

NAVIGATING THE SEA OF
SMARTPHONES

RISING CRUDE OIL PRICES

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE
G20 DELHI SUMMIT

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BUSINESS 360°

**BLEAK
OUTLOOK
OF THE
ECONOMY
INTENSIFIES**

**BIKALPA:
CHANGING THE
DISCOURSE
FROM
POLITICS TO
POLITICAL
ECONOMY**

**REGULATING
E-COMMERCE
WILL IT CREATE
A TRANSPARENT
DIGITAL MARKET**

ACCELERATING
SUCCESS

ASHEEM MAN SINGH BASNYAT
MANAGING DIRECTOR, PATHAO NEPAL







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would we be concerned by its colour? Because this hue of blue is true to our tradition of watchmaking excellence. It is the exact colour taken by our unique alloy of niobium, zirconium and oxygen when it has been anodised to stop the process of oxidation. This blue is essential to us, because it symbolises the long-lasting performances which we hold ourselves to. This hairspring is insensitive to magnetic fields, unwavering in the face of temperature variations, and resistant to shocks as to corrosion. Therefore, each Rolex equipped with a Parachrom hairspring will tick at a most regular and perpetual beat.

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CLASSIC FUSION

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When the world has evolved so much and made technological advancements that support humankind, how is it that there is so much unrest and despair in the world. How was one pandemic able to displace economies around the world? What does it really tell us about the human capacity to think and prepare for the unknown, or I am even forced to think: was this a strategy. I look at the wars that are unfolding around us. I look at the natural disasters occurring worldwide. I look at the warnings of climate change. And, nothing speaks to me about human evolution.

The 2023 Global Peace Index report reveals a concerning surge in global conflicts, with pre-existing tensions predating even the significant Russian invasion of Ukraine, touted as the most significant conflict since World War II. A stark increase in conflict-related deaths had already been observed prior to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Notably, battle deaths spiked by 45% between 2020 and 2021, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa regions.

Internationalised conflicts have increased nine-fold since 2004. In fact, internationalised intrastate conflicts are now just as common as intrastate conflicts, reflecting a trend where over 80% of intrastate conflicts from 1975-2017 saw external support.

Though military expenditure in terms of GDP witnessed improvements in 92 countries in 2022, the overall military spending increased. The global average for military expenditure as a percentage of GDP shrank from 2.04 to 1.95%. While these figures may suggest reduced military focus, absolute military expenditure went up, especially in powerhouses like China, the US, and India where total expenditure increased by \$180 billion, \$70 billion and \$40 billion respectively since 2008.

(GPI Index and data source: [visionofhumanity.org](https://www.visionofhumanity.org))

In times of increasing geopolitical tensions, economic disparities, political instability and climate vulnerability, I think of what anthropologist and ecologist, Michael Ghiglieri in his book, *The Dark Side of Man*, says: War predates humanity, that it is natural, and that it vies with sex for the distinction of being the most significant driver of human evolution. I however prefer what cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead said in her 1940 article: "Warfare Is Only an Invention—Not a Biological Necessity". Because it speaks to me of the human's ability to choose hope, compassion and wisdom.

Perhaps what really needs correction is our choice of leadership – the people we vote to power and enable to make decisions on our behalf.

Charu Chadha
editor

BIZ INDICATORS

FOREX MARKET	10-Oct-23	10-Sep-23	Year ago
USD	133.20	132.85	131.71
GBP	162.85	166.18	145.61
Chinese Renminbi (Yuan)	18.28	18.23	18.41
Indian Rupee (INR 100)	160.00	160.00	160.00
Euro	140.66	142.79	127.76
Australian Dollar	-	-	-
GOVERNMENT SECURITIES	Lowest	Highest	Weighted Avg.
Discount rate of T-bill (Subject to latest issuance)			
Treasury bills (28 days)	2.69	3.14	2.90
Treasury bills (91 days)	3.95	4.60	4.34
Treasury bills (182 days)	4.90	5.33	5.20
Treasury bills (364 days)	5.24	5.95	5.68
PRICE INDICES	15-Aug-23	15-Jul-23	15-Aug-22
National Consumer Price Index (base year 2014/15 = 100)	165.79	162.95	154.19

Source: Refinitiv Eikon, Nrb

P = Provisional, R = Revised

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DISRUPT YOURSELF BEFORE SOMEBODY COMES AND DISRUPTS YOU BECAUSE THERE ARE MANY GOOD EXAMPLES OF GREAT COMPANIES MISSING THAT MOMENT AND BEING DISRUPTED. KODAK IS AN EXAMPLE. NOKIA IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE. GREAT COMPANIES, NO DOUBT, BUT AT SOME POINT, SOMEBODY CAME AND JUST DISRUPTED THEM. AND WHEN YOU LOSE MOMENTUM, YOU ARE OUT OF THE GAME.

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ACCELERATING SUCCESS

**ASHEEM MAN SINGH
BASNYAT**

MANAGING DIRECTOR
PATHAO NEPAL

THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH OUR GOVERNMENT IS THEY ONLY TALK. BEFORE INTRODUCING ANY POLICY OR REGULATION THEY NEED TO CONSULT WITH THE CONCERNED STAKEHOLDERS AND GET SUGGESTIONS. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS NEED TO READ AND BE INFORMED ABOUT THE SECTORS THEY ARE PLANNING TO INTRODUCE RULES FOR.



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TOUGH PATHS CAN MAKE LEADERS STRONGER.
LEARN TO LOOK AT THE SITUATION AS THEY ARE
BECAUSE IF YOU LOOK AT THE SITUATION AS THEY
ARE, IT WILL NOT AFFECT YOU, HOWEVER IF YOU
TRY TO INTERPRET IT, IT COULD AFFECT YOU

Arun Rana
International Development Professional

LEADERSHIP

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HI 5

THE WELLBEING, HAPPINESS AND GROWTH OF PEOPLE AROUND ME IS WHAT I BELIEVE DEFINES MY SUCCESS AND THIS IS SOMETHING I LEARNT FROM MY FATHER. OF COURSE, PROFIT AND MONEY ARE IMPORTANT BUT PEOPLE COME FIRST.

ROHIT GUPTA
VICE CHAIRMAN
RAMESH CORP



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"THE GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T VIOLATE CITIZENS' RIGHTS ONLINE AND IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS WITHOUT SAFEGUARDS. IN NEPAL, NEW LAWS, POLICIES AND MECHANISMS RELATING TO PRIVACY, DIGITAL DATA, CYBER SECURITY, PHONE TAPPING ARE PROPOSED BUT WITHOUT ADEQUATE PUBLIC DISCOURSE OR CONSULTATION."

SANTOSH SIGDEL
Executive Director
Digital Rights Nepal

FACE2FACE

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"EVEN AFTER BATTERIES EXPIRE, THEY CAN BE UTILISED AS AN ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF POWER SUPPLY. NISSAN HAS DONE CONSIDERABLE WORK ON THIS FRONT AND WE HAVE USED EXPIRED BATTERIES AS A SOURCE OF POWER SUPPLY IN NUMEROUS VILLAGES ACROSS INDIA. NISSAN HAS ADOPTED A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO BATTERY MANAGEMENT AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT WE WILL BE DOING THE SAME IN NEPAL"

RAGHUNATH NAIR
Head, South Asia Sales Unit
Nissan Motor India

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ACCELERATING SUCCESS

ASHEEM MAN SINGH BASNYAT
MANAGING DIRECTOR, PATHAO NEPAL

To reach business success, the perseverant Asheem Man Singh Basnyat had to reconcile what he wanted with what he was willing to risk. He did everything to make Pathao Nepal work.





Asheem Man Singh Basnyat, Managing Director of Pathao Nepal, calls himself an accidental entrepreneur. “While growing up, I had never thought of starting a business as I was more interested in joining the army. I was fascinated by the uniform because the army legacy runs deep in my family with my father being a seventh-generation army personnel.” However, destiny chose a different path for Basnyat who

today is running Pathao, a tech-based ride hailing and delivery business that has become a household name in just five years of its establishment.

“To be honest, Pathao is not my first venture. I previously tried my hand in a few other businesses which were failures,” Basnyat shares, candidly adding that during that course he even went bankrupt on more than one occasion. “There was a time when I had zero bank


balance but these failures have taught me lessons which I am definite no business school could ever be able to teach,” he states.

Basnyat emphasises that Pathao has been a success because of the team. “People often think I am the person leading the team but there have been many instances when the team has guided me,” he says.

The trials, the sweat, the challenges and the learnings

have been a huge part of Basnyat’s entrepreneurial journey but he wouldn’t change a thing even if he could; it is what has moulded him to become the person he is.

In this edition of **Business 360**, we spoke to Basnyat about his work, what drives him and what has made Pathao the success it is today. Excerpts:



on the table; this has helped me keep a fast pace at work. We have been able to launch six different services within five years. If I had waited for things to stabilise one service at a time, it would have taken us 12 years to launch these six services. I feel this is a strength and a blessing for me. Fortunately, things have gone the way I wanted but there is always a risk associated with this trait.

Why Pathao for Nepal?

The major reason I chose to launch Pathao is due to the fact that it has endless possibilities. Moreover, a small company can move faster than a bigger one which has many processes in place. When we brought Pathao to Nepal, it was a young company with young technology and the risks associated with it were high. No one had any prior experience at all. But I saw this as a benefit because we could course correct as we went along. If Uber were here, it would not have been very Nepal-centric as our country would just be a speck in their global operations. However, for Pathao, Nepal was a big market and the parent company saw many possibilities here. We have the liberty to change and reinvent the wheel to make Pathao adaptable in Nepal. The other aspect is that Pathao has its roots in South Asia; the mindset and experiences are similar - ranging from the good to the bad - and this has guided us in many ways. A young company with a young mindset has made it possible for us to make a mark in the country.

What was the initial investment and what challenges did you face when starting the company?

Investments are done in two aspects; global and in Nepal. The parent company has invested millions of dollars as they launch this service in multiple core locations. The other intangible investment they make is sharing their experiences. One of the key

global investors sends people to provide various training programmes to us and this cannot be valued in terms of money. If we had to hire consultants to substitute these training programmes, it would cost us a lot and we probably would not have received industry experience. Regarding the investment in Nepal, our authorised capital is Rs 20 crores.

When launching Pathao in Nepal, the technology was not a problem and we were able to deal with the government's attempts to scrutinise the technology. However, changing the mindset of the people was a very big obstacle. Initially, the job was considered low-level and was looked down upon. Also, the thought of taking a ride with a stranger wasn't acceptable for all. But over these years, there has been a massive change in mindset. These days, there are many famous vloggers who proudly call themselves Pathao riders and reveal their names and faces on different social media platforms. Similarly, many people have shared and tagged Pathao in their stories. It was a different scenario initially and people would literally wear face masks and use fake names in order to hide their identity. Now we can see many people calling themselves Pathao saviours and share their names. It has been a long journey but we still have some way to go. We can still hear stories of a Pathao service provider whether it be a captain, a rider or a food delivery person being treated badly. I hope someday people will address our service providers with respect and I attempt to add dignity to this job. One lesson I have learnt since this journey began is never to lose hope. There was a time when the government had announced that it would close down Pathao and it was quite disheartening.

How does the Pathao model work in Nepal?

We have six services as of now. We began with the two-wheeler model. It's basically a gig economy where a person has their vehicle registered and serves during flexible hours and pays a service fee. Our taxi service also follows a similar model but the commission cost is less as the operational cost is high. We have launched three-wheeler service in Chitwan as these rides are more popular there. We also have the food delivery service where we have tied up with various restaurants. We are, in fact, the fastest food delivery service provider in Nepal. The other service we have is the bazaar, which is basically a quick service whereby we deliver emergency goods and even gifts. Recently, we started the parcel service and we deliver home-made food too. We are working on a few more models which we will be launching pretty soon. I think we have been successful due to our adaptability. We have adapted as fast as we can and we became a household name in the first couple of years itself. These days some people are providing ride-sharing service even in Humla by using our name. We do face a backlash now and again as people misuse our brand name but on the brighter side, it is good to know that our brand name has reached across Nepal.

With the number of unregulated ride-sharing services increasing; how do you deal with it?

The first thing that we are trying to do is spread awareness among the people. We are trying to spread the message that Pathao is a ride-sharing service that has to be booked through our app to a larger mass and we have been successful to some extent. We are also trying to make concerned government authorities aware about how such rides are unsafe because there will be no record of such rides. What if somebody has

What are your personal strengths that have seen you through some failures and now the success with Pathao?

I feel I am an arrogant leader at times and though arrogance is usually perceived as a negative trait, I believe it has helped me move faster. My nature of getting things done in the now has brought certain things on track. I always say - Decide in the snap of a finger and get it done with a bang

used a fake vehicle registration number plate? Moreover, the government also loses revenue. As per our calculations, with every such offline trip the government loses revenue of Rs 5 to Rs 7. Hence, the government too needs to act on this and the users also need to be aware. We cannot take any action against such riders because it is not in our jurisdiction. People need to understand that to use our service, they need to use the Pathao app and the system will connect them to the nearest rider who has a better rating. We want riders with good ratings to earn more and consumers to get better experience. This is how our system works.

Among the verticals that you have mentioned which has performed well and why?

I call the two-wheeler, four-wheeler and food delivery services our core verticals. The remaining are our supplementary verticals. However, even the three core verticals are very weather-centric. There have been days when we have done more taxi rides than bike rides. For instance, when there is a heavy downpour then bike rides are almost nil but taxi rides and food deliveries increase. But when we have pleasant weather and during the festive seasons, we have five to six times more bike rides than taxi rides. So, weather plays a big role on the service that customers choose but the contribution they have to the company's annual growth is similar. At present, we are focusing more on food delivery service; we want to change the perception that people have to cook or visit a restaurant for food. We are also trying to promote the cloud kitchen concept. Our next focus is on these home-based family-run businesses.

The main problem with our government is they only talk. Before introducing any policy or regulation they need to consult with the concerned stakeholders and get suggestions. Government officials need to read and be informed about the sectors they are planning to introduce rules for.

There have been some issues related to safety and commissions in the past. How are you addressing them?

We have been trying to create awareness among the public about our service and how they can avail it and stay safe. The other aspect deals with privacy. Pathao has zero tolerance policy on data sharing and data selling. We don't share data with even our sister organisations. We are concerned about data protection in the same way that we are concerned about physical security.

When it comes to commission, the globally practiced commission model is 30% to 35% on average. However, we have been charging only 15% for four-wheelers and 20% for two-wheelers. Moreover, we also pay VAT to the government from that commission. There have been voices raised that we should reduce our commission but what one has to understand is that we are a business and we also have other costs involved. So, do we reduce our commission and compromise

on other areas? Or do we operate on 0% commission basis but sell consumer data to earn? We can also operate on 5% commission and our company might be able to sustain but we will not be able to run other services. We will not be able to run a 24/7/365 call centre led by 70 people and will have to compromise on that service. There are also costs incurred in training our manpower. Moreover, this may lead us to close down our insurance policy. We do not want to compromise on the safety factor at any cost. It may be a bit expensive but safety of our riders as well as our users is our number one priority.

Could you elaborate about Pathao's insurance policy?

We were the first company to start the insurance policy. Initially, the total insurance amount was Rs 6 lakhs, with Rs 5 lakhs for accidental coverage and Rs 1 lakh for medical. The insurance policy is for both our riders and service seekers. Later, we increased the insurance amount to Rs 11 lakhs with Rs 10 lakhs for accidental coverage and Rs 1 lakh for medical purposes.

There are two ways to claim the insurance. It's either RTA (Road Traffic Accident) or RTI (Road Traffic Incident). In both cases the first responder is the traffic police, so we first have to report it to a traffic police. If it is a heinous act, then one needs to first go to Nepal Police and they will collect the evidence. Then the concerned person has to visit the hospital and collect the medical reports. After obtaining these documents they have to contact our help desk. In fact, our help desk will also help in obtaining these reports, we provide assistance throughout the process. It is then our help desk makes the claim for the insurance and will follow up until the cash is received. Once the money has been received by our help desk, the claimant can come and collect the amount.

How do you view the government policy for ride-sharing services and what do you think needs to be immediately addressed?

The main problem with our government is they only talk. Before introducing any policy or regulation they need to consult with the concerned stakeholders and get suggestions. Government officials need to read and be informed about the sectors they are planning to introduce rules for. Secondly, they don't listen when others have something to say. They just talk and at times the talks are so absurd, you start wondering about its possibility. This is very commonly found in both bureaucracy and politics. We have forwarded a case study on ridesharing which incorporates its definition, purpose and objectives to different concerned authorities and every time there is a change in leadership in those bodies, we have resent the document. I doubt if they ever read it and when we try to explain certain things they say they know about it. But when it comes to action, they lack clarity. The situation is such that when we meet government officials, they talk about framing policies for ridesharing service and when a person associated with taxis visits them, then they talk about closing down Pathao. However, I am quite hopeful at present that there will be some solutions as three provinces have already talked about ridesharing in their budget announcements.

The first thing that everybody needs to understand is that ridesharing is a viable industry for Nepal. Once that has sunk in, then we can have regulations and think about expanding the sector. There should not be any conflict whereby the provincial government says ridesharing is legal and the federal government says



it isn't. Around three years back the court had asked the government not to close down ridesharing services and instead frame rules and policies for their operation but nothing has happened on the policy front.

What is the market share of Pathao and whom do you consider to be your main competitor?

There are around 50 ridesharing and nearly 10 food delivery companies at present. Meanwhile, there could be approximately 30 logistic companies right now. I don't think there is any other quick commerce company. What we need to realise is Pathao does not do everything itself. We just create a platform for service providers and seekers. When it comes to ridesharing, our biggest competitors are the fake Pathao drivers who wait on the roadsides and claim to be associated with us.

Pathao currently has around 70% market share in ridesharing with the remainder split between other companies as well as the fake Pathao drivers. According to our recent calculations, we have grabbed 60% market share of the food delivery business with our second largest competitor doing 30% business and the others at 10%. We do 3,000 to 3,500 food deliveries a day. We recently started logistics service, the market for which is huge, and we have 1% market share in this vertical. But we aim to be among the top 10 in the next one year, top five in the year after that and the market leader in the third year.

There has been a rise in the gig economy globally; how do you see its growth in Nepal?

There is just one drawback in our country; we cannot file our own taxes. This is why those who are self-employed do not pay taxes and it is not that they are not willing to pay. They are just not willing to take up all the difficulties in the tax payment process. I believe the

government should introduce a tax system for the gig economy. It is time the government classifies the gig economy and clarifies the taxes or the amount of tax that needs to be paid. If I am providing services using my own means, then a certain amount from what I earn needs to be taxed. The closest thing which I think the government has done in the gig economy is it collects a Rs 500 tax annually from taxi drivers. But tech-based gig economy has not been classified. I think it is necessary for the government to allow people to file their own taxes because for example, if our riders could do so then they could show exactly how much they earn and could avail loans from banks. At the moment, that is not happening and our riders are left out from the financial ecosystem and this is really concerning for the long-term development of Nepal.

Opening a startup in not a very big deal, in fact, opening any business is not an issue provided you have the finances. The major concern always lies in the sustainability of the project. What I personally feel is that one should first identify the existing problems (needs) in the market and then launch a product or service to solve that problem. Of course, one should also calculate the financial feasibility of it. These days, startups are being opened to provide solutions for a non-existent problem. To be honest, some startups are being opened by people just for the sake of the business card – to be called a CEO or founder – and the source of funding is usually the family or friends. They neither create any economic nor social impact. What is even more surprising is despite having zero revenue they claim to have a company valuation of crores with no data to back it up. Due to such entrepreneurs (I don't even think 'entrepreneur' would be a right word to refer to them by) actual impactful startups have also been misunderstood. So, when a startup which really could solve a problem tries

Pathao currently has around 70% market share in ridesharing with the remainder split between other companies as well as the fake Pathao drivers. According to our recent calculations, we have grabbed 60% market share of the food delivery business with our second largest competitor doing 30% business and the others at 10%. We do 3,000 to 3,500 food deliveries a day. We recently started logistics service, the market for which is huge, and we have 1% market share in this vertical. But we aim to be among the top 10 in the next one year, top five in the year after that and the market leader in the third year.

to seek investment from a venture capital fund or an angel investor then the investors are reluctant to invest due to these fads. As a result, the concept of investing in an idea is gradually fading away. Currently, investors are only willing to invest in a mature company. It

is rare to hear of them investing in a new company even if it has a potential. They invest in companies that are around for six to seven years but such firms can always avail loans; it is the new ones that need such funding. Also, the rate of return on the investment has to be high because the banks are providing quite high interests on fixed deposits so investors find it better to deposit money in banks.

By 2027, the ridesharing market is projected to grow by 25% making it a \$218 billion market internationally. How is Pathao positioned for this?

It is quite amazing that many global economic trends do not affect Nepal. For instance, during the global financial crisis in 2007-08, Nepal remained unaffected. We are somehow immune to such trends. It is like 'nothing works in Nepal, yet everything works in Nepal'. Yes, internationally the figure you mentioned could be true but the market here is very small. What we at Pathao definitely know is in the next three years we will be present across the country. Having said that what I would like to mention is that if the government had promoted this type of business when we initially launched, we would be doing a lot better now and it would have helped in other ways too. At present, I think in Kathmandu one in every five people owns a two-wheeler and the number of people buying four-wheelers is also rising, which is increasing the import bill and traffic congestion is also increasing.

Is there any mechanism to verify riders?

We do have a rider verification mechanism. Any person who wants to be associated with us needs to first open a rider account with us. They are then trained and examined. If anybody does fail the examination, then they are retrained and examined again. Once they pass this test then

we ask them to bring some original official documents and then the verification process starts. It is only after this process we determine their eligibility. Security is a big concern for us so we have never compromised in the rider verification process.

Is there a success story of a rider that you would want to share?

Since the last five years of our establishment, we have had over a hundred riders who have done more than 10,000 trips, which means that on an average they must have earned over Rs 10 lakhs each. The fact that we have been able to provide an opportunity to so many people to earn a decent livelihood is in itself a big success for us and the riders. However, there is one story of an army sergeant I have always shared with people. After having retired from the army, he had gone to the Gulf to work as a driver and when he was in Nepal on a holiday, he heard about Pathao and the ridesharing concept. Fascinated by the idea, he requested his friend for his taxi for a couple of days. Realising it was a pretty good source of earning he started working for a taxi dealer in shifts. In one month itself he was able to earn more than Rs one lakh and he thus quit his foreign employment and decided to stay back. This may seem like a small story for some but for us it is a huge thing. It makes me feel proud that in our own small way we have been contributing to not only the national economy but also the social fabric of the country. **B**

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“The government shouldn’t violate citizens’ rights online and impose restrictions without safeguards. In Nepal, new laws, policies and mechanisms relating to privacy, digital data, cyber security, phone tapping are proposed but without adequate public discourse or consultation. Few years back, a bill had been brought into discussion whereby the Special Services Act, 1985 would be amended to provide the National Investigation Department authorities broad powers to wiretap and intercept individuals’ digital communications. Initially, a few members of parliament took a stand against it but later it was passed by the National Assembly. Then MDMS entered into the scene, which provides access to your call details, digital content and your location. Then TERAMOCS came and now NTA has proposed collecting e-KYC of the subscribers. It seems like we are having too many laws and policies without proper public consultation and questions are being raised on whether the government is moving towards the control mechanism”

Santosh Sigdel

Executive Director, Digital Rights Nepal

Santosh Sigdel is the Executive Director of Digital Rights Nepal. He is a lawyer by profession and completed his Master’s in Commercial Law and International Human Rights Law. Keen to explore the interrelation between technology, business, and human rights, he has been involved in different areas of human rights over the years.

In 2007, Nepal had just gone through a political transformation and an international organisation called Article19 which works on areas related to freedom of expression across the world had started work in Nepal and Sigdel was appointed as its Country Representative. “Due to political transformation, human rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression were pressing issues then and it was necessary for us to identify our agenda for change,” he says.

In order to identify the scope and solutions to those policy issues, Sigdel shares that they had a series of exercises with the political leaders, media organisations, civil society and other concerned stakeholders and in about a year came up with a document titled ‘Agenda for change’. “This document primarily focused on freedom of expression, right to information, press freedom, among others. This led me to become more interested in human rights,” he recalls. He then did another Master’s degree in International Human Rights Law from the Central European University.

Later, with the aim to amplify information rights in Nepal, Sigdel joined hands with like-minded people to set up Citizen’s Campaign for Right to Information. “I was the founding General Secretary of CCRI and my journey has continued with a few changes, and as of today, I am focused on digital rights,” he says.

In this issue of **Business 360**, we spoke to Sigdel about the various facets of digital rights and what it actually means in the present context. Excerpts:

How would you define digital rights and what is its importance in the present context?

We have many rights enshrined in our constitution and there are international laws and standards that we have to abide by as Nepal is a signatory to a number of international human rights treaties and conventions. These days, rights are not limited to the physical realm and offline processes. At present, freedom of speech is not just about freedom to express your ideas and opinion in physical space. Likewise, the right to privacy is not just about not letting someone enter your personal space, or not letting someone search you and your belongings without your consent. Today, it has expanded to the online sphere as well.

If a person is disappointed with the current system, government actions or any political party, then before going to Maitighar to protest that person usually posts their feelings on their social media like Facebook or Instagram, to name just a few. People express their opinions and use their freedom of expression through these online platforms. This clearly shows how freedom of expression has extended from the offline world to the online world. Similarly, just the way no one can enter your house without your permission, no one can check your SMS or mails without your permission. The extension of human rights to the online space is exactly what digital rights are all about.

In the context of digital rights, the first thing we require is access to internet and appropriate gadgets. Access to the web and gadgets that are reliable and affordable is also digital rights. And it is not limited to that only, even availability of preferred content falls under digital rights. If you have access to reliable and affordable internet and gadgets but don’t have the content in your preferred language, then how useful will the internet be for you? In recent times, internet is being utilised in various fields like education, health, banking, among others but does everyone have access to internet? For instance, during the Covid 19 pandemic, those

who had reliable internet and gadgets could study but others could not. So, digital rights are directly connected to right to education. Similarly, reliable internet infrastructure is the basis of tele-medicine, thus connecting digital rights to right to health. At present, if you don't have good knowledge and access to information technology, it becomes difficult to get a job, thus digital right is now connected to the right to employment too. In this way digital rights are very extensive and touch upon all aspects of our lives.

To safeguard digital rights, one crucial element is digital security. Imagine if someone had access to the websites you visit or could intercept the SMS messages you send – how would that make you feel? Therefore, digital security is indispensable for upholding digital rights. A few years ago, there were fewer internet users, resulting in less online activity. However, the number of users and their online engagement have been steadily rising, along with increased internet penetration. This surge also brings about new threats. To effectively protect digital rights, digital literacy is imperative.

How would you rate cybersecurity in Nepal?

Over the years, cyber incidents and cyber-attacks have been rising along with data breaches. In fact, many government systems and services have faced data-breach issues several times. Even private sector service providers have been a victim to this issue in recent days with the data of Foodmandu and Vianet being breached some time back. So, as the usage of internet increases so does our vulnerability and this leads to various forms of risks. Phishing, spam and ransomware are alarming nowadays. News about people being scammed and losing their money have become quite common. People even in this age and time believe in mails stating they have won millions in some scheme. This makes us question the level of digital literacy.

How do you find cybersecurity mechanism in Nepal?

There is no dedicated and functional cyber emergency response unit in Nepal. The existing legal framework is limited to the Electronic Transaction Act, 2008 and a by-law on cybersecurity developed by the Nepal Telecommunications Authority, which applies only to the licensees of the NTA. The Cabinet recently endorsed the National Cyber Security Policy in August this year, and it is expected that the government will prioritise the enactment of laws and mechanisms proposed under this policy.

While talking about cybersecurity we do have some concerns with the National Cyber Security Policy 2023. Digital Rights Nepal has conducted a preliminary assessment of the policy which incorporates all our concerns and curiosities. Our primary concern is that there are topics included in the policy which had not been discussed in the earlier draft. The one related to national internet gateway was completely new in the policy. With the national internet gateway, it seems like Nepal is trying to enter a controlled internet era. The objective, aim and purpose of this provision was never discussed. The government needs to clarify on this. The other important aspect is a clarification regarding for whom or what is this cybersecurity for – it could be the government, private sector or citizens. So, its emphasis needs to be clarified.

What I would say is that the emphasis of the policy should be on citizens. If the policy fails to protect the rights of the citizens, then there will be no value of having such policies. If this policy is for the citizens, then the policy must be centred around the citizens.

How do you find the situation of digital rights in Nepal?

There are no explicit mentions of digital rights in the constitution or laws in Nepal. However, relevant provisions can be found scattered in the constitution and other legal instruments. Nepal is yet to

recognise access to internet as a fundamental right but other legal provisions such as right to freedom of expression and right to privacy has recognised the concept of 'online' or 'digital space'.

Apart from legal provisions, if we look at the practice, meaningful access to internet is still a major concern in Nepal. Quality of internet, affordability issues, availability of local and relevant content are other major issues. We have no segregated data on access of different groups and communities to the internet.

Freedom of expression online is another important aspect of digital rights. We have observed a number of cases in recent times, which provides not so encouraging picture of digital rights in Nepal. Some examples include the order by the Election Commission to remove the Facebook page 'Enough is enough' from the internet during elections, prosecution of rap artist Samir Ghising aka Vten and stand-up comedian Apporva Kshitiz and use of Section 47 of the Electronic Transaction Act to persecute journalists.

