



NADA

BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

■ Ramesh Kumar

President of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) Rajesh Kumar Agrawal declared last week that the economy was in a deep recession. But others cite record high remittances and foreign exchange reserves to say there is no cause for alarm.

Whom to believe? Both sides are right. The External sector of the economy is sound, but jobs are down, so is domestic demand and economic activities. There is no domestic and foreign investment.

"Looking at our macroeconomic indicators, we most certainly aren't heading towards a recession," says Ishwori Prasad Bhandari of the National Statistics Office. "We are, however, experiencing a slow growth rate."

Unlike what many had predicted last year, Nepal has not gone down like Sri Lanka. Foreign reserves have climbed to \$11.85 billion, enough to cover imports for more than 10 months. Nepalis sent home Rs116.2 billion in just the last month, a record and 26% up from the same month in 2022. And that is just through official channels.

After nearly 34 months, the current account deficit is on firmer ground. And the Asian Development Bank this week projected that the economic growth

rate this year will bounce back to 4.3% from 1.9% last year.

The inflation rate also dropped to 7.52% in July, down from 8.26% at the same time last year mainly because of lower fuel prices and lower inflation in India.

There are no figures for unemployment, but since about 1 million Nepalis left for overseas jobs and work-study in 2022-23, the picture is not rosy.

On the import side, demand declined first because of the pandemic and later the government-imposed ban on luxury goods. Imports three years ago were down to Rs1.54 trillion only for it to climb back a year later by nearly 25% once the restrictions were removed.

The decline in demand can also be credited to a slowdown in construction and infrastructure projects. Much of the reconstruction after the 2015 earthquake is complete, and so is new infrastructure for new local and provincial governments. This has led to a decline in demand for cement and other building materials. The growth rate of bank loans has shrunk to 4.6% which many saw as a reluctance of industries to invest. But higher interest rates in the past have not necessarily resulted in economic

growth, production, or jobs.

Loans are starting to see an increase. Last month the figure stood at Rs44.15 billion, which is double the amount in the same period last year.

"The economy went into decline, but did not collapse," concludes Chhetri. "But the Central Bank could lower interest rates, relax the limit of Rs10.2 million imposed on the stock market and increase capital expenditure to boost the morale of the private sector." Former Finance Secretary Rameshore Khanal argues that just because some shops have closed

down does not mean that the economy is on the verge of collapse. "A lull in market and consumption have changed, leading to some businesses experiencing difficulties. But other businesses have sprung up. This is a natural trend," he says.

Indeed, much business has shifted to digital platforms since the Covid pandemic. Just last month, mobile banking accounted for Rs243 billion, up from Rs73 billion two years ago.

"If it was a real recession, people would stop buying home appliances but here during the NADA auto show this year, there was a record high transaction worth Rs20 billion," says Khanal.

**Nepal's Maoist
leader visits
China
EDITORIAL
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So why are businesses trying to make it look like we are facing the Great Depression?

Experts say businesses are exaggerating the recession narrative to influence policy so they can get away with not paying high interest rates on loans taken earlier.

"This problem arose in the first place due to the flow of cheap loans," explains Shivraj Adhikari of Tribhuvan University. "And what we have now is the business community trying to create a policy trap by demanding concessions on their unpaid loans."

But this is not to say that all is hunky dory. Much of the remittances are spent on unproductive sectors when they should have gone into job creation, renewable businesses, and manufacturing. Nepal also needs to increase its capital expenditure.

Says Nepal Rastra Bank's Prakash Kumar Shrestha: "There are structural problems from the past and we will need major reforms to speed up the economy. Business as usual and only relying on the real estate and stock market for growth will not be enough."



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Longer version of this story online.



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Nepal's Maoist leader visits China

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to China comes as the season here in Beijing begins to shift from the summer to autumn.

As the Prime Minister alights from his aircraft at the Beijing Capital International Airport being greeted by still balmy



GUEST EDITORIAL
Bhaskar Koirala

conditions, he may very well wonder why his flight could not have touched down at the other (newer) colossal international airport in Beijing, Daxing International.

Although by land-area, Daxing International is still significantly smaller than King Fahd International or even Denver International or Washington Dulles, the way in which the airport evokes, in combination, a sense of power, networks and a futuristic vision is inescapable.

This is not surprising at all because the People's Republic of China is probably at this juncture of history the example par excellence of a Eurasian power vigorously straddling the super continent in almost every sense of the word: political, economic, cultural and certainly in respect to hard infrastructure systems.

It is also no surprise that it is exactly due to this position China currently occupies as a preeminent Eurasian power that it is bumping up with such great and increasing friction against not just the United States but other leading powers in the system such as India and so on.

The state of progressively intense upheavals that is consequently being generated within the international system is something that smaller powers like Nepal will find almost impossible to circumvent let alone easily maneuver around.

It is within this broad lay of the land that Dahal's sojourn to China must be viewed and analysed. Sino-Nepal relations do not exist in a vacuum, they are part of larger (and ever shifting) structural, geopolitical forces at play that can potentially pull Nepal against the gravitational force into spaces not easily comprehensible, much less simple to navigate.

This comes back to the question as to what is the natural direction of Nepal's foreign policy, where does the gravity of Nepal's foreign policy lie, because it is against this question too that better

inferences and assessments of the Prime Minister's China visit can be brought to bear.

Nepal's relationship with India and then the United States exerts a profound impact on its foreign policy towards China, and this is exponentially the case in contemporary times as larger and larger diaspora communities in those countries become more entrenched and organised, giving rise to push and pull factors that reverberate back into the corridors of power in Kathmandu.

It must not be forgotten as well that the Maoist party Prime Minister Dahal's visit to China takes place at a time in Nepal's history when its governmental and administrative apparatus is perhaps the most fragile and fungible they have ever been, and therefore prone to being malleable in general or definitely within certain distinct pockets.

Surely in terms of big-ticket items in the bilateral relationship such as expansion of BRI and an elevated position for China in harvesting the green energy market in Nepal, it appears that Nepal's position is currently circumscribed to a large extent by structural factors and that Kathmandu would need to approach cooperation with China with greater creativity encompassing an international approach.

For example, harnessing Nepal's substantial hydropower potential is a key objective of policy makers in the country

but due to the divergent and fragmented geopolitical environment Nepal faces externally, it becomes challenging for any one of the great powers alone to plan and actually execute large scale infrastructure projects without inciting adverse pushback.

So would it be feasible for Kathmandu to think

along the lines of gradually proposing and nurturing international consortia (by including within a single basket China, India and the United States, for instance) to address the development of hydropower in Nepal or other large scale infrastructure initiatives?

It is unlikely that such an approach can be made to happen, but it is certainly worth the effort by the Prime Minister to explore during his high-level engagements with leaders in China. Sticking to a strictly bilateral approach on this visit to China will be a safe bet for Prime Minister Dahal and will not ruffle any feathers.

But if one can think out of the box as a means to inject more momentum from Nepal towards much needed regional economic growth, then why not at least try?

Bhaskar Koirala is an independent analyst with Peking University. The views here are his own.



PRADEEP RAJ ONTARSS

Prime Minister Dahal's visit to Beijing comes at a time when Nepal is the most fragile and fungible it has ever been.

ONLINE PACKAGES



ABC AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Trekkers and climbers have already arrived for the autumn season in Nepal and have headed out to the high Himalaya. But it is important for trekking groups to now be alert about weather warnings and extreme events, especially on the Annapurna Base Camp. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and read the story on page 6-7.



RIVERWAYS

Every monsoon there is also a flood of recrimination in India about Nepal releasing water on its rivers and unleashing floods — even though there are no reservoir projects and sluice gates on two border barrages on the Kosi and Gandaki, which are both controlled by India. There is no alternative but for the two countries to work together to prevent future disasters. Follow our YouTube channel to watch the video and for more original multimedia content. Analysis on page 5.

CONSERVATION

I do not think the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2029 allows anybody to cull tigers ('Don't fix what ain't broke', Editorial, #1179). We have heard this before, and let us hope that some wisdom prevails. Many conservationists have invested their time and resources to bring these positive changes. The ministry and national parks are committed. Ministers are usually tourists for a short period of time, they come and go.

Hem Sagar Baral

■ Greed cannot be fixed.

Krishna Joshi

■ There's no limit to which a Nepali minister can stoop for money.

Pravat Kafley

■ Forest Minister Mahato is out of his mind.

Ajay Pradhan

■ How low can these ministers go on ('Conservation vs Conservatives', Maheshwor Acharya, #1179)? The one who is meant to protect and facilitate the conservation of tigers is rooting for their destruction. Money is necessary, but that does not mean you take a shortcut. It can be earned via tourism if parks are developed to host tourists.

Manoj Rawal

■ You pull this, Nepal, and I assure you, it will hurt tourism more than enhance it. You will permanently change the world's perception of you and perpetuate a backward thinking.

