

WEEKLY GOVERNANCE

Issue 166 | APR 11, 2025

Kathmandu's Toxic Air: A Public Health Crisis Needing Preventive and Lasting Government Response

Kathmandu's air quality has once again deteriorated to alarming levels, exposing a deepening public health crisis. In early April 2025, the city recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 373—classified as “hazardous” by global standards. The thick smog had covered Kathmandu for more than two weeks causing visibility to drop below eight kilometres. Such conditions are also driven by soaring levels of PM2.5, a fine particulate matter known to penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream.

Health professionals have consistently raised serious concerns over the impact of sustained exposure to polluted air. Experts suggest the chronic inhalation of PM2.5 can lead to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer, and strokes. Vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and individuals with existing health conditions are even more vulnerable, though recent levels are harmful even to healthy populations.

The root causes of pollution are well known: unchecked vehicle emissions, rampant construction, industrial output, and forest fires. However, there has been a lack of regulatory enforcement, policy reform, and public awareness to prevent such scenarios. The air pollution has been a recurring problem for Kathmandu around this time each year, yet the preventive and responsive measures haven't been employed. Kathmandu continues to operate normally even as pollution reaches life-threatening levels.

Meanwhile, the citizens have been paying the [pollution taxes](#) for 17 years now, more than NRs. 25.39 billion has been collected from vehicle users—NRs. 1.50 for every liter of fuel purchased. While these funds are earmarked for pollution mitigation, there is minimal transparency or accountability regarding their use. The Finance Ministry, which receives the funds from the Nepal Oil Corporation, has yet to clarify how this significant amount has translated into tangible pollution control efforts.

Nepal's constitution guarantees citizens the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Yet, in the absence of emergency protocols, updated emission standards, and long-term urban air quality strategies, that right is increasingly being denied. Air pollution in Nepal is no longer solely an environmental issue—it is a public health emergency. The government must treat it as such, prioritizing immediate action, inter-agency coordination, and transparent use of public funds to safeguard the well-being of its citizens.

Read More: [The Kathmandu Post](#)

Governance Issues of the Week

- Teachers federation declines government's invitation:** The Nepal Teachers' Federation has rejected the government's third invitation for dialogue, issued on April 8 by the Ministry of Education. The federation insists their demands center on the implementation of past agreements from 2017, 2021, and 2023, particularly the development of the School Education Act. Despite government appeals for teachers to resume work and engage in talks, the federation remains firm on not returning until the Act is finalized.

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- Nepal sketches action plan to exit from grey list:** Nepal has initiated efforts to exit the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list. On 8 April 2025, a meeting of the Anti Money Laundering Prevention Directorate Committee concluded with a decision to finalize and implement an action plan. Officials stressed the need to strengthen risk assessment, regulation, prosecution, and inter-agency coordination. Nepal was previously on the grey list from 2008 to 2014 and was delisted after amending the Anti-Money Laundering Act and strengthening policy frameworks.

Read More: [The Kathmandu Post](#)

- Rampant use of antibiotics risks millions:** Nepal is facing a growing crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) due to unregulated use of antibiotics in both humans and livestock. Using antibiotics in livestock to promote growth and prevent diseases, has resulted in a spread of drug resistant bacteria through the food chain. As a result, common infections are also becoming increasingly difficult to treat.

Read More: [Ukaalo](#)

- Rabi Lamichhane arrested for judicial custody:** Rabi Lamichhane, president of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), has been arrested and taken into judicial custody. The former home minister was remanded to the district prison in Rupandehi after being presented before the district court on April 7, 2025. He is facing charges related to organized crime and fraud in connection with the Supreme Savings and Cooperative of Butwal, which is alleged to have defrauded over NPR 1 billion.

Read More: [Setopati](#)

- Status of Health Insurance in Nepal:** The Health Insurance Board has released a white paper detailing the current state of health insurance in Nepal. As of mid-March, the board still owes NPR 16.45 billion to service providers. Similarly, despite the health insurance being available in all 77 districts, its coverage at the municipal level remains weak. Only 749 local governments have expanded insurance, covering 8.95 million people.

Read more: [Nayapatrika](#)

- KMC staff remunerated after CAO resumes duties:** Following the reinstatement of Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Saroj Guragain, employees and representatives of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) have started receiving pending salaries after several months of halt. KMC spends NPR 125 million every month on salaries for over 4,000 employees among whom around 1700 are teachers.

Read More: [myRepublica](#)

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