I am also concerned about the lack of public awareness and discourse on the scope of digital rights. I will give you an example. A few years ago, Nepal decided to ban online 'pornography' which also resulted in the ban of websites with domain names that had words like porn or sex. Many sites related to reproductive health of several universities and also helpline websites also could not be accessed. So much so, even the website of a musical band called Sex Pistols was not accessible. However, there was no public discourse on whether the entire focus on preventive mechanism, without any intervention to promote digital literacy was a useful approach.

When people in power use their authority to silence voices or when minority voices are suppressed, digital rights are violated. Formulating preventive mechanism alone is not enough, the government should create conducive environment to promote these rights.

We could dive deeper and question, "Are all government websites user-friendly for people with disability?" If a person with disability is unable to access such websites, then it is clearly a violation of digital rights. The government should ensure its websites have colour correction mechanism for a visually impaired person. Moreover, the content availability and preference of people need to be catered to as well. Will a person be able to access a government website in their preferred language? It is the government's responsibility to make websites inclusive. Also, many government sites aren't secure. This is also a violation of digital rights.

To protect individual privacy rights, how can we organise data and data privacy rights?

This is a very pertinent question in the current context. One important aspects of digital rights is to ensure control of individuals over their personal data. However, the concept of privacy as well as digital privacy is new to us.

In today's world both the government and the private sector have access to our personal data. The government collects and manages all our personal data right from our birth to death. Similarly, the private sector, in both the offline and online spaces, has access to our personal and sensitive data.

In Nepal, the government hasn't been taking the issue of digital privacy seriously. Various government bodies are violating individual data privacy. For instance, the Election Commission has made various data about the voters public in its portal which is considered to be sensitive. Similarly, other government agencies such as Transport Management Department, Credit Information Bureau have made public sensitive private information.

Likewise, we receive calls from different political parties to vote for their parties during the elections. In the private sector too, many organisations use our personal data; they call us either to sell their service or goods or for any other reason. What we have to understand is

a phone number in many cases is our digital ID. In many digital spaces, people don't know you by your name, they know you by your phone number. It is the same with email addresses. If anyone leaks your phone number, email address, citizenship number, or date of birth then your various other digital data will be at risk right now.

To implement the fundamental right to privacy guaranteed under Article 28 of the constitution, Nepal has adopted the Individual Privacy Act, 2018, which does help in some ways to protect individual privacy but not much with data protection. Thus, to ensure control of data subjects over the personal and sensitive data, privacy and data protection mechanism should ensure the rights of the data subject, responsibility of both the government and the private sector and make arrangement for ensuring accountability when violation of data privacy occurs.

How do you find the regulation of digital space by the government?

There are very few legal instruments to regulate the digital space at the moment. However, a number of new policy initiatives are being discussed at this moment. The government has recently adopted the National Cyber Security Policy, and it has been working on bringing the Information Technology Bill, that could not be passed by the last parliament. Government is also working on the new Telecommunication Bill and Cyber Security Bill. At the programme level, Mobile Device Management Service (MDMS) and "Telecommunication Traffic Monitoring and Fraud Control System" (TERAMOCS) have been proposed.

We observed the strong stakeholder reaction against MDMS and the TERAMOCS, citing the possible impact on privacy and data protection of the citizens. Recently, the prime minister ordered not to implement TERAMOCS after stakeholders expressed concerns about its possible

misuse and impact on right to privacy. This goes to show that the government brings new provisions without proper discussions with the public. Similarly, there is always a lack of public discourse whenever the government procures any technology. From the perspective of human rights, we believe that any technology should not violate human rights.

The government shouldn't violate citizens' rights online and impose restrictions without safeguards. In Nepal, new laws, policies and mechanisms relating to privacy, digital data, cyber security, phone tapping are proposed but without adequate public discourse or consultation. Few years back, a bill had been brought into discussion whereby the Special Services Act, 1985 would be amended to provide the National Investigation Department authorities broad powers to wiretap and intercept individuals' digital communications. Initially, a few members of parliament took a stand against it but later it was passed by the National Assembly. Then MDMS entered into the scene, which provides access to your call details, digital content and your location. Then TERAMOCS came and now NTA has proposed collecting e-KYC of the subscribers. It seems like we are having too many laws and policies without proper public consultation and questions are being raised on whether the government is moving towards the control mechanism.

Technology's pervasive presence raises concerns about government profiling, dependent on the government's nature and respect for human rights. Open public discussions are crucial to build trust and effectively implement policies. In a democracy, transparent policy formation, in line with constitutional rights and limitations, is essential for government credibility and stakeholder compliance.

Which section of the society is more vulnerable to digital rights violation?

In terms of security, we all are vulnerable as our data

is not safe so our digital rights are not secure. Our society is still patriarchal and is not very inclusive towards women. We can observe a similar trend in the online space as well. Similarly, the society isn't very inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community and a similar extension can be observed in the online world as well. Basically, the online space is a reflection of the offline space because it is the same people in the offline world who have shifted to the online realm. When it comes to digital security, we all are vulnerable but in terms of social and cultural harassment, stalking and suppression of voices, women and LGBTQIA+ community are more vulnerable. Similarly, people from certain professions are also prone to vulnerability. For instance, journalists, human rights defenders face threats online.

In terms of digital literacy, our older generation is more vulnerable as they aren't able to differentiate between actual content and spam. Even in developed countries like the United States, it is the older generation who is more prone to spam and phishing. And when we talk about risks, it is children who are at a greater risk from cybercrime and cyber violation. Digital exposure of children is increasing and so is the threat of early age infatuation. Similarly, luring through the online space is also very prevalent. Children and young people should be taught ways to stay safe online. Digital awareness is necessary. Another thing that concerns me is on whether we are capable of digital parenting. Are parents themselves capable of guiding their child in online space? So, all these things point towards the necessity for digital awareness and digital literacy.

How threatened is our national security in the digital space?

In recent times digital security has become an indispensable part of national security. We can take the example of the Russia-Ukraine war itself, where these two countries are also found

involved in cyber warfare. Even during the blockade of our southern borders, we had witnessed a cyber-war between Nepali and Indian hackers. So, if our digital infrastructure is not secure, it hampers our national security as well. If our critical infrastructure is not secure then obviously, we and our system can be attacked, which means we are at risk. Another aspect is that our critical infrastructure, if not secured properly, can be weaponised against another country by some other country. So, we must be very careful and we should immediately start building our capacity.

In the policy front, National Security Policy 2016 has slightly touched on cybersecurity aspect and the recently adopted National Cybersecurity Policy, in principle, has considered cybersecurity as a part of the national defence system. However, the policy has failed to articulate the coordination between the cyber security mechanism and national defence mechanism.

How can we minimise the digital divide?

The digital divide exists in different layers and levels in our country. There is divide based on gender, geographical regions, physical abilities, language barriers, etc. We need to consider ways to address the divides while adopting any ICT-based programmes or policies, otherwise there is a possibility of widening the access gap further.

For example, in our country, we are progressing with digitisation efforts, such as the implementation of a national ID card with provisions for various services, including healthcare. However, the concern arises when individuals who previously couldn't access these services offline find it even more challenging to access them online. In essence, digitisation is excluding certain groups and widening the divide. If not executed properly, it poses a greater threat.

Therefore, it is crucial for the government, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to carefully consider and address this aspect. **B**



AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE G20 DELHI SUMMIT



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Now that world leaders have departed after witnessing the grandeur and splendour of the G20 summit in New Delhi, it is time to take stock of the outcome – honestly and dispassionately.

The questions begging for answers are: (a) What has the Delhi summit actually resolved? (b) Can the Delhi Declaration be transformed into reality in a reasonable time frame? and (c) What has been G20's delivery record since its inception in 1999?

Keen observers of geo-politics point out some major achievements: (a) induction of the African Union into G20 as a permanent member, following which the group now represents 80% of the world's population (b) proposal to create a modern Spice Route connecting Europe, the Middle East and India through shipping and railways, thus offering an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative which already involves 149 countries through MoUs (c) launch of Global Biofuels Alliance wherein Brazil, India and USA – major producers and consumers of bio-fuels – will join hands along with other interested countries.

India's presidency ensured that all resolutions were passed with consensus even though the one on the Russia-Ukraine

conflict did not reflect the existing reality. Notably, G20's Bali summit last year had categorically criticised Russia's aggression.

The consensual passage of the resolutions was the outcome of backbreaking efforts of the sherpas – personal representatives of the leader of a member nation who play a critical role in negotiations and resolving conflicts. Like Nepal's renowned Sherpas, who guide mountaineers to Everest and other summits, sherpas help in tiding over contentious issues in conferences of global leaders like G7 or G20. Each member nation is represented by one sherpa. Sherpas representing different G20 countries spent over 200 hours at different locations in India well before the 2023 summit, striving for political consensus at the highest levels.

But G20's past shows that it has been big on talk and low on outcome. This is because the group's resolutions are not legally binding which is a systemic weakness. It was only in the years 2008 and 2009 that G20 played a notable role in dealing with the Global Financial Crisis. This prompted G20 to venture into diverse fields like climate change, gender issues, sustainable development, terrorism, security concerns, technology and financial inclusion, etcetera. The focus was lost and the group has eventually transformed into a Jack of all trades and master of none.

Way back in 2009, the group's summit in Pittsburgh resolved to gradually do away with fossil fuel subsidies. The Delhi summit has repeated the same. But New Delhi is right now hiking subsidies on cooking gas in view of the general election in 2024. The



summit also chose to avoid direct reference to prevent the world warming by 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial revolution level. This is being seen as a serious lapse at a time when extreme weather disasters are causing havoc around the globe.

However, the proposed India-Middle East-Europe shipping-railways project is a visionary one though it will require enormous funding. Involvement of Saudi Arabia and other petroleum-rich countries in the Middle East (West Asia) will be vital for the ambitious plan.

The corridor should boost opportunities for Nepali entrepreneurs and businesspersons. Export of our goods up to the gates of Europe via other buyer countries will become an easier and alluring proposition. We need to gear ourselves to make the most of the new avenues, beginning this hour. Even chance favours the prepared mind.

For the G20 to become more effective, it needs to devise a way cutting across the widely varying and often conflicting ideologies, economic models and world-views of its member countries. It has no permanent secretariat. The presidency moves from one member country to another annually. It

has been passed on to Brazil after the Delhi summit.

Continuity – the cornerstone of good governance in governments, international organizations like the UNO or G20, business corporations – has been largely absent in G20 as member countries have been found promoting their individual interests instead of the group's larger goals. With this being the background, the Delhi summit's slogan 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' appears farfetched. It is also being claimed that the 'mind-boggling' pomp and show during the Delhi summit was aimed at projecting Narendra Modi as a global leader with an eye on the forthcoming general elections. Allegedly over INR 4000 crores was spent. But it is being ignored that much of the infrastructure created for the Delhi summit will serve that city for a long time.

We have witnessed NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) and SAARC losing their relevance in today's world. G20 needs to move beyond grand pronouncements and deliver on its promises. A more manageable list of priorities needs to be devised so that action speaks for itself. That is imperative if G20 has any intention of leaving its footprints on time. **B**



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REGULATING E-COMMERCE

WILL IT CREATE A TRANSPARENT DIGITAL MARKET



In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, the government has taken proactive steps to regulate the burgeoning realm of online business. The cornerstone of this endeavour is the e-commerce bill, a legislative milestone aimed at bringing online commerce under the purview of legal recognition and taxation. Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Ramesh Rijal, presented the bill in the National Assembly on June 27, 2023. The e-commerce bill marks a significant shift in the way business conducted through electronic means is defined and governed in Nepal. It seeks to encompass all commercial transactions of goods or

services facilitated through information technology, collectively referred to as electronic commerce or e-commerce.

This comprehensive legislation covers a diverse spectrum of online activities including advertising, movies, television, music, over-the-top (OTT) services, data collection, cloud services, gaming, mobile apps, online markets, software supply, data services, image download services, education, consulting, skill development and training services, e-books, e-libraries, e-magazines and more. One of the key provisions of the e-commerce bill mandates that any individual, firm, company or organisation engaged in online business

must obtain prior permission from the relevant government agency.

Further, online business operators are required to establish an electronic platform which could take the form of websites, app, Facebook page, YouTube channel, or similar digital mediums. This platform is to serve as the digital storefront containing essential details such as the business name, address, registration information, head office location, as well as branch and outlet information for businesses with multiple locations. The bill outlines a meticulous process for listing businesses in the e-commerce domain. After establishing the electronic platform, businesses

must submit an application to the Department of Commerce, Supply and Consumer Protection for listing, which includes obtaining a unique listing number. This step serves as the gateway to conducting online business activities legally.

However, the e-commerce bill is not without its share of challenges. One notable concern is the lack of clear definitions for various terms, such as 'online business operator' and 'e-commerce'. This ambiguity can lead to confusion and differing interpretations, making it challenging for businesses to fully comprehend their obligations under the law. It is also one of the reasons some sellers hesitate to register their businesses.

Customers, too, may fear that access to a wide range of imported goods and brands could be restricted if vendors decide to cease operations due to regulatory complexities. Despite these challenges, the e-commerce bill represents a significant milestone in Nepal's journey toward establishing a regulated and transparent online business environment.

The government's steps to govern this dynamic sector is envisioned to pave the way for sustainable growth, consumer protection and greater accountability in e-commerce. As Nepal's online population continues to grow, the e-commerce bill may be seen as a step towards fostering a secure and thriving online business ecosystem. With the

right balance of regulation and innovation, the interests of both businesses and consumers can be safeguarded. This legislation acknowledges the transformative power of online commerce and is seen as a commitment to adapt to the changing economic landscape in the digital era.

It is essential to note that Nepal's digital landscape has seen an exponential rise in

social media usage. Platforms like Facebook lead the way with a staggering 9,857,000 users, encompassing 32.6% of the country's entire population. Instagram boasts 1,300,800 users, Twitter counts 2,300,000, YouTube claims 3,800,000 users, and Pinterest and LinkedIn are also carving their presence in the digital space. This rapid expansion of social media has prompted

digital marketing agencies to focus their efforts on these platforms, capitalising on their massive user bases to promote businesses. The ability to harness the power of social media for marketing purposes has become an invaluable asset.

Leveraging these platforms allows businesses to tap into vast audiences, giving them a significant advantage in reaching potential customers.

While the e-commerce bill represents a significant milestone, there is need for clarity on whether it will enhance e-commerce or create roadblocks.

In this edition of **Business 360** spoke to a few people working in the landscape of e-commerce to get their opinion on the development of e-commerce in Nepal and the recently introduced e-commerce bill.

AABHUSHAN KANSAKAR

Founder & CEO
Jeevee Health

How do you view the current state of online business in Nepal, and what challenges do you think the introduction of regulatory measures such as the e-commerce bill aims to address?

From my perspective, when we talk about the current state of online business in Nepal, it's important to recognise that while it might seem straightforward from an outsider's viewpoint, it's actually an incredibly complex and ever-evolving industry when you are on the inside. Nepal is still in its early stages of e-commerce development, and over the past few years, we have witnessed notable growth in this sector. However, this growth has brought along its own set of challenges.

One significant issue we have observed is the emergence of what seems like organised e-commerce companies gaining near-monopoly in the market. On the other hand, unorganised e-commerce remains largely unregulated. This duality has created a peculiar situation. On one hand, it has enabled many individuals to earn a decent livelihood and build small to mid-sized businesses, which is undeniably positive. These businesses, however, often struggle with scaling up due to the lack of a structured framework and support.

Conversely, the unregulated nature of e-commerce has also given rise to a host of problems. Customers frequently find themselves cheated with sub-

standard products or, in some cases, not receiving their orders after making payments. Such fraudulent practices tarnish the reputation of e-commerce as a whole and erode the trust of consumers.

The issue with monopolies in e-commerce, as I see it, is a double-edged sword. While they can indeed contribute to the development of strong infrastructure, they also have the potential to result in higher prices for consumers due to a lack of competition. Additionally, they may squeeze suppliers, leading to reduced profits or even losses for them. Striking the right balance between encouraging competition and promoting a healthy business environment is crucial.

In light of these challenges, the introduction of the e-commerce bill in Nepal is a significant step forward. While no bill is perfect and amendments are often needed, this legislation appears to be a genuine attempt to address some of the pressing issues in the industry. Specifically, it seeks to tackle the problems associated with unregulated commerce and the formation of monopolies. The e-commerce landscape in Nepal is at a crucial juncture. It has shown promise but it also faces inherent challenges. The e-commerce bill, with some necessary refinements, can play a pivotal role in bringing about a more organised, fair and customer-friendly e-commerce environment while also ensuring that businesses have the opportunity to thrive in a competitive marketplace.

What are the key advantages and disadvantages of the e-commerce bill's comprehensive approach in regulating a wide range of digital business activities in Nepal?

The e-commerce bill's comprehensive approach in regulating various digital business activities in Nepal comes with both distinct advantages and disadvantages. One of the key advantages of the e-commerce bill is that it establishes much-needed standards for the e-commerce industry. These regulations are designed to bring order and accountability to the sector, which, in turn, can lead to increased trust and loyalty among consumers towards online shopping platforms. When customers have confidence that their rights are protected, and they are dealing with reputable businesses, they are more likely to engage in online transactions. This boost in trust can drive the growth of the e-commerce market and benefit both consumers and businesses alike.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the potential disadvantages as well. One notable drawback of comprehensive regulation is that it can discourage risk-taking and innovation, particularly among entrepreneurs. When there are stringent rules and requirements in place, some individuals may be hesitant to enter the e-commerce market due to the perceived complexity and compliance burdens. This might limit the emergence of new and creative business models and ideas. It's worth noting, though, that the

tension between regulation and innovation is a common challenge in various industries. Innovation often thrives in unregulated or less-regulated markets, where entrepreneurs can experiment with novel concepts and approaches without being encumbered by bureaucratic requirements.

However, as the market matures and becomes significant, regulation becomes essential to protect consumers, ensure fair competition and maintain overall market stability. Also, the e-commerce bill represents an effort to strike a balance between fostering innovation and safeguarding the interests of consumers and businesses. While it may introduce some level of regulatory complexity, its overarching goal is to create a more trustworthy and secure environment for online commerce in Nepal. As with any regulation, its effectiveness will depend on its implementation and the willingness of all stakeholders to adapt to the changing landscape of the e-commerce industry.

With the e-commerce bill mandating government permission and detailed information disclosure, how might these regulations impact the growth and innovation potential of startups and small businesses in the digital space?

The e-commerce bill's provisions regarding government permission and detailed information disclosure can have a significant impact on startups and small businesses operating in the

digital space in Nepal. Firstly, let's look at the requirement for every e-commerce entity to register itself. On the surface, this might appear as a potential roadblock for startups and small businesses. However, it's important to note that if the government can streamline and simplify the registration process, it need not be overly burdensome. If the procedures are clear, straightforward and don't entail excessive red tape, it can actually be a step in the right direction.

Formal registration can bestow a sense of credibility to these businesses, potentially leading to increased trust among consumers. Trust is a valuable asset in the digital marketplace, and it can drive growth and customer loyalty.

Secondly, the demand for detailed product and seller information disclosure may appear challenging, especially for smaller businesses. However, as rightly pointed out, e-commerce is fundamentally a technology-driven field. From a technological standpoint, implementing such disclosures is entirely feasible. Many successful e-commerce platforms worldwide already require sellers to provide comprehensive information about their products and their identities. This transparency not only enhances consumer trust but also safeguards buyers from potential fraud. Now, let's address the issue of innovation. Regulations like these can indeed pose challenges to innovation, as they introduce new requirements and processes that businesses must comply with.

It's essential to understand that innovation often arises in response to challenges and demands. Startups and small businesses have a history of finding creative solutions to meet regulatory requirements while simultaneously improving their operations. For instance, they may develop innovative methods for verifying product quality and seller authenticity, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience. Regarding digital platforms



like Facebook Marketplace, it's true that these regulations may introduce complexities in their operations.

But it's a necessary step toward ensuring that even global tech giants adhere to local regulations. This can create a more level playing field for local startups and small businesses, fostering fair competition. So, while the e-commerce bill's regulations may initially appear daunting, they have the potential to drive growth and innovation in Nepal's digital space if implemented thoughtfully. The key lies in the government's ability to simplify administrative processes and support businesses in adapting to the changing landscape. Ultimately, these regulations aim to create

a more trustworthy and secure environment for e-commerce, which can benefit businesses and consumers alike in the long run.

Transparency and consumer protection are said to be the central themes of the e-commerce bill. How do you foresee these measures influencing consumer trust and confidence in online businesses?

The emphasis of the e-commerce bill on transparency and consumer protection is a crucial step that has the potential to significantly influence consumer trust and confidence in online businesses, especially in the context of Nepal. First and foremost, when consumers know that there are regulations in place that prioritise their protection

and rights, it instills a sense of security. It assures them that they have legal recourse in case of any issues, which is a fundamental aspect of building trust in online transactions. In a market where online shopping is still evolving, this sense of security can be a game-changer.

Moreover, the transparency measures mandated by the e-commerce bill are equally significant. When consumers have access to detailed information about products and sellers, it empowers them to make informed decisions. They can evaluate the credibility and reliability of the businesses they are dealing with, which is critical for building trust. Knowing the information they see online accurately reflects the product

and seller builds confidence that they are not falling victim to deceptive practices. One of the major challenges in Nepal has been the fear of being cheated by individuals or businesses masquerading as legitimate e-commerce entities. With the e-commerce bill in place, consumers can be more assured that they are dealing with genuine, registered e-commerce businesses that adhere to certain standards and regulations.

This assurance can go a long way in overcoming skepticism and encouraging more people to embrace online shopping. In summary, the emphasis on consumer protection and transparency in the e-commerce bill has the potential to be a turning point for online businesses in Nepal. It can help bridge the trust gap that has existed and continues to be a challenge in the online marketplace. When consumers feel secure and well-informed, they are more likely to engage in online transactions, which can drive the growth of e-commerce and benefit both consumers and businesses in the country.

The e-commerce bill places emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance. How might this affect the behaviour and practices of online businesses, and what are the challenges or benefits that could emerge as a result?

The emphasis of the e-commerce bill on electronic platforms' compliance is a significant aspect that can have both challenges and potential benefits for online businesses. However, there seems to be some misunderstanding and ambiguity in its interpretation. Firstly, it's important to clarify that if a business falls under the category of e-commerce, it essentially means they are conducting transactions in the digital realm. This typically involves having a registered website or app where customers can make purchases. This digital presence serves as a vital point of reference in case of any fraudulent or unlawful activities, allowing the law to identify the business responsible.

On the other hand, the e-commerce bill also recognises the provision for e-commerce sellers to operate through registered e-commerce platforms. In such cases, individual businesses may not necessarily need to maintain their own separate websites or apps. Instead, they can leverage established e-commerce platforms to reach their customers. This provision can be beneficial for smaller businesses that may find it challenging to maintain their own online presence. However, the ambiguity arises when we consider transactions occurring on social media platforms. For instance, if a business owns a physical store and utilises Facebook as a channel to reach customers, it might be perceived as similar to selling via WhatsApp, SMS or telemarketing. In this scenario, the e-commerce bill's requirements may not be as clear-cut.

The challenge here is that if a business does not have a physical location registered, which is typically a requirement for a registered company, they may find themselves in a legally uncertain position when conducting online transactions through social media. This ambiguity can lead to confusion about whether they are operating within the bounds of the law. However, a potential solution to this issue lies in the registration of social media platforms as recognised marketplaces in Nepal. As you rightly pointed out, if Facebook, for example, were to register itself as a marketplace in Nepal, it could provide a legitimate platform for businesses, including those without physical stores, to sell their products or services online.

This could clarify the status of such transactions and ensure compliance with the e-commerce bill. In conclusion, the e-commerce bill's emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance is a significant step towards regulating online businesses. However, the interpretation and application of these regulations, particularly in

the context of social media transactions, can be challenging and ambiguous. To address these issues and unlock the potential benefits, collaboration between the government and digital platforms, as well as clear guidance for businesses, is essential. This would not only ensure compliance but also facilitate the growth of the digital economy in Nepal.

As Nepal takes steps to regulate its digital marketplace, what broader implications do you think this has for the country's economic development and its positioning in the global digital landscape?

From my perspective, the efforts to regulate Nepal's digital marketplace carry significant implications for the country's economic development and its positioning in the global digital landscape.

Stimulation of Economic Growth: Effective regulations in the digital marketplace can act as catalysts for economic growth. By creating a structured and secure environment for online transactions, these regulations can foster the growth of e-commerce. As more businesses venture into the digital space and consumers gain confidence in online shopping, there is a potential for increased economic activity. This translates into higher sales for businesses, generating revenue for the government through taxes and fees, and contributing to overall economic development.

Job Creation: The growth of the digital marketplace has a direct impact on job creation. When businesses expand their online operations or new e-commerce startups emerge, there is a demand for a skilled workforce. Jobs are created in various sectors such as digital marketing, e-commerce management, logistics, customer service and more. Additionally, the growth of supporting industries like payment gateways and delivery services further enhances employment opportunities.

Enhanced Consumer Trust and Confidence: Regulations that address the disclosure of

seller and product information are essential to build and maintain consumer trust and confidence. When consumers have access to accurate and comprehensive information about products and sellers, they are more likely to engage in online transactions without fear of being misled or defrauded. This trust factor is critical for the sustained growth of e-commerce and ensures that consumers continue to participate in the digital marketplace.

Technological Adoption: A well-regulated digital marketplace encourages technological adoption within the country. Businesses are more willing to invest in technology and innovation when they operate in an environment that offers legal clarity and protection. This can lead to the development of new digital products and services, fostering innovation and growth in the technology sector.

Global Positioning: Nepal's efforts to establish a well-regulated digital marketplace can enhance its positioning in the global digital landscape. An environment with clear and reliable regulatory frameworks is attractive to international businesses and investors. It can potentially attract foreign direct investment and facilitate international trade, positioning Nepal as a player in the global digital economy.

In conclusion, the journey to regulate Nepal's digital marketplace is not only about creating a fair and secure environment for online businesses but also about unlocking its potential for economic growth and global competitiveness. Effective regulations can stimulate economic activity, create jobs, build consumer trust, drive technological innovation and position Nepal as a favourable destination for digital investments. These broader implications are pivotal for the country's economic development and its role in the ever-evolving global digital landscape.

SUSHMITA AGRAWAL

Founder
Bhumi Nepal

How do you view the current state of online business in Nepal, and what challenges do you think the introduction of regulatory measures such as the e-commerce bill, aims to address?

I view the current state of online business in Nepal as incredibly promising, especially in the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic. The Covid 19 crisis has acted as a catalyst, propelling online businesses to new heights. Consumers have become increasingly reliant on online shopping due to its convenience. The ability to purchase goods from the comfort of one's home has become a habit for many. Moreover, Nepal's impressive 78% internet penetration has played a significant role in connecting consumers from all corners of the country to online marketplaces. This widespread internet access has made it easier for consumers to access a wide range of products and services online, contributing to the growth of e-commerce in Nepal.

I am particularly excited about the introduction of the e-commerce bill in Nepal. This regulatory measure seems to address several critical aspects that are essential for the sustainable growth of online businesses in the country. Firstly, it aims to ensure consumer protection. As more people turn to online shopping, it's vital to have regulations in place that safeguard their rights and interests. Consumer trust is paramount in the e-commerce industry, and having measures in place to protect consumers from fraudulent activities and subpar products is crucial.

Secondly, the e-commerce bill focuses on cybersecurity which is of paramount importance in today's digital age. With increasing reliance on online platforms, the risk of cyberattacks and data breaches is ever-present. The bill seeks to establish guidelines and standards to protect both

businesses and consumers from cyber threats. Another significant aspect is payment solutions. The bill aims to streamline and regulate online payment systems, making transactions more secure and efficient. This is particularly important as online payment methods become increasingly popular among consumers.

Data protection is also a critical concern. With the growing amount of personal data being shared online, it's essential to have regulations in place to protect individuals' privacy and data security. The bill addresses these concerns by setting standards for data protection in the e-commerce sector. Additionally, it seeks to maintain global integrity by aligning with international standards and best practices in e-commerce. This is crucial for Nepal to be seen as a credible and reliable player in the global online marketplace.

Lastly, the bill includes provisions for monitoring online marketplaces. This will help ensure fair competition and prevent illegal activities on e-commerce platforms, promoting a level playing field for businesses. Further, the bill's focus on collecting taxes from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that operate online without proper registration is a commendable effort. This will help the government generate revenue while also ensuring that businesses operate within the legal framework.

In conclusion, the introduction of the e-commerce bill in Nepal is a significant step forward for the online business ecosystem in the country. It addresses critical issues such as consumer protection, cyber security, payment solutions, data protection, global integrity and marketplace monitoring. These measures are essential to foster a safe, trustworthy and thriving e-commerce environment in Nepal, benefiting both businesses and consumers alike.

What are the key advantages and disadvantages of the e-commerce bill's comprehensive approach in regulating a wide range of digital business activities in Nepal?

It has both advantages and disadvantages, and it's important to consider the potential impact on various stakeholders. One of the key advantages of regulating digital business activities is that it instills trust and a sense of security among customers. When consumers know there are regulations in place to protect their rights and interests, they are more likely to engage in online transactions with confidence. This can lead to increased consumer participation in the digital marketplace, ultimately benefiting businesses.