World Citizen

BHUTANESE PRISONER

Remember all the credulous climbers who bought into the idea that Bhutan was a prelapsarian paradise ('No country for dissent', nepalitimes.com)?

Arthur Snell

FARMING

Farming has to become a financially attractive profession in Nepal—and market platforms and haat bajars that bring real farmers in direct consumers will help immensely ('Food security is national security', Bishow Parajuli, nepalitimes.com).

Netashwa

WHAT'S TRENDING



Greening a concrete jungle

by Pinki Sris Rana

An agro-tech company has combined vertical layered farming and hydroponics to maximise productivity while saving water. Watch video of the technique on our YouTube channel.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Pokhara's China Connection

by Durga Rana Magar

Pokhara and eight Chinese cities have sister-city links with Pokhara. But Nepal has not been able to take adequate advantage of China's soft spot for the city. Read the full story on our website.

t Most popular on Twitter

Don't fix what ain't broke

Editorial

Nepal has a forest minister hell-bent on undermining these gains. The government's proposal to auction tigers for hunting is another gross illustration of greed, incompetence and malgovernance. Join the discussion online.

💬 Most commented



Conservation vs Conservatives

by Maheshwor Acharya

The Forest and Environment Minister is the architect of proposals that could undermine Nepal's hard-earned conservation achievements. He sees national parks as a gold mine, not as an ecosystem to be protected. Visit nepalitimes.com for details.

🔴 Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"Minister Mahato clearly has no understanding of how conservation works."

Forest and Environment Minister Birendra Prasad Mahato is the architect behind a series of proposals that could undermine Nepal's hard-earned conservation achievements.

👍 🔄 🌟 ...



Arpan @arpanshr

Talk about Gainda! Take a look at the republican clowns.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Recently freed political prisoner from Bhutan has revealed ghastly conditions that inmates are subjected to including food shortages and inadequate medical care.

They have not received new bedding or clothing since Covid. Families aren't allowed either.

👍 🔄 🌟 ...



Ed Douglas @calmandfearless

Gross Domestic Unhappiness.

1,000 WORDS



PBABAL GURUNG X

FLOTUS SELFIE:

Nepali-American celebrity fashion designer Prabal Gurung with US First Lady Jill Biden at a reception hosted by President Joe Biden for delegates at the UN General Assembly in New York on 20 September. 'We love you here in New York,' Gurung Xed.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Resilience

It is very easy to give up and be cynical given the state of the Nepali state. Maoists fought a bloody war for 10 years to bring about social and political changes only for them to succumb to the trappings of power.

The public rejected career politicians to elect a new crop of independent, alternative mayors and MPs but some of them have also fallen on populism and bigotry to remain relevant. And now we have anti-federal pro-Hindu sentiments being fanned by other parties.

A look back at this editorial from 20 years ago this week following an end to the Maoist ceasefire is a timely reminder that not all is ever lost. Excerpts from the piece published on issue #163 19-25 September 2003:

Nepalis have never been as despondent about their future as they are now. Yet, with Dasai and Tihar around the corner, we must try to restore some of our lost self-esteem. Not the deceptive optimism in an elusive peace, but bringing back a sense of realistic faith in our own resilience and inner strength as a people.



Nepal is the oldest nation-state in the subcontinent. It has a remarkable capacity for bouncing back which manifests itself during traumatic periods of our history. True, our national institutions have been weakened by political interference, neglect and, it must be said, we have rarely had the rulers we deserved.

But this is also a society and a nation that has an innate ability to

rebound in an instant. We just need the occasional visionary to tide us over bad times. The foundations of national identity built over the last two centuries are strong. We may not agree on what that identity is exactly, but a sense of Nepalihood courses in our veins.

The astounding thing is that while pampered Kathmandu moans and groans, across Nepal even people who have suffered dislocation, bereavement or loss of livelihood have taken the hardships, threats and violence in their stride while they wait for a better tomorrow.

For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



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The Arctic meets the Himalaya

The first Inter-Polar Conference in Kathmandu shares knowledge and solutions to the climate crisis

■ Pema Gyamtsho

As those of us in mountainous regions have witnessed, even a rise of 1.5°C is too hot.

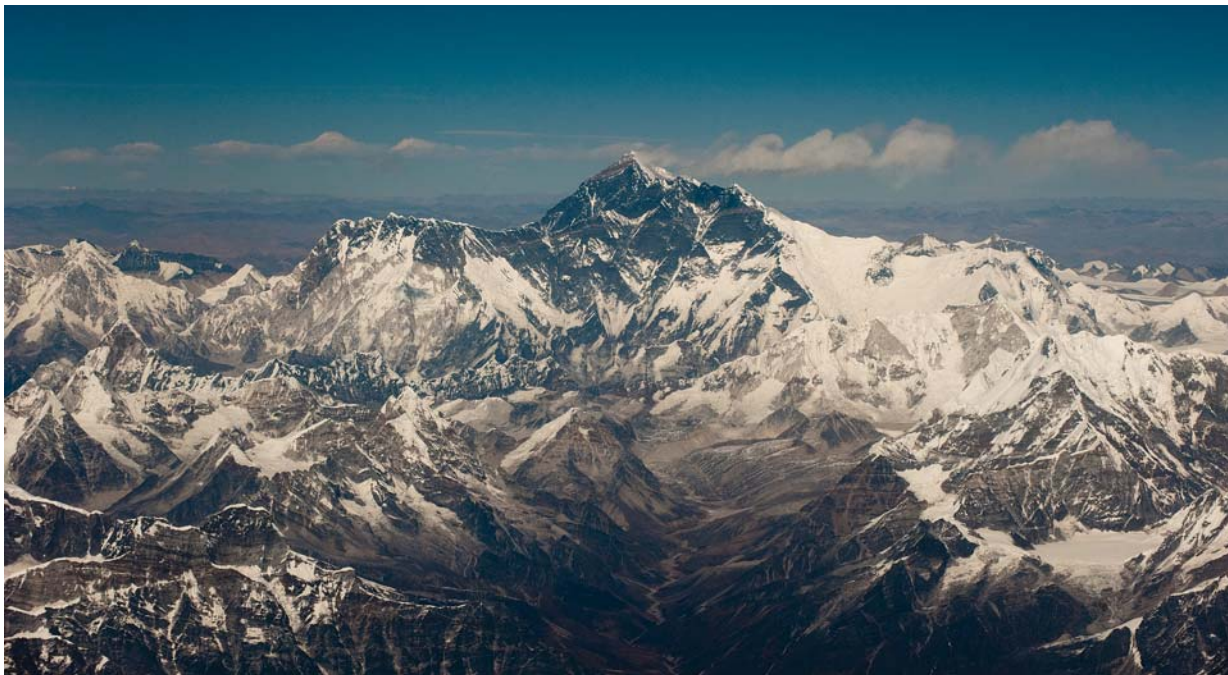
It is too hot for the glaciers and permafrost, which are melting at an unprecedented rate, whilst changing snowfall, snowmelt and avalanches are becoming more unpredictable. It is too hot for our ecosystems, our food and water sources, and for our people. The ensuing impacts of food and water security will impact one-quarter of humanity living downstream.

With this crisis upon us, it is vital that regions of the world sharing similar challenges come together to also share knowledge, experience and solutions. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which works for the eight countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), and the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland jointly held the first ever Inter-Polar Conference on 6-9 September in Kathmandu.

The Arctic polar region encompasses the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. The Himalaya is sometimes referred to as the 'Third Pole' as it contains the largest area of permanent ice cover outside of the polar regions. It spans Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

Despite both the Arctic and the Himalaya experiencing a thawing cryosphere frozen water at the earth's surface including glacier, lake and river ice, permafrost and snow – these two regions have traditionally been considered separately.

The Inter-Polar Conference



ALEX TREADWAY/ICIMOD

which was held in collaboration with the UArctic Chair in Arctic Legal Research and Education, and Law Thematic Network, sought to unite representatives from the polar regions, and to serve as a networking platform to share commonalities, links, and differences, especially concerning geo-political, socio-cultural, environmental, and legal aspects.

ICIMOD drew on its substantial experience as a regional and international mediator to bring together policymakers from mountain regions to drive forward change.

The overarching message from this pioneering conference demonstrated the importance and power of global--and regional--cooperation and collaboration when dealing with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

Representatives and researchers from the Himalaya-Hindu Kush learnt of the specific experience and history of the Arctic Council, which was set up in 1996 to understand environmental challenges and preserve the Arctic environment while promoting sustainable development, and to address issues of climate adaptation and resilience. It has since evolved to establish institutional and governmental mechanisms for sharing knowledge and scientific findings.

The conference's keynote speakers sharing their insights on critical issues facing our polar regions included Timo Koivurova from Arctic Centre, University of Lapland; Akhilesh Gupta, Senior Adviser at the Department of Science and Technology Secretary, Science and Engineering Research Board, India; and Aisha Khan,

Chief Executive of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC) in Pakistan.

