is the setting for most of the ambitious but ultimately cramped horror-comedy "They Will Kill You," a wonderful vehicle for its star, Zazie Beetz, while not exactly fulfilling in either the horror or comedy modes. You might want your security deposit back.

There are extended chase scenes in tunnels and an inspired fight scene with a flaming ax

Writer-director Kirill Sokolov borrows elements of Blaxploitation and apes cinematic techniques from Quentin Tarantino's violent revenge fantasies to come up with a muddled movie that has a patina of satire, a smear of dread, a little camp and some surreal touches, like eyeballs that bounce around with agency.

Much of the underwhelming nature of "They Will Kill You" is its lack of ambition. It's said the filmmakers used Dante's "Inferno" as an inspiration for a building that would house on its floors each of the vices from the nine circles of hell—lust, gluttony, greed and so forth. They settled on two and so both initially widened the plot idea but then immediately stunted it. Beetz's Asia Reaves shows up at The Virgil—named after Dante's guide—to locate her little sister, who we learn in a prologue got separated 10 years before. The sister may be inside as a maid for a group of satanists and she may have gotten in too deep.

Beetz is a revelation as a clever-wielding,

close-combat boss lady who slices and dices her way through hordes of black-cloaked baddies, who we learn, unfortunately, don't stay dead. "I'm sick of you killing me!" one tells her.

Sokolov leans into a kind of gimmick in which the victim of a disemboweling suddenly grows still and silent for a beat until sprays of blood shoot out from their various wounds like a fire hydrant. He's also got slo-mos of assailants hanging in the air poised for murder, plenty of limbs cut off and shotgun booms. Costume designer Neil McClean fumbles the satanists' cloaks, making them fussy and vaguely shiny, like art smocks for kindergarteners.

The cast also includes a great Myha'la as the sister, Tom Felton and Heather Graham as vengeful, evil satanists—are there any other kind?—and Patricia Arquette as the prim building manager with a terribly uneven Irish accent that incorporates everything from Lucky Charms sing-song to Belfast hardman.

There are extended chase scenes in tunnels and an inspired fight scene with a flaming ax but Sokolov can't pull off the ending, a bizarre and deflating faceoff with Satan himself. The devil himself seems smaller than you'd expect.

"They Will Kill You" may remind you of the marriage between mad-cap, social satire and bloody mayhem from "Ready or Not" but it's a warning of how hard that combo is to get correctly. (Our hero here at one point just explains the gore-fest with two words—"rich people"—as if that's enough.) If you do decide to see it this weekend, come for the beat-downs but stay for the Beetz ■

AP



Just average

The plot is so convoluted that at one point it stops being believable and the thrill aspect of it goes away



REVIEW BY **KEYUR BASNET**

Alice Feeney's book 'His & Hers' has a Netflix adaptation that I really enjoyed watching. Though I had heard quite a bit about the author before watching it, I hadn't actually picked up any of her books. But His & Hers, a mindbending thriller about a murder in Blackdown village where the primary suspects of the case are DCI Jack Harper and his ex-wife, newsreader Anna Andrews, both of whom are inves-

It's definitely not Feeney at the height of her powers despite it being her most recent work

tigating the case and suspect each other, had me on the edge of my seat. I wanted to read the book despite knowing what

happens in the end.

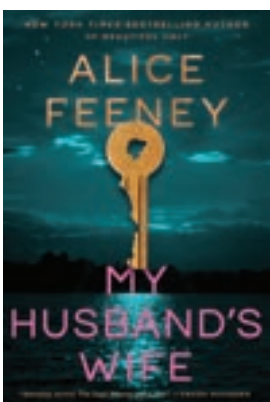
Initially I couldn't get my hands on a copy of 'His & Hers' but I came across 'My Husband's Wife' at the bookstore and despite the book not being my preferred size (book lovers will understand that there is always a preferred size and font, and maybe even paper), I couldn't resist getting it. I wanted to read more of the author's works after having such a good time watching His & Hers. The British novelist and former journalist has quite a few books to her

credit and I pretty much intend to read them all. On my list are 'Daisy Darker', 'Rock Paper Scissors', and 'Sometimes I Lie'. But I digress.

Set in a village called Hope Falls, My Husband's Wife is a far-fetched story full of intricate twists and turns. Eden Fox goes for a run right before her painting exhibition is set to take place and comes back to find that her key doesn't fit the lock in the home she has recently moved into with her husband.

A woman who looks like her opens the door and claims to be her. Worse, her husband says this stranger is his wife and that he doesn't know who she is. It's a convoluted plot that gets even more confusing as different narrators tell the story. It doesn't help that the characters are unreliable and shifty.

Spoiler Alert: I wasn't satisfied with the hurried and incredulous ending. Nothing about the plot led to it. The plot and the ending, in my opinion, seemed like they belonged in two separate books. The problem with thrillers with too many twists and turns is that they stop being believable when there are just too many of them. It's the same with jump scares. They lose their effect. To be honest, I'm still not sure what exactly happened and how it unfolded. I would give it a two and half out of five stars though it could have been a five out of five stars with a little more character development and fewer twists.



THRILLER
MY HUSBAND'S WIFE

Alice Feeney
Published: 2026
Publisher: Flatiron Books
Pages: 310, Paperback