However, there are also several disadvantages to consider, especially when it comes to governing small digital business activities. Small startups often want to test the waters and experiment with their business ideas without committing to a full-fledged website and complex registration processes. For instance, imagine a farmer in Dhankuta who grows avocados and decides to sell them online. This farmer may want to start small, perhaps by posting about the avocados on social media. If orders start coming in, they can quickly fulfil them without getting tangled in the bureaucracy of website development and formal legal registration.

The concern here is that the introduction of these regulatory processes may deter aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly the youth of Nepal, who are already facing various challenges and demotivation. Many young individuals wish to try their hand at startups before making significant commitments, especially if they are unsure whether their products or ideas will be well-received by consumers. This experimentation phase is crucial for innovation and economic growth. If the e-commerce bill makes it mandatory for small businesses

to go through a complex registration and website-building process, it could create a barrier to entry. This might lead to talented young entrepreneurs abandoning their business ideas and leaving the country in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

It's essential to support and encourage the entrepreneurial spirit among the youth and provide them with an environment where they can test their ideas without unnecessary hindrances. While the e-commerce bill has its advantages in terms of consumer protection and trust-building, it should also consider the unique challenges faced by small digital businesses and startups in Nepal. Balancing regulation with flexibility for experimentation and innovation is crucial to ensure that the bill does not discourage young entrepreneurs from pursuing their dreams and contributing to the growth of the digital economy in the country.

With the e-commerce bill mandating government permission and detailed information disclosure, how might these regulations impact the growth and innovation potential of startups and small businesses in the digital space?

The regulations outlined in the e-commerce bill, particularly the requirements for government permission and detailed information disclosure, could have a significant impact on the growth and innovation potential of startups and small businesses in the digital space, and not necessarily in a positive way. One of the immediate concerns is that these regulations could deter small businesses from even attempting to innovate or enter the digital space. Imagine a scenario where a skilled baker, fresh out of a reputable bakery school, wants to test the waters in Nepal by selling their baked goods online before committing to the establishment of a

physical bakery or a large-scale online platform. The thought of navigating the bureaucratic process of obtaining government permission and disclosing detailed information might discourage them from pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams in Nepal.

The cost implications are another critical factor to consider. Startups and small businesses often operate on limited budgets. The expenses associated with complying with these regulatory requirements can be daunting. These financial burdens could divert resources away from innovation and business development, making it even more challenging for startups to compete and thrive in the digital space. Furthermore, the introduction of such regulations might force small businesses to rely heavily on big established e-commerce companies to explore online opportunities. These large corporations may have their own sets of rules and regulations, along with commission structures that may not be favourable to small and medium-sized enterprises. In such a scenario, SMEs could find themselves lost in the crowd, struggling to gain visibility and compete with established players who have more resources at their disposal.

Ultimately, these regulatory barriers could stifle the innovation potential of startups and small businesses in Nepal's digital space. Instead of fostering a diverse and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem, such regulations may inadvertently discourage new entrants and limit competition. It's crucial for policymakers to strike a balance between regulating the digital marketplace for consumer protection and ensuring that these regulations do not create insurmountable obstacles for aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses, which are often the drivers of innovation and economic growth.



Transparency and consumer protection are said to be the central themes of the e-commerce bill. How do you foresee these measures influencing consumer trust and confidence in online businesses?

In my opinion, the emphasis on transparency and consumer protection in the e-commerce bill is undoubtedly a positive step that will have a significant impact on consumer trust and confidence in

online businesses. With these measures in place, consumers will likely feel more secure and comfortable when engaging in online transactions. Knowing that there are regulations and safeguards to protect their rights and interests can make consumers more willing to trust online vendors without hesitation. This increased trust can lead to higher consumer participation in the e-commerce

space, ultimately benefiting online businesses.

Transparency is a key element of building trust. When consumers have access to clear information about products, prices and sellers, they are more likely to make informed decisions and have confidence in their online purchases. The bill's focus on requiring detailed

information disclosure by online businesses contributes to this transparency, which, in turn, enhances consumer trust. However, it's essential to acknowledge that there are potential concerns associated with the e-commerce bill. One notable concern is that the bill may appear as a liability and a burden to business owners, especially small businesses and startups. While consumer protection is vital, it's equally important to create an environment that supports sellers, particularly those who are just starting their online ventures.

The bill's regulatory requirements, including government permissions and detailed information disclosure, may impose additional costs and administrative burdens on businesses. For small businesses, these costs and administrative complexities could be particularly challenging to navigate. It's crucial for policymakers to strike a balance between consumer protection and the ease of doing business to ensure that the regulatory framework does not become overly burdensome for entrepreneurs. So, while the e-commerce bill's focus on transparency and consumer protection is expected to boost consumer trust and confidence in online businesses, there is a need to address the potential challenges it poses to business owners, especially small businesses. Striking the right balance between regulation and support for sellers is essential to create a fair and successful e-commerce environment that benefits both consumers and businesses alike.

The e-commerce bill places an emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance. How might this affect the behaviour and practices of online businesses, and what are the challenges or benefits that could emerge as a result?

The emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance in the e-commerce bill has the potential to significantly impact the behaviour and practices of

online businesses, leading to a mix of challenges and benefits. One notable advantage is that compliance with electronic platforms can streamline and simplify the operations of e-commerce businesses. Embracing electronic platforms can make various aspects of business management, from inventory tracking to order processing, more efficient. This ease of operation can contribute to business growth, as it allows online businesses to focus on providing quality products and services to consumers.

For customers, this emphasis on compliance can enhance trust and convenience. When consumers know that online businesses are following regulations and best practices, they are more likely to make purchases without concerns about data protection or cybersecurity. This trust is vital for building long-term relationships with customers and encouraging repeat business. Moreover, compliance can also help online businesses gain trust in global markets. Adhering to international standards and regulations can make it easier for businesses to expand their reach and engage with customers from around the world. This can be particularly advantageous for businesses looking to tap into the global e-commerce market.

However, there are challenges associated with this approach, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. The bill's requirements for compliance may pose a significant burden on SMEs, potentially leading to their closure. The need to register and maintain compliance at multiple levels and in various areas can be overwhelming and costly for smaller businesses with limited resources. This can create an uneven playing field, where only well-established e-commerce companies with substantial financial backing can thrive, while smaller players struggle to keep up. Additionally, the bill's focus on consumer perspectives may lead to complex and

stringent regulations that could be challenging for new businesses to understand and navigate. The compliance costs associated with meeting these regulations can be a significant barrier to entry for startups and entrepreneurs, deterring them from entering the e-commerce market.

In summary, the emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance in the e-commerce bill offers potential benefits in terms of simplifying business operations, enhancing customer trust and facilitating global expansion. However, it also presents challenges, particularly for SMEs, in terms of compliance costs and regulatory complexity. Striking a balance between consumer protection and the feasibility of doing business is crucial to ensure a fair and sustainable e-commerce environment.

As Nepal takes steps to regulate its digital marketplace, what broader implications do you think this has for the country's economic development and its positioning in the global digital landscape?

One of the most significant potential benefits is the boost to Nepal's economic growth. By establishing clear regulations and a regulatory framework for the digital marketplace, Nepal can create an environment that fosters confidence among global investors. This, in turn, can attract more investments into the country, leading to economic expansion. Increased investment can also result in the creation of jobs and opportunities, particularly among the youth, who are vital for driving innovation and progress.

The regulatory measures can provide stability for new innovators who wish to enter the digital space. With defined rules and regulations in place, entrepreneurs and startups can operate with a sense of certainty, knowing that they are working within a secure and supportive environment. This can encourage more individuals to venture into digital entrepreneurship, leading to a more dynamic

and competitive landscape. Moreover, the positive effects of these regulations can extend beyond Nepal's borders. As the digital marketplace becomes more regulated and secure, it can attract a global audience. Many Nepali citizens living abroad may want to use Nepal's e-commerce sites to send gifts or make purchases for their friends and loved ones back home. With trust in the security and reliability of these websites, they can engage in digital transactions without concerns about fraudulent practices, ultimately benefiting the Nepali economy through remittances and increased international trade.

Cybersecurity is another critical aspect. The regulation of digital payment transactions can enhance security, making online transactions more secure and reliable. This, in turn, can attract more international transactions, as consumers and businesses worldwide seek trustworthy digital platforms for their financial activities. The perception of Nepal as a secure and reliable digital marketplace can positively impact the country's global positioning in the digital landscape. So, Nepal's efforts to regulate its digital marketplace have the potential to bring about significant economic development and enhance the country's standing in the global digital landscape. These measures can attract investments, create jobs, provide stability for innovators, and boost international transactions. Additionally, cybersecurity measures can enhance trust and further contribute to Nepal's positive image in the global digital arena.

SAGAR DEV BHATTA

President
E-Business Association
of Nepal

How do you view the current state of online business in Nepal, and what challenges do you think the introduction of regulatory measures such as the e-commerce bill aims to address?

The current state of online business in Nepal can be described as being in its early stages, akin to infancy. Despite the enforcement of online business operations following the Covid 19 pandemic, we haven't reached the full potential of online commerce in Nepal. There's still much work to be done in terms of expanding and maturing the online business landscape. It's commendable that the government has introduced the e-commerce bill as a means of protecting consumers and preventing fraudulent activities. One of the primary issues in Nepal is that many transactions are conducted without proper documentation, such as bills. This lack of documentation increases the risk of people getting cheated in transactions. In this regard, the e-commerce bill seems to be addressing this problem correctly by emphasising the need for clear records and transparency in e-commerce transactions.

However, the bill appears to be primarily designed for established e-commerce companies like ours, which are already competing in the customer care and trust-building arena. It doesn't seem to account for informal transactions, such as those taking place on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. In many cases, individuals sell goods on these platforms without registering their businesses in e-commerce, and there are neither incentives nor regulations in place to encourage or control these activities. One of the challenges with the introduction of this regulatory measure is the requirement for registration with the Department of

Commerce. If a business is already registered with the department, it might seem redundant to register in multiple places for the same company. Furthermore, the bill doesn't cover the nuances of person-to-person (C2C) transactions. It only distinguishes between sellers and marketplaces, making it challenging for those who want to operate in both capacities from the same company. This could lead to confusion and additional administrative burdens.

Moreover, in a country like Nepal where many groceries, such as vegetables, are sold unpackaged, the bill's requirement for mentioning manufacturing dates for groceries poses challenges. It's often impossible to determine when certain grocery products like lentils were manufactured. Similarly, the bill's insistence on specifying expiry dates raises concerns, particularly in C2C transactions. For example, when purchasing a second-hand charger from a reseller, it's often impossible to discern the charger's manufacture date. In conclusion, while the e-commerce bill has the laudable goal of consumer protection, there are various practical challenges and ambiguities that need to be addressed. It appears that the bill focuses more on compliance and enforcement than on facilitating and promoting the growth of online businesses, particularly in the informal sector. Addressing these issues and providing more clarity in the bill's provisions will be essential to ensure its effectiveness in regulating the digital marketplace in Nepal.

What are the key advantages and disadvantages of the e-commerce bill's comprehensive approach in regulating a wide range of digital business activities in Nepal?

The e-commerce bill's comprehensive approach in regulating various digital business activities in Nepal has both advantages and disadvantages worth considering.

Advantages

Increased Tax

Collection: The introduction of this bill is a positive step as it has the potential to increase tax collection for the government. Tax revenue is crucial for funding various public services and development projects. It is essential for the government to focus on this aspect as well, especially given the growth of the digital economy.

Focus on Transparency:

The bill emphasises the need for transparent transactions and encourages the conversion of transactions into digital formats. This focus on transparency is vital for reducing tax evasion and fraudulent activities in the digital marketplace. It also helps in tracking and monitoring financial transactions.

Consumer Protection:

The bill includes provisions related to consumer protection, which is essential for building trust in the digital marketplace. Ensuring that consumers are protected from scams, fraudulent products and other malpractices is crucial for the growth of e-commerce.

Easy PAN Provision: The idea of providing an easy Permanent Account Number (PAN) to businesses is a valuable suggestion. Simplifying the process of obtaining a PAN number can encourage more businesses to comply with tax regulations. It streamlines the tax collection process.

Disadvantages

Compliance Burden:

The bill mandates that every online business operator must possess an electronic platform, which can take various forms, including websites, applications, social media pages and digital channels. This requirement might place an unnecessary burden on certain businesses. For instance, if someone is hired by a foreign company in Nepal to create digital content, it might not make sense to require them to create a website or application.

Lack of Clarity:

The bill does not provide clear definitions for various terms,

such as 'online business operator' and 'e-commerce'. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion and different interpretations, making it difficult for businesses to understand their obligations under the law.

Additional Compliance

Requirements: The bill adds an extra layer of compliance by mandating the listing of e-commerce businesses on a designated portal. This creates additional administrative work for e-commerce platforms, adding to the already existing compliance requirements such as company registration, industry registration and tax-related registrations. The accumulation of these requirements can be burdensome for businesses.

Repetition of Existing

Provisions: The bill appears to repeat provisions that already exist in other laws, such as tax payment regulations. This repetition can create confusion and redundancy in the legal framework, and it doesn't introduce new provisions to address specific issues related to e-commerce.

In conclusion, while the e-commerce bill has commendable objectives, such as increasing tax collection and ensuring consumer protection, it also presents challenges and shortcomings in its current form. There is a need for clarity in definitions, a reduction in unnecessary compliance burdens and a focus on addressing unique e-commerce-related issues rather than duplicating existing regulations. Balancing these aspects will be crucial to creating an effective and business-friendly regulatory framework for the digital marketplace in Nepal.

With the e-commerce bill mandating government permission and detailed information disclosure, how might these regulations impact the growth and innovation potential of startups and small businesses in the digital space?

It could have significant implications for the growth and innovation potential of

startups and small businesses in Nepal's digital space. While the intentions behind the bill such as regulating e-commerce and ensuring trustworthiness are commendable, there are several challenges and concerns that need to be addressed.

Cost Barrier: One of the major challenges highlighted by the bill is the cost barrier for startups and small businesses. The bill mandates the need for electronic platforms, which can be websites, applications or other digital infrastructures. Building and maintaining such platforms require substantial financial investments. For instance, the cost of developing a simple website can range from Rs 3 lakhs to Rs 5 lakhs. More advanced features, like search engines that utilise machine learning and AI, can push the costs to a range of Rs 50 lakhs to Rs 1 crore. These expenses can be prohibitive for startups and small businesses, making it difficult for them to compete with international players.

Competitive Disadvantage: The high costs associated with compliance to the bill can lead to a competitive disadvantage for smaller businesses. Established companies with more resources may find it easier to adapt to these regulations, while startups and small businesses struggle to meet the requirements. This could create a situation where larger companies grow even bigger, potentially stifling competition and innovation.

Limited Innovation: The bill's stringent requirements may also limit innovation and experimentation in the digital space. Startups and small businesses often rely on creative approaches and flexibility to experiment with new ideas. The financial and regulatory burden imposed by the bill may discourage these businesses from pursuing innovative projects, as they focus more on compliance and survival.

Demotivation for New Ventures: The bill's requirements, particularly the



upfront costs of infrastructure development, may demotivate individuals from starting new businesses. The prospect of having to meet these prerequisites before even opening for business can deter aspiring entrepreneurs, hindering the growth of the digital economy.

Redundancy with Existing Laws: There is a valid argument that the bill duplicates some aspects of existing laws, such as the Consumer Protection Act. These laws already provide mechanisms for addressing consumer grievances and ensuring product quality. Instead of creating a new regulatory framework, it might be more effective to strengthen and improve the enforcement of existing legislation.

In conclusion, while the e-commerce bill aims to regulate and promote trustworthy e-commerce practices, it must consider the practical challenges it poses for startups and small businesses in Nepal. Finding a balance between regulatory compliance

and fostering innovation is crucial. Additionally, exploring ways to reduce the financial burden on smaller businesses and aligning the bill's objectives with existing consumer protection laws could lead to a more effective and balanced regulatory environment for the country's digital marketplace.

Transparency and consumer protection are said to be the central themes of the e-commerce bill. How do you foresee these measures influencing consumer trust and confidence in online businesses?

The emphasis on transparency and consumer protection in the e-commerce bill raises some important questions about its actual impact on consumer trust and confidence in online businesses. While the intention to protect consumers is undoubtedly crucial, there are some concerns that need careful consideration. The introduction of e-commerce bill may seem like populist rhetoric. It creates a dilemma regarding which legal framework should be used

to address issues: the existing Consumer Protection Act or the new E-Commerce Bill. This confusion could potentially hinder effective consumer protection and enforcement. The bill appears to be more focused on scrutinising and penalising e-commerce companies rather than fostering a protective environment for online transactions. While penalties have their place in ensuring accountability, a balance should be struck to encourage legitimate businesses to thrive in the digital space.

The provision of imposing fines immediately after a mistake is made raises concerns, particularly when some mistakes could simply be human errors. It might be more reasonable to have a graduated approach that considers the nature and severity of the mistake before imposing fines. While consumer protection laws are essential, consumers also have a role to play in safeguarding their interests. They should be informed and aware of their rights and responsibilities when engaging in online transactions. Education and awareness campaigns can empower consumers to make informed choices.

The bill doesn't address the challenges faced by businesses related to hosting websites. Many businesses, especially smaller ones, have to spend substantial amounts on hosting websites hosted outside the country. This adds to the cost of doing business and should be taken into account when crafting supportive legislation. To truly benefit the e-commerce ecosystem and encourage its growth, the bill could include provisions that provide incentives for businesses to identify themselves as e-commerce companies. One approach could be setting yearly transaction targets for registration, allowing businesses selling through various digital platforms to qualify as e-commerce companies. Such recognition

can boost confidence and foster growth, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

In summary, while consumer protection is crucial, the e-commerce bill should strike a balance between scrutiny and support for the growth of the digital economy. This could involve clearer distinctions between existing laws and the new bill, a more graduated approach to penalties, and provisions that incentivise and recognise businesses in the digital space. By doing so, the bill can contribute to building consumer trust and confidence while fostering the growth of e-commerce, including the informal sector, and boosting small business confidence in Nepal's digital landscape.

The e-commerce bill places an emphasis on electronic platforms' compliance. How might this affect the behaviour and practices of online businesses, and what are the challenges or benefits that could emerge as a result?

The emphasis that the e-commerce bill places on electronic platforms' compliance raises several important questions and concerns regarding its practical implementation and potential impacts on online businesses. Firstly, the bill suggests that electronic platforms should be responsible for ensuring their compliance. However, this notion seems somewhat impractical. In the realm of online business, there are various ways to sell products or services. For instance, a business owner might have their own physical shop, operate a Facebook page, and also sell on established platforms like Daraz. This diversity in selling channels poses a challenge when it comes to addressing compliance. How can authorities effectively audit platform compliance in cases like this where businesses operate across multiple channels?

The bill lacks clarity on the audit process for platform compliance. It's essential to

define a clear and practical methodology for auditing and ensuring compliance across various types of electronic platforms. A well-defined process will help avoid confusion and ensure fairness in regulatory enforcement. When drafting new legislation for e-commerce, especially in places where the e-commerce industry is relatively new, it's crucial to anticipate what might happen over the next 20-25 years to provide a flexible regulatory framework that accommodates innovation. However, adding additional layers of information to the bill can make it complex and challenging to implement.

Moreover, there is a concern that the bill might inadvertently make certain business practices illegal. For instance, based on the information we have, if a business sells its products or services through platforms like Facebook, Instagram and other social media channels, it could be considered completely illegal under the bill. This raises significant concerns, as many small businesses rely on these social media platforms to reach their customers and conduct transactions. So, while the e-commerce bill's emphasis on electronic platform compliance is well-intentioned, it needs to address the practical complexities of online business operations. A clear and flexible regulatory framework that considers the diverse ways in which businesses operate in the digital space is essential. Additionally, careful thought should be given to how audits will be conducted and how compliance will be enforced to ensure that the bill achieves its intended goals without hindering innovation or placing undue burdens on businesses.

As Nepal takes steps to regulate its digital marketplace, what broader implications do you think this has for the country's economic development and its positioning in the global digital landscape?

As Nepal takes steps to regulate its digital marketplace,

there are several broader implications to consider for the country's economic development and its positioning in the global digital landscape. First and foremost, it would be beneficial for the government to create a more foreign investment-friendly environment for the digital marketplace. The current regulations, such as the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act 2019 (FITTA), have high capital requirements that can be challenging for foreign direct investment (FDI). Easing the investment threshold, even for amounts as low as \$20,000-30,000, could attract more FDI into the e-commerce sector, stimulating economic growth.

However, as we move towards a more digital marketplace, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed. These include concerns about safety, security and data breaches. It's crucial to establish robust cybersecurity measures to protect both businesses and consumers in the digital space. Additionally, there is a need to enhance digital literacy among the population. This includes educating the public on safe online practices, what to do and what not to do, and developing educational materials to facilitate digital literacy. Investment in digital literacy is vital for ensuring that everyone can participate in the digital economy. One key aspect of Nepal's economic landscape is the significant reliance on foreign remittances. Digital platforms have made it easier for people living abroad, with high spending power, to send gifts, electronics and other goods to their family members back home.

This has improved services and accessibility. However, building trust in these digital transactions is essential. There is a misconception that e-commerce deliveries should be flawless, but this is unrealistic. Even globally recognised platforms like Amazon can have defective

deliveries. Therefore, the focus should be on establishing clear return and refund policies to protect consumers' interests. While the e-commerce bill addresses various aspects, it would have been more effective if it had prioritised and emphasised return and refund policies. In Nepal, many orders are placed through various digital mediums, such as phones, Viber, WhatsApp, websites or apps, but payments are often made through cash on delivery. This creates difficulties in implementing consumer protection measures. To address this issue and promote consumer protection, there should be a greater emphasis on encouraging digital wallet and card payments.

These payment methods naturally enable consumer protection through the implementation of return and refund policies. Therefore, the government should focus on promoting digital payment methods to enhance consumer protection in e-commerce transactions. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of government focus on the use of invoices in digital transactions. Invoices play a crucial role in creating a transparent and accountable business environment. Encouraging businesses to use invoices in their digital transactions can further enhance the credibility of the digital marketplace. Thus, regulating the digital marketplace in Nepal holds immense potential for economic development and global positioning. To fully harness these benefits, the government should consider creating a more foreign investment-friendly environment, addressing cybersecurity concerns, investing in digital literacy, and prioritising return and refund policies to protect consumers. Additionally, promoting digital payment methods and emphasising the use of invoices can contribute to the growth and credibility of Nepal's digital landscape.

SUSTAINABILITY & OUTCOME OF INVESTMENT BOARD NEPAL REQUIRES A LEVEL OF AUTONOMY

Text: Pushpa Raj Acharya

Though there had been efforts since early 1990s to create a favourable investment regime to attract private investments including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Nepal started to make significant strides in this area after the establishment of Investment Board Nepal in 2011 to attract large scale investments as direct private investment and public-private partnership (PPP).

The Investment Board Nepal is the first reference point for large-scale investments of Rs six billion and above and for energy projects with capacity of 200MW and more. In its 12-year-long journey of promoting private investment and PPP, the board has approved investments worth Rs 1,249.80 billion for 42 projects; 28 energy and 14 non-energy projects.

Investment trend of last five years

Fiscal Year	Approved investment (in Rs crores)
2019/20	34,219.18
2020/21	13,581.31
2021/22	12,268.71
2022/23	16,759
2023/24*	19,876

(Source: *Till October of 2023/24)

The investments approved by IBN must be realised during the gestation period of the projects. "We are confident that the approved investment will be realised in due course of time during the implementation of the projects," said Sushil Bhatta, CEO of IBN, adding, "The reinvestment and additional

project investment that are going to be mobilised in the country by Dabur Nepal and SJVN Ltd are a few illustrative examples of improved investment climate."

According to him, Dabur Nepal, the first generation FDI venture in Nepal, has obtained approval to invest Rs 9.68 billion for capacity enhancement and product diversification. Similarly, SJVN Ltd has decided to develop another hydroelectric project - 669 MW Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project - after investing in the 900 MW Arun-3 Hydroelectric Project in the Arun Basin. The Project Development Agreement (PDA) of Lower Arun with the developer company, SLPDC (SJVN Lower Arun Power Development Company), was signed during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to India on June 1 this year.

Bhatta shares that IBN has streamlined projects with installed capacity of around 4,000MW including the 750MW West Seti Hydroelectric Project which is a national pride project and is in the study phase. Two hydel projects in the same river basin, the West Seti Hydroelectric Project and the 450MW Seti River (SR)-6 are currently preparing the Detailed Project Report (DPR). The study rights of these two projects were granted to NHPC Ltd, a government of India enterprise, and the DPRs are expected to be submitted by next year.

Currently, with the execution and completion of different projects, IBN has

brought investment worth Rs 525.42 billion towards realisation. Two large-scale cement manufacturers - Hongshi Shivam Cement and Huaxin Cement - have already commenced operations with capacity to produce 6,000 and 3,000 metric tonnes per day, respectively. Along with these two cement projects, Venture Waste to Energy project in Dharan has also come into operation.

Similarly, four energy projects namely: 900 MW Arun-3, 216 MW Upper Trishuli-1, 900 MW Upper Karnali and 669 MW Lower Arun Hydroelectric Projects are in the implementation phase. Among them, Arun-3 has achieved significant progress with 65% physical work and 15% transmission line component work being completed. The developer of Arun-3 has also been installing the 253-km-long cross-border transmission line of 400 kV from Arun-3 powerhouse Pukhuwa (Sankhuwasabha) to Sitamarhi of India via Bathnaha.

IBN - An institution of strategic importance

Many countries across the world have formed such investment promotion agencies (IPA) as the first reference point for private investment including FDI. The government of Nepal has also strengthened the institution with Public Private Partnership and Investment Act (PPPIA) 2019 and Public Private Partnership and Investment Regulation (PPPIR) 2020 that have replaced the

Investment Board Act 2011. The law has mandated IBN to function as an investment promotion agency and also as national PPP agency.

Chaired by the Prime Minister and with other key ministers as well as private sector representatives, IBN is an institution of strategic importance for fast-tracking projects of private investments and FDI. IBN's effective facilitation and handholding could lead us towards a prudent investment regime driven by robust institutions. IBN's One Stop Service (OSS) integrates various government agencies concerned with the investment ecosystem.

IBN was established as a vehicle for economic transformation by creating a single agency with a single-minded goal led by a powerful institution at the highest level of the government. Investment Board Nepal has been expanding its role in national development by executing infrastructure projects under PPP that are aligned with the national development goals.

A total of 55 board meetings have been held till October 2023. Since its establishment, IBN has been led by six prime ministers: Dr Baburam Bhattarai, Khil Raj Regmi, Late Sushil Koirala, KP Sharma Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Similarly, three chief executive officers have served in the institution, one term each so far, as the government appoints the CEO for four years through a competitive selection process.

IBN projects in operation and under construction

S.N.	Project Name	Stages of development	Project Cost (Rs in Crores)
1	Arun III HEP, 900 MW	Construction – more than 65% physical progress	14,476
2	Upper Trishuli-1 Hydropower, 216 MW	Construction	7,315.62
3	Hongshi-Shivam Cement Pvt Ltd	Operation	3,735.47
4	Huaxin Cement Narayani Pvt Ltd	Operation	1,482.6
5	Venture Waste to Energy, Dharan	Operation	24.44
6	Upper Karnali HEP, 900 MW	PDA implementation, financial closure stage	16,240
7	Lower Arun HEP, 669 MW	PDA signed during the state visit of the Prime Minister to India	9,268
	TOTAL		52,542.13

Major achievements

Date	Major achievements
2011	Establishment of IBN
2014	Project Development Agreement (PDA) of two critical hydel projects – Arun-3 and Upper Karnali Hydroelectric Project signed
2017	Project investment agreement with Hongshi Shivam Cement Nepal Investment Summit organised
2018	Project investment agreement with Huaxin Cement Narayani signed Commercial operation of the first phase (6,000 metric tonnes per day) of Hongshi Shivam Cement Project Foundation stone of Arun-3 Hydroelectric Project laid by Prime Ministers of Nepal and India
2019	Nepal Investment Summit, 2019 organised
2020	MoU signed for the study of 756 MW Tamor Storage Hydroelectric Project Common facility agreement of 900 MW Arun-3 Hydroelectric Project signed
2021	IBN Strategic Plan including Business Plan and IBN Project Bank Guideline unveiled System development and process improvement (standard operating procedures, web-based one stop service, knowledge management platform, project infrastructure mapping GIS system) Study report of China Nepal Friendship Industrial Park approved. MoU for development of 669 MW Lower Arun Project signed. MoU signed with Risen Energy Singapore JV Pvt Ltd to prepare Detailed Feasibility Study Report (DFSR) of 250 MW grid connected solar energy project with 40 MW battery storage plant in Nepal
2022	Commercial operation of Huaxin Cement Narayani (3,000 metric tonnes per day) begins. MoU with NHPC Ltd, a government of India enterprise, for study of 750 MW West Seti and 450 MW SR-6 Hydroelectric Project and issuance of survey licence Hosted Sustainable Infrastructure Investment Summit
2023	Project Development Agreement of 669 MW Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project signed. MoU signed with Dabur Nepal to reinvest Rs 9.68 billion for capacity enhancement and product diversification MoU with German-based DIAG Industries GmbH and Malaysia-based reNIKOLA Sdn Bhd to prepare Detailed Feasibility Study Report (DFSR) of chemical fertiliser plants in Nepal

Radhesh Pant, the first CEO of Investment Board Nepal, has said IBN was formed as the commercial face of the government to attract private investment including FDI to develop critical infrastructure to unlock the bottleneck in the country's

economic development process considering the requirements of huge investments in view of inadequate domestic capital in this regard.