The rich networking event sparked a series of interdisciplinary discussions with the aim of developing creative solutions, not least charting a clear roadmap for the Himalaya Hindu Kush to launch its own Regional Institutional Mechanism for the Third Pole.

The Inter-Polar Conference was a crucial step towards building a shared knowledge network for positive change. We're joining forces and pushing for faster, ambitious emissions cuts to save our snows. ❄️



Pema Gyamtsho is the Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu.

Three Poles

Soundbites from the Inter-Polar Conference

"The Arctic, as the Hindu Kush Himalaya, has seen its share of history. It is a place that connects everything together. Some years ago, we said the climate change in the Arctic is two times faster than the global average, then we said three times faster, then four. If we lose the Arctic, we lose the globe."

Markku Heikkila, the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland

"As we approach the critical 2030 deadline of limiting Global Warming to 1.5°C, the cryosphere, in particular, does not grant us the luxury of time. We must view it through a holistic lens that encompasses not only scientific considerations but also addresses the profound social, economic, and ecological impacts it entails."

Aisha Khan, Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change, Pakistan

"The Arctic is changing faster than any other region in the world affecting people's lives, not only in the Arctic but globally. We need to work together across the regions to be able to adopt and find solutions to save our snow and people's homelands."

Kirsi Latola, University of the Arctic

"Science and technology play a crucial role in building resilience against climate change in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. It's imperative to establish robust mitigation and adaptation measures grounded in both indigenous and evidence-based knowledge."

Akhilesh Gupta, Science and Engineering Research Board, India

"The science-driven approach of the Arctic Council has many benefits, empowering researchers and indigenous knowledge holders to actively shape inter-governmental policy decisions, ensuring that critical issues receive the attention and consideration they deserve."

Timo Koivurova, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland



NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक

\$1=Rs132.94

The value of the US dollar has spiked to its highest in Nepal with the buying rate at Rs132.94. The selling rate has reached Rs133.54. This is due to the weakness of the Indian currency against the USD owing to depleting foreign exchange reserves in India. This in turn affects NPR due to the fixed exchange rate with INR.

While this means more remittance money and higher export earnings, imported goods and services on the other hand will be more expensive, further driving inflation which is now at 7.5%. Remittance has increased by 25%, the highest in a single month ever compared to the same period last year.

Ncell is 18

Ncell launched the 'Every Customer is a Winner' campaign on its 18th anniversary on 17 September in which for 28 days customers will receive Ncell products and services without any charge daily by dialing *17117#. Meanwhile, 1,000 participants will



get a Rs100 balance weekly and seven customers will win a scooter each. Also launched was the theme 'Here for You' which includes activities like health camps, blood donation drives, tree-planting initiatives and friendly football matches.

Viber media roundtable

Rakuten Viber held a media roundtable this week highlighting creative business solutions to improve the user experience and promote local businesses. Through its Cricket Vibes Channel, Viber has been connecting fans with players. It also launched the Sasto Tickets Chatbot where subscribers can search and book flights. Chef Nepal, which promotes Nepali food and culture, was also one of Viber's collaborators this year.



NMB Digi Station

NMB Bank has introduced a Digi Station featuring cash deposit, clearing cheque deposit, check stop, check requisition, balance inquiries, cash withdrawal, and statement generation-- all integrated into an automated ecosystem. The Digi Station facility is currently set up at the Babarmahal Branch premises where users can make cash deposits below Rs100,000.

Global IME post

Surendraraj Regmi has been appointed Senior Deputy CEO of Global IME Bank. Regmi has 35 years of experience in the banking sector and has been at Global IME for the past 15 years.

Beautiful Homes

Asian Paints Nepal has set up a state-of-the-art luxury home décor showroom Beautiful Homes Boutique in Kathmandu. The multi-storey site features a fusion of bespoke designs for fabrics and wallpapers, engineering excellence in bathroom fittings and sanitary wares as well as innovative paints.

Esewa home run

Esewa Money Transfer is set to continue its Mero Digital Desh initiative aimed at promoting digital remittance and now, one lucky user can win a brand-new house in Kathmandu. Any Nepali worker outside the country can be a part of the 'Win Your Dream Home' campaign, which is valid until 16 July 2024, by sending remittances directly to the eSewa wallet.

Samsung Dasain

Samsung Mobile's Chyappai, Scooter Jhyappai! festive scheme allows customers a shot at winning a TVS Ntorq 125cc scooter worth Rs233,900 every day until 20 October. Participants can enter the contest upon the purchase of any Samsung smartphone or tablet

following which they have to dial *#06# to get the serial number of the device, then type SAMSUNG<space>Serial Number and send the SMS to 31001.



Honda Elevate

Syakar Trading has launched Honda Elevate cars in Nepal with a cash discount plus an additional Rs75,000 off with free service for the first 10 customers. The Elevate SVMT is priced at Rs5,635,000. Other variants including the Elevate VMT is Rs6,035,000, Elevate VXMT is Rs6,695,000 and Elevate ZXMT Rs7,344,000.

World Class Turkish

Turkish Airlines has received the World Class award for the third time by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) held in California. APEX makes



evaluations by assessing safety, well-being, sustainability and service-guest experience criteria. Says Chief Marketing Officer Ahmet Olmüstür: "This award demonstrates the accuracy of our strategies and efforts while motivating us to further enhance our future goals."



GOPEN RAI

■ Pinki Sris Rana

Libya, Greece, Spain, China — videos of catastrophic floods have flooded the international media.

Floods swept away most of the Libyan city of Derna, killing more than 11,000 people. Climate change was blamed, but it was also caused by war and unheeded warnings about weak dams.

The disasters are a warning to Nepal where a range of factors could worsen monsoon flooding in the coming years. The Melamchi flood in 2021 that nearly destroyed Nepal’s largest infrastructure project, and this monsoon’s destructive floods in eastern Nepal show that these disasters are already happening.

But every monsoon there is also a flood of recrimination in India about Nepal releasing water on its rivers and unleashing floods —

even though there are no reservoir projects and sluice gates on two border barrages on the Kosi and Gandaki, both controlled by India.

Yet, every monsoon the media in the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are full of headlines blaming Nepal.

The 2008 flood that affected 2.3 million people in Nepal and India was actually caused by a breach in the eastern embankment of the Kosi. The rain that year was not even heavy, so one wonders what would happen in a year when there is abnormal precipitation in the Kosi catchment.

“After the completion of Kosi Barrage in the 1960s, the embankments have collapsed about eight times until now, but the major one was 2008,” says Ajaya Dixit, a water expert.

In 2008, the Indian media had ill-informed headlines like ‘Nepal opened the Kosi Barrage’ which has affected public opinion. The real

story is about faulty engineering of the barrage and its embankments on the Kosi, which is a river with one of the highest sediment loads in the world.

Eklavya Prasad, water campaigner who is with Megh Pyne Abhiyan in Bihar, says it is unreasonable to blame Nepal for annual floods in India. He explains: “Geographically, a large number of Himalayan rivers flow down from Nepal and discharge the waters and sediment into the north Bihar region. It is a natural drainage path that flows across the international boundary and beyond human capabilities.”

Kosi, also known as Sorrow of Bihar, is notorious for frequently changing its course. In the last 200 years, the Kosi has gradually shifted 120km westwards.

“River always chooses the path of least resistance. And when it doesn’t get to flow, it forces its way through,” says Dixit.

Ignoring this nature of the river when infrastructure and new settlements are designed on old floodplains is what has increased the intensity and impact of floods.

In many ways, it is the same reason Kathmandu gets flooded every monsoon. Infrastructure has been sited along floodplains constricting rivers such that even moderate rain becomes destructive.

“All of the 56 floodgates of the Kosi Barrage are operated by the Bihar government, and if they fail to open the Nepal side is flooded. If they are opened, the flood goes downstream,” says Dwarika Nath Dhungel, former secretary of the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation.

Although there is no clear clause on the operational right of the barrage in the agreement between Nepal and India, on the Kosi Project, Dhungel surmises that a subclause is being used by India to manage the barrage.

Says Dhungel: “The same clause also uses the word ‘maintenance’ of barrage here, but there has been no maintenance effort from the Indian side.”

The barrage impounds water forcing the river to deposit its sediment behind it so that the river is now flowing a few metres above the surrounding land — increasing the dangers of floods.

The solution to transboundary floods is to look at the river system in totality. If India and Nepal are to prepare for cataclysmic water disasters in the future, the two countries must work together. The ‘national interest’ in harnessing Nepal’s rivers must be based on bilateral benefit.

Says Ajaya Dixit: “Studying the nature of the rivers, not just where it floods but also from where it originates, and incorporating these elements while building infrastructure can minimise the risk of river-related disasters.” 🇳🇵

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१० वर्ष टिटछ

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Navigating Nepal with r

The future is location, location, location for drivers and trekkers

■ Shristi Karki

Nama Raj Budhathoki was doing his PhD in the US when he came back to Nepal in 2009 and made plans to have dinner with a friend. He received a long, complicated email from his friend with directions to his home.

