

WEEKLY GOVERNANCE KEYLY

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Mukkumlung Controversy: Balancing Development with Indigenous and Environmental Concerns

The week-long protest against the proposed Pathibhara Cable Car project in Taplejung district has come to a temporary halt following a six-point agreement between the government and protestors. The protests, which escalated into a transportation [strike](#) across nine districts, highlighted the deep divide between infrastructure development and indigenous, environmental, and livelihood concerns.

Pathibhara temple is a sacred site for Hindu and indigenous Limbu community, who refer to it as Mukkumlung. The proposed cable car project, aimed at reducing the difficult two-hour trek to a ten-minute ride, has met significant opposition from local groups, including the Mukkumlung Struggle Committee. Protesters argue that the construction threatens the cultural and religious significance of the site, along with environmental damage and economic displacement.

The opponents of the project also emphasize constitutional and international legal frameworks that protect indigenous rights. Article 26 and 32 of Nepal's Constitution ensures safeguarding of religious and cultural heritage of indigenous communities, while the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples mandate prior consent from indigenous communities before any development projects in their areas. However, the protestors claim that such consent was not sought, violating Nepal's international commitments.

In addition to that, environmental concerns have been raised regarding the destruction of medicinal herbs, deforestation—an estimated 10,000 trees have already been cut—and threats to endangered species like the red panda and rhododendron forests. Livelihood issues also play a crucial role, as an estimated 1,500 porters and small businesses rely on the existing trekking route. Many fear that the introduction of the cable car will lead to economic displacement and commercialization of the sacred site, benefiting only business interests.

In contrast to these arguments, the proponents of cable cars argue that it will boost tourism, create employment, and increase accessibility for all, especially the elderly and those unable to complete the difficult trek. They also claim cable cars are more environmentally friendly compared to traditional road construction and transportation.

The six-point agreement, reached after a long clash, includes an immediate suspension of construction, the release of arrested demonstrators, medical support for the injured, and a commitment to further assess the project's impact. The protestors maintain their stance, demanding complete cancellation of the project.

The Pathibhara Cable Car debate has evolved beyond infrastructure concerns into a broader discussion on indigenous rights, environmental sustainability, and economic equity. It serves as a reminder that indigenous communities should be engaged in the development and decision-making process from the outset to create mutually beneficial outcomes. As discussions continue, the challenge remains to balance development with cultural preservation and the concerns of marginalized communities. The outcome of this debate will also set a precedent for how Nepal navigates future issues related to development and preservation of indigenous traditions.

Read More: [Kantipur](#)

Governance Issues of the Week

1. Asset Freeze Resulting from East-West Railway Project: In 2019, a freeze was imposed on land transactions for the construction of East-West Electric Railway. Despite the government's initial promise, after over five years and four governments affected residents have not received any compensation for their land, and are barred from selling, mortgaging or using the property as collateral for loans, while still having to pay land tax.

Read More: [The Rising Nepal](#)

2. Bill registered to split CAAN into two: A bill to split the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has been registered in the House of Representatives. If passed, CAAN will focus exclusively on oversight and compliance, while a new separate authority will handle airport construction, operation, and related services. The proposed bill will replace Civil Aviation Authority Act 1996 to streamline regulatory framework, improve safety, international standard compliance and operational efficiency

Read More: [The Annapurna Express](#)

3. Sudurpaschim Ayurvedic Hospital battles understaffing: The Sudurpaschim Provincial Ayurvedic Hospital, built with federal investment of NRs 3.2 billion has not started specialist services after two years of operations, citing lack of medical personnel. Only 20% of beds are in use due to the shortage of specialists. The hospital only has 21 staff members, despite requesting 114 staff members with the province.

Read More: [Naya Patrika](#)

4. 9% budget trim announced: The government has reduced its annual budget by 9 percent, adjusting the original allocation of NRs. 1.86 trillion to NRs. 1.69 trillion for this fiscal year. This decision was made following a mid-term budget review. In the first six months, the government utilized 35.89 percent of the budget, marking a 17.66 percent increase from the same period last year. Experts warn that cutting spending could hinder Nepal's goal of graduating from LDC status by 2026.

Read More: [The Kathmandu Post](#)

5. Sub-par progress in curbing neonatal mortalities: Nepal aims to reduce neonatal mortality to 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030 and below 10 by 2035 under the SDGs. While under-five and infant mortality have declined significantly since 1996, neonatal mortality has only fallen from 50 to 21 per 1,000 live births. Key causes include respiratory and heart complications, pregnancy and delivery issues, infections, sudden infant death syndrome, and hypothermia.

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6. HPV vaccine campaign begins: Around 140,000 teenage girls were vaccinated on the first day of the HPV vaccination campaign against cervical cancer. The government aims to vaccinate around 1.68 million adolescent girls across the nation. Every year, 22,000 people in Nepal are diagnosed with cancer, and 14,000 succumb to it. The HPV vaccine is a crucial preventive measure against cervical cancer, which is one of the leading cancers among women in Nepal.

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