As an investment promotion agency, Investment Board Nepal has been playing a pivotal role in promoting

Nepal as an attractive investment destination, creating a conducive environment for investments (domestic and international), providing one window service, and coordination among various investors. On the other hand, given the complexity and diversity of PPP, the IBN deals with such complexities on behalf of the government and over the years has specialised and acquired the specific skills required to handle this job.

Challenges

The Office of the Investment Board Nepal has been facing challenges related to sustainability as it lacks permanent staff. The human resources working here are civil servants and embedded consultants (supported by development partners). Due to the frequent transfer of government staff and temporarily hired professionals the board has not been able to fully fulfil its potential. "Having permanent staff is key to strengthen the institution as per its motive of being a PPP centre of excellence," said CEO Bhatta, adding, "IBN should be delegated authority to recruit permanent staff based on the O&M (organisation and management) survey that will be endorsed by the board and subsequently by the Cabinet."

He said that it is obvious that developing bankable PPP projects is resource intensive – time, capital and expertise – and we lack all of that. In its 12-year journey, the Office of the Investment Board Nepal has developed

its expertise, experience and the human resources who have served in the institution have developed their capacity with a vast experience of concession agreements drafting; project development and management; facilitation; effective coordination and prompt communication; and the promotion of projects, institution and the country as an integral part of investment promotion, among others. Considering the specialised and strategic nature of Investment Board Nepal, the institution must be accorded human resources (HR) and financial autonomy, according to experts. In this respect, the governing laws – PPPIA, 2019 and PPPIR, 2020 – must be amended.

Meanwhile, the Office of the Investment Board Nepal has already started efforts to amend the law and operationalise the IBN Fund. IBN has already set up a separate fund called IBN Fund, however, it has not been provided the autonomous right to operate the fund. Once HR and financial autonomy are granted, IBN will be able to recruit staff itself and operate the fund as well which are critical components to enable the Office of the Investment Board Nepal to create an environment to attract the best talent and strengthen the institution as the PPP centre of excellence by establishing a pool of experts, archiving the resources, garnering knowledge, enhancing capacity as well as creating networks of professionals in the country and beyond, and most importantly to develop a pipeline of well-studied/conceived, credible, sustainable and bankable PPP projects along with needful promotional activities in the country and beyond with proper showcasing, roadshows and investment marts, among others, to attract FDI in the country. **B**

BLEAK OUTLOOK OF THE ECONOMY INTENSIFIES

Text: Pushpa Raj Acharya

Amidst the slowdown of economic activities in the country, there are projections of sluggish economic growth in the ongoing fiscal year 2023-24. However, the government has anticipated achieving 6% growth in this fiscal through the implementation of the policies and programmes incorporated in the fiscal budget. But multilateral development partners – Asian Development Bank and World Bank Group – have projected the GDP (gross domestic product) growth to remain at 4.3% and 3.9%, respectively. Further, the most conservative forecast comes from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at 3.5%.

The Asian Development Bank, in its recently unveiled flagship publication, Asian Development Outlook (ADO), stated that external risks remain relatively well contained, and the target of maintaining foreign exchange reserves sufficient to sustain at least seven months of imports seems achievable. Amidst stable remittances and higher imports, the current account deficit is expected to widen to 1.8% of

GDP as growth revives in this fiscal.

However, it has flagged that downside risks to the economic outlook in fiscal 2023-24 may arise from more contractionary economic policy by the authorities to stem price rises given the uncertainties centred around geopolitical tensions. This may dampen consumption and domestic production and adversely affect growth.

The government has been facing trouble in estimated revenue mobilisation and this will certainly hit the capital expenditure target. Low spending on infrastructure development and capital formation gives less room for leveraging resources for expanding economic activities. It is obvious that the economy has plunged into a recession as we have witnessed negative growth for three consecutive quarters since the last quarter of fiscal 2021-22 including the first two quarters of fiscal 2022-23. According to former Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatiwada, “There are mainly two reasons for this particular situation. The first is political instability which has compelled the head of the government

to be confined in keeping the ruling alliance intact by any means and resultantly the government has not been able to take necessary initiatives to cope with the challenges of the economy. The second is due to the contractionary monetary policy of Nepal Rastra Bank.”

Economic growth over the years

Fiscal Year	Growth
2012/13	3.53%
2013/14	6.01%
2014/15	3.98%
2015/16	0.43%
2016/17	8.98%
2017/18	7.62%
2018/19	6.66%
2019/20	-2.37%
2020/21	4.84%
2021/22	5.61%
2022/23	1.86%
2023/24	?

In the last 10 years, low growth of below 4% has been witnessed in a majority of the fiscal years, and it was even

negative in one fiscal. The highest growth ever in fiscal 2016/17 of 8.98% was a base effect of the extremely low growth in 2015/16 caused by the undeclared blockade of India when the economy was already shattered by the earthquake. The country witnessed negative growth in fiscal 2019/20 after four decades due to the manifold impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic coupled with the Russia-Ukraine tensions triggered a slowdown in the global economy including Nepal.

Vicious cycle

Burgeoning trade deficit, low productivity and stagflation are considered structural challenges of the economy. These challenges require to be addressed with short-term, medium-term and long-term policy actions as boosting productivity, lowering trade deficit and creating employment are fundamental for the economy which has been gradually losing production base in manufacturing and agriculture. Production is highly inefficient

and total factor productivity is zero, as per Swarnim Wagle, a lawmaker and former Vice Chairperson of the National Planning Commission.

Nepal is in a vicious cycle of import-based consumption for revenue collection. A large chunk of the revenue is being collected at the customs points through the import of goods. Customs are the source of 50% of the tax revenue, according to the Department of Customs (DoC). Contraction in imports along with soaring commodity prices including that of fuel in the global market have discouraged consumption in the domestic market. In the meantime, Nepal Rastra Bank has enforced stringent provisions – cash margin and increased risk weightage of import credit – which has further plunged imports and also consumption.

Foreign trade

Trade indicators	First two months of 2022-23 (Rs in bn)	First two months of 2023-24 (Rs in bn)	Change
Import	273.59	259.75	-5.06%
Export	28.68	26.45	-7.79%
Trade deficit	244.92	233.30	-4.74%

(Source: Department of Customs)

The central bank has annulled the 50% to 100% cash margin provision while opening letter of credit (L/C) for import, however import has squeezed in this fiscal too. According to DoC, imports and exports slumped by 5.06% and 7.79% respectively in the first two months of this fiscal.

Revenue mobilisation from consumption-based import and redistribution of revenue through public expenditure increasingly tempts the government to facilitate consumption-based imports that are mainly fuelled by remittances. “There would not have been any issue if the government channelised public spending in productive capacity enhancement of the economy, job creation, and addressing the infrastructure bottleneck,” said Dr Dilli Raj Khanal, Senior Economist, adding, “However,

the quality of public spending is low. Improving the quality of public spending and developing efficiency of spending are critical to accelerating and sustaining economic development.”

Revenue mobilisation in the first quarter of this fiscal year is far lower than the target. According to the Financial Comptroller General Office (FCGO), around 14% of the annual target worth Rs 1,472.48 billion has been collected in the first quarter. The trend of revenue mobilisation shows the annual revenue collection target is highly unrealistic. In the last fiscal 2022-23, only Rs 1,031.69 billion or 70.73% of the annual revenue collection target worth Rs 1,458.61 billion was achieved. Despite revenue collection having unexpectedly plunged in the last fiscal, the government

has set an ambitious revenue collection target in this fiscal year too, which is a herculean task to achieve considering the economic situation.

Higher lending rate discouraging private investment

Lending rates are still in the higher territory. According to Nepal Rastra Bank, commercial banks have still kept a double-digit base rate. The weighted average lending rate of commercial banks is around 12.24%. Though banks have enough loanable funds to expand private sector credit, there is slackness in loan demand due to the high lending rates. The Monetary Policy 2023-24 expected private sector credit to expand by 15% compared to the previous fiscal year. Anal Raj Bhattarai, Financial Sector Analyst, said that the target of 11.5% credit

the government has anticipated achieving 6% growth in this fiscal. But multilateral development partners – Asian Development Bank and World Bank Group – have projected the GDP growth to remain at 4.3% and 3.9%, respectively. Further, the most conservative forecast comes from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at 3.5%

growth is a very ambitious one while taking into consideration the 3% credit growth in fiscal 2022-23. The central bank has recently amended the threshold of margin lending and real estate lending. However, such a piecemeal approach hardly addresses the deep-rooted problem of the economy. Amending its directives, NRB has raised the single obligator limit of margin loan to Rs 200 million from Rs 120 million. Further, the loan to value ratio against the collateral of land in Kathmandu valley has been increased to 50% from 40% earlier.

Way forward

There has been an improvement in external sector stability due to high remittance inflow, shrinking imports and disbursement of foreign loans and grants in foreign aid projects. The country has high foreign exchange reserves

in the current situation. The country's foreign currency reserves till mid-August stood at \$11.85 billion which is sufficient to cover the import of goods and services for 10.3 months. Similarly, the country received remittances worth Rs 116.02 billion in a single month till mid-August with 25.8% growth in remittances inflow.

Meanwhile, the balance of payments surplus was at Rs 32.90 billion. The current account surplus hovered at Rs 12.99 billion in mid-July to mid-August of this fiscal year as compared to a deficit of Rs 15.13 billion in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. It is reported that banks have a cushion of Rs 500 billion loanable funds and is flush with liquidity due to lack of credit expansion.

Rajesh Kumar Agrawal, President of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries, opined that the slackness and insular sentiment among the entrepreneurial mass should be quashed without delay and confidence must be boosted with positive intervention amidst the widespread pessimism for economic comeback. Most importantly, the precious resources that will be mobilised by the government as public spending should ensure efficiency and quality while being mobilised in productive capacity enhancement, infrastructure development of synergic impact and investment in human development. On the other hand, government spending should leverage the private sector investment to propel growth, assets and job creation as well as to provide stability in the economy to cope with the aforesaid structural challenges – burgeoning trade deficit, low productivity and stagflation. **B**

WHY NEARLY HALF OF HIGHER-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS SAY THEY ARE 'MORE RELIANT ON CREDIT CARDS THAN EVER'

If you're wondering why even high-income households are racking up record credit card debt to make ends meet, look to the central bankers and the cheerleaders of monetary expansion.



JONATHAN MILTİMÖREL IS THE EDITOR AT LARGE OF FEE.ORG AT THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED ON THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER.

David Brooks is sorry. The New York Times columnist admitted he “screwed up” when he posted on social media a photo of his meal — a burger,

fries, and a whiskey — at a New Jersey airport, along with these two sentences.

“This meal just cost me \$78 at Newark Airport,” tweeted Brooks. “This is why Americans think the economy is terrible.”

The post quickly went viral, reaching nearly 40 million views. This was bad news for Brooks since the restaurant and observant readers noted he must have been knocking back the bourbon to rack up a \$78 tab. (The burger and fries go for \$17, so either Brooks is a very generous tipper or he had a second double bourbon not pictured.)

In an interview with PBS’s William Brangham, Brooks admitted there’s a big difference between “an upper-middle-class journalist having a bourbon at an airport” and “a family living paycheck to paycheck.” He’s right, but data suggest a surprising percentage of well-to-do people are indeed living paycheck to paycheck.

A recent report from Moneywise cited a survey from the personal finance software company Quicken that found “32% of Americans earning at least \$150,000 a year are currently living paycheck to paycheck.”

This seems extraordinary, but recent data published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York show a surge in borrowing,

with credit card debt in the second quarter of 2023 eclipsing \$1 trillion for the first time. Despite high interest rates, people of all income levels are turning to credit cards to make ends meet. The New York Times recently noted that more than two-thirds of U.S. families now have credit cards, and balances were up more than 16% compared to the previous year.

Somewhat surprisingly, it is higher-income households that report being more reliant on credit cards than ever.

“The Quicken survey found that 46% of higher-income groups are more dependent on their credit cards than they’ve ever been,”

Moneywise reported, “compared to just 40% of middle- and 39% of lower-income groups.”

Meanwhile, a third of earners making more than \$150,000 a year say they won’t be able to pay off their balance this year, a costly move considering that LendingTree reports that the average interest rate on a credit card currently stands at 24.45%.

Mismanagement of credit cards is one reason millions of people are struggling with debt. And with student loan repayments set to resume on Oct. 1, the situation for millions of households is only going to get worse.

The reason so many are struggling is not a mystery, of course.

Inflation is often called “the silent killer” because it erodes wealth slowly. The Federal Reserve’s 2% inflation target is small enough that people don’t normally feel it in their grocery bills, but the runaway inflation people experienced in the last few years is another story, with inflation reaching 9% in the summer of 2022.

4 A recent report from Moneywise cited a survey from the personal finance software company Quicken that found “32% of Americans earning at least \$150,000 a year are currently living paycheck to paycheck.”

The difference between 2% inflation and 9% might not sound huge, but a simple financial planning calculator shows why former President Ronald Reagan once compared inflation to a violent mugging.

Assuming an annual inflation rate of 2%, a 35-year-old making \$50,000 a year would need to make \$90,568 just to maintain the same standard of living at retirement. At 9%, he’d have to make \$663,384!

This shows the pernicious power of inflation. It’s a force that has destroyed empires and ushered in tyrants. So, it invites a question: If inflation is so dangerous, why is it a feature of our economy?

Many will argue that the answer is found in the Fed’s “dual mandate”: Keep prices “stable” (what a lovely job they’ve done) and unemployment low. Three of the most celebrated economists in history, however, offer a better answer.

John Maynard Keynes, Milton Friedman, and Murray Rothbard disagreed on a great many things, but each recognized that central banks offered the government a stealthy method of expropriation.

“By a continuing process of inflation, government can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens,” Keynes, arguably the most influential economist of the 20th century, once observed.

Friedman and Rothbard made similar observations.

So if you’re wondering why even those in higher-income households are racking up record credit card debt to make ends meet — even those not knocking back \$30 bourbons — look to the central bankers and the cheerleaders of monetary expansion. **B**

Source: fee.org



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Rising Crude Oil Prices

As we enter the last quarter of 2023, it is interesting to observe that crude oil prices have been grabbing headlines once again. After experiencing 11-year high in 2022, the year started with the energy product commencing trade at \$80.40 per barrel. In the initial few months until May, the prices treaded a bearish trend with the value slumping to \$63.69 per barrel. However, since June, the price increased reaching the highest at \$95.02 per barrel (the highest since August 2022). The prices have breached the \$90 per barrel for the first time in a year and market analysts opine that there are no signs that the rise is slowing down.

While the increasing prices is a welcome relief for bullish traders, the rise in the price would negatively impact consumers, especially on gasoline and transportation costs. Although the US Federal Reserve's rate hikes have helped curb inflation effects, the other factors like oil supply dynamics are uncontrollable. In hindsight, increasing oil prices put the Fed's attempts to trigger a soft landing for the economy in jeopardy. Hence, the million-dollar questions are what are the driving factors behind the rise and will the prices return to the \$100 per barrel mark?

Pandemic Equation

Before the Covid 19 pandemic hit the news and influenced the global economy, prices mostly traded between the \$50-\$60 per barrel range for most of the year. When the pandemic hit the global economy in early 2020, lockdown orders negatively impacted oil demand, plunging prices to all-time lows. As a result, US oil production numbers fell three million barrels per day. However, as the lockdown restrictions eased and normalcy returned, demand rebounded faster than expected while supply lagged.



This imbalance in the demand and supply equation sparked a climb in oil prices that lasted for the next two years.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, many countries banned Russian oil imports in retaliation. However, removing this vital supply source strained the markets, propelling oil to break the \$100 per barrel mark in the ensuing months of 2022. In response, the US released a record amount from their Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) thereby boosting supply albeit temporarily. As per the figures, between the start of the invasion and now, 235 million barrels of oil have been released from the SPR, accounting for 40% of pre-invasion levels. This has apparently pushed oil prices back below the \$100 per barrel mark. Subsequently, prices fell below \$70 per barrel in the early half of 2023. But the SPR release was a risky strategy, simply because OPEC member nations could simply cut off production to compensate for the increase in supply from the

SPR. And, that's exactly what they reverted to.

OPEC+ Production Cuts

OPEC+ member nations responded by cutting production to compensate the release of the SPR by the USA. Russia and Saudi Arabia reduced output significantly, slowly tightening supplies again. Their recent announcements to continue with the decision through 2023 surprised the markets with prices rallying further. The major oil-producing economies will always work in their best interest and that involves pushing oil prices high without hindering the global economy and sparking the next global recession. Also, the devastating floods in Libya, one of the top 20 oil producers in the world, has prevented the export of oil to the global markets.

Supply Side

The US productions have continued to escalate and will almost inevitably set a new record for this year. But supply has not been enough to stay ahead of the rising global demand in combination with

production cuts from OPEC+ member nations. The other significant factor is that we are heading into lower-demand season in the US. Combining this with the rising US production will likely keep the US market well-endowed.

Limited Alternatives

The Biden administration has limited alternatives to rescue itself from further oil price spikes with the SPR now severely depleted after record releases. If Saudi Arabia and Russia want oil prices to rise above \$100 per barrel, it will only hurt President Biden's chances as he heads into election year.

Conclusion

OPEC+ supply reductions are the primary accelerator behind the renewed oil price momentum nearing the \$100 per barrel. If member nations do not change their stance, oil prices may continue to rally presenting challenges to contain inflation pressures and economic stability for the US and other economies around the world. **B**



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Beed's take on the market

During the review period of September 2 to 24, the Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) index rose by 49.57 points (+2.53%) to close at 2,010.35 points. The secondary market was able to recover slightly from its downward momentum, reaching its highest point of 2,029.78 points on September 21. Dividend announcements by listed companies, decreasing long-term interest rates, and the anticipation of favourable revisions in the margin lending policy by the central bank were some of the primary drivers that somewhat improved investor morale. However, despite the improvement in the index, the total market volume during the review period declined by 50.01% to reach Rs 19.151 billion compared to the previous review period.

During the review period, contrary to the previous review period, all 10 of the sub-indices landed in the green zone.

The Hydropower sub-index (+7.38%) was the biggest gainer as the share value of Shuvan Power (+Rs 303.9), Three Star Hydropower (+Rs 262), and Menchhiyam Hydropower (+Rs 78) increased substantially. The Finance sub-index (5.80%) witnessed rise in the share prices of Gurkhas Finance (+Rs 26), Progressive Finance (+Rs 25.6) and Guheshowori

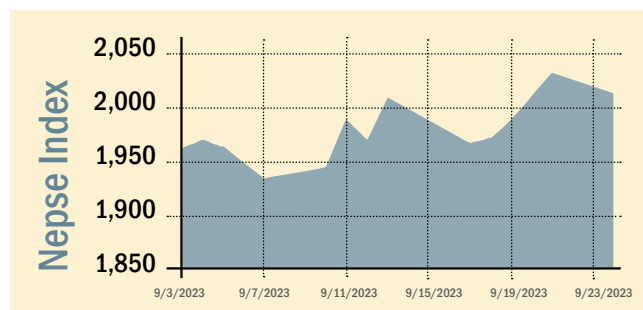
Merchant Bank and Finance (+Rs 25).

Development Bank sub-index (+4.87%) followed suit with increase in the share prices of Green Development Bank (+Rs 32), Lumbini Bikas Bank (+Rs 15.3), and Kamana Sewa Bikas Bank (+Rs 15.2). Microfinance sub-index (+4.10%) also went up as the share value of Himalayan Microfinance (+Rs 90), Swarojgar Microfinance (+Rs 87.9) and Mahila Microfinance (+Rs 70.8) inclined.

Manufacturing and Processing sub-index (+3.26%) increased with the share price of Unilever Nepal (+Rs 510), Himalayan Distillery (+Rs 54) and Shivam Cement (+Rs 36) going up. Non-Life Insurance sub-index (+1.95%) also surged with rise in the share value of Prabhu Insurance (+Rs 28.1), Nepal Insurance (+Rs 24.9) and IGI Prudential Insurance (+Rs 16).

Others sub-index (+1.85%) witnessed a rise in the share prices of Nepal Republic Media (+Rs 10), Nepal Telecom (+Rs 5.5), and Nepal Reinsurance (+Rs 1.2). Life Insurance sub-index (+1.03%) had an upswing with rise in the share value of Suryajyoti Life Insurance (+Rs 11), Himalayan Life Insurance (+Rs 2) and Nepal Life Insurance (+Rs 2).

Figure 1 NEPSE Index during the review period
(September 3 to 24, 2023)



Source: Nepal Stock Exchange

Further, Reliable Nepal Life Insurance and Sun Nepal Life Insurance started their trading in the review period closing at Rs 463.1 and Rs 455.9, respectively.

The Commercial Bank sub-index (+0.89%) followed suit with an expansion in the share value of NIC Asia (+Rs 8.9), Laxmi Sunrise (+Rs 8), and Nabil (+Rs 4.7). The Hotels and Tourism sub-index (+0.69%) saw no movement in the share prices of Soaltee Hotel, and a decrease in share prices of Oriental Hotels (-Rs 30.5) and City Hotel (-Rs 96).

News and Highlights

On the public issues front, SEBON did not approve any new Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) during the review period. SEBON, however, has put the IPO of two hydropower companies and one reinsurance company under preliminary review. The hydropower companies are Bhujung Hydropower (Rs 145.5 million) and Sanvi Energy (Rs 379 million). Their respective issue managers are Kumari Capital and Nepal SBI Merchant Banking. The reinsurance company, Himalayan Reinsurance worth Rs 6.24 billion, has been appointed NMB Capital as the issue manager.

Outlook

As the end of the first quarter of the current fiscal year and the holiday season approaching, investors are hopeful of increased economic activities having a positive reflection on the market post-festivities. However, the long-term interest rates for the month of Asoj did not decrease as anticipated with commercial banks continuing to increase their rates to protect deposits. This has dented investor morale. The future direction of the market is likely to depend on the anticipated revision of monetary policy measures in accordance with the new agreement between the central bank and the Ministry of Finance. **B**

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Table 1 Sub-indices during the review period
(September 3 to 24, 2023)

	September 3, 2023	September 24, 2023	% Change
NEPSE Index	1,960.78	2,010.35	2.53%
Sub-Indices			
Commercial Bank	1,251.73	1,262.88	0.89%
Development Bank	3,677.56	3,856.58	4.87%
Hydropower	1,990.08	2,137.03	7.38%
Finance	1,665.72	1,762.32	5.80%
Non-Life Insurance	10,406.08	10,609.12	1.95%
Others	1,438.04	1,464.58	1.85%
Hotels and Tourism	5,448.25	5,485.83	0.69%
Microfinance	3,555.18	3,700.80	4.10%
Life Insurance	10,681.25	10,791.71	1.03%
Manufacturing & Processing	5,117.25	5,284.32	3.26%

Source: Nepal Stock Exchange



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E-Commerce In Nepal: Protecting Data Amidst Growing Digital Use



Suman Siwakoti is an Associate at Pioneer Law Associates and deals with the firm's e-commerce and data law groups.

Internet and technology are synonymous today with people highly dependent on its usage for work, financial transactions and personal use. The pandemic escalated the use internet in the country especially for fund transfers and online shopping. And the trend continues to grow as more people get digital literate. However, this ease also exposes people to cyber security and privacy issues as data protection is still in a nascent stage in the country. It is a well-known fact that data is the new mineral in the technological world and every business is looking to leverage this.

Cyber and data security have become one of the biggest challenges faced by e-commerce businesses. Security breaches are a common occurrence, however, in Nepal, data breaches remain mostly unreported. This is perhaps because there are no notification requirements for such breach of data placed upon the data controller. Past examples show that no substantial action has been initiated by law enforcement authorities or the users themselves.

Why is protection against data breaches not considered a major part of business investment in Nepal? The

answer is (1) lack of awareness among people about the importance of their personal data, and (2) no strict data privacy laws in Nepal.

It is impossible to fully explain the significance of data security in e-commerce, as the application of data evolves quite rapidly. Large consumer data is gathered by online merchants, including transaction histories and personal information. Businesses value this information because it helps them improve their goods and services. It is also used for showing personalised advertisement and automated decision making (often without obtaining consent). Data is similarly important for business competitors or actors of malicious intent. E-commerce platforms are exposed to a variety of risks without strong data security safeguards, including hacking, data breaches, identity theft and financial fraud.

lead to reputational damage, financial losses and legal liabilities. Customers may lose trust in a company that fails to protect their data, resulting in decreased sales and long-term reputational harm. Misuse of private data of individuals makes them vulnerable to criminal attacks. Moreover, in Nepal, the lack of mandatory reporting requirements for data breaches means that businesses may not be held accountable for their slack security practices, further undermining the incentive to invest in cybersecurity.

To address these challenges and ensure the security of e-commerce in Nepal, several critical steps should be taken:

a. Awareness: The foremost thing is to educate public about the importance of data security and privacy. Individuals should be aware of the risks associated with sharing their personal information online and take steps to protect themselves.



Data breaches can have severe consequences for both businesses and individuals. For businesses, a breach can

b. Privacy Legislation: Nepal must develop and implement comprehensive data protection legislation that sets

clear standards for the collection, storage and use of personal data. Such laws should also mandate the reporting of data breaches, cross-border transfer security and penalties for non-compliance.

c. Digital Security:

There should be legislative mandate to adopt minimum security standards, and further e-commerce businesses must also adopt industry best practices for data security like data encryption, regular security audits and employee training on cybersecurity awareness.

d. Government Oversight:

Government agencies should play a proactive role in monitoring and enforcing data protection regulations. This includes conducting audits, investigating breaches and imposing penalties on non-compliant organisations.

e. Notification Rights:

Individuals should have the right to know how their data is being used and the option to opt out of certain data collection practices. Transparency and consent should be at the forefront of data processing.

All in all, the internet has changed the way we live and direct business, with internet businesses being a huge recipient of this transformation. Nonetheless, the accommodation of e-commerce in Nepal accompanies its own arrangement of difficulties, especially in the domain of information security and assurance. The absence of mindfulness about data privacy and the shortfall of strong regulations in Nepal have established a circumstance where data breaches are not addressed adequately, ultimately presenting threat to organisations and concerned individuals. **B**



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Bikalpa: Changing The Discourse From Politics To Political Economy

Poverty, populism, illiberal policies and bad governance are the biggest problems of this country, which has hindered the growth of the nation and forced people to leave the country to seek opportunities elsewhere. Poverty is the biggest problem here and no single country on the planet has achieved prosperity without creating a conducive environment for trade and entrepreneurship. With the objective to solve these existing problems and create a discourse for a free and prosperous Nepal, Basanta Ahikari founded Bikalpa – an Alternative.

The story dates back to 2011 when Nepal was on the verge of making a new constitution. The individual and economic liberties of Nepali citizens were restricted by frequent political shutdowns. Students were deprived from going to schools and colleges, factories and workplaces were forcefully closed, private properties were vandalised and damaged, livelihood was badly affected, and the country was facing a state of anarchy.

When Adhikari returned from South Korea in 2011 after completing his Master's degree from Sungkonghoe University, he was frustrated by the situation and decided to speak out against it. He started promoting 'Gari Khana Deu', a campaign initiated by Samriddhi Foundation in eastern Nepal that promotes three fundamental values of 'Security of Life and Property', 'Rule of Law', and 'Freedom to Enterprises'. He came to the realisation that these values were crucial for human survival and economic growth of the country and felt someone like him needed to work for the livelihood and ease of doing business issues which ensure prosperity.



BASANTA ADHIKARI
DIRECTOR, BIKALPA – AN ALTERNATIVE

In July 2013, he left Biratnagar for Kathmandu to do an internship with Samriddhi Foundation and to learn about how think tanks work. There he met Robin Sitoula, Executive Director of Samriddhi Foundation, who inspired and encouraged him. “He also helped me to network with like-minded people and organisations which has been greatly helpful to me till date,” says Adhikari. In January 2014, he started Bikalpa from a one-room office in Biratnagar to work for the values of Freedom, Entrepreneurship and Public Policy that encompasses common people. There were many organisations who were working on many different issues in eastern Nepal, but hardly any of them were working to reduce poverty through entrepreneurship.

Bikalpa is doing policy research, advocacy and educational programmes to amplify its mission and bring change at the local level. As a grassroots organisation, it is engaging local and provincial government stakeholders, including business agencies and civil society members on the reform agendas in eastern Nepal. Throughout the year, Bikalpa organises different activities like entrepreneur talk programmes, training, workshops, camps, discussions and campaign activities to educate and engage young people on the values of freedom and entrepreneurship.

Bootcamp is one of the activities of Bikalpa’s educational strategy. Every year it directly reaches over 2,000 youths and works through them to amplify its mission. It creates compelling messages on public policy issues and reaches a large Nepali audience with their regular visual and media contents. Many of its videos have been very successful and have helped to create the needed discourse in the region. This also has helped to enhance Bikalpa’s visibility and reputation both inside the country and outside of it.