Detailed as his friend’s instructions were, it was still difficult to find the house following landmarks.

“Navigating in Nepal was a nightmare, I remember it being a waste of time and energy,” Budhathoki recalls. “I hoped that one day we would be able to solve this problem.”

In 2011, Budhathoki completed his PhD with a focus on OpenStreetMap, an open-source global geographic database maintained by volunteers and contributors from across the world. He came back to Nepal, and in 2013 founded Kathmandu Living Labs (KLL), a mapping initiative to build on the OpenStreetMap movement that he had introduced to Nepal.

“Governments make maps, but more from their perspective to govern and make their own decisions,” says Budhathoki, who is currently with the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) as the Regional Director of the Open

Mapping Hub – Asia Pacific. “OpenSourceMap is necessary for a country like Nepal because we do not have other relevant free maps accessible to people, its value lies in people being able to map what they are interested in,” he adds.

Kathmandu Living Labs eventually worked on disaster response, using crowdsourced mapping to aid relief agencies and volunteers to plan and target their relief efforts in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake.

While the importance of digital navigation tools and technologies was better realised after the earthquake, their uses have expanded in the last few years — especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns which led to an e-commerce boom in Nepal.

After the lockdowns, delivery and ride-sharing services have seen significant growth, and digital navigation is central to such services.

But navigation in Nepal is trickier than in other countries. The streets are not consistently named or numbered, and house numbers are either poorly assigned or not assigned at all. Most Nepalis rely on landmarks like temples, historic buildings, trees, and even garbage dumps to find their way around.

“Localised maps are crucial to Nepalis because the way we navigate is very different to the way people navigate in the West,” says Budhathoki.

Recognising the unique navigational challenge in Nepal, civic-tech companies have begun to develop navigation applications that are contextualised to Nepali communities.

Baato Maps, developed by Kathmandu Living Labs itself, is one such service. It was introduced to the public as a navigation app in 2023. Galli Maps, another nav app was first launched in Kirtipur before spreading across Nepal.

“We started Baato because there is a huge problem not only in navigation in Nepal but also in



mobility,” says Prithvi Jung Khadka of Baato. “There is a huge gap in mobility infrastructure and it was clear Nepal needed more reliable maps.”

Raj Bikram Maharjan, an aeronautical engineer, built drones in his spare time which proved to be useful in the aftermath of the earthquake when Nepal

required them to map out heritage reconstruction work.

Maharjan left his job in aviation to work on 3D heritage mapping full-time and also made maps for local governments. When the pandemic hit in 2020, it took some personal experiences with delivery services for Maharjan to realise the challenges Nepalis and navigation-

based businesses faced because Nepal’s alleys and buildings were not properly represented by global navigation services like Google Maps.

“Other countries use navigation-based technologies such as delivery and ride-sharing services because they are convenient, but in Nepal, it has expanded because it is a

Trekking in the time of climate

Himalayan tourism now has to be prepared for more frequent extreme weather events

■ Achyut Tiwari

Just as the global tourism industry begins to revive after the pandemic, climate anxiety is affecting the travel business.

In industrialised countries, awareness is spreading about consumption and the carbon footprint of long-distance air travel. The more ecologically conscious travellers are taking trains where available, and buying carbon offsets.

Seasonal weather patterns in Nepal are complex to begin with, and climate change has made them even more unpredictable and variable. This is something that trekkers to Nepal should now consider, and be flexible enough for change of itinerary or duration.

Weather forecasts are getting more accurate, and it is now possible to plot the trajectory of late monsoon troughs, or cyclones in the Bay of Bengal so there is enough warning.

Nepal is influenced primarily by the South Asian monsoon but the country has a rainfall gradient with a much wetter east and drier conditions as one heads westwards.

Climate data analysis reveals that the Himalayan range is undergoing rapid change, with temperature increasing at a rate that is double that of the global average. In recent



ALL PHOTOS: ACHYUT TIWARI

years, there has been an unpredictable rise in the frequency of extreme weather events.

Higher temperature means the air carries more moisture, and as it rises along the mountains there can be violent convection storms. Higher temperatures also means an elevated risk of snow avalanches, and increased instances of rock falls as the ice in crevices on slopes melt.

With more precise storm forecasts, tragedies like the blizzard that hit Central Nepal in 2014 that killed at least 43 below

Annapurna and Dhaulagiri can be prevented. Similar freak storms have occurred in the Khumbu and even in the usually arid trans-Himalayan regions like Mustang and Manang.

The risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) is higher in eastern Nepal, but the Annapurna region also has some dangerous glacial lakes like Thulagi below Himachuli, and others. But even without lakes, supraglacial ponds can cause sudden floods downstream like the one that hit Kagbeni this year. There are sections of the Annapurna

Base Camp trek, for example where avalanches off Annapurna South can funnel right down to the river. Evidence of these are ice fan deposits even at lower elevations.

During a trek in May this year, we witnessed numerous such powder snow avalanches above Deurali. And unusually heavy downpours and hailstorms lashed us in the Chomrong and Sinuwa sections.

Such extreme weather events not only pose risks to trekkers but also endanger local communities, including mountain porters.

new digital maps



MANISH PAUDEL/NT ARCHIVE

necessity," says Maharjan. "And localised maps are crucial to such services. If there are inefficient maps, neither navigation-based businesses nor everyday life in Nepal can be sustainable."

And so Maharjan along with his friends Janam Maharjan and Ashon Shakya set out to develop a navigation service that recognised

alleyways, small road networks, and buildings in Nepal.

They collected mapping data from OpenStreetMaps, GPS, 360-degree cameras, their own drone imaging technology as well as from local governments, who were loath to share data initially even as they had begun to number houses — something that the

general public had no idea about."

"Nepal does not necessarily have a culture of sharing data, and we spent a lot of time explaining to government agencies and local governments why open data was crucial," notes Maharjan. "That was a challenge, but once Kirtipur agreed to share its data, other municipalities followed suit."

However, since local navigation apps are still at a nascent stage, not only are Nepal's institutions hesitant to share data, they also do not want to use the data provided by such services.

And while individual users seem to be taking to the applications — Galli shares is at 95,000 downloads so far while Baato is at 60,000 downloads. Most services dependent on navigation technology still rely on established global navigation software and applications.

There are other challenges. Crowdsourced mapping as well as Nepal-based navigation apps are meant to be participatory, say digital mapping experts, but the fact that individuals and institutions are using those services has not necessarily meant that they contribute back to mapping at similar levels.

Although much of Nepal has access to mobile technology, internet use is stuck at 65%, which means the flow of information and data is such that cities and densely populated areas with robust infrastructures are better mapped than rural Nepal.

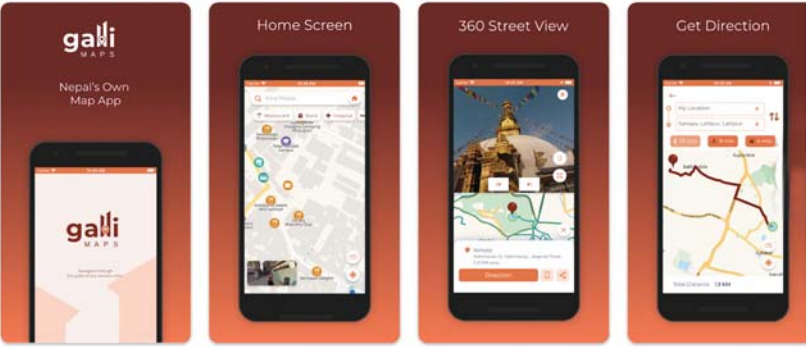
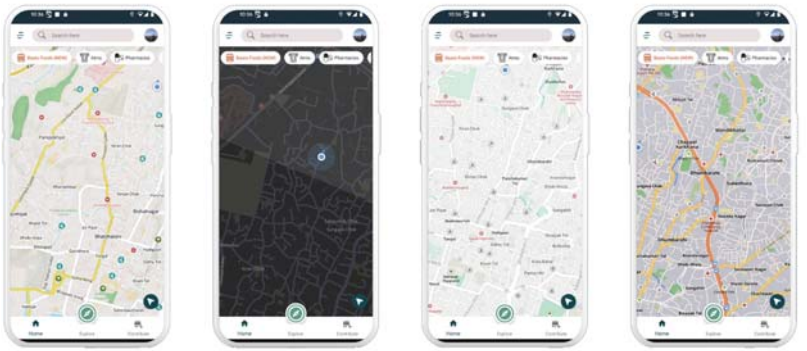
Additionally, open-source mapping also means that data might be collected by ordinary people in a way that is not always accurate or updated.

"Maps are constantly changing, and keeping that in mind, we have to work to make sure that our virtual maps better reflect the reality of Nepal while encouraging users to contribute at the same time," says Khadka of Baato.

