

WEEKLY GOVERNANCE

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Nepal's Deadly Air Pollution : World Bank Warns of National Health Emergency

In recent years, air pollution has been a major concern in Nepal, posing significant threats to the environment and public health. Now, the World Bank's most recent report titled "Towards Clean Air in Nepal" has provided a harrowing insight, proclaiming the country's air pollution as a national emergency with serious, economic, environmental and health consequences.

According to the report, air pollution ranks as the leading factor for death and disability in Nepal - ahead of malnutrition and tobacco. It is linked to an estimated 26,000 premature deaths annually and reduces the average Nepali's life expectancy by 3.4 years. The report also links it to contributing to 75% of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) cases, 46% strokes, 44% ischemic heart disease, and over a third of respiratory infections, lung cancer cases, and neonatal complications.

The report mentions that none of Nepal's monitored locations meet the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline for safe limits for fine particulate matter of PM 2.5 (5 µg/m³). Instead, several sites regularly record concentration levels above 50 µg/m³, particularly during the winter and spring months. This is ten times the safe limit prescribed by the WHO guideline.

The causes of air pollution in Nepal are multifaceted. In Kathmandu Valley, the industrial emissions, residential cooking, and transportation are top contributors, while the Terai region suffers pre-dominantly from cross-border pollution, with around two-thirds of PM2.5 exposure traced to sources outside Nepal. The pollution levels are further aggravated by seasonal forest fires and crop residue burning.

Despite having policies including Euro emission standards, vehicle testing programs, and the Kathmandu Valley Air Quality Management Action Plan, the execution remains weak in practice. The government's fragmented, reactive response is hampered by overlapping mandates, insufficient resources, and enforcement gaps.

The World Bank recommends five policy pillars to reversing the crisis. It includes; 1) improving data systems and inter-agency coordination; 2) strengthening and reducing loopholes in environmental regulations; 3) promoting economic tools such as green tech subsidies and pollution taxes; 4) encouraging social change through education and incentives and 5) investing in infrastructure like EV charging stations and clean energy grids.

Nepal has pledged to reduce average PM2.5 levels to 35 µg/m³ by 2035, aligning with commitments made by other Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills countries. But without urgent structural reforms, and coordinated and accountable action, the worsening air crisis threatens to claim more lives and further erode the nation's developmental potential.

Read More: [World Bank](#)

Governance issues of the week

- 1 Rescue and repatriation registration opened for Nepalis in Israel:** The Nepali Embassy in Tel Aviv has issued a notice requesting interested Nepali citizens to register for possible repatriation. So far, [485 individuals](#) have registered on the form. Around 5,500 Nepali currently live in Israel, and 11 Nepalis are in Iran with 6 reportedly imprisoned. An emergency meeting involving officials from several ministries was held to assess risks and coordinate a response, and the government has committed to using all available state resources to ensure their safety.
Read More: [The Kathmandu Post](#)
- 2 Floods and landslides affect roadways and lives :** Multiple highways were affected by the rain-induced floods and landslides throughout the week. The affected districts are Dhankuta, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Maygdi, Gulmi, Jumla, and Doti. [A bus carrying 38 passengers](#) was swept away by the Binayi Khola where everyone was rescued. [Flood Risk Alerts](#) have been raised in Sunkoshi and Bhotekoshi after fears of flooding following heavy rainfall in the Tibet region.
Read More: [The Rising Nepal](#)
- 3 Natural gas discovered in Dailekh:** An estimated 1.12 billion cubic meters of methane in just one of four sites has been confirmed in Dailekh. This project, launched after a 2019 Nepal-China agreement is Nepal's deepest, at 4,013 meters and most scientifically advanced petroleum exploration to date. Final confirmation of gas quality and commercial viability is expected by December 2025.
Read More: [Setopati](#)
- 4 Judges who overturned Alam verdict to be investigated:** Judges Khushi Prasad Tharu and Arjun Maharjan, who controversially overturned Aftab Alam's Life sentence in April 2024, will be investigated by a committee chaired by Supreme Court Justice Vinod Sharma. Judges Tharu and Maharjan have been summoned by the Supreme Court. It's also reported that the Law Minister Ajay Kumar Chaurasia attempted to end the meeting citing no need for investigation and tried to end the session prematurely. Alam and the Law Minister both are from the same party, Nepali Congress.
Read More: [eKantipur](#)
- 5 Nepal receives Worldbank soft loan and South Korean grant:** The government has approved the acceptance of a concessional loan of NPR 50.51 billion from the World Bank to support infrastructure development, specifically strategic road network and trade route upgrades. Of the loan, NPR 29.72 billion will fund road and trade route projects, while NPR 20.79 billion will support the third phase of the bridge upgrade program. Also a grant of NPR 1.8 billion from South Korea was accepted for an inclusive rural development project.
Read More: [The Himalayan Times](#)
- 6 NEA exporting electricity to India and Bangladesh:** The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is currently exporting 350 Megawatts (MW) daily. 200 MW to Haryana, 80 MW to Bihar, and 30 MW to India's power exchange, and 40 MW to Bangladesh. Nepal has the approval to export up to 940 MW, 400 under a bilateral treaty and 540 MW under the India Energy Exchange. Nepal's installed capacity is 3,602 MW but only 2,300 MW is currently generated, while the national demand stands at around 1,900 MW.
Read More: [Annapurna Express](#)

Nepal Governance Weekly is an analytical update of Nepal's current affairs based on media and real sources mining, to sensitize the communities on hot news on various governance issues from the perspective of accountability.

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