We do not have to limit ourselves with our past, we humans can create our circumstances with our choices

As per the Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom 2023, Nepal ranks 142 out of 184 countries, which suggests the country is not a good destination for doing business. “If Nepal wants to prosper economically, we need more economic freedom that ensures individual and economic growth of the country,” says Adhikari. Through the Campaign for Economic Freedom, Bikalpa identifies poverty as Nepal’s primary problem and envisions a prosperous Nepal through the policies of economic freedom. The campaign aims to change the conversation from politics to political economy and start discussions about the need to create a business-friendly environment within the country. To ensure economic freedom, the campaign advocates for four key areas – Freedom to Enterprise; Rule of Law and Security of Life and Property; Freedom of Choice, and Competition; and Accountable and Limited Government.

Starting or running a think tank in Nepal is not easy, says Adhikari. Being a local organisation and working with limited resources is always a challenge. Getting qualified human resources and retaining them is another big issue. Being an economically backward society, local fundraising and organisation sustainability always remain a challenge.



Working with policy makers, businesspeople, civil servants and civil society and bringing them together to consensus on reform agendas is also never easy. “As Bikalpa is a mission and value-based organisation which works to promote the values of freedom and prosperity, there are very few like-minded people and organisations to align with,” he adds. However, he states that Bikalpa’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. Bikalpa won the 2019 and 2023 Asia Liberty Award. It was also the finalist for 2021 Think Tank Shark Tank in Miami, USA, finalist for Smart Bets in 2022 in New York, and finalist for Light Camera Liberty Award in 2017 and in 2020.

“However, it was not an easy journey. Registering the organisation itself was a lengthy process. I had to rely on a third party for compliance documents and organisation registration. I had to travel to Kathmandu to register my organisation as there was no registration office in Biratnagar,” he shares. “Additionally, before I got into the ‘Gari Khana Deu’ campaign and Bikalpa, I was influenced by populist and left-wing political views. Marx, Mao, Lenin, Stalin were my role models,” he says, adding that things changed when he started reading alternative sources and libertarian values.

“I believe it is never late; when I started this organisation, I was already 36 years old. I was very new to the idea of individual, economic freedom, entrepreneurship, and policy

issues. I was not certain if my ideas would work because I came from a different background. But my teammates and hard work helped to build the organisation and reach the stage where we are at now. We do not have to limit ourselves with our past, we humans can create our circumstances with our choices,” Adhikari reflects.

Despite the numerous challenges, Bikalpa has been able to bring policy revolutions that have actually brought exemplary changes. In July 2022, Bikalpa’s advocacy effort helped to ease the service delivery of the motorbike licence in Biratnagar. Prior to that, it was very difficult to obtain a motorbike licence due to red tape and procedural hurdles. Now riders can obtain their licence within two weeks. Similarly, in 2016, when the municipal authorities of Biratnagar imposed a registration quota for e-rickshaws, it took away the livelihood opportunities of many e-rickshaw drivers. Bikalpa’s continuous advocacy helped to increase the registration quota in Biratnagar which made it possible for many e-rickshaw drivers and their families to pursue their livelihood.

To augment the mission, Bikalpa has started its media outlet called Bikalpa Khabar. Some months back, Bikalpa Khabar’s media advocacy helped provide justice to Lal Bahadur BK who was detained in jail for eight months on false charges since January 5. **B**

Navigating The Sea Of Smartphones: A Buyer's Guide To Making The Right Choice

The rapid evolution of technology in recent decades has significantly transformed our lives and perhaps nothing exemplifies this transformation more than the ubiquitous smartphone. In a relatively short span of time, these pocket-sized marvels have become an integral part of our daily existence, revolutionising communication, entertainment, work, and even our personal relationships. The smartphone landscape is constantly evolving, driven by relentless innovation and intense competition among manufacturers.

Brands such as Xiaomi, Apple, Redmi, Samsung, Huawei, OnePlus, and countless others have emerged as global giants in the industry, each striving to outdo the other with cutting-edge features, sleek designs and of course, the promise of enhanced user experiences. This intense competition has led to an astonishing proliferation of smartphone options, catering to a vast spectrum of consumer preferences and budgets. While this variety is undoubtedly a boon for consumers, it also poses a significant challenge. How does one navigate the sea of smartphones and make the right choice?

Here are some key considerations that buyers should weigh carefully before investing in a new smartphone. While these considerations may seem daunting at first, they are crucial to ensuring that your chosen device aligns with your needs and expectations.

Camera: Capturing Memories

Smartphone cameras have become central to our daily lives, capturing memories



and moments. Understanding camera specifications can help you make an informed choice. While megapixels matter, they aren't the sole determinant of photo quality. Consider other factors like aperture size and image processing capabilities for a better assessment of camera performance. A wider aperture allows more light to enter the camera sensor, resulting in better low-light performance and more pronounced background blur (bokeh) in photos.

Optical image stabilisation, night mode and AI enhancements can significantly improve camera capabilities. Look for these features to capture stunning photos in various conditions. Assess both front and rear camera specifications if selfies and video calls are important to you. Some devices prioritise one over the other.

Display: The Window to Your Digital World

The display of a smartphone is the primary means through which users interact with their devices and access content. Understanding the nuances of the display can help buyers make informed decisions. The screen size is a critical consideration. Larger screens are great for media consumption and multitasking, while smaller screens are more compact and suitable for one-handed use. Choose a size that aligns with your preferences and usage patterns. The display resolution determines the clarity of images and text. Higher resolutions offer crisper visuals which is particularly important if you enjoy watching high-definition videos or reading on your phone. Full HD (1080p) and Quad HD (1440p) resolutions are common for premium smartphones.

Different display technologies impact factors like brightness, colour accuracy

and power efficiency. OLED and AMOLED displays offer vibrant colours and deep blacks, while LCD displays are more power-efficient. Consider which technology suits your preferences and needs. The refresh rate determines how smoothly content scrolls and how responsive the screen feels. Higher refresh rates (eg, 90Hz, 120Hz, or even 144Hz) result in smoother animations and gaming experiences. Gamers and enthusiasts may prioritise devices with higher refresh rates. High Dynamic Range (HDR) support enhances the visual quality of photos, videos and games by providing a wider range of colours and contrast. Look for smartphones that support HDR content for a more immersive experience.

Battery Life: Ensuring Your Device Keeps Up

Battery life is a pivotal aspect of any smartphone, as it directly impacts how long you can use your device on a single



charge. The battery capacity, measured in milliampere-hours (mAh), indicates the amount of energy the battery can store. A higher capacity generally translates to longer battery life. However, other factors, such as software optimisation, also play a role. Fast charging technology allows your smartphone to charge quickly, which is especially useful when you are in a hurry. Look for devices with fast-charging capabilities, such as Qualcomm Quick Charge or USB Power Delivery, to minimise downtime.

Likewise, wireless charging eliminates the need for cumbersome cables. While it may be slower than wired charging, the convenience it offers can be a significant advantage for some users. Ensure your smartphone supports wireless charging if this feature is essential to you. Smartphone manufacturers often implement power-saving features and modes to extend battery life. Research whether a particular device has efficient power management features to make the most of its battery.

Storage: Don't Run Out of Space

Running out of storage space on your smartphone can be frustrating, so understanding storage options is crucial. Internal storage is the built-in storage capacity of the device where apps, photos, videos and other data are stored. Choose a device with an adequate amount of internal storage based on your media and app usage. Some smartphones offer expandable storage via micro-SD cards. This is a valuable feature for users who want flexibility in adding more storage without upgrading to a higher-priced model. Many smartphones come with cloud storage options that allow you to store files remotely. Consider whether the manufacturer offers free cloud storage or integrates seamlessly with popular cloud services.

Security: Protecting Your Data

In an age of increasing digital threats, smartphone security is paramount. Ensure your device keeps your data safe: fingerprint sensors provide quick and secure access to your device. They are typically located on the front or back of the phone. Facial recognition technology scans your face to unlock the device. Look for devices with advanced facial recognition for better security.

Manufacturers often release software updates and security patches to protect against vulnerabilities. Ensure that your chosen smartphone regularly receives updates to stay secure. Modern smartphones should offer data encryption to safeguard your personal information. Verify that your device uses encryption to protect your data from unauthorised access.

Build: Durability Matters

The build quality of a smartphone impacts its durability and how it feels in your hand. Smartphones can be made of various materials, including glass, metal, plastic or a combination. Consider the trade-offs between aesthetics and durability when choosing a material. Phones with water and dust resistance ratings (eg, IP68) are better equipped to withstand accidents and environmental factors. If you are prone to spills or use your phone in challenging conditions, this feature is valuable. Invest in protective cases and screen protectors to shield your smartphone from accidental drops and scratches. These accessories can extend the life of your device.

Processor: Power Under the Hood

The smartphone's processor determines its overall performance, affecting multitasking, app loading times and gaming. The CPU (Central Processing Unit) is responsible for general tasks and app execution. Look for devices with high-quality CPUs from

reputable manufacturers like Qualcomm or Apple for snappy performance. A powerful GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) is crucial for gaming and graphics-intensive tasks. Gamers should prioritise smartphones with capable GPUs. RAM (Random Access Memory) affects how many apps you can run simultaneously without slowdowns. Choose a device with sufficient RAM based on your multitasking needs.

Price of the Smartphone: Finding the Right Balance

Price is often a key factor in choosing a smartphone. Finding the right balance between features and budget is crucial. Set a clear budget based on your financial capacity. Stick to it to avoid overspending on features you may not need. Consider mid-range smartphones, as they often provide a balance between performance and

price. They can be excellent value for money. Evaluate whether the premium features of flagship phones are worth the extra cost for your specific use case. Mid-range phones may offer a similar experience at a lower price point. Explore the option of purchasing used or refurbished smartphones from reputable sellers if you are looking for cost-effective alternatives to brand new models.

As the smartphone market continues to expand, smartphone buyers are presented with an array of choices. By meticulously considering these aspects of display, battery life, storage, security, build quality, processor, camera and price, you can make well-informed decisions that align with your unique needs and preferences, ensuring that the smartphone you choose enhances your digital experience and everyday life. **B**

“Even after batteries expire, they can be utilised as an alternative source of power supply. Nissan has done considerable work on this front and we have used expired batteries as a source of power supply in numerous villages across India. Nissan has adopted a holistic approach to battery management and I can assure you that we will be doing the same in Nepal”



Raghunath Nair

Head, South Asia Sales Unit, Nissan Motor India

As the head of the South Asia Sales Unit of Nissan Motor India, Raghunath Nair looks after exports from India and the overall sales and marketing of South Asia. He has been associated with Nissan for over 20 years across various verticals, positions and countries. He holds an MBA degree from the University of Calicut and is certified in Executive General Management from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Nair was in Nepal recently to unveil the Nissan Magnite AMT at the NADA Auto Show and spoke to **Business**

360 about the recent launch and future strategies of the company. Excerpts:

Could you tell us about the global automobile industry in general, and the market in Nepal particularly?

Currently, electric vehicles (EVs) have started dominating the global automobile market. Even in Nepal, we can see that EVs have gradually started making a mark. I believe that certain policies introduced by the government here have helped boost the EV market in the country. This is possible because the EV market is quite nascent and the overall

market is also comparatively smaller, so when the number of customers is small it is easier to make the desired changes. I would say Nepal is blessed with this fact. Having said that, I must add that a lot still needs to be done here but looking at the current trend I am definite Nepal will make remarkable changes in the near future.

Do you think Nepal is ready for electric vehicles?

Nepal has huge hydropower surplus so from this point of view, this is one of the biggest assets. However, the government must prioritise

developing other advanced and accessible infrastructure like charging stations that are necessary for the growth of the EV market. Realising the importance of infrastructure, Nissan has brought a new e-POWER technology of extremes. e-POWER is Nissan's unique electric-drive powertrain that integrates a gasoline engine and motor achieving an overwhelming power and excellent quietness of high level. I would also like to announce that Nepal is going to be the first market in South Asia to get this extreme power.

There are concerns on how batteries will be managed once they expire. How is Nissan looking into this aspect?

We give safety and security the utmost priority and it is in Nissan's culture to be prepared beforehand. For instance, prior to launching our model Leaf, we had made all the preparations and taken care of the entire technological aspects which made it easier for us to manage everything. Till date, we have faced no issue regarding the Leaf's battery. We provide an eight-year warranty on our batteries and we also ensure that other infrastructural needs associated with our vehicles are properly managed.

I believe Nepal has the potential to develop the required infrastructure, especially in battery management. Moreover, the batteries may not be fit for automobiles when they expire but can still be used as inverters. So, even after batteries expire, they can be utilised as an alternative source of power supply. Nissan has done considerable work on this front and we have used expired batteries as a source of power supply in numerous villages across India. Nissan has adopted a holistic approach to battery management and I can assure you that we will be doing the same in Nepal.

How do you assess your collaboration with your local partner, Pioneer Moto Corp?

Our collaboration with Pioneer Moto Corp has been amazing. Pioneer has made concerted efforts to establish a reliable network of dealer throughout Nepal. There are many joint initiatives we have launched with Pioneer and it has been a genuine partner.

For example, we recently introduced a joint initiative called Customer and Sales Satisfaction and this collaborative effort did really pay off well. The vision that the Pioneer management has and its unwavering support in our initiatives have helped



us maintain consistency with regards to Nissan's brand recognition.

We at Nissan always put our customers first and Pioneer has adopted and prioritised this strategy. It has understood the importance of customer satisfaction and worked really hard. I am happy with the relationship that we have developed with Pioneer over the years.

What I would also like to mention is we consider every market as an important one and we do not provide any special services as such to only a few certain markets. We have set global standards for all the services we deliver, so whatever services that Nissan in India provides we provide the same in Nepal too.

Nissan recently signed UN empowerment principles. How do you implement this in Nepal and India?

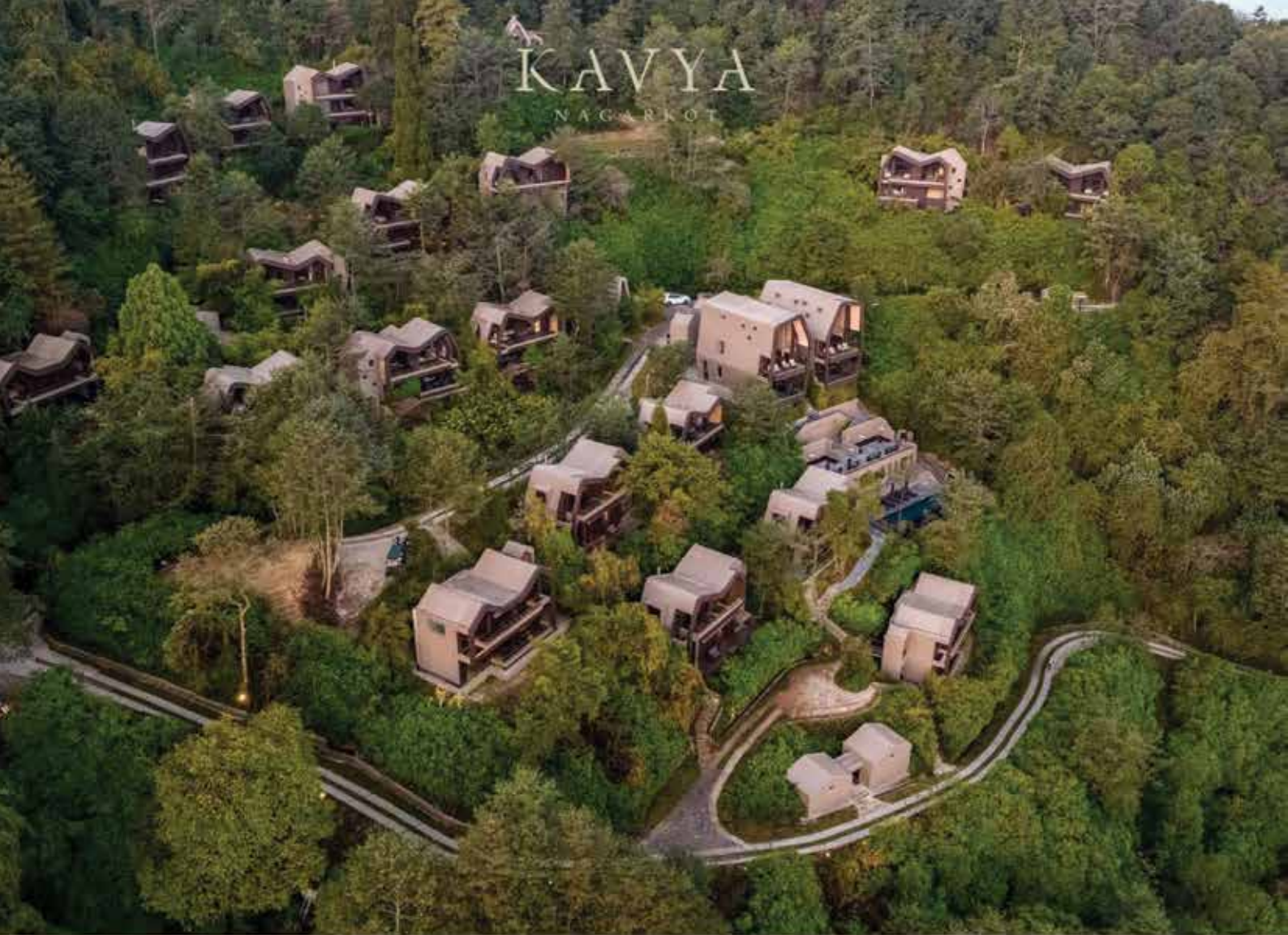
Nissan has always prioritised and accorded importance to diversity. Diversity is one of the key pillars of the strategy that we have adopted across the region. Nissan has long supported initiatives that provide opportunities for women's advancement in a traditionally male-dominated industry. These include specific female talent development initiatives, a woman leadership programme, and a framework to support employees balancing work with childcare, nursing care and other activities. As a result, the percentage of female managers at Nissan globally has increased from 6.7% in 2008 to 15.5% as of March 2023.

Women comprise 10.4% of Nissan's management in Japan, where the manufacturing

industry average is 5.1% for companies with 1,000 or more employees. If you look into the workforce in Nepal, yesterday I was talking to the wholesale executives and the top three executives were female. Therefore, we are trying our best to become more inclusive and diverse.

Tell us about some recent and future launches?

Recently, we launched Magnite AMT which is an automatic variant of Magnite. This was launched during the NADA Auto Show 2023. We also will be launching the globally successful model X Trail e-POWER within 2023. If we talk about our future launches in Nepal, we have eight new models coming in the market of which we have two new SUVs, two EVs and the facelift of our most loved SUV in Nepal, Magnite. **B**



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Nepal's economy anticipated to grow by 4.3% in FY 2024: ADB

Nepal's economy is anticipated to grow by 4.3% (at market prices) in fiscal year FY 2024, up from an estimated growth of 1.9% in FY 2023, according to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) September 2023, the latest edition of the Asian Development Bank's flagship publication.

With moderation in inflation and comfortable foreign exchange reserves, Nepal Rastra Bank adjusted its monetary policy stance by lowering the policy rate by 50 basis points to 6.5%, which is expected to help lower commercial interest rates and stimulate economic activities. Services are expected to perform well with expansions coming from real estate, wholesale and retail trade and accommodation and food services. Agriculture growth may however decelerate owing to deficient rainfall in June and erratic weather patterns, further aggravated by lumpy skin outbreak in cattle.

The report projects annual average inflation to fall to 6.2% in FY 2024 from 7.7% in FY 2023 on subdued oil price increases and a decline in inflation in India, Nepal's main source of import.

"Despite some progress in restoring price and external sector stability, fiscal challenges persist. While the estimated fiscal deficit for FY 2024 is moderate at 2.4% of GDP, much lower than the deficit of 6.1% in FY 2023, the actual deficit could be substantially higher if the government does not meet its ambitious revenue target for FY 2024," said ADB Principal Economist for Nepal, Jan Hansen.

External risks remain relatively well contained. Considering the recent trends and the central bank's prudent monetary policy stance, the target of maintaining foreign exchange reserves sufficient to sustain at least seven months of imports seems achievable.

Amid stable remittances and higher imports, the current account deficit is expected to widen to 1.8% of GDP as growth revives in FY 2024.

Downside risks to the economic outlook in FY 2024 may arise from a more contractionary economic policy by the authorities to stem price rises given the uncertainties centred around geopolitical tensions. This may dampen consumption and domestic production and adversely affect growth.

Balance of Payments at surplus of Rs 32.90 billion, foreign exchange reserves at Rs 1,573.12 billion

According to the current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation of Nepal based on the first month's data ending mid-August, 2023/24, published by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the year-on-year (y-o-y) consumer price inflation stood at 7.52% in mid-August 2023 compared to 8.26% a year ago. Food and beverage inflation stood at 8.95% whereas non-food and service inflation stood at 6.42% in the review month.

Under the food and beverage category, y-o-y price index of spices sub-category increased 45.56%, cereal grains and their products 13.20%, milk products and eggs 12.19%, restaurants and hotels 11.05% and vegetables 10.80% while y-o-y price index of ghee and oil sub-category decreased 15.13%. Under the non-food and services category, y-o-y price index of recreation and culture sub-category increased 15.55%, education 9.10%, housing and utilities 6.93% and furnishing and household equipment 6.79% while y-o-y price index of transportation sub-category dropped 0.81%.

In the review month, y-o-y consumer price inflation in Kathmandu Valley, Terai, Hill and Mountain region surged to 8.50%, 6.70%, 7.50% and 11.46%, respectively. Inflation in these regions was 7.39%, 8.72%, 8.64% and 6.64%, respectively a year ago.

As per the report, during the first month of 2023/24, merchandise exports decreased 8.7% to Rs 13.53 billion compared to a decrease of 28.7% in the same period of the previous year. Destination-wise, exports to India fell 20.8% whereas exports to China and other countries increased 527.2% and 15.4%, respectively. Exports of cardamom, zinc sheet, particle board, juice, ginger, among others increased whereas exports of palm oil, soyabean oil, medicine (ayurvedic), pashmina, silverware and jewellery, among others decreased in the review period.

Similarly, in the review month, merchandise imports decreased 1.6% to Rs 129.24 billion compared to a drop of 12.9% a year ago. Destination-wise, imports from India and China rose 3.3% and 17%, respectively while imports from other countries decreased 23.1%. Imports of rice/paddy, MS wire rod, bars, coils and others, chemical fertiliser, hot rolled sheet in coil, electrical goods, among others increased whereas imports of petroleum products, crude soyabean oil, crude palm oil, medicine, MS billet, among others decreased in the review period.

Trade deficit decreased 0.7% to Rs 115.71 billion during the first month of 2023/24. Such deficit had declined 10.4% in the corresponding period of the previous year. The export-import ratio decreased to 10.5% in the review period from 11.3% in the corresponding period of the previous year.

During the first month of 2023/24, merchandise imports from India by paying convertible foreign currency amounted to Rs 17.30 billion. Such amount was Rs 13.37 billion in the same period of the previous year.

Meanwhile, remittance inflows increased 25.8% to Rs 116.02 billion in the review period compared to an increase of 20.3% in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, remittance inflows increased 21.5% to \$879.8 million in the review period

compared to an increase of 12.5% in the same period of the previous year.

The number of Nepali workers (institutional and individual-new) taking approval for foreign employment decreased 12.1% to 39,152 in the review period. The number of Nepali workers (renew entry) taking approval for foreign employment dropped 19.5% to 16,423 in the review period. It had increased 75.4% in the same period of the previous year.

As per the Central Bank data, the current account remained at a surplus of Rs 12.99 billion in the review period against a deficit of Rs 15.13 billion in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, the current account registered a surplus of \$98.5 million in the review period against a deficit of \$118.8 million in the same period last year.

In the review period, capital transfer decreased 65.9% to Rs 272.6 million and net foreign direct investment (FDI) remained a positive of Rs 2.65 billion. In the same period of the previous year, capital transfer amounted to Rs 800.3 million and net FDI amounted to a negative of Rs 1.40 billion.

Meanwhile, the Balance of Payments (BOP) remained at a surplus of Rs 32.90 billion in the review period against a deficit of Rs 19.76 billion in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, the BOP remained at a surplus of \$249.5 million in the review period against a deficit of \$155.2 million in the same period of the previous year.

The gross foreign exchange reserves increased 2.2% to Rs 1,573.12 billion in mid-August 2023 from Rs 1,539.36 billion in mid-July 2023. In US dollar terms, the gross foreign exchange reserves increased 1.2% to \$11.85 billion in mid-August 2023 from \$11.71 billion in mid-July 2023.

Of the total foreign exchange reserves, reserves held by NRB increased 2.9% to Rs 1,385.24 billion in mid-August 2023 from Rs 1,345.78



billion in mid-July 2023. Reserves held by banks and financial institutions (except NRB) decreased 2.9% to Rs 187.89 billion in mid-August 2023 from Rs 193.59 billion in mid-July 2023. The share of Indian currency in total reserves stood at 21.9% in mid-August 2023.

Based on the imports of first month of 2023/24, the foreign exchange reserves of the banking sector are sufficient to cover the prospective merchandise imports of 12.5 months, and merchandise and services imports of 10.3 months.

World Bank approves \$20 million grant to support Nepal's agriculture and nutrition sector

The World Bank has approved a grant of \$20 million to support the Government of Nepal's Food and Nutrition Security Enhancement Project (FANSEP)-II. The project aims to benefit more than 55,000 small-holder farmers in 16 rural municipalities in Nepal through improved agricultural productivity and nutrition practices and scaling up climate-smart agriculture practices.

"Achieving food and nutrition security and reducing poverty are national goals of the Government of Nepal, in line with commitments to realise the Sustainable Development Goals and Zero Hunger Challenge," said Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. "This operation supports the Government of Nepal's efforts to enhance productivity and livelihoods and improve nutrition security of marginalised communities," he added.

FANSEP-II has three components: climate and nutrition smart agricultural technology adaptation and dissemination, income generation and diversification, and improving nutrition

security. It aims to build on the success of the Food and Nutrition Security Enhancement Project, which is closing on June 30, 2024.

"The operation, financed by a grant from the Global Agriculture Food Security Programme (GAFSP) Trust Fund, is aligned with Nepal's green, resilient, and inclusive development agenda and will help build the resilience of marginalised communities in food insecure and disaster-affected areas of Nepal," stated Karishma Wasti, World Bank's Project Task Team Leader.

It will take some time to see results of reforms in economy: Minister Mahat



Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat has said it will take some time to see the results of the reforms made in the economy. Speaking at an interaction with the newly elected executive committee of the Society of Economic Journalists-Nepal (SEJON), he said, "It's painful, it's slow, but it's in a positive direction. There are some difficulties in implementation, so it will take time to see the results as expected." He added when all concerned agencies fulfil their responsibilities, it will not take time to rise above the existing problems.

Minister Mahat cited investors' reluctance as the reason for not being able to invest in the capital market and real estate even though remittances have increased. He asserted that because of the loose policy in the past, loans that flowed to unproductive sectors are now in trouble. The finance minister also informed that the government has prepared to form a high-level committee to study the problems seen in revenue and make preparations for budget management.

On the occasion, Finance Minister Mahat lamented the trend of the large number of students going abroad to study after completing higher secondary education. He stated that the practice of drawing a conclusion that there are no opportunities in Nepal is wrong. "There is opportunity in the country and there are a lot of things to be done," he said and reiterated that going abroad does not guarantee a bright future. However, he said youths who have left the country for foreign employment have helped in the national economy.

Talking about the private sector's concern over the agitation and demands made by contractors' associations, the FM said the issues mentioned by the private sector are not necessarily correct. "The contractors were protesting saying that the government had not paid them and even started an agitation, however, in essence, their demand was for an extension of the contract time or deadlines," he pointed out. "We may have shortcomings, but just because the private sector says something it doesn't mean everything is right."

Regarding reforms, the minister said there are more problems in implementation than the announcements.

SEJON President Sujan Oli welcomed the steps taken by the FM in the structural reform of the economy and informed that SEJON will extend support to overcome the challenges in the economy.

CNI hosts 'President's Banquet', unveils its latest publication, Chronicle



The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) hosted the 'President's Banquet' in Kathmandu on September 15. The event saw the attendance of more than 500 distinguished

guests and industry leaders. The chief guest was Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

CNI President, Rajesh Kumar Agrawal, delivered the welcome address, emphasising the pivotal role played by the private sector in propelling Nepal's economic development. President Agrawal stressed the need for precise policies to advance the country's progress. He underscored CNI's role as an advocate for Nepali industries, actively lobbying for policies and regulations that bolster industrial growth. In his speech, President Agrawal highlighted CNI's active participation in the formulation of industrial policies and strategies in close collaboration with the government, aiming to create an environment conducive to businesses. He advocated for promoting local production, asserting its significance in fostering self-sufficiency.

Further, Agrawal revealed CNI's commitment to research and information dissemination tailored to the industrial sector. This initiative seeks to empower businesses with knowledge, enabling them to make well-informed decisions crucial for their growth and success.

CNI's efforts to foster trade partnerships were also discussed. The private sector organisation is actively working to promote exports and attract foreign investments, contributing to Nepal's economic expansion. CNI President Agrawal urged all stakeholders to join forces in enhancing the national economic situation. He cautioned that in the absence of active government involvement, Nepal's economic status could deteriorate significantly.