But navigation services are making progress. Baato Maps has



BIKRAM RAI/NT ARCHIVE



Screenshots from the Baato (above) and the Galli apps (below).

digitised public transportation and made transportation information available on the application. Galli Maps is preparing to introduce a crowd-sourced 'reporting' feature that allows users to input information about traffic, as well as issues of infrastructural damage and upkeep that will go directly to the dashboard of local governments for them to address.

Not only do Nepal's localised navigation services help Nepalis and navigation-based businesses, but they could also help enhance the tourism sector. Both Baato and Galli apps include Nepal's major trekking routes.

However, navigation experts do note that the availability of trekking routes, as helpful as they are, must be reconciled with the fact that trekkers, both foreign and domestic, rely primarily on the experience and knowledge of trekking guides and tourism professionals.

Nama Budhathoki notes that Nepal-based navigation apps are an infrastructure themselves, with tremendous opportunities to enable and enhance the lives of individuals, start-ups, institutions as well as the government.

Adds Budhathoki: "The future is location-based." 📍

ate change



It is important for trekking groups to now be alert about weather warnings, and also take precautions like crossing avalanche fans before or after the most risky times between 9AM and 12 noon because of rising temperature triggers melting overnight snow.

Undoubtedly, embarking on the ABC trek is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and with careful planning and adequate preparation against the growing incidence of extreme weather events in the region, it can be a relatively easy trek. A Himalayan trek is an opportunity to contribute to Nepal's rural economy, and slow down the pace of life.

The ABC of Treks

Nepal's tourism is seeing a vigorous rebound of trekking this autumn season, and total arrival figures for 2023 look like they will only be slightly lower than the

pre-covid 1.2 million high in 2019. Trekkers and climbers have already arrived for the autumn season and have headed out to the high Himalaya.

Nearly 30% of all visitors go on treks, and most of them land up in the Everest and Annapurna trails, although the Manaslu circuit and Langtang are also gaining popularity. Trekkers on longer duration trips go to Mustang or Dolpo.

Of these, the ABC trek and the Annapurna Circuit are the most popular because of the awe-inspiring views. The Base Camp trail follows the Mardi Khola and into the sanctuary which is ringed by rock and ice ramparts of Annapurna South, Annapurna I, Annapurna III and Machapuchre.

The Round Annapurna trail is now mostly motorised, but this cuts short the approach time which can be devoted to exploring side valleys in Manang and Mustang.



Annapurna I at 8,091m is the 10th highest mountain in the world and was the first eight-thousander to be climbed, and the story of 1950 French expedition by Maurice Herzog propelled Nepal into the world stage even before the Everest ascent three years later.

Annapurna I has long held the highest fatality-to-summit rate among the eight-thousanders because of its technical difficulty and avalanche risk. As of 2022, 365

people had reached the summit of Annapurna I, while 72 have lost their lives attempting it.

However, in recent years, climbing success rates have improved with reduced fatalities. Nevertheless, the mountain still presents serious objective dangers due to avalanches and rockfalls which have reportedly become more frequent due to climate-induced weather extremes.

The south face of Annapurna I soars 3,000m above the base of the mountains and is considered one of the most difficult climbs in the world.

Not everyone is there to climb Annapurna, and a trek to its base is an adventure in itself. The ABC trail alone gets 55,000 visitors a year, and offers an enchanting excursion into a wilderness area with cloud forests teeming with wildlife. The ABC trek is of moderate difficulty and does not require advanced physical fitness, making it accessible to everyone, including families with children.

The trek offers a glimpse into Nepal's immense biodiversity as well as ethnic groupings. A bonus is a natural hot spring near Jhinu Danda nestled amidst forested flanks. Locals believe the waters possess healing properties, and offer a refreshing respite to trekkers.

Trekking to Annapurna Base Camp via Ghorepani aids in acclimatisation to high altitudes, allowing the body to adapt gradually. This preparation enables hikers to better cope with the physical demands of walking at up to 4,000m and above. 🇳🇵

Achyut Tiwari, PhD, is a Plant Ecologist and Assistant Professor at the Central Department of Botany at Tribhuvan University.

EVENTS



Indra Jatra
This week marks the beginning of Indra Jatra -- the eight-day festival dedicated to the god of rain Indra— in Kathmandu. Join the festivities.
28 September onwards

Kid's Carnival
Take the kids and spend the day at the Kids Carnival, which will include carnival rides, food stalls, live entertainment, a magic show, as well as games and prizes.
23 September, 11am onwards, Hyatt Place Kathmandu, Tahachal



Art Exhibition
Artist Umesh Shrestha's first-ever solo exhibition From Mundane Friction To Self Flow showcases Shrestha's paintings and drawings from 1994 to 2023 and details his journey from a young artist who moved to the valley from Dolakha to an established painter.
Till 29 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Nepal Adventure Expo
The Nepal Adventure expo will bring together Nepal's adventure and outdoor enthusiasts. Find out the latest about adventure outdoor gear, discover destinations, and connect with industry experts.
23 September, 10am-6:30pm, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg

Movie screening
Join a screening of Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest, a docudrama about the the ambition, dedication, and triumph of Nepal's first woman to climb Mt Everest.
22 September, 2pm-3:30pm, iHub Kathmandu, Teku

DINING



Erma Restaurant
Try out the multi-cuisine restaurant by Hotel Shambala featuring selected favourites from all over the world and chef-curated continental cuisine.
Hotel Shambala, Bansbari, 9803867240

MUSIC

Vocal workshop
Join Kaleidoscope Music Academy's vocal workshop with Jigme Lepcha, lead vocalist of the band Mt8848.
23 September, 12pm, Chakhewa Lounge & Bar, Lazimpat



Mukti and Revival
An evening of blues awaits at the Mukti and Revival show, with an additional live performance by Aawartan. Call and book tables now.
22 September, 6pm, Club Fahrenheit, Thamel, 9841726830



Live Wire Original
Shree 3 will perform live on Friday with an opening performance from Try Tone. Get Tickets at Ticket Sansar
22 September, 7pm onwards, Tito's Pub, Thamel



Psychedelic Night
Stop by Watering Hole for an evening of free shots on the pub's Queen of the Night Wednesdays. Food and drinks will be accompanied by live music from Cambodia-based Nepali band Samsaara.
Wednesdays, 6pm-1am, Watering Hole, Naxal

World Music Sessions
The third edition of Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory's World Music Sessions is set to be a night of traditional Polish and South American folk music fused with jazz with musicians from Poland, Chile, Germany, and Nepal.
27 September, 7pm, Moksh Jhamsikhel



Akari & Koko
Vivanta Hotel's Asian-inspired fusion restaurant and bar serves an impressive assortment of East Asian dishes with modern twists. Try the sushi and pad thai.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5425002

Utpala Cafe
Utpala Cafe, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options, known for the buffet lunch, use of fresh produce and variety of baked goods.
Boudha, 9810700763

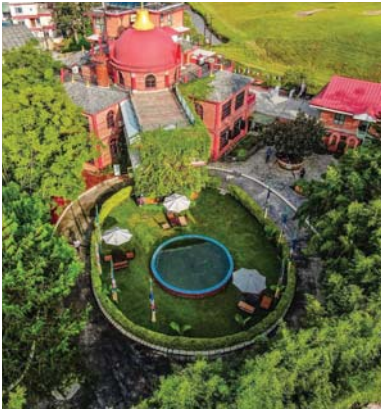
About Town

GETAWAY



Evergreen Eco-Lodge
Evergreen Eco-lodge, is a rustic stay in Chitwan. Unwind in one of the wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forestry.
Sauraha, 9845693879

Tuki Resort
With modern structures, dedicated service and comfortable rooms, Tuki Resort provides visitors great accommodations and dining experiences at affordable prices.
Lakeside, Pokhara, 9856025350



Grand Norling Hotel
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.
Gokarna, 9801121560

Mount Princess
Surrounded by mountains and forestry, Mount Princess is a haven for city-dwellers. Spend the morning sipping a warm cup of tea while taking in the breathtaking views.
Dhulikhel, 9808258214



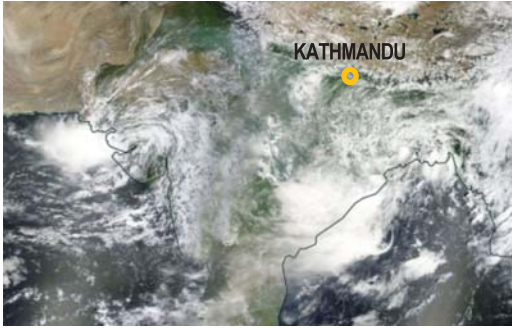
Gorkha Gaun Resort
Gorkha Gaun resort is a sustainable getaway to enjoy natural surroundings in comfortable cottages, offering services like restaurant and bar, authentic local and continental food, short treks and guided tours of the nearby villages.
Gorkha, 9801001166

Yala Cafe
Grab a stack of fluffy pancakes, well-seasoned eggs benedict or a country breakfast at Yala Cafe. With a cosy ambience and soul-warming food, Yala is the best way to kick start the day.
Thamel, 9801169212



Raithaane
Take a gastronomic tour of Nepal at Raithaane, a restaurant committed to using locally sourced foods. Each dish on the menu is connected to the different communities of the nation.
Kupondle, 9801002971

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
25° 18°	26° 18°	27° 19°	27° 18°	28° 19°

Rain October 1st week
Long term weather models for the Subcontinent show another huge low pressure circulation coming off the Bay of Bengal and coursing across Central India this weekend, and by the first week of October it will be blown back by the westerlies bringing more rain late in the season. In the meantime there is enough water vapour in the air to feed afternoon buildup across the foothills that will mean passing showers.

OUR PICK

A minimalist romance drama, Past Lives-- the directorial debut from South Korean-Canadian playwright Celine Song-- explores the ever-eternal debate of love and destiny. The film is about two childhood sweethearts Nora and Hae Sung, and centres mostly around Nora's life. The two meet each other at their home town in Seoul, but everything changes when Nora and her family emigrate to Canada. Following the characters across time and space, the film tells the story of childhood sweethearts who reconnect deacdes later as adults. Stars Greta Lee and Teo Yoo.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउँ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Stopping between Asia and Europe

Dasain used to be a time for family reunions, celebrations and feasting in Nepal. Now, it is time to take an annual vacation to destinations abroad.

Bali, Bangkok and Goa are the preferred cities, and within Nepal domestic visitors to Pokhara, Mustang or Sauraha have also picked up after the pandemic.

Now, Istanbul has become a competitive destination thanks to stopover offers by Turkish Airlines as well as the US dollar exchange rate, making Türkiye surprisingly affordable. It is hard to believe that a city destination in Europe is only a six-hour flight away.

Turkish Airlines flies three times a week from Kathmandu, and from there to 314 destination airports in 126 countries around the world. In fact, more than 90% of passengers on every Kathmandu-Istanbul flight are transiting to Europe or the Americas.

“Bangkok and Bali are great, but why keep going to the same place each time? Istanbul and Türkiye in general have so much to offer,” says Turkish Airlines Country Manager Serkan Başar. “Nepalis will find many things familiar, but also exotic in the meeting place of Asia and Europe, the food, culture and shopping.”

Turkish Airlines is also promoting Nepal among other destinations as a tourism attraction at the fifth travel and tourism EMITT Istanbul to be held 6-9 February in 2024.

Nepal and Türkiye established



Bosporous

TURKISH AIRLINES

diplomatic relations in 1962, but it was not until Turkish Airlines connected Istanbul and Türkiye that exchanges were picked up. Türkiye’s ambassador to Nepal is based in Delhi, but the country is soon setting up its embassy in Kathmandu.

Historically, Nepal-Türkiye links go back even further to Nepali soldiers fighting alongside the allies in the Gallipoli campaign during the First World War.

Turkish Airlines is currently the only European airline flying into Nepal and now offers Nepali

passengers with connecting flights to Europe and beyond who can get a wide range of complimentary tour and travel services from the airlines. Passengers can make the best use of their layover in Istanbul.

One of the three options by the airlines is Touristanbul for passengers with a layover between six to 24 hours. Interested individuals can sign up at the Transfer Desk or the International Arrivals Terminal of Istanbul Airport.

There are eight scheduled tours to select from given one’s flight

times. After landing at İstanbul Airport, passengers will be picked up by a vehicle and driven back to the airport at the end of the tour.

Passengers can take advantage of a free tour using their ticket number only if issued by Turkish Airlines stock number starting 235. Touristanbul is available for Turkish Airlines’ flights including codeshare flights.

Economy class passengers with a connection time of 12 hours or longer and business class passengers with nine hours or more can get hotel service free of

charge. A maximum of two nights’ accommodation will be offered.

The layover period is calculated taking the landing time of the first flight and departure time of the second flight as a basis. Passengers under 18 are not accepted without accompanying adults, and passengers on Codeshare airlines are also eligible.

The most attractive complimentary service is the Stopover in Istanbul valid for passengers with a connection period of at least 20 hours. Economy Class passengers can stay one night at a 4-star hotel and Business Class passengers may stay two nights in a 5-star hotel for free.

Passengers are required to make a reservation at least 72 hours before their first flight. They need to send in their name-surname, reservation code (PNR) and ticket number, desired accommodation dates, preferred room type, telephone number and e-mail address information to the e-mail address corresponding to their country of departure, or visit Turkish Airlines website for details.

Nepalis can easily get an e-visa if they have a Schengen, UK or US visa for the complimentary stopover. Forms can be obtained at www.evisa.gov.tr/ website. Nepalis without onward visas can get a single entry tourist visa valid for a maximum of 30 days at VFS.

Stopover e-visa can also be obtained from the Turkish Airlines sales or ticket desks before or on the day of departure. 🇹🇷

Viber’s new partnerships in Nepal

Rakuten Viber has revealed new partnerships and business solutions in Nepal by teaming up with Sasto Tickets, Bus Sewa and Chef Nepal to enhance user experience and boost local businesses. Nepali Times spoke with Berina Tanovic, Sales Director at Rakuten Viber and Karla Banua, Sales Lead, Advertising in APAC at Rakuten Viber about Viber’s strategies to position itself as a superapp for brand-user communication. Excerpts from interview:



GOPEN RAI

Nepali Times: What does it mean for Viber to become a "superapp" and how will it enhance the user experience and benefit brands?

Berina Tanovic: According to statistics, 77% of the time we are actually using only three of all downloaded apps. And from that three, 50% of the time, we’re using only one. So what we realised was people are not keen to use several apps for several purposes, they want to have one app, which is actually a super app. So Viber will enable them to do several daily tasks in one place, meaning that they will be able to use Viber to call a taxi, order food, or do any activity in their daily life. From a brand perspective, it’s a huge opportunity because it allows them to contact their target-focus customers in their natural environment. So it’s a win-win for both parties.

Every industry in the world can actually use Viber for business solutions either to provide better customer support or experience, or just to enhance communication with the target audience. For example, two of our local business messaging partners,--Sparrow SMS and F1Soft-- have implemented Viber for business with several brands here in Nepal. They provide cost-effective solutions and offer a better communication platform.

Could you elaborate on the recent launches, such as the searchable Business Account and Business Inbox folder?

Berina Tanovic: We are talking about aligning with a strategy. We launched this business account, which is a unique entity where all the information about brands and all the communication channels are at one place. Additionally, business accounts are searchable. We also have business inbox, which is one folder in your chat that combines the whole communication between end user and a brand. This gives better customer experience. From the end user perspective, we have realised that the end user wants to have separate private and business communication.

What are the differences or similarities in how brands use Viber for communication around the world?

Karla Banua: In terms of similarities, I guess on the consumer side, it’s providing more value, making your life easier. It’s something that you see globally, and in the APAC as well. Viber is able to support every stage in terms of addressing the needs of the customer from brands. And in terms of similarities, we’re seeing more and more verticals, coming on

board into promoting their services. So we’ve seen travel, being the top vertical, then you have your retail, your banking.

What specific trends have you observed in brand-user communication in the Asia Pacific?

Karla Banua: We see Nepal as a market, similar to APAC and the rest of the world. Brands are incorporating more and more mobile strategies whenever they make their media campaigns through media mix. And in terms of the consumer side, they want it to be easy. They want all the tools and all the communications in one place. And this is where Viber fits perfectly, because we offer a full set of business solutions, from advertising, messaging, messaging chatbots. It is a solution, one tool that helps brands to address every customer need.

Are there examples of sectors that have seen particularly significant benefits?

Karla Banua: For one, we are seeing a good traction in terms of user adoption for Viber. For brands convenient for them to come into a messaging app that the audience use. Second is data, security and privacy is a priority. And it’s a two way process, brands and consumers would like to engage with an app that they can trust, then we have different tools from every funnel, because we understand

that you have it’s a step by steps for both the consumer and the brand. So that’s why we get into the process.

Berina Tanovic:

Every business is always looking for a cost effective solution. So compared to any other communication channel Viber is one of the most cost effective, why because it’s per delivered pricing model, meaning that all the messages that are not delivered for any reason, maybe someone doesn’t have Viber installed, or they are not online, or their mobile phone is switched off, the brand will not be charged for those messages, compared to SMS, where whatever you send is

going to be charged. This is one of the key benefits that brands are getting.

How important is user privacy and data security in brand-user communication, and how does Viber address these concerns?

Berina Tanovic: Security is the DNA of Viber. And there are a lot of security measures and protocols that we put in place, in order to make sure that all the data are secured. For example, all the private chats, and all the private calls are secure with end-to-end encryption. This is the the highest standard of security.