On the occasion, Prime Minister Dahal unveiled CNI's latest publication, the 'Chronicle'. In his address, PM Dahal assured the private sector of the government's unwavering support for economic and social prosperity in Nepal. He praised CNI's diligent efforts in improving the country's economic situation.

Fonepay, NIPL launch cross-border QR payment between Nepal and India

Fonepay Payment Service, Nepal's largest payment network and NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL), the international arm of the National Payment Corporation of India, is now ready to launch the first cross-border QR payment between Nepal and India. This historic unveiling took place at the Global Fintech Fest 2023, a global gathering of fintech visionaries, thought leaders and innovators.

This collaboration between Fonepay and NIPL will empower millions of citizens of both nations, to securely and conveniently make instant payments through QR codes across various stores by using the mobile application certified by Fonepay and NPCI.

Both companies have now completed operational preparations and technological integration is in the final process after which the companies can offer the service to their issuing and acquiring members and enable their consumers and merchants to enjoy the service.

The strategic partnership between the two companies will provide a considerable boost to the digital payment ecosystem in both countries and will prove to be a major stepping stone for wider reach in the international market.

Chairperson of Fonepay and President of F1Soft Group, Biswas Dhakal, said, "This remarkable launch marks a significant step towards enhancing financial connectivity between Nepal and India by leveraging technology for the benefit of our citizens. I am confident that this initiative will significantly contribute to the growth of trade, tourism and economic relations between both countries, ultimately fostering prosperity and development."

Fonepay is a Payment System Operator facilitating inter-bank person-to-person

(P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions through its interoperable network and mobile platforms. Fonepay is regulated by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) and was the first mobile payment network to be licensed by NRB as Payment System Operator (PSO).

Fonepay is actively contributing towards a cashless economy by enabling fast, secure, and reliable digital payment services to customers as well as businesses through partner banks and wallets. Fonepay is a subsidiary of the F1Soft Group.

NIPL, an international arm of NPCI is devoted to the deployment of NPCI's indigenous, successful Real-Time Payment System – Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Card Scheme – RuPay, outside India.

NPCI has successfully developed and proved its product and technological capabilities in the domestic market by transforming payment segment in India.

With its knowledge and experience, NIPL can offer several countries to establish a 'real-time payment system' or 'domestic card scheme' in their own country with technological assistance through licensing, consulting for building real-time payment system. NIPL is focused on transforming payments across the globe with the use of technology and innovation.

Newly appointed Finance Secretary Pushkar assumes office



Newly appointed Finance Secretary Krishna Hari Pushkar assumed office on September 21. Addressing a programme, Finance Secretary Pushkar stressed the need for bureaucracy to put in optimal

efforts to resolve problems in the country's economy.

He said, "The government has entrusted me with the responsibility of looking after affairs of the Ministry as Finance Secretary at a time when the economy is facing challenges. I have taken this very seriously. I have the confidence that we can resolve the challenges being faced by the state. We will resolve challenges of the economy at any cost," he said. "Results can be achieved through coordination and implementation of the disaster policy and monetary policy", he opined. Previously, Pushkar served as revenue secretary of the Finance Ministry.

Bhutan Airlines resumes flights to Kathmandu



Bhutan Airlines (B3), Bhutan's first private airline headquartered in Thimphu, represented in Nepal by Society International Travel Services as the official General Sales Agent has announced the resumption of scheduled flights from September 16. It will have four weekly flights on Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Bhutan Airways flights will resume flights on the Paro-Kathmandu-Delhi route and vice versa.

Through this resumption of scheduled flights, Bhutan Airlines will resume its operations to Kathmandu, which had been halted due to the global Covid 19 pandemic.

With Bhutan Airlines operations first starting in 2013, the company intends to tap the opportunity within the Nepali market by strengthening the presence of its services and facilities towards the Nepali people in line with the airline's continuous commitment to boost tourism connectivity to and from Bhutan - the land of

the thunder dragon.

Pema Nadik, CEO of Bhutan Airlines, expressed his happiness at the resumption of Bhutan Airlines' operations to Kathmandu.

Turkish Airlines awarded World Class honour for third time



Turkish Airlines, most valuable brand of Türkiye, has been honoured with the World Class award for the third time by APEX (Airline Passenger Experience Association), one of the leading organisations in the aviation industry.

During the APEX/IFSA Global Expo held in California, Turkish Airlines received the World Class award in recognition of its global leadership in guest experience and service quality in the aviation industry.

Accepting the award on behalf of Turkish Airlines, Chief Marketing Officer Ahmet Olmüstür stated, "We are glad to receive the highly prestigious APEX World Class award given by APEX, one of the world's foremost airline evaluation organisations. This award showcases the result of the dedication shown by all our team members."

On the award, APEX CEO Dr Joe Leader stated, "In the world of elevated aviation experiences, Turkish Airlines soars above five-star airline status as a paragon of excellence winning as one of the only prestigious 2024 APEX World Class airlines in the world. Through rigorous and professionally executed audits across both economy and business class service, our team gleaned insightful revelations about their unwavering commitment to passenger experience, safety, and sustainability advancements."



Turkish Airlines is among the select few airline companies recognised by APEX, which makes its evaluations by assessing safety, well-being, sustainability and service-guest experience criteria. Comprehensive assessments conducted by aviation industry professionals confirm that Turkish Airlines has reached global standards in these areas. Furthermore, the APEX World Class award reaffirms Turkish Airlines' commitment to continuously elevate the guest experience and maintain service quality at the highest level.

Investment Board Nepal marks 12th anniversary



Investment Board Nepal (IBN) held a ceremony to mark its 12th anniversary in Kathmandu, on September 8. Addressing the programme, IBN Chairperson Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal urged the private sector and foreign investors to invest in Nepal saying that the opportunities for investment in areas of comparative and competitive advantages are vast.

PM Dahal said that the government was committed to effective handholding of investment during the entire business lifecycle. "We value every investment, large or small, and we are committed to de-risking those investments". He also assured that the government was committed to policy improvement in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to effective handholding of the projects that are in the various stages of development particularly in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Dahal added it was his top priority to improve the investment climate in Nepal and pledged to continuously work to increase private investment including FDI for the economic development of

the country in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

Noting that Nepal has aspired to become a middle-income country by 2030 and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the PM shared that realisation within the stipulated timeframe will continue to be a key challenge due to the Covid 19 pandemic, global conflict and climate change impacts.

Vice Chairperson of IBN, Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat pointed out the need to conduct infrastructure and productive projects through PPP and direct private investment by attracting large private investments, including foreign ones.

In the 12 years, since its inception, IBN has sanctioned investments worth Rs 1.25 trillion for a total of 42 projects including 28 projects in the power sector. Investments worth Rs 525 billion have been mobilised during this period. Similarly, Hongshi Shivam Cement and HuaXin Cement projects with production capacities of 6,000 and 3,000 metric tonnes, per day respectively, have come into commercial operation. Likewise, Waste to Energy Project in Dharan has been completed and brought into operation.

Arun III hydropower project (900MW), Upper Trishuli (213MW) and other projects are in the final phase for implementation, while the project development agreement (PDA) of Upper Karnali Hydropower Project (900MW) and Lower Arun Hydropower Project (669MW) have been completed and are under financial management. A detailed project report (DPR) is being prepared in agreement with NHPC Ltd for the study and development of West Seti Hydroelectric Project (WSHEP) (750MW) and Seti River - 6 (450MW) which are national pride projects. Apart from this, the DPR of Upper Marsyangdi-2 Hydropower Project (327MW) is being evaluated and the preparation of PDA has also started.

IBN has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Dabur Nepal for reinvestment in the construction, operation and management of the latter's capacity enhancement and diversification projects. A committee formed by the IBN's 55th Board Meeting for the PDA of Nepal-China Partnership Industrial Park project has started its work, according to IBN. According to IBN CEO Sushil Bhatta, IBN has worked to develop the Office of the Investment Board as a specialised organisation of PPP.

Ncell celebrates 18th anniversary



Ncell organised a press conference on the occasion of its 18th anniversary at its head office in Lainchaur, Kathmandu, on September 17. Ncell has been able to provide job opportunities to more than 26,000 people in Nepal. It accounts for 1.3% of the country's economy and Rs 1.8 billion contributing to the social sector. "We are here for you - this is our fundamental value," Jabbor Kayumov, CEO, Ncell, stated adding, "It is a part of our DNA. We are celebrating our customers on our anniversary."

During the press conference, Ncell, the first private mobile service provider operating in Nepal, also announced a few of its new projects. Ncell has invited all the customers to participate in a campaign 'Every customer is a winner', and get a chance to win prizes. It was announced that by dialing *17117# customers can win various prizes. They have themed this campaign as 'Harek din Surprise, Sabailai sure prize' where those who dial the given code every day for seven days

will receive different prizes daily.

Under its Corporate Social Responsibility, Ncell announced '18 grants to 7 provinces'. Under this scheme, people who are interested in working on a project, particularly in health, education, environment, women empowerment and livelihood sectors will receive grants to conduct their project. The Ncell team will assess the proposed projects before proceeding. This is a year-long work announced by Ncell. It also shared about its partnership with National Paralympic Committee Nepal to support players with disabilities.

NICCI team visits Italy to boost business relations

A delegation from Nepal, led by Nepal Italy Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) President Sanjay Agrawal, visited esteemed Italian chambers in Rome and Milan from September 3 to 9. This visit was aimed at opening new avenues for NICCI to discuss bilateral relations and explore business opportunities, with a focus on building and expanding business and cultural relations between Nepal and Italy.

Nepal engaged with the Rome Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Milan Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the first time. This meeting also established and recognised NICCI within Italian government authorities and ASSOCAMERESTERO, reflecting a shared vision for the future and the European Union.

During the meetings, discussions took place with the respected Consulate General of Nepal, Paolo Nugari, in Rome. With extensive Nepal experience since 1970, Nugari expressed optimism for Nepal's future and pledged support for NICCI's recognition by the Italian government.

The meeting with Milan Chamber of Commerce (PROMOS ITALIA), the first of its kind by a private entity from Nepal, yielded considerable success, with Milan offering its readiness to support NICCI in various capacities.

Startup Nation 2030 aims to transform Nepal's startup landscape

The 'Startup Nation 2030 Conference' was held in Kathmandu with an aim to nurture and elevate Nepal's startup ecosystem. The highly anticipated two-day conference that kicked off on August 28 was a collaborative effort by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MoICS), Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), University Grants Commission (UGC) Nepal, PUM Netherlands senior experts, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), and Antarpurana.

The conference aimed to nurture and elevate Nepal's startup ecosystem. Launched on July 25 last year, the campaign's vision is to make Nepal an attractive destination for startups, paving the way for the establishment of 10,000 new startups and the creation of 100,000 jobs by 2030. This year, UGC Nepal also lent its support to this ambitious initiative.

Drawing participants from Nepal, India, Bangladesh and the Netherlands, the conference served as a platform for around 200 attendees to share insights, bridge resource gaps, forge partnerships, exchange knowledge and discuss policy strategies.

Addressing the conference, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Ramesh Rijal, reiterated the government's commitment to formulating policies and legal frameworks that will foster the growth of fledgling companies. He emphasised ongoing projects like idea-based funding and subsidised loans for entrepreneurs and returning migrant workers. Additionally, he revealed that a new startup policy is on the horizon.

Antarpurana Chairperson Om Rajbhandari highlighted the campaign's triple helix model uniting policymakers, academia

and the private sector to provide support for innovation and startups in Nepal. He stressed the importance of a regulatory framework that encourages private sector to invest in startups and empowers innovation. Despite these aspirations, doubts linger regarding the government's dedication to the cause. A National Startup Enterprise Policy, 2019 was jointly drafted by the National Planning Commission and the private sector in the previous fiscal year but has yet to be implemented.

On the occasion, FNCCI Senior Vice President Anjan Shrestha voiced concerns about the outflow of Nepali youths from the country. Nearly one million Nepalis left the country for foreign employment in the previous fiscal year, he said and underscored that a startup-friendly policy could play a pivotal role in retaining local talents and further suggested the government expedite the implementation of the National Startup Enterprise Policy.

Izabella Koziell, Deputy Director General of ICIMOD, emphasised the need for startups to address climate-related challenges and prioritise sustainable practices alongside profits. She briefed about ICIMOD's involvement in nature-related businesses such as strengthening the Himalayan nettle value chain and large cardamom farming. Koziell stated that Nepal possesses the potential for diverse and innovative startups with a focus on ecological and climate-related solutions.

Likewise, Pim de Bokx, PUM Programme Manager and an incubation expert, echoed Koziell's optimism. He opined that although startups are in their nascent stages, they will rapidly gain momentum in Nepal. PUM has considered Nepal as one of its priority projects to aid stakeholders, policymakers, students, enterprises, and startups.

Startup Summit Nepal 2023

The Startup Network (Nepal) organised 'Startup Summit Nepal 2023' in Kathmandu on September 9. The programme aimed to foster entrepreneurship, promote innovation, and facilitate connections between startups, investors and mentors and the development of entrepreneurship capabilities in all aspects of startup development and implementation.

Chief guest of the event, NIBL Ace Capital CEO, Shivanth Pande, in his opening remarks, said the summit served as a testament to the vibrant dynamic startup ecosystem that is emerging in Nepal. "The theme of the summit 'Startups in Nepal from a global perspective' is both timely and relevant. In today's interconnected world, startups have the potential to leap from the status quo, transcend borders, and make an impact on a global scale. Nepal has a hardworking and resilient workforce, geographical proximity to the world's largest markets, and is poised to become a hub for learning generation of entrepreneurship," Pande said.

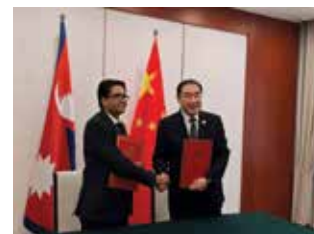
Ram Krishna Khatiwada, CEO of Nepal Infrastructure Bank Ltd and guest of honour, said that startups are instrumental in advancing infrastructure development across various sectors.

Saarthak Bakshi, founder and CEO of Rissa IVF from India and G20 Young Entrepreneurs Alliance and Asia 40 under 40, remarked that every entrepreneur goes through failure before they reach a point of success and urged entrepreneurs to build their confidence to take the next step. A successful person is one who can turn a 'No' into a 'Maybe' and that into a 'Yes'," he urged.

The summit included panel discussions on the topics 'Startups in Nepal from a global perspective' and 'Startups in innovation'. At the event,

Intern Nepal bagged the award for Startup Pitching, Durbean, CabTM, and Saino Marketplace were competitors for the award.

CNI, CCPIT reach understanding to establish Nepal-China Business Council



The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) and the China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) have reached an understanding to establish the Nepal-China Business Council aiming to promote bilateral investment and business cooperation.

The understanding was reached between the two sides on the occasion of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to the northern neighbour. CNI President Rajesh Kumar Agrawal and CCPIT Vice Chairman Zhang Xiufeng signed the document on behalf of their respective sides in Beijing on September 24. The council's affairs will be centred around creating networking opportunities, arranging bilateral business visits and organising events and dialogues to further systematic business affairs between the two countries, prioritising research and studies on the relevant field. To achieve these goals, both parties have prepared a roadmap for collaboration. The Nepal-China Business Council will have four members, two each from both sides.

CNI's Immediate Past President Vishnu Kumar Agarwal, and current Vice Presidents Nirvana Chaudhary and Bhim Ghimire were also present at the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding.

Japan-Nepal Development Forum launched



The Nepali Embassy in Japan in collaboration with the Government of Japan and the local business community has officially launched Japan-Nepal Development Forum. On September 1, Tani Kouichi, Japan's Minister of State for Disaster Management and Ocean Policy and Durga Bahadur Subedi, the Nepali Ambassador to Japan, jointly inaugurated the Forum.

The forum headed by Motoyuki Odachi, Japan's former Deputy Minister of Finance, is co-chaired by Sarbashree Yoshiharu, Hiroyuki Fukuyama, Dr Toru Utsumi, Takatoshi Nakamura, Tomohiko Kawamoto and Yosuke Kikuma. Japan-Nepal Parliamentary Friendship Group Chair and Ambassador Subedi serve as honorary patrons of the forum.

The establishment of the forum primarily aims to facilitate Japan's cooperation in Nepal's social, economic and technical development endeavours. In addition to this, it seeks to encourage engagement of Japan's private sector in Nepal's tourism, energy, agriculture, education, health, and employment sectors. This collaborative effort aims to enhance investment opportunities and foster a more conducive industrial environment in Nepal.

High-ranking officials from the Foreign Ministry of Japan, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), industrialists, businesspersons and heads and representatives of companies investing in Nepal as well as involved in trade and business were present on the occasion.

India endorses MoU to purchase 10,000 MW power from Nepal in ten years

India has officially given its approval to a memorandum of understanding (MoU) concerning the purchase of electricity from Nepal. Under this agreement, India has agreed to import 10,000 megawatts of electricity from Nepal in the next 10 years.

According to Nepali Ambassador to India, Shankar Prasad Sharma, the Federal Council of Ministers of India formally endorsed the agreement paper on the power trade with Nepal and India shared information about this through the social networking site X. He said the decision will contribute to accelerating Nepal's economic development and restructuring efforts.

The MoU was initially signed between the two countries during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to India on May 31-June 3. Energy secretaries from both countries signed and exchanged the document. Following India's latest decision to endorse the agreement, energy secretaries from both nations will participate in a special ceremony to formally re-sign it. Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation and Spokesperson for the Ministry, Madhu Prasad Bhetuwal, said they were unofficially informed about the official decision of the Indian government to endorse the agreement and expect to receive an official confirmation regarding the decision.

With the decision, the door to export electricity to the Indian market in an easy and smooth manner has been opened. Nepal had been urging for power export to the Indian market in short-term, mid-term and long-term. Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has been exporting 452 MW of electricity to the Indian energy market on a daily basis.

Economic diplomacy should be given impetus

During a discussion organised by the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) on 'Cooperation between Nepali embassies and private sector for economic diplomacy' on September 3, the speakers mentioned that Nepali missions abroad could cooperate with the private sector for effective economic diplomacy.

Addressing the discussion, Minister for Foreign Affairs, NP Saud, opined that the private sector has a major role in export promotion, tourism development and attracting foreign investment. He urged Nepali ambassadors appointed to different countries to collaborate with the private sector for the country's development and prosperity.

Advisor to the National Security Council and former Chief Secretary, Shankar Das Bairagi, suggested that diplomatic missions could expand their ambit and work in alliance with the private sector. On the occasion, Chief Secretary, Baikuntha Aryal, opined that multilateral bodies could be approached to expand economic diplomacy. The private sector also needs to diversify commodities and markets, he said.

Finance Secretary Arjun Prasad Pokharel said the government will allocate budget to expand economic diplomacy. According to Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Madhu Kumar Marasini, Nepal is in need of augmenting its role in World Trade Organisation (WTO). The time has come to analyse the impact of the country getting graduated from LDC, he said.

Secretary at Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Kewal Prasad Bhandari, suggested that 'economic diplomacy' be termed 'labour diplomacy'. Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Bharatmani Subedi

suggested that the ambassadors should play a role in boosting tourism and economy by helping operate the new international airports in Pokhara and Bhairahawa.

FNCCI President, Chandra Prasad Dhakal, said if Nepali missions abroad show willingness for change, it will help boost the country's economy. "In the emerging and developing countries, ambassadors are evaluated based on their roles in expansion of trade and promotion of investment and tourism," he opined.

Speaking on behalf of the newly appointed ambassadors, Ambassador to Thailand, Dhan Bahadur Oli, said they were ready to listen to the private sector's suggestions, and urged the private sector to furnish suggestions being focused on issues. Former President of FNCCI, Shekhar Golchha, said all types of opportunities should be looked into to expand entrepreneurship and business.

Oli elected President of SEJON



Sujan Oli has been elected President of the Society of Economic Journalists-Nepal (SEJON). The 25th annual general meeting (AGM) of SEJON held in Kathmandu on September 2 formed a new executive committee under the leadership of Oli. In the election held by the umbrella organisation of professional journalists working in the economic, business and financial sectors of Nepal, Oli mustered 99 votes against his competitor Shiromani Dhungana who had 96 votes.

Binaya Banjara has been elected Vice President of SEJON and Bishwas Regmi was

unanimously elected General Secretary. Sovit Thapalia was elected Secretary and Achut Puri as Treasurer. Other elected members include Keshu Lamichhane, Hemanta Raj Joshi, Mamata Thapa, Chhabi Raj Sapkota and Basanta Raj Upreti.

Team Nepal embarks on global quest of robotics and innovation at First Global Challenge 2023

Team Nepal is gearing up to represent Nepal on the global stage at the First Global Challenge 2023 to be held in Singapore from October 7 to 10. A group of exceptionally gifted young individuals driven by a deep passion for robotics and innovation are poised to leave an indelible mark on the world of technology.

Team Nepal's journey to the First Global Challenge 2023 commenced under the expert guidance of the Robotics Association of Nepal (RAN), a renowned organisation dedicated to nurturing youthful talents in the field of robotics.

Through a meticulous selection process and intense competition, RAN picked 10 extraordinarily gifted individuals, all under the age of 18. Team Nepal members include Nirajit Acharya (Pragya Kunja School); Raghav Agrawal (Euro School); Aayush Kunwar, Adhish Gautam and Raunak Kushwaha (Kanjirawa School); Saugat Bhattarai and Kabya Parajuli (Pragya School); Sonesh Shrestha and Bihan Pandey (Sambriddhi School); Anweshan Adhikari (Nist School); Sachin Bijukchhe (United Academy); Team Director Bikash Gurung; and Team Mentor Subash Shrestha.

These aspiring engineers and innovators demonstrated their mettle through outstanding performances in events such as the Intra Robotics Competition, Science Exhibition, and Robotics Classes.

The First Global Challenge is an international robotics competition that brings together young minds aged

between 14 and 18 years from across the globe to address pressing global issues through the application of robotics and engineering. FIRST Global, the US-based not-for-profit public charity, is organising a competition that carries a mission to inspire science and technology leadership and innovation among young people worldwide. The organisation emphasises the importance of global cooperation, tackling global challenges, and enhancing the quality of life for all.

This year's competition theme, 'Hydrogen Horizon', spotlights the vital role of sustainable energy sources and the potential of hydrogen in reshaping the energy landscape.

Samsung Electronics Global President pays courtesy call on President Paudel



Samsung Electronics Global President Park Seung-Hee paid a courtesy call on President, Ram Chandra Paudel, on September 11. During the meeting held at Shital Niwas, President Paudel praised the development made by the Republic of Korea and enquired about different aspects of information technology (IT).

Park briefed President Paudel about Samsung's various activities including the industries that could be operated in Nepal, high-level IT-related training for Nepali students under its corporate social responsibility, and possible cooperation between Samsung and Nepal in the near future.

Vice-Chairmen of Samsung Electronics, Hyung Gyu Lee and Sung Jun Park, Managing Director Hyun Lee, Ambassador of South Korea to Nepal, Park Tae-Young, and Chairperson of Golchha Group,

Shekhar Golchha, among others, were present at the meeting.

Golchha Group established a television factory based on Samsung's technology in Nawalparasi district last April. The factory has the capacity to produce 100,000 TV sets annually while running at full capacity, shared Global President Park.

It was shared that a two-year programme has been launched with 100 students of Pulchowk Engineering Campus participating under Samsung Technology Transfer Programme.

Finance Minister Mahat elected GEF Vice Chairperson



Finance Minister, Prakash Sharan Mahat, has been elected Vice Chair of Global Environment Facility (GEF) by a plenary session held at the Seventh GEF Assembly in Canada. During the session, the Republic of Panama proposed his candidacy for the post and it was backed by the Netherlands, according to the Finance Minister's Secretariat. The assembly that kicked off on August 22 concluded on August 26.

Minister Mahat in his address to the assembly said, "Nepal has protected 45% of forests of its total land and contributed to the emission of clean air (oxygen) for the entire human community." He said Nepal is honestly engaged in efforts to preserve biodiversity. It has protected rare and endangered wildlife species and as a result, there has been a significant rise in the populations of tigers and rhinos. Such wildlife reserves are not only the treasures of Nepal but also of the entire world.

According to Mahat, despite efforts, Nepal remains highly vulnerable to climate

change impacts. It is the 10th most vulnerable nation to such hazards and it continues to witness incidences of landslides, flooding, partial rainfall, dryness and the increased threat of glacial lake outbursts in recent times.

The temperature is estimated to increase from 0.5 to 2.0 degrees celsius by 2030. Finance Minister Mahat drew the attention of the participants that the country will require more than \$50 billion by 2050 to combat the impact and adverse effects of this temperature rise. He stressed the need for effective implementation of programmes run through climate financing and urged for focusing resources including the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund endorsed by the assembly for highly-affected countries. Only expanding the fund is not going to be effective until it is implemented in an integrated and paramount way", Mahat said.

IBN 55th Board Meet approves investment of Rs 36.37bn for four hydel projects



The Investment Board Nepal (IBN) has approved investment equivalent to Rs 36.37 billion for the development of four hydropower projects. The 55th Board Meeting of IBN chaired by Board Chair and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on August 25 endorsed the investment for Rolwaling Khola, Chhujung Khola, Dana Khola and Sanibheri hydropower projects.

The meeting also reviewed the developments so far regarding moving ahead with the implementation of the Tamor Reservoir-based hydropower project and decided to constitute a high-level committee to give



suggestions regarding the project's future course of action.

The meeting further decided to award a study licence to Dolma Himalayan Energy to conduct a study on the solar project of 245 megawatts (MW) capacity and 20MW capacity battery power project in Rajpur Rural Municipality, Dang district.

IBN has taken into notice the comprehensive feasibility study report presented by Risen Energy Company Ltd which was commissioned to carry out a study on the development of 250MW capacity solar energy development project at Kohalpur of Banke and at Banganga of Kailashpur.

IBN has made a decision to present a proposal before the Council of Ministers for the implementation of the directive order issued by the Supreme Court regarding the Upper Karnali Hydropower Project. Moreover, it approved the draft of the memorandum of understanding to be signed with a company based in Malaysia for carrying out a study on setting up a chemical fertiliser industry.

Prime Minister Dahal directed all bodies concerned to carry out more study and analysis so that the determination of cost for hydroelectricity projects is 'bankable' in the coming days, to deepen the required coordination for timely completion of the projects under construction, and to carry out result-oriented works by shortening the processes related to investment approval and project implementation.

Coca-Cola collaborates with Maiti Nepal to empower women and promote sustainable agriculture

The Coca-Cola Foundation has joined forces with Maiti Nepal to lead a journey towards sustainable development, community enrichment, and the empowerment of women through integrated farming,

agricultural training and agro-tourism.



Chief Minister of Bagmati Province, Shalikram Jamkattel, led the foundation laying ceremony in Makwanpur Gadhi where he marked the commencement of an extraordinary project that symbolises empowerment, compassion and sustainable progress fostered through collective efforts. He also stated the potential of the initiative to promote rural growth, foster sustainable farming methods and provide financial stability to the community.

Under this project, a training centre will be established, providing training to survivors, rural women and girls at risk of trafficking. The goal is to ensure a sustainable economic source for 30 individuals and equip them with the skills necessary for success in the agriculture sector. Following the training, the organisation will link them with the local government and banking institutions for funds required to start-up for developing sustainable employment at their yards. In the second year, the organisation has also planned to establish model agro-tourism units offering employment opportunities and allowing participants to implement their newly acquired knowledge. Also, for those wanting to follow a career in their village, the organisation will coordinate with local bodies to provide them with financial support including agri-loans from banks.

Saadia Madsbjerg, President of The Coca-Cola Foundation, expressed her excitement about the collaboration, stating, "We believe that empowering women and promoting sustainable agriculture go hand in hand. Through this partnership with Maiti Nepal,

we aim to create real and lasting change, providing survivors and at-risk individuals with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive."

Anuradha Koirala, Founder of Maiti Nepal, shared her enthusiasm for the project, noting, "By combining integrated farming, agricultural training and agro-tourism, we are not only empowering women economically but also creating a model that can be replicated and scaled up. We are grateful to The Coca-Cola Foundation for their support and look forward to making a meaningful impact together."

Aadhyanta Accelerator Programme rolls out first cohort

Aadhyanta Fund Management Ltd, in a landmark move, wrapped up its inaugural cohort of the Aadhyanta Accelerator Programme in Biratnagar on September 21, spotlighting the high-growth potential of Koshi Province's agri SMEs. Crafted in collaboration with Sahaj-NAMDP, FNCCI Koshi Province, and the Provincial Investment Authority, the eight-month programme zeroes in on empowering agricultural enterprises, priming them for scalability and drawing investors. The initiative actively envisions amplifying the entrepreneurial pulse of Koshi, catalysing economic vibrancy and pioneering innovation.



As a testimony to its effectiveness, ten enterprises emerged investment-ready at the culmination. Significant investors, including Global Equity Fund, NIMB Ace Capital, Himalayan Capital, Reliable Ventures and Aadhyanta Fund Management, expressed interest in an impressive five enterprises,

signalling commitments to the tune of Rs 200 million. Beneficiaries of this financial confidence comprise Birat Group, Khetipati Organics, Agri Center Jhapa, Raktakali Tea Estate and Dibyadristi Veneration and Agro.