For the business messages, we use encryption in transit, which is the closest that you can get to end-to-end encryption. Also, when onboarding new businesses, we are not doing it automatically. We have a team who actually checks each Sender ID, each business. Also we have very strict opt-in policies, so we can investigate if someone complains that they didn’t opt-in for that specific message, we take that seriously and review cases internally with our partners to make sure that this never repeats again. Also from technical side, we are not sharing data, we are not storing data, anywhere. On top of this we’re using HTTPS protocol. We are putting in the efforts to make sure that Viber is actually one of the most secure app, compared to any competitor currently.

Learning rubbish, memorising gibberish

Quality of instruction is bad in most of Nepal's schools, but textbooks and test contents are even worse

Write a couple of paragraphs to describe the physical appearance of your English teacher.'

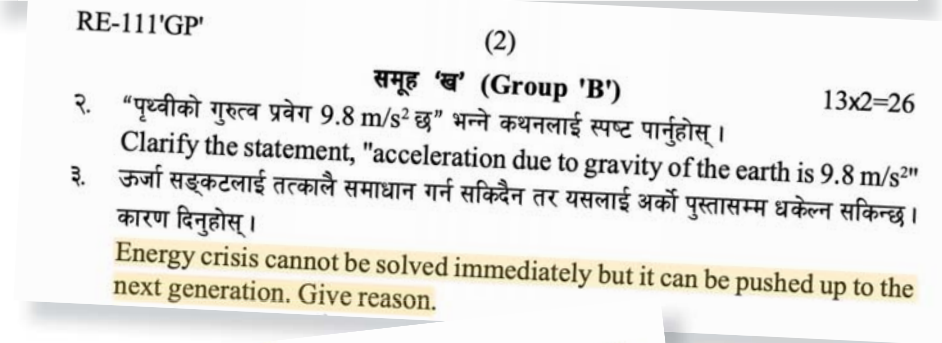
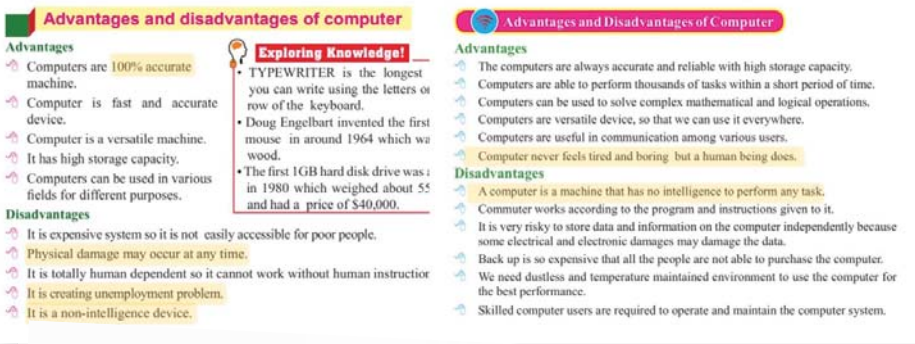
This is a 6-mark writing prompt in a Grade 9 question bank for an English exam meant to evaluate the quality of students' use of language.

Nepal's textbooks have long earned a reputation for being sloppy, unrevised, and filled with content that ranges from comical to outrageous.

The New Gateway to Computer Science textbooks for Grades 8 and 9 define computers as '100% accurate machine', adding 'computer never feels tired or boring but a human being does', while also blaming computers for 'creating unemployment problem', 'being non-intelligence devices' and alerting students that 'damage may occur anytime'.

To make matters worse, these modern day computer textbooks have several pages dedicated to tautological descriptions of ancient computers and obsolete devices, and only a single cursory reference to artificial intelligence.

Green Books' Health, Population and Environment Education for Grade 10 offers an easy solution to overpopulation: 'When females have job



opportunities, they have less time in rearing and bearing children. Ultimately, the population is controlled.'

Government-directed exam questions are no better. An SEE science question asking students to reason out why the energy crisis can be 'pushed up to the next generation' poorly phrases what it is actually trying to ask (pictured left, middle). As a result students are left questioning the concept of sustainable development that they

have spent hours memorising.

Rajendra Dahal, editor of the Shikshak Monthly magazine for teachers, blames the poor quality of government funding in education. "Those who are entrusted with developing the curriculum as well as writing and approving content in both government and private textbooks should be experts in their field, not unmotivated officials who cut corners," he says.

Outdated content creeps into compulsory English and Nepali

The Exceptional Buhari

The portrayal of the daughter-in-law in a story in a school textbook entrenches Nepal's patriarchy

■ Sudeshna Thapa

Flipping through the pages of the government textbook for Grade 7 Nepali, one comes across this baffling paragraph which would be funny if it were not so serious:

An elderly couple live in a village. They bear a son in their old age whom they name Balram. When Balram grows up to be a young man, the couple decide to get him married. The wedding is a grand affair. Balram's wife is exceptionally beautiful and his parents are ecstatic about having found such a beautiful buhari. However, the sasura, curious about her intellect and disposition, decides to test her. So he calls her in and asks her, 'Buhari, can you tell me how much you think we spent on your wedding?' Red flags go up all over that

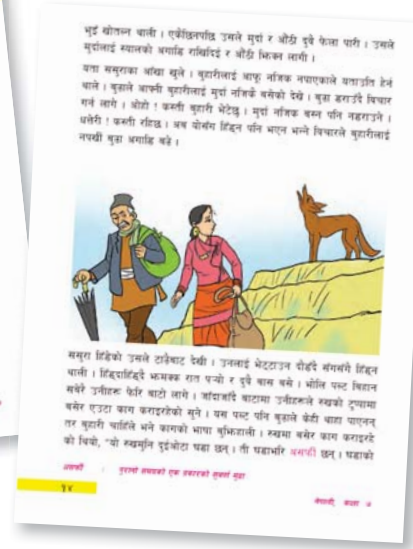
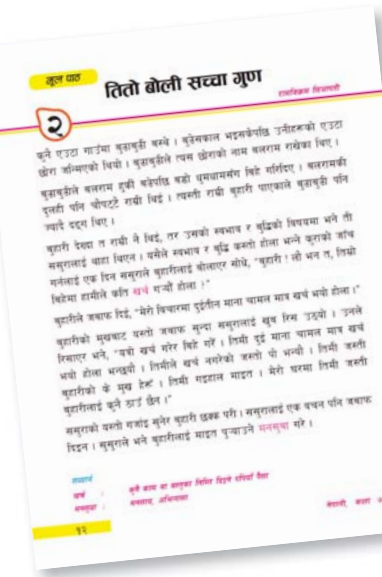
paragraph that serves as the story's exposition. But wait, things get even more interesting:

The buhari replies, 'I think you must have spent only about 2-3 manas of rice grains'. Offended by these words, the sasura retorts as he fumes with anger, 'Your wedding cost me a fortune, and you're saying 2-3 manas of rice grains is all that was spent? You make it seem like I incurred no expenses'.

In what sounds like a line lifted right off of a hammy Indian daily soap, the sasura then goes on to say, 'I don't even want to look at your face anymore. Go back to your parents' house right away! There is no place in my home for a buhari like you'.

Although aghast at her father-in-law's response, the buhari does not utter a word. The dad-in-law, on the other hand, is determined to send her off to her parents' house. The two then embark on a journey to the buhari's parental home.

As the plot thickens, it is revealed that the buhari has a special ability, thanks to which she can communicate with animals. Along the way, the sasura-buhari hear a wolf howling. The sasura does not think much of it, but the buhari knows exactly what the wolf is 'saying'. The wolf's words



translated are too bizarre to ideate. It says,

'There is a corpse buried right here. If someone were to dig it up, I could feed on it. There's a diamond ring on one of its fingers. I'd give the ring to whoever digs up the corpse for me'.

Upon hearing this, the buhari thinks to herself,

'If only I could lay my hands on that ring. My sasura will never

believe me if I tell him about this. Oh, what a fix I am in!'

Soon, the sasura-buhari decide to make a pit stop under the shade of a banyan tree, and the sasura dozes off as he rests. The buhari then sneaks off to the spot where the wolf had been howling and starts to dig. Unsurprisingly, she unearths the corpse, presents it to the wolf, and takes the diamond ring on the body's finger.

Not only are readers confounded by the sheer absurdity of the plot of this 'story', but it must be hard for young Grade 7 readers (or even their teachers) to shake off the macabre mental image it projects in the mind. Aside from a blatant disregard for the concept of dignified treatment of the dead, this story actually presents grave robbing as a perfectly acceptable thing to do.

This is not all. The buhari then goes on to dig up some more valuables after a crow tips her off. The sasura is delighted to have come upon so much wealth because of the buhari. Subsequently, she also hands the diamond ring to the sasura and tells him all about how she found it.

As you may have guessed, the sasura is now in awe of the buhari and regrets ever having doubted her. Having had a change of heart, he decides not to take the buhari back to her parental home.