Rajendra Raut, Executive Member of FNCCI and President of FNCCI Koshi Province, chaired the gathering. The event was attended by Chief Minister of Koshi Province Hikmat Karki, Mayor of Biratnagar Metro, Nagesh Koirala and other distinguished personalities.

The Aadhyanta Accelerator Programme's successful foray outside Kathmandu solidifies its monumental contribution to Nepal's alternative finance industry.

Environmental activist Tiwari wins Glocal Teen Hero Nepal 2023 title

The 'Glocal Teen Hero Nepal 2023' event held in Kathmandu on September 1 celebrated the exceptional achievements of Nepal's youth, encouraging them to continue making positive contributions to society and fostering a brighter future for the nation. The celebration marked youth accomplishments and dedication to environmental causes. With over 500 attendees, the event recognised the outstanding achievements of 20 young individuals under the category 'Glocal's 20under20'.

The event shone the spotlight on the exceptional achievements of the top six finalists of Glocal Teen Hero Nepal 2023: Aryan Sigdel (17) is an educator and activist from Tanahun; Atith Adhikari (17) is a social entrepreneur from Banke; Madhav Khanal (18) is a writer from Lamjung; Nirajan Rimal (18) is a science enthusiast from Kathmandu; Preeti Pantha (18) is a social activist from Gulmi, and Shruti Tiwari (18) is an environment activist from Dhanusha.

Ghana Shyam Gurung, Country Representative

at WWF Nepal, and Snow Leopard Champion of the WWF network, presented the 'Certificate of Recognition' to the finalists. Seema Golcha, speaking on behalf of Golchha Group, emphasised the company's unwavering support for youth and acknowledged the transformative impact of Glocal on the lives of countless young individuals. She urged the youth to harness this platform to become the future leaders of Nepal.

Labour Minister Bhandari announced the winner of Glocal Teen Hero Nepal 2023, Shruti Tiwari (18), an environmental activist from Dhanusha.

Tilganga City Eye Centre comes into operation in Chuchchepati



Tilganga City Eye Centre has been inaugurated at Dampa Complex in Chuchchepati, Kathmandu. The eye centre operated on the concept of public-private partnership, aims to provide top-notch eye health services in the community. The centre is run by a team of skilled professionals offering a range of ocular sub-specialties.

Prof Dr Sanduk Ruit and Dr Reeta Gurung, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology, jointly inaugurated the eye centre on August 26.

Tilganga City Eye Centre has advanced diagnostic equipment and a team of skilled professionals. The eye centre, well-equipped to provide comprehensive eye examinations, offers a range of services, from routine eye examinations to complex surgical procedures.

The institution also offers services such as cataract surgery, management of corneal and retinal disease, glaucoma, and squint and amblyopic conditions, in

addition to providing contact lens fittings and vision therapy sessions.

Syakar Trading launches Honda Elevate



Syakar Trading Company, the authorised distributor for Honda cars in Nepal, launched the all-new Honda Elevate at a programme at the Honda Showroom in Lalitpur on September 19. Honda Nepal has introduced an exciting introductory offer with cash discount and an additional Rs 75,000 discount with free service for the first ten customers.

As a brand known for its commitment to excellence, Honda continues to redefine expectations with the introduction of the Elevate in Nepal. The Honda Elevate redefines the driving experience with a blend of captivating design and advanced technology. From its striking aesthetics to its innovative features, the Elevate is set to enhance every moment behind the wheel.

The Honda Elevate has a design highlighted by its distinctive front grille and highly visible LED projector headlamps, ensuring it stands out on the road. Stepping inside, it boasts a luxurious two-tone interior in brown and black. The interior offers ultimate seating comfort, and the spacious rear cabin ensures ample room for passengers. Starting your journey is as easy as pushing a button. The Elevate features a one-push engine start/stop functionality for your convenience.

The Honda Elevate is designed to tackle diverse terrain, such as that in Nepal, with its Alpha-Bold Signature Grill and best-in-class 220 mm ground clearance. The diamond-cut alloy wheels with R-17 dual-tone add a touch of sportiness and sophistication to its already bold looks.

Available in a 1.5L petrol engine, Honda Elevate SVMT has been priced starting at Rs 5,635,000. Meanwhile, the starting price of Elevate VMT is Rs 6,035,000; Elevate VXMT is Rs 6,695,000; Elevate ZXMT is Rs 7,344,000; and Elevate VCVT is Rs 6,570,000. Similarly, the starting price of the Elevate VXCVT is Rs 7,195,000; Elevate ZXCVT is Rs 7,870,000 and Elevate ZXCVT is Rs 7,944,000 (dual tone colour).

Citroën Nepal announces 'Festive



Scheme 2080'

Shangrila Motors, the sole official distributor for Citroën in Nepal, has announced its Festive Scheme 2080. The company also offered special gifts worth Rs 25,000 to customers who made bookings during the NADA Auto Show. Under this scheme, customers looking to buy Citroën C3 will get an attractive cash discount, free comprehensive insurance and free road tax worth Rs 5,000. Along with these offers, customers who bought any model during the NADA Auto Show received a free car washer.

Shangrila Motors is a leading automotive company based in Kathmandu. It is the sole authorised distributor of Peugeot and Citroën vehicles from France in Nepal. Established in 2017, the company has become a prominent player in the Nepali automotive market, offering a wide range of products and services related to automobiles.

Shangrila Motors has been in the automotive industry for more than 50 years, under Golchha Organisation.

Yamaha Nepal launches deluxe version of FZ-S FI V3



MAW Enterprises, the official distributor of Yamaha motorcycles and scooters in Nepal, has launched the new deluxe version of FZ-S FI V3 in new colour options of metallic grey and navy blue. The new backlight design adds a modern and stylish element to the motorcycle's aesthetics. FZ-S FI V 3.0. is reputed for exceptional handling and a muscular design. Made with the finest Yamaha technology – including a fuel Injection 149 cc engine. FZ-S FI Ver 3.0 mounts an air-cooled 4-stroke 149cc SOHC, 2-valve, single-cylinder fuel-injected engine which has been tuned to further polish the feeling of superior acceleration from stops and exhilarating feeling when overtaking. Further, it is equipped with dual disc brakes and single-channel ABS in the front.

"FZ-S V3 is the heartthrob of many motorcycle enthusiasts, and we are thrilled to announce the launch of the new variant with astounding new colour options, navy blue and metallic grey featuring exciting updates that will elevate the riding experience. The new deluxe version reflects the Yamaha attributes of sportiness, style and excitement," said Raju Chettri, CEO of MAW Two Wheelers Division.

The Yamaha FZ series has had its legacy in the Nepali market since 2008. This popular line of motorcycles produced by Yamaha Motors is known for its sporty and aggressive styling, along with its performance-oriented features.

KFC opens in Kalanki on International Day of Sign Languages

Devyani International Nepal on the occasion of International Day of Sign Languages announced the opening of its first Special KFC in Kalanki, Kathmandu on September 23.

The Special KFC in Kalanki is operated majorly by hearing and speech-impaired women workforce. The restaurant has a passionate and dedicated team of well-trained 10 hearing and speech-impaired staff who have the skills to manage an entire restaurant. This groundbreaking initiative marks a significant milestone in DIL and KFC's journey towards fostering a culture of an inclusive organisation and creating equal opportunities for all.

Rajat Luthra, CEO of KFC India and Nepal at Devyani International, expressed his joy over the first-ever restaurant operated by an inclusive workforce comprising the majority of speech and hearing-impaired women and pledged his unwavering support in the transformative influence of having an inclusive and diverse workforce.

KFC Nepal has also reopened its newly refurbished store at Durbar Marg, Kathmandu. The store showcases a modern and delightful ambience that promises an enhanced dining experience for all. KFC Durbar Marg began operations on November 25, 2009, and is the inaugural flagship store for KFC in Nepal, signifying the brand's pioneering presence in the country. Along with this, KFC Nepal has also introduced the highly-anticipated Double Down Burger (All Chicken - No Bun), coinciding with the festive season.

Foodmandu removes minimum order value policy, reduces delivery fee

Foodmandu, Nepal's first and most popular food delivery

company, has removed the minimum order value policy and reduced the delivery fee. In order to enhance the convenience and cater to every food lover's needs, Foodmandu has eliminated the minimum order value of Rs 500. Along with this Foodmandu has also reduced its delivery charges.

For those placing smaller orders below Rs 500, a nominal small order fee of just Rs 50 will be applicable. In response to customer feedback and changing market dynamics, Foodmandu has removed the minimum order requirement, allowing customers to order their preferred meals without any restrictions.

In addition to the removal of the minimum order value, Foodmandu is also rolling out a revamped delivery fee policy. For distances up to 1.5 km, the delivery charge is just Rs 25. And for distances beyond 1.5 km, there will be an additional charge of Rs 25 per km. For example, if the delivery distance is 3.5 km, the delivery charge will be Rs 75 (Rs.25 + Rs.25*2). However, if the order value exceeds Rs 1,000, the maximum charge will be Rs 75, even for longer distances.

Manohar Adhikari, Founder and MD of Foodmandu, said, "We are always committed to consumer satisfaction and these changes reflect our dedication to providing affordable, convenient and accessible food delivery services to every Nepali consumer. With the removal of the minimum order requirement and reduced delivery fees, customers can explore an even broader selection of dishes without worrying about order size constraints or excessive charges."

Beyond Chats: Rakuten Viber ventures into travel, food and sports in Nepal

Rakuten Viber organised a press meet to launch their latest collaboration with Bus Sewa, Sasto Ticket and Chef Nepal on September 19. Nitin Tyagi, Business Development

Director, Southeast Asia, Rakuten Viber; Samrat Dahal, Chair Founder and CEO, Sasto Tickets; PR Khanal, CEO, Bus Sewa; and Dharma Raj Pandey, Producer, Chef Nepal spoke at the press meet.

Tyagi said, "Nepal is one of the fastest growing countries in the region and to scale up our service, we have now introduced three basic collaborations with travel, food and cricket."

Through collaboration with these companies, Viber is making essential services accessible to all groups of people. In collaboration with Chef Nepal, Viber is able to provide its customers with access to exclusive chef recipes and food facts. Sasto Tickets and Bus Sewa are other collaborative partners through which issues like occupied seats, unavailability of tickets prior to festive seasons, and expensive international fares have been solved. Sasto Tickets provides accessibility to ticketing at minimum cost and this collaboration has made it even easier to provide this service to the people.

Cricket is another chatbot that Viber has introduced. There are different cricket channels where people can see exciting content related to cricket and read the chats and comments provided by local cricketers.

Hyundai Festive Delight 2080

Laxmi Intercontinental, the authorised distributor of Hyundai automobiles in Nepal, has begun 'Hyundai Festive Delight 2080' as a grand festivity that runs from September 7 to November 19. Under this campaign, customers can pick their dream Hyundai vehicle from a diverse selection, all the while enjoying irresistible perks. These include an attractive cash discount of up to Rs 600,000 and a complimentary one-year comprehensive insurance plan. Additionally, the scheme presents the opportunity to claim an extra

cash discount of up to Rs 100,000 through scratch cards. Under this scheme, a customer will also get a chance to win a magnificent Hyundai SUV in a grand lucky draw.

Customers can experience hassle-free ownership of Hyundai which is also backed by a three-year warranty and six years of complimentary servicing, according to the company.

Hyundai Nepal has earned the loyalty of millions with its range of top-quality vehicles. Customers can embrace affordable ownership with their low maintenance costs and experience the convenience of their state-of-the-art after-sales service. The company has a pan Nepal presence with 17 dealers and 19 service centres across the country for easy purchase as well as servicing all Hyundai vehicles.

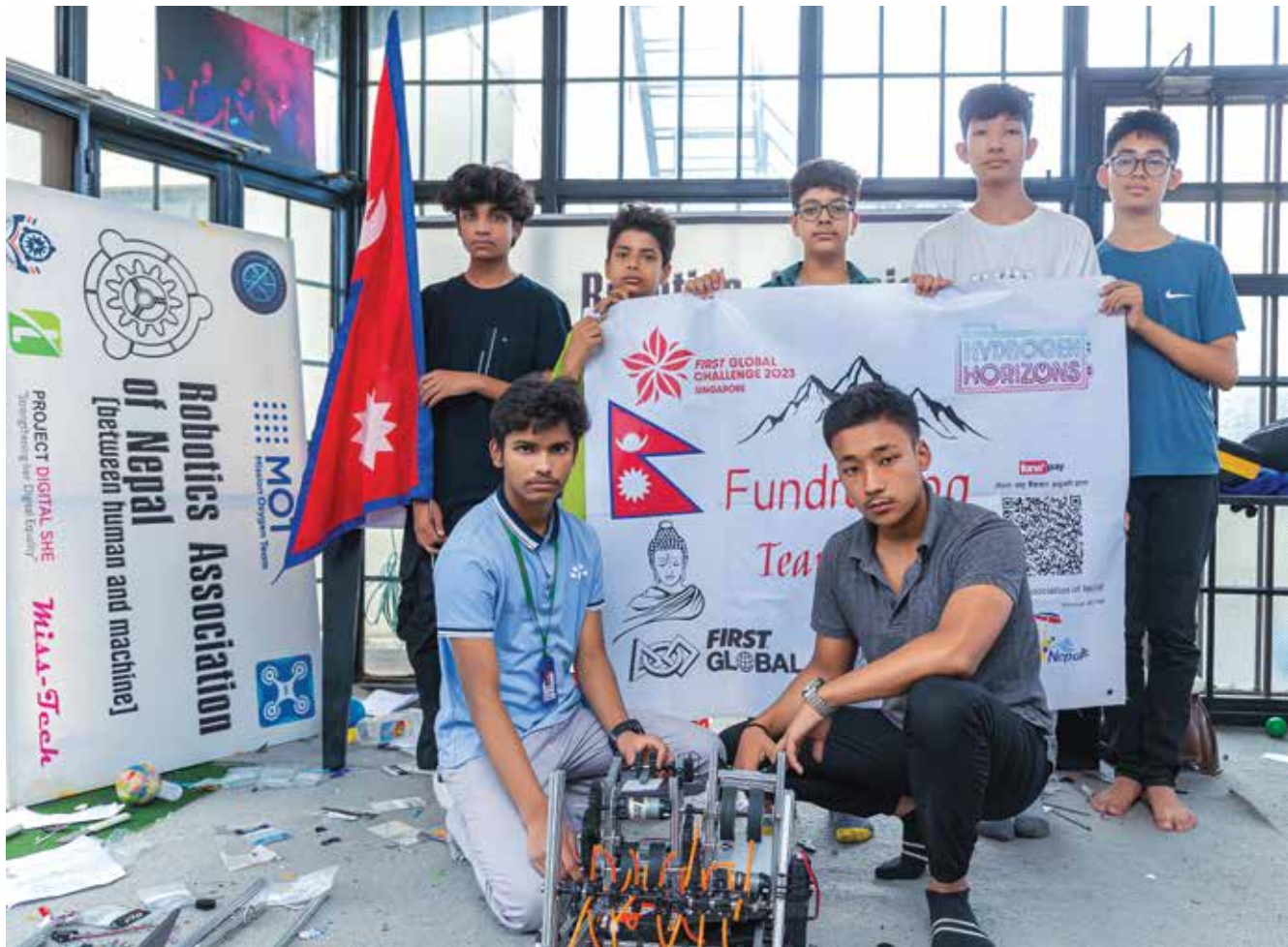
KL Dugar Group introduces Movenpick Ice Cream



Movenpick Ice Cream, renowned for its exquisite Swiss craftsmanship and commitment to using 100% natural ingredients, has made its grand entrance into Nepal. Imported by the KL Dugar Group, Movenpick Ice Cream embodies the true essence of purity, with no preservatives, flavouring or stabilisers, setting a new standard for premium ice cream offerings. With its inaugural store now open at The Corner, Thamel, Movenpick Ice Cream store remains open daily from 11:00 am to 11:00 pm, and until 2:00 am on Fridays and Saturdays, making it the perfect late-night destination for ice cream enthusiasts.

ROBOTICS & INNOVATION AS SOLUTIONS TO REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

TEAM NEPAL IS SET TO MAKE A MARK IN THE FIRST GLOBAL CHALLENGE 2023 IN SINGAPORE.



Team Nepal is set to make its mark on the global stage as it prepares to participate in the First Global Challenge 2023. Comprised of a group of exceptionally talented and driven young individuals with a passion for robotics and innovation, Team Nepal represents the future of technological excellence in Nepal. These budding innovators are not merely dreamers; they are doers, and their participation in the First Global Challenge 2023 underscores their unwavering determination to create a

positive impact on a global scale.

The First Global Challenge is organized by FIRST Global, a US-based not-for-profit public charity with a profound mission to inspire science and technology leadership and innovation among young people worldwide. FIRST Global aims to foster a deep understanding of global cooperation, address pressing global issues, and enhance the quality of life for all.

In this edition of **Business 360**, we spoke to two members of Team Nepal to get an insight

into what the future holds for robotics in Nepal and what it means to be able to participate in the First Global Challenge 2023. Excerpts:

Raghav Agrawal Team Executive, Team Nepal

Raghav Agarwal is a 15-year-old prodigy from Nardevi, Kathmandu, and currently pursuing his education at Euro School in grade 10. His remarkable journey has taken a fascinating turn as a dedicated member of Team Nepal for First

Global Challenge (FGC) 2023 Singapore. He is the driving force behind the team's online presence, serving as their Executive, deftly managing platforms and rising to the challenge of submitting videos and documents.

Agarwal's adeptness extends beyond the digital realm; Agarwal plays a pivotal role in Team Nepal's international engagements, ensuring that meetings with diverse countries are conducted seamlessly. As the team's Speaker, his eloquence shines, and his proficiency in editing



Raghav Agrawal
Team Executive, Team Nepal

and social media marketing makes him a standout Team Executive. With a thirst for knowledge and relentless commitment to excellence, Agarwal is poised to leave an indelible mark on the world of robotics and innovation.

Can you tell us more about your journey to qualify for the First Global Challenge 2023? What were the selection processes and competitions you participated in?

My journey into robotics and innovation was motivated by a deep fascination with technology and a desire to create solutions to real-world problems. From a young age, I was intrigued by the potential of robotics to revolutionise various industries and improve our daily lives. This curiosity led me to explore robotics as a hobby and engage in

self-learning through online resources, books and local robotics clubs. It was the perfect blend of my interests and passions that set me on this exciting path. Qualifying for the First Global Challenge 2023 was a long and tremendous journey for all of us students. It felt like a mission that we were determined to accomplish. The selection process was rigorous and challenging, designed to identify the best candidates to represent Team Nepal on the global stage.

The selection process consisted of multiple rounds, each with its unique challenges. It included technical assessments, where we had to demonstrate our proficiency in robotics and problem-solving. These assessments were not just about showing off technical skills but also

about showcasing our ability to think on our feet and adapt to unpredictable situations. Teamwork was another critical aspect of the selection process. We needed to demonstrate effective collaboration with other team members. The ability to work well with diverse teammates and communicate clearly was highly valued, as the high-pressure environment of the competition demanded seamless teamwork.

Being selected for Team Nepal was not just about having the necessary technical skills; it was also about being a good fit for the team in terms of collaboration, communication and shared goals. Team dynamics played a crucial role in our selection and we worked hard to ensure that we complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. Once we were selected, our real journey began. Extensive training and preparation were necessary to get us ready for the First Global Challenge 2023. We spent countless hours refining our technical skills, brainstorming and developing our project, and honing our problem-solving abilities. It was an intense but immensely rewarding experience that brought us closer together as a team.

In the end, our journey to qualify for the First Global Challenge 2023 was a testament to our passion for robotics, our dedication to learning and growing, and our ability to work as a cohesive team. We are proud to represent Nepal on the global stage and contribute our innovations to the world of robotics and technology.

What motivated you to pursue robotics and innovation?

What motivated me was the remarkable growth I observed in these fields and the inspiring efforts of the Robotics Association of Nepal in cultivating a strong interest among young students like me. I was genuinely captivated by the potential of robotics and innovation to make a positive impact on the world. It was like a door to a world of endless

possibilities had opened up before me. The initial spark that ignited my interest in robotics came from those tiny toy cars and robots. They held an irresistible fascination for me, and I was eager to understand how they worked and, more importantly, how I could create something similar. That's where it all began for me personally – the curiosity, the tinkering and the desire to bring my ideas to life through robotics.

Ultimately, it was a combination of my motivation, unwavering dedication and the support of a like-minded team that led me to become a part of Team Nepal for the First Global Challenge. This journey has been nothing short of incredible, filled with valuable lessons, collaboration and innovation. Being part of Team Nepal is a source of immense pride for me. It's an opportunity to represent my country on the global stage and showcase the innovative potential of Nepal's youth. I firmly believe that our collective passion and ingenuity can contribute positively to the world of robotics and innovation, and I am excited to be a part of this journey of growth and exploration.

Could you describe the robot you have been working on at the Robotics Association of Nepal (RAN) for the First Global Challenge? What are its key features and capabilities?

The robot we have been tirelessly working on for the First Global Challenge 2023 at the Robotics Association of Nepal (RAN) is proudly named 'THULO KANCHI.' Let me describe its key features and capabilities in detail. Firstly, 'THULO KANCHI' boasts a robust design with six wheels, providing it with excellent stability and maneuverability. Its dimensions are 40cm in length and 42cm in width, making it well-suited for the tasks at hand. One of the standout features of our robot is the ball intake mechanism. This system is designed to rapidly intake hydrogen and oxygen balls, a crucial task in the competition. It efficiently

collects these balls, setting the stage for the subsequent actions. The second remarkable feature is the Storage and colour dividing system. Here, the balls, which come in two distinct colours – green and blue – are collected and then precisely separated into two separate compartments. This is achieved through advanced technology, demonstrating the sophistication of our robot. Next up, we have the shooting mechanism, a critical element of our robot's capabilities. This mechanism is engineered to shoot out the collected balls with remarkable speed and precision. It boasts a high velocity and operates at a high RPM, allowing us to accurately score points in the two different tanks as per the competition requirements.

The final highlight is the hanging mechanism. To showcase our robot's strength and efficiency, we have designed it to be capable of hanging itself up to a height of 100 cm. This ability not only demonstrates the robot's prowess but also its versatility in tackling various challenges. Our robot's key features include the use of high-tech motors and a meticulously crafted design, which required considerable time and effort. Its capabilities encompass the precise separation of hydrogen and oxygen balls by colour, high-velocity ball shooting, and the impressive feat of hanging its own weight. Furthermore, its mobility allows it to efficiently collect the atoms, making it a well-rounded contender for the First Global Challenge 2023. Working on 'THULO KANCHA' has been an incredible journey, and we are excited to put it to the test on the global stage, where we hope it will shine and make Nepal proud.

First Global has a mission to inspire science and technology leadership. How do you think your participation in this competition aligns with that mission?

My participation in the First Global Challenge aligns perfectly with the organisation's mission to inspire science and

technology leadership. Allow me to elaborate on how my involvement in this competition directly contributes to that mission:

Promoting STEM

Education: First Global places a strong emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education, and by participating in this competition, I am deeply immersed in hands-on STEM learning. This not only enhances my own knowledge and skills but also serves as a tangible example for other young individuals. By showcasing the exciting possibilities within STEM fields, I hope to inspire them to pursue STEM education and, ultimately, careers.

Global Collaboration:

The First Global Challenge brings together teams from all corners of the world. This international gathering fosters not only healthy competition but also invaluable opportunities for global collaboration and cultural exchange. Engaging with teams from different countries exposes me to diverse perspectives and encourages cross-cultural understanding, an essential skill for future leaders in the fields of science and technology.

Problem-Solving and

Innovation: This competition is not just about building robots; it's about addressing real-world problems using robotics and technology. It pushes us to think critically, to problem-solve creatively, and to innovate relentlessly. These skills are not only essential for success in this competition but also for future leadership roles in science and technology where solving complex challenges is the norm.

Leadership

Development: Being a part of Team Nepal for the First Global Challenge offers me a unique opportunity to develop leadership skills. Leadership isn't just about taking charge; it's about effective communication, teamwork and the ability to motivate and inspire others. These are

qualities that are cultivated and refined throughout the journey of preparing for and participating in this competition.

Community and

Outreach: Beyond the competition itself, Team Nepal often engages in community outreach activities. These include conducting STEM workshops, visiting schools and organising awareness campaigns. These outreach efforts directly contribute to the mission of inspiring science and technology leadership by reaching out to young minds in our local communities. We aim to ignite their passion for STEM and empower them to become future leaders in these fields.

In essence, our participation in the First Global Challenge is not just about building a robot and competing; it's about embracing a mission to inspire science and technology leadership. By actively promoting STEM education, engaging in global collaboration, fostering problem-solving and innovation, developing leadership skills, and conducting community outreach, we are dedicated to furthering the goals of First Global and, in doing so, contributing to a brighter future in science and technology leadership.

The theme for the First Global Challenge 2023 is 'Hydrogen Horizon'. How have you approached this theme in your robot design and strategy for the competition?

For the First Global Challenge 2023 with the theme 'Hydrogen Horizon', our approach to robot design and competition strategy is centred around harnessing the potential of hydrogen as a clean and sustainable energy source. As our robot showcases the idea of clean energy and how electrolysis works in order to produce hydrogen energy which is a clean source and can be produced easily and strategy is to make the bot as efficient as possible and also as simple, also Nepal has an advantage as Nepal is one of

the richest sources to hydrogen. We have approached this theme in our robot by showcasing two atoms of hydrogen and oxygen which get under the process of electrolysis and produce energy that could power a car. Our strategy for this competition is to achieve the maximum points and play safe and win this competition.

Aayush K Kunwar

Team Captain, Team Nepal

Aayush K Kunwar is the Team Captain for Team Nepal for the First Global Challenge 2023. A ninth-grader at Kathmandu's Kanjirowa National Secondary School, his roots trace back to Pokhara. His journey into the world of STEM began in fourth grade with robotics classes and evolved to encompass programming languages like C, C#, C++, Java, and Python in grades six to nine. In seventh grade, he started actively participating in national competitions and STEM expos, gaining recognition for his talents.

Notably, Kunwar had the privilege of representing Team Nepal as the Team Captain in Technoxian 7.0, the world's largest robotics championship, held in Noida, Delhi. This experience honed his leadership skills and deepened his understanding of robotics and engineering. As the captain of Team Nepal in the First Global Challenge 2023, Kunwar is thrilled to bring his experience, skills, and unwavering passion to the forefront, ready to tackle new challenges and make impactful contribution to the global STEM community.

Can you share some insights into the skills and knowledge you have gained in robotics and STEM education through your involvement in this competition?

The theme for the First Global Challenge 2023, 'Hydrogen Horizon,' has been at the forefront of our robot design and strategy for the competition. This theme goes beyond robotics; it's about addressing real-world challenges and fostering a deeper understanding of the



Aayush K Kunwar
Team Captain, Team Nepal

importance of science and technology in today's world. First and foremost, it's essential to recognise that the First Global Challenge is like an international Olympics-style robotics game. It's organised by First, and it provides a platform for youths from around the world to immerse themselves in the world of robotics. It's not just about competition; it's about education, collaboration, and finding solutions to global issues.

One of the primary goals of this international competition is to help young people grasp simple yet crucial concepts that can benefit our planet

Earth. In our case, 'Hydrogen Horizon' serves as a reminder of the pressing need for sustainable energy sources and the potential of hydrogen in addressing this challenge. It's about instilling in youth the awareness that they can play a role in shaping a more sustainable future. Participating in this competition has given me and my team in Nepal a unique opportunity to delve deep into both simple and complex machinery and engineering. We've had to think critically, engage in logical problem-solving, and apply computational thinking to design a robot that aligns with

the 'Hydrogen Horizon' theme.

Our strategy has revolved around not just building a robot but understanding the bigger picture. How can our robot contribute to the mission of using hydrogen as a clean energy source? How can it showcase the benefits and address the challenges of integrating educational and entertaining robots into curricula? How can we create a positive and engaging experience for youths who may one day pursue careers in STEM fields? Being involved in this competition has been transformative for us. It has enhanced our STEM concepts, sharpened our logical thinking, honed our problem-solving skills, and prepared us for future careers in STEM fields. It's not just about the competition; it's about nurturing the next generation of leaders who will drive innovation and address the pressing challenges of our world, including those related to hydrogen and clean energy. In essence, our approach to the 'Hydrogen Horizon' theme in our robot design and strategy has been about education, empowerment and a commitment to making a positive impact on our planet and future generations.

What do you hope to achieve as representatives of Nepal in this international robotics challenge, both in terms of personal growth and impact on global issues?

As representatives of Nepal in this international robotics challenge, our primary aim is to make our country proud on the global stage. Being part of this competition in the field of our passion, robotics, has ignited a deep determination to work harder and excel. We aspire to achieve several significant goals, both in terms of personal growth and our impact on global issues.

Country's Pride:

Representing Nepal in an international arena is a tremendous honour, and it has inspired us to give our absolute best. We want to make a name for our country and show the world the talent and innovation

that exist within the youths of Nepal. Our success here not only reflects our dedication but also the potential of Nepal to excel in the field of robotics and technology.

Personal Growth:

This journey has been transformative in terms of personal growth. We've not only honed our technical skills but have also improved our communication, presentation and public speaking abilities. First Global, as the competition's organiser, provides various challenges throughout the competition period. These challenges have pushed us to communicate effectively with teams from other countries, learn about their cultures, and represent Nepal with pride. It's been a journey of self-improvement, and these skills will serve us well in our future endeavours.