The story drags on as the sasura continues to ask the buhari random questions to test her wit till he is convinced of her 'intelligence' and ends with the sasura 'entrusting' the buhari with all his household responsibilities as he is finally impressed with her.

What is a student to learn from



JIM HOLMES/WIKIMEDIA

exams as well, where time and again students are required to write and design lengthy letters and postcards in exams. Add pretty borders, a stamp, and a neat envelope illustration, and you will get bonus points.

Moreover, not only are questions poorly framed, they are also flawed in how they are asked. As a result, teachers have to decipher questions to students alongside teaching how to answer them. The stark difference between

the English and Nepali versions of a SEE science question (pictured above), where half of the question is lost in translation, says it all.

With such poorly revised content in books and exams, the authors only promote confusion and frustration among students. Sentences are rife with grammatical errors, proofreading and fact-checking are thrown out of the window, and rote learning is entrenched in the fabric of every chapter, every model set, and

the protagonist's attitude towards his daughter-in-law? Will the story leave a child assuming it appropriate for a man to ask his daughter-in-law how much he must have spent on her wedding? Will a child be able to question why such an enquiry on the part of the father-in-law is even relevant?

Will a seventh grader who reads the story consider it a man's prerogative to 'send his daughter-in-law off' to her parents the minute he feels offended? What is a girl child to make of the portrayal of the buhari in the story? Are they to think that there is nothing wrong with assuming that a man is entitled to 'test' whether his daughter-in-law is good enough for the household?

Is it only after she proves her 'worth' that a woman is acceptable to her marital family, even if that means digging up graves to bring in wealth? Oh, by the way, where was the woman's husband while all of this transpired?

Even if the author who wrote this story thought it would be an appropriate example to teach children they should not be too quick to judge a person, didn't a single person who reviewed this story to decide whether it should be part of the school curriculum find the details in the story in the




slightest bit objectionable?

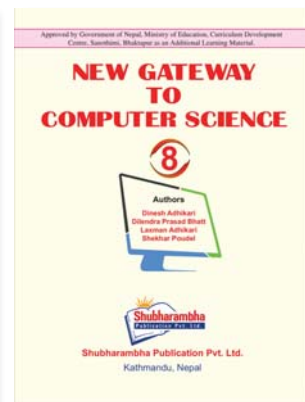
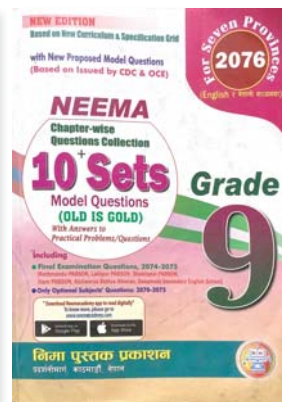
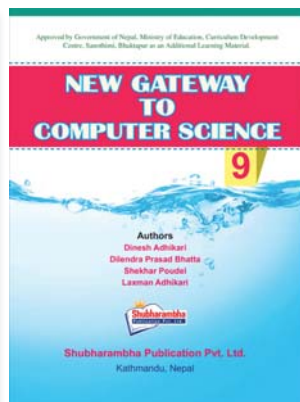
It is worth noting here that the line-up of authors and reviewers featured in the preface of the textbook in question is predominantly male and all from the dominant ethnic group. Perhaps objections were raised to the content of the book, but they were overruled?

Either way, this and many other examples warrant a closer assessment of the government's school curriculum development system, particularly the process of reviewing and screening content to ensure it is conducive to children's overall social and emotional development in addition to helping enhance creative and analytical skills.

It is crucial for those who design Nepal's school curricula to be mindful that the content of textbooks can solidify gender and social

stereotypes in young minds and shape how people perceive and interact in society. If we are to envisage a future free of gender bias and social inequality for Nepal, school textbooks may be a good place to start. 

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ii) A को ठाउँमा एल्मोनियम राखी B सँग रासायनिक प्रतिक्रिया गराउँदा बन्ने यौगिकको अणुसूत्र लेख्नुहोस् ।
Keeping aluminium instead of A, which product would you expect? Write molecular formula of it.

every question.

Admittedly, every five years, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) revises its textbooks, and completely rewrites them every ten years. This academic year, the updated curriculum for Grades 5, 8 and 10 rolled out along with all-new textbooks, but the quality of content is no better.

When questioned about the deplorable quality of school textbooks, CDC Director Kunti Adhikari was indifferent. “Minor errors in textbooks within the first year of publication are normal, and we regularly correct them,” she said. “Besides, our review process is rigorous and extends beyond CDC to a wider group of experts and professionals.”


That is not reflected at all in the content. The CDC-issued Grade 8 English textbook, in the name of

‘speaking activity’ asks students to read out pointless dialogues that do not match the level of intellectual stimulation their age requires. Absent are prompts that ignite critical thinking, and meaningful discussions that allow students to voice their views on topics that actually matter to them.

Even more worryingly, the 2023 edition of CDC's Health, Physical and Creative Arts Grade 8 textbook reduces the cause of mental illness to this inane definition: 'People sometimes are affected by small things and they become sad. This condition causes depression.'

Over 7 million students go to school in Nepal, of which a majority study in rural schools, 80% of them government-run. For these children, such books are the only source of information and education.

“By neglecting the importance of these learning materials, not only do we compromise their right to quality education, we also limit their ability to become competent academics, workers, and leaders,” adds Rajendra Dahal.

Over two decades ago, school teacher Perry Thapa had raised this very issue in *Nepali Times*. What she wrote in this paper in 2000 still holds true: “Too many young minds are being brainwashed with rubbish. Too many hours are being spent memorising gibberish. Too many hands are slavishly penning utter nonsense. Even discerning students are forced to parrot nonsense if they want to succeed.” 

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■ Anita Bhetwal

When Balam Chitrakar was only 10, he started helping his father in a photo studio in inner city Kathmandu to develop photos in darkroom. By age 12, Chitrakar was already a bonafide photographer.

By the time he finished high school in 1959, his father had handed him the keys to the studio. He attended Trichandra College during the day and developed film by night.

“Perhaps because photography had become my passion it did not matter that I worked all night,” says Chitrakar, now 82.

In 1967, as he finished his BSc exam Chitrakar joined the Department of Archeology’s Bir Library. But during the first few months, all he was made to do was keep written records of the documents.

He realised that library users, mostly foreign researchers, had access to original texts and documents of historical importance, as a result of which they had become torn and damaged.

So Chitrakar proposed to the Director of the Archeology Department to make duplicate copies of documents so the



SUMAN NEPALI

originals were preserved. The department accepted it and set aside Rs800 for him to buy a camera.

Chitrakar then began to make photocopies of documents, the first time this was done. Impressed with his work, the Department of Archaeology sent him to India to be trained in microfilming.

“Microfilms had not been introduced in Nepal at the time, so I used my curiosity and made an effort during training to figure out how the practice could be brought into application back home,” Chitrakar recalls.

When he returned in 1969, the Bir Library was incorporated into the Department of Archaeology’s National Archives. The Nepal government had also agreed with their German counterparts to make microfilms of Nepal’s archival documents, one copy of which would be with Nepal and the other sent to Germany.

German state-of-the-art equipment, including cameras and dark rooms were used to microfilm 29,000 documents during the first phase of the five-year project. The team worked every day for five years, microfilming many old

books and paintings that Patan and Bhaktapur wanted preserved.

In 1972, King Birendra personally took an interest in Chitrakar’s work and helped him with preserving the archives. The work continued for 25 years during which 182,000 manuscripts, inscriptions, copper plates, and other objects of archaeological significance were microfilmed.

Chitrakar travelled to Helambu, Langtang, Pokhara, Manakamana, Janakpur and elsewhere to preserve more archival religious documents.

He even went to microfilm archives in Dhaka.

By 1993 Chitrakar found there was a storage unit of microfilms but it was not temperature and humidity controlled. With his help, the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya in Patan also began microfilming its archives.

After 30 years, Chitrakar retired in 2001, and some of the documents he archived are 1,700 years old. But since then, the fragile microfilms themselves need to be preserved with digitisation.

The microfilms Chitrakar had so painstakingly preserved are beginning to deteriorate due to ‘Vinegar Syndrome’— a chemical reaction that decays the emulsion in film.

Microfilms have a lifespan of 100 years, but in Nepal they have begun to deteriorate in half that time. The National Archive has more than 200,000 positives and negatives of ancient texts and documents, out of which 500 are already damaged beyond repair.

The Department of Archaeology submitted the Microfilm Reel Preservation Action Plan to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation in 2014 but the Ministry has not done much.

Nepal stands to lose its archive of archaeological objects, and 82-year-old Chitrakar stands to lose his life’s work and legacy. He preserved historical documents by microfilming them which themselves now need to be preserved.

“The fact that these microfilms are in a state of decay means that my entire life’s work will have gone to waste,” says Chitrakar wearily. “And what will we have left if we fail to conserve these microfilms?” 🇳🇵

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