Impact on Global

Issues: The theme for this year's competition, 'Hydrogen Horizon', is particularly meaningful. It's not just about robotics; it's about addressing critical global issues. Our goal is to create awareness among youths about the importance of transitioning away from fossil fuels and lithium-ion batteries, which can produce harmful gases in mass production.

We want to convey the message that there is another reliable resource, hydrogen, which has the potential to produce pure electricity and reduce the environmental impact. By participating in this competition, we hope to inspire a new generation of thinkers and innovators who are passionate about finding sustainable solutions to global energy challenges.

Our journey as representatives of Nepal in this international robotics challenge is driven by a desire to make our country proud, achieve personal growth, and contribute to addressing global issues. It's a journey filled with learning, collaboration and a commitment to making a positive impact not only on Nepal but on the world at large.

What challenges have you faced as a team?

Teamwork has been absolutely essential in our preparations for the competition and it has played a pivotal role in shaping our approach. In the First Global Challenge, cooperation with teams from different countries is a fundamental aspect, reflecting the spirit of international collaboration. First has partnered with REV Robotics, and their components are designed to work seamlessly together. This partnership symbolises the need for us to work together effectively as a team. The components and technologies provided by REV Robotics serve as the building blocks for our robot and it's through teamwork that we bring them together to create a functional and competitive machine.

Throughout our preparations, we have encountered various challenges, and it's been our teamwork that has helped us overcome them. Each team member has taken on specific roles and responsibilities based on our strengths and interests. For instance, Raghav has been responsible for managing our social media presence. His role in keeping our online presence active and engaging is crucial in spreading the word about Team Nepal and our journey in the competition. Another member, Adhish Gautam, on the other hand, has been focused on game-field designing. This involves creating and setting up the physical field for the competition, ensuring it aligns with the rules and requirements of the game. His contribution is integral to our ability to practice effectively.

As for myself, I have taken on the task of building and programming the main robot for the competition. This involves designing and assembling the robot's physical components and writing the code that controls its actions. I have also played a role in coordinating and organising the work of our team members,

ensuring that everything comes together smoothly. This division of labour has made our work as Team Nepal more manageable and efficient. By splitting responsibilities based on our skills and interests, we have been able to tackle multiple aspects of the competition simultaneously. However, it's important to acknowledge that teamwork, while incredibly valuable, does come with its own set of challenges. Effective communication and coordination are key. Ensuring that all team members are aligned in their goals and timelines can sometimes be challenging, especially when we have tight deadlines to meet.

Despite these challenges, our commitment to teamwork has been a driving force in our preparations. It has allowed us to leverage each team member's strengths and expertise, making us a stronger and more cohesive unit. We believe that it's our collaborative spirit that will ultimately help us succeed in the First Global Challenge.

Could you describe the support and mentorship you have received from Robotics Association of Nepal?

The support and mentorship we have received from Robotics Association of Nepal (RAN) over the past two months have been truly invaluable. RAN has played a significant role in our preparations for the competition and our experiences working together have been nothing short of wonderful. RAN has been instrumental in providing us with opportunities for our fundraising challenge, a task set forth by First. Fundraising is a crucial aspect of our journey, as it helps cover the costs associated with participating in the competition. RAN's guidance and support have been essential in helping us navigate this challenge successfully.

One of the standout aspects of our experience with RAN has been the education we have received through

their 'Ujjwal Education'. This programme has been incredibly enriching, teaching us the fundamental concepts of robotics and STEM. It's been eye-opening to delve deeper into these subjects and gain a deeper understanding of the principles that underlie our robot's design and functionality. Our mentors at RAN have been exceptional in guiding us throughout this journey. They have gone above and beyond to teach us things that we hadn't even considered in our initial research. They have educated us about the specific rules and regulations of the competition, ensuring that we operate within the boundaries of what's allowed. Additionally, they have provided us with valuable insights into the pros and cons of the competition, helping us make informed decisions and strategies.

Another significant support from RAN has been in facilitating meetings with important figures. They have arranged meetings for us with the education minister and various news outlets. These meetings have provided us with opportunities to showcase our journey, share our experiences and raise awareness about the importance of robotics and STEM education in Nepal. Overall, our collaboration with RAN has been an enriching and empowering experience. Their support and mentorship have not only helped us prepare for the First Global Challenge but have also deepened our understanding of robotics and STEM. We are immensely grateful for their guidance and the opportunities they have provided us on this incredible journey.

What would you like to convey to young people who are interested in robotics and STEM fields?

My message is simple yet profound: pursue your passion for robotics with unwavering dedication and enthusiasm. As we move forward, our world is increasingly shaped by small innovations, each of which plays a crucial role

in maximising the use of renewable energy sources and minimising our reliance on non-renewable ones. It's young, passionate robotics enthusiasts like you who can lead the charge in advancing our technology and ushering in a brighter, more sustainable future for our planet.

My advice to those aspiring to participate in future robotics competitions, such as the First Global Challenge, is this: dive deep into your chosen field of engineering, programming and innovation. Develop a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that will serve as your toolkit for success. Robotics competitions are not just about building robots; they are about solving real-world problems, and that requires a deep understanding of the principles that underlie technology. Furthermore, nurture your innovative mindset. Embrace curiosity and creativity as your guiding forces. Think outside the box, challenge the status quo, and don't be afraid to make mistakes and learn from them. Innovation often arises from pushing boundaries and exploring uncharted territories.

Remember, this international competition can indeed be a tremendous success for you if you commit your mind and heart to it. It's a journey filled with learning, collaboration, and personal growth. It's an opportunity to not only represent your country but also contribute to global progress in the fields of robotics and STEM. So, to all young robotics enthusiasts, I say this: Your passion and dedication can lead to remarkable achievements. Embrace the challenges, keep learning and let your innovation soar. The world is waiting for your brilliant ideas and contributions to make it a better place. **B**



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TOP PICK

“Success is not measured in just profits or the money you earn but rather in the customer loyalty you win”

What began as a childhood curiosity, fashion turned out to be Ramila Nemkul's calling and career. She completed her graduation in International Business from the Central University Finland in 2011, followed by a Master's degree in Entrepreneurship from Aalto University in Finland in 2015. Then in 2018, she completed another Master's degree in Fashion Designing from AFT, India.

Nemkul has been part of the fashion industry for the last 18 years and is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of KASA, which she established as a sustainable fashion line to promote Nepal in the international fashion arena. KASA is recognized for its environmentally friendly approach to fashion through the wide use of natural fabrics like pashmina. The brand also holds the distinction of organising two major sustainable fashion events in the Mount Everest region. KASA has been recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records for organising the geographically highest fashion show. Nemkul likes to do things differently and she also finds creative expression in her shows hosting remarkable fashion events in heritage sites.

In this edition of **Business 360**, Nemkul speaks about her list of top brands.

Top 3 apps that you use the most

Banking apps, Instagram, Vogue Runway

Favourite Clothing Brand

Definitely KASA

Top 3 startups in Nepal which have the potential to grow big

Khaalisisi: It's a woman-oriented business which converts trash to cash. Today, it



Ramila Nemkul
CEO, KASA

is not just a business but also a problem-solving idea.

SY Panel Nepal: It is a leading construction company in Nepal which offers innovative and interesting building solutions.

Tigs accounting software: This software helps manage finances and is Nepal's first cloud-based accounting application.

What do you drive

Volkswagen. Planning to shift to EV soon.

Favourite tech company

Alibaba: It's incredible to see how it started and

flourished into international spaces over time.

Khaalisisi: It's amazing to see how they are solving our problems and converting trash into cash.

3 places in Nepal that's on your bucket list

Gosaikunda, Mustang and Annapurna Base Camp

Perfume

Chanel

Most used electronic gadget

As a designer, I use maximum time on my laptop

An entrepreneur you look up to and why

Elon Musk. I was really inspired when I read his biography. He failed so many times but he used those experiences as his strength. There were times when he didn't even have food to eat and he used to ask friends for money. There were times when people didn't trust him but his entrepreneurship skills and journey is really inspiring.

Best work advice you have received

My dad was also an entrepreneur and he used to tell me 'Loyalty and dedication to your work are the key to success'. Success is not measured in just profits or the money you earn but rather in the customer loyalty you win. So, in business your success is the loyalty that you can get and the dedication that you give towards your work. I think this advice has really helped me throughout my journey.

Favourite shopping destination

Paris

Go-to eating spot

Firstly, I am not a foodie. It may sound funny but I eat to live. But when I go out, I prefer going to GG Machhan as I love the sukuti there which is made from fresh meat.

Future plans with the company

After long research our mock-up is ready. I have tried Zara, H&M and every other brand in these six years. But now I will go a little exclusive. There is a very large competition in the clothing industry and now since we have already built a brand, I will concentrate more on the elegance side. After this mock-up, I am going for a franchise at both the national and international levels. **B**

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I started the mobile business when I was 26 years old because I saw a huge revolution of mobile phones coming and changing the world. I believed in the idea so despite some initial hiccups I was persistent in making the business work. I didn't distract myself. What I have noticed these days is people open a business, get some funding and start earning some revenue and then they start doing everything else except running the business. This is one basic reason why startups fail"

Rohit Gupta, a third-generation entrepreneur and Vice Chairman of Ramesh Corp, says he like to keep things simple. "Life is already so complicated, I don't want to add to it. I like being surrounded with positive people and love talking about positive things. If you get into the mode of not complicating things, then life becomes easy and sane."

After graduating in Business Administration from Amity University in Delhi, Gupta went to the UK to complete his Master's degree in Finance and Management from the University of Exeter. "Initially, I had no precise goal in life but gradually I got hooked to the finance part of the course," he shares. Going to Delhi and then to UK gave him a lot of exposure and his perspective towards life changed dramatically. "I actually started appreciating myself which I believe is very important," he states

Gupta always knew with certainty that he wanted to chart his own entrepreneurial journey in Nepal. Today he is recognized for his business acumen.

In this issue of **Business 360**, we asked Gupta to share the five things that have impacted his life and work:

Finding opportunities in challenges

I returned to Nepal from the UK in 2007 and at that time my father was leading the business. I struggled for the first one year because the business was set up in a family business atmosphere where there were very little

gaps. I did get involved in several businesses but after a year, I realised I had to do something of my own. That is when I got in touch with one of my school friends and we started a mobile phone distribution business. Back then, we had mostly Nokia and Samsung phones so we started distribution of Spice Mobiles which was a fast-growing mobile brand at that time. We had to literally chase them for six months before we were finally appointed as its distributor in Nepal. That is how my entrepreneurial journey began.

I have faced several crises during this journey and what I have learnt is to look at the problem closely and check the factors that are within or beyond our control. We can't help it if the factors are beyond our control but if they are within our control then we need to talk to our core team members and try to find the best long-term solutions.

I have never sought shortcuts in my decisions. Our plans are always built for the long term, we believe in sustainable solutions and ways. An entrepreneur is a person who faces a lot of challenges and obstacles but looks at them as an opportunity. I have also learnt that an entrepreneur has to be forward looking and possess a broad mind and is someone who doesn't look at only their benefit but at a wider purpose,

and is able to drive the business and carry forward their vision.

For an entrepreneur, the main challenge is to make people believe in you. Previously, when I used to visit banks for loans, I would get it due to my father's reputation and not my educational degree or whatever. Initially even your family members will have concerns on whether you will be able to handle a business. I think that is the main challenge everyone faces. Personally, for me the trust factor was a big challenge but I took it as an opportunity and moved forward.

People often ask about the challenges in continuing a business legacy but like I mentioned earlier if a person is forward looking then all the challenges convert into opportunities. I know this from personal experience because when my father passed away five years ago things were not easy as he was the patriarch of our family and the business. However, I took strength from his life and I rebranded our business as Ramesh Corp in his memory. We are now living by his principles through the organisation and taking our business forward.

A leader is only as good as his team

After I got more actively involved in our business I have revamped our thought process. We have been fortunate that my father had already created a strong platform from where we could launch ourselves.

I have tried to bring in more professionalism in our organisation and as owners, we do not attach ourselves to each and every business. We have professionals, senior management teams with young members who are driving the businesses. At Ramesh Corp we have made sure to invest in our human capital. We try to hire the best and retain the best. What we have also done over the years is to hire people who are competent regardless of their gender. However, we do empower women in our organisation to ensure they rise through the organisational hierarchy. We have very competent female managers who have improved the office environment through their diligence and seriousness. We are working on bringing more women on board and we try to give the best organisational culture and environment across all our offices.

The other aspect I have emphasised on is to create an open atmosphere and culture where people are able to share their experiences. We want our staff to not be afraid to share their thoughts with the management. I wouldn't claim that I changed this aspect because it already existed before, but we gradually took this even further.

We have always been running our businesses in a very ethical manner. We believe in working with trustworthy people and building an ethical



Rohit Gupta
Vice Chairman, Ramesh Corp

business where we can create opportunities for our staff too. It should not always be 'me' and if any person wants to succeed in business they must think of the betterment of their employees too.

As a leader in whichever sphere of life we are involved, we have to be very clear about our intent. One needs to be thoughtful about others too and when you can do that then no matter how diverse the backgrounds of the people working for you, there will never be any problem. You have to back your people and whatever decision you make it has to be for the good of the entire organisation and not just for you. I have always believed in making our staff a part of our vision so that they develop a sense of belongingness because at the end of the day no organisation will sustain and survive if it is one-man show. As a leader you are as good as your team.

People first

Till date I have never been overwhelmed by success. The way I measure success for myself is how people around me are doing. The wellbeing, happiness and growth of people around me is what I believe defines my success and this is something I learnt from my father. Of course, profit and money are important but people come first.

What we have to bear in mind is that in any difficult situation, at the end of the day, it will only be us facing that along with our near and dear ones with whom we can confide in, and if you have helped people along the way they will be there when you need them.

It is very easy to break or destroy anything but extremely difficult to protect and safeguard things. So, whether I am in the boardroom dealing with company issues or elsewhere dealing with personal family matters, I put people first. This is something I have always

THE WELLBEING, HAPPINESS AND GROWTH OF PEOPLE AROUND ME IS WHAT I BELIEVE DEFINES MY SUCCESS AND THIS IS SOMETHING I LEARNT FROM MY FATHER. OF COURSE, PROFIT AND MONEY ARE IMPORTANT BUT PEOPLE COME FIRST.

followed in life.

Though we have been quite successful over the years, I don't think we have really achieved something that I can be really proud of. I believe we have a really long way to go and this is just the beginning. At Ramesh Corp, 90% of the average age of employees is below 40. We call ourselves a very young organisation. We have definitely reached some milestones in our business but one can never be complacent. We see a lot of opportunities and hope for more development to take place in Nepal in the coming days. At present, the country is in a very bad situation but every economy runs through its own cycle. So, we are heavily invested in the country for the next ten years. When Nepal's economy revives, when we

have reverse brain drain in the country, and when Ramesh Corp reaches a higher platform, then maybe I would be able to say that I have succeeded and am really proud of my achievements.

We also need to give back to the community and society where we do business in. We established the Ramesh Gupta Memorial Trust in 2018 in memory of my late father. Through the trust we have been creating awareness about cancer and also providing financial help to patients who cannot afford treatment. Besides, we also conduct counselling sessions for cancer patients and their families. The reason why we have focused on cancer is because my father passed away due to cancer and I know it is a big ordeal for both patients and their families.

A brand is not just a name

People often talk about how successful a brand is but fail to see the tireless efforts that have gone into making that brand. A brand is not just a name. It is a combination of core values, vision, mission and principle objectives. I think these are the pillars that anyone has to look into while trying to create a brand.

When I was rebranding our business as Ramesh Corp, it was not about just giving a name to our organisation. I spent a lot of time with my team and consultants to take our core principle forward together because my father always believed in taking everyone together. That is how we introduced our core principle of 'forward together'.

Then we have our core pillars - speed, authenticity, professionalism and pioneers. All these things are not just for name sake; they are values we deeply believe in. We have tried to imbibe these pillars in

any business we do or activities we conduct within any of our verticals. We have it at the management level right now and slowly we want to translate it to our stakeholders and employees too. I think our brand is a combination of all these thoughts and attributes.

Persistence matters

I started the mobile business when I was 26 years old because I saw a huge revolution of mobile phones coming and changing the world. I believed in the idea so despite some initial hiccups I was persistent in making the business work. I didn't distract myself. What I have noticed these days is people open a business, get some funding and start earning some revenue and then they start doing everything else except running the business. This is one basic reason why startups fail.

Whenever you open a business your life should revolve around it until you have grown big enough whereby you are able to hire others to look after it.

The other challenge I see in Nepal for startups is getting the required funding. The third aspect is we lack a startup ecosystem. There are many smart professionals and entrepreneurs who are willing and able to build startups but we lack an ecosystem that can provide the necessary skillset. There is also lack of support from the government and business community. Being involved in the Confederation of Nepalese Industries I have received the opportunity to look at what is going on in Nepal more closely and deeply. The issue I feel is negligence and avoiding what is in front of you. If you look at the policy makers, bureaucracy or politicians, everyone knows there is something wrong but no one is willing to address it or take accountability or work on improving it. **B**

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Sandesh Palungwa Limbu, Certified professional fitness instructor, founder of RAGE Fitness, and specialises in mixed martial arts.

With the festivals on us and the weather changing, it does get tough for some of us to stay motivated to exercise. There's holiday plans, festival shopping, incredible amounts of food, parties and family visits and staying on top of your exercise routine can take a backseat. But there are a few ways to not

get derailed from all the hard work you have put into staying fit and healthy. It's just a few simple tweaks that will allow you the flexibility of enjoying the festivals without the guilt or completely letting go.

Find every opportunity to move and say active. Additionally squeeze in a little exercise through the chaos of travel, shopping, family visits, pujas and parties. Aim for shorter, high intensity workouts. Instead of a full 30-45 minute workout, do short 10-15 minute workouts three times a day. Even if it's just a 10 minute brisk walk or jog that you can manage, it's better than nothing. Also, just stay active, walk instead of driving, take the stairs instead of the elevator.

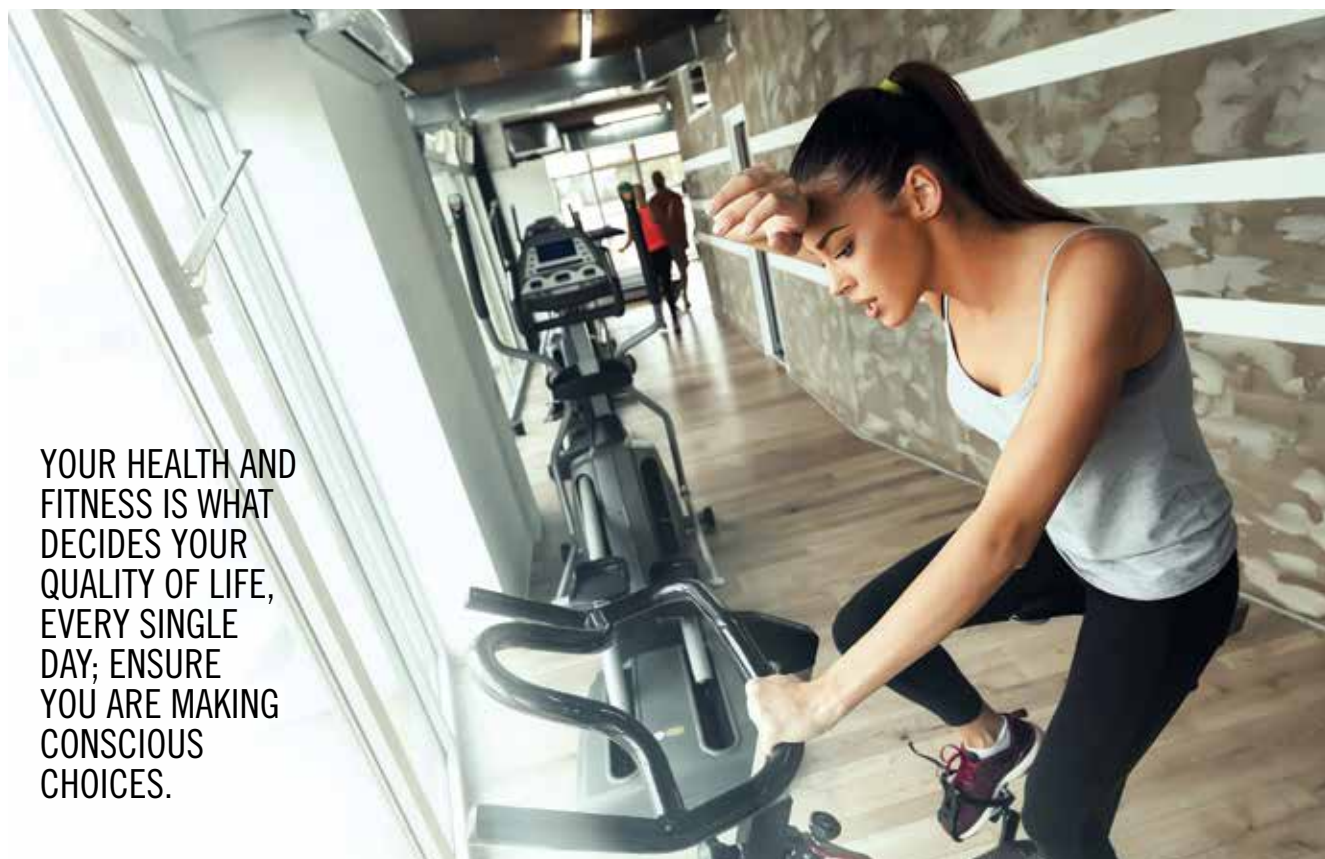
Create micro workout goals for the day. Write it on a piece of paper the night before and tick it off at the end of the day. This creates a momentum and helps you keep tabs and stay accountable.

Make it social. How about hiking or mountain biking with friends instead of playing cards all day? Get your family and friends involved. This makes it fun and challenging at the same time. There are incredible outdoor and indoor opportunities for workouts – a game of futsal, running or tennis is always fun.

Eat healthy, nutritious meals. It's tempting to eat all that heavy, fried stuff. Eat a little if you must but in the larger scheme of things, make healthier choices. Most people get tempted to overdo

it during the holidays and think they will go on a diet afterwards and balance it out. It's never 'all or nothing'. That defeats the entire process and purpose of choosing a healthy and fit lifestyle. Remember sustainability and commitment to your health and wellbeing are the key to living an active and purposeful life.

Stay active, practice mindful eating, get sufficient sleep, remain stress free and enjoy the festivals for the opportunity it all allows to meet and enjoy family and friends, travel, and understand our culture and rituals. Ultimately your health and fitness is what decides your quality of life, every single day; ensure you are making conscious choices. **B**



YOUR HEALTH AND FITNESS IS WHAT DECIDES YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE, EVERY SINGLE DAY; ENSURE YOU ARE MAKING CONSCIOUS CHOICES.

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Tough paths can make leaders stronger. Learn to look at the situation as they are because if you look at the situation as they are, it will not affect you, however if you try to interpret it, it could affect you”

An international development professional, Arun Rana has over two decades of experience in areas of banking, private sector promotion, project management, agro forestry value-chain growth, international trade, journalism and communication that includes various executive and managerial roles. He has also worked extensively with the highest levels of Nepal bureaucracy, political parties and expatriates. He is the former Country Director, ICF Nepal.

Currently, Rana is involved with Samriddha Pahad and Rato Bangala Partnership Outreach Programme as board member. He is also active at Manavsewa Ashram as its advisor. Prior to that Rana was with GIZ and Nepal Investment Bank.

Rana holds a Master's in International Affairs/ International Finance and Business from Columbia University, New York and a Bachelor's in Communication from Goshen College, Indiana, US. He shares, “During my grad school at Columbia University, I got an opportunity to work as a short-term consultant at Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan, and it was a great learning experience for me.”

In this edition of **Business 360**, Rana shares his views on leadership and what it means to him.

How do you define leadership?

I have never thought about defining leadership but if you ask me about how I take on my leadership role then it would be a three-pronged approach, i.e., sustainability, talent and goodwill that are intertwined. What I believe is for any leader pursuing the leadership role, sustainability



ARUN RANA
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL

matters. Sustainability leads to a secure and bright future. Secondly, good talent is needed. For a leader who wants to do something better and make a change, they need those who are talented and skilled. A vibrant and motivated team always make things smoother. Lastly, it is goodwill; the goodwill of a company and stakeholders will add value to the work delivered. When there is sustainability and good talent, goodwill tends to be there and when there is sustainability and goodwill, there is a tendency to attract good talent. Hence, this has been my focus or my mantra while leading.

Is leadership ‘acquired’ or ‘inborn’?

For the most part, leadership is acquired and then it's both, but then it is mostly acquired. In order to be a successful leader, more hard work is needed as opposed to more intelligence. I am sure that there are innate qualities that come but then it is more of a nurturing which plays a greater part in terms of leadership. Also, some leadership occurs genetically, for example, daughters of XYZ tend to be successful and go up very rapidly because of family ownership and all. Well, it will definitely help you to climb the ladder but in terms of inbuilt intrinsic nature, a lot has to be done.

What are ways to win over people or to create influence?

I believe one should focus on the empathetic side of their work, for example, whether or not my junior colleagues are wanting to come to work. If your junior colleagues are not wanting to come to work, then there is something wrong. Teamwork is shown by the motivated team members. Therefore, to motivate and win them over, creating a fearless environment is important. When there is fear there is no creativity and no creativity leads to machine-like (automation mode with less awareness) work. When there is no fear, there is creativity which means. You

can be liberal while becoming politely assertive.

The other thing that one can look into is the emotional side of things because if you are emotionally sound, you want to give your energy and do more work. The top priority should be emotional health and wellbeing of an employee.

Creating a fearless environment, giving them opportunities and incorporating both personal and professional growth helps to create an impact. Personally, the supervisors that I have had in the past provided me with the space to debate with them, to be open and this helped me a lot. I believe people will follow you when your intentions are better.

One incident that has tested your leadership ability and the way you handled it.

While working in an organisation, I had to lead teams, for example a team looking into programmes and also an administrative team. As a leader, I had to facilitate the uneasiness that used to arise at times while working together. Believe me, leading a team and making everyone satisfied with their work might not be so easy. First, I try to facilitate my colleagues in such a way that they themselves will sit for a negotiation and solve the conflict on their own. But if that does not work, I try to become politely assertive. Further, even if a majority (i.e., in management team) has supported a cause, I may overrule it because sometimes the majority may not be right.

What aspects of your personality have helped you to serve various roles in the past?

Basically, my tendency to network which tends to happen effortlessly is one of the characteristics that has helped me deliver in various roles and situations. I believe this is one of the few qualities which could be inherent for me. Although I am an introvert, most people might perceive me for an outwardly oriented because for work related matters, I tend to connect, talk and learn more

from people I meet. When you are in a leadership position, it is essential for you to know about various fields even if that is not your area of expertise. Therefore, it is key to my growth.

The other aspect is that I follow a slightly democratic process. During my roles in various organizations, I used to consult with the concerned team members following which I reached a conclusion and that conclusion would accommodate most concerns. Having said this, sometimes it used to be so hectic for me because everyone used to have their own perception and to make things work better, while aligning with their thoughts was challenging too. But I used to manage because I used to enjoy doing that.

I believe it is okay to make mistakes and I share the same with my colleagues. I used to tell them that one should never be afraid to make mistakes. But it is key to learn from the mistakes while getting better by time. Lastly, the politely assertive side of me has helped.

What would you suggest to effectively lead a team?

To effectively lead a team, you must have people skills. Every staff member should enjoy doing their work and the feeling should be 'I want to go to office, there is so much fun'. You can only effectively run a team when your colleagues start thinking that they are getting paid for having fun. What I mean is hard work is there but then all the hard work comes effortlessly when you enjoy your work.

Additionally, some dealings are contextual because every member in your team is different as they come from various schools of thought. It is futile to expect the same kind of support from each and every one and treat them in the same way. You must be able to guide people in such away that they become more productive. One size cannot and does not fit all.

How can a leader prepare for the unknown?

A leader should always be ready for the unknown because

nobody knows what the future holds. We must be mindful and accept the fact that the political situation can change anytime and if you are working on grants, donors might not be as supportive as they were previously, human resources can leave you anytime. Therefore, it is always better to have a backup plan. I could be working in a project and there could be a political change during the span, in such a situation, the team should be guided to have an adaptive mind set and should be ready to change their priorities. That is how life is also and the beauty of life is that it is not predictable.

When should a leader pass on the baton?

There could be official plan for passing on the baton but then what I believe is a leader should only pass on the leadership role when they have fulfilled the goal of creating an impact, making a more progressive and productive working environment, making improvements in their own personalities, and has identified someone to take over. The organisation must work on creating leaders preemptively. This will ultimately set a legacy and create more sustainable and longer run changes.

Is there any ideal leader you look up to and why?

I look up to the veteran actor, Madan Krishna Shrestha. I admire his simplicity, humbleness, realistic views and down to earth personality. I believe he is one of the few people I know who has an in-depth understanding of life and is a realised individual who doesn't complain about the things life has put forward. With qualities like these, many people in his industry have idolised him and try to imitate him. He is a great motivator. By watching people like him, I have learned to respect others and understood that the more simple you're, the more respect you receive.

What would your advice to young emerging leaders be?

If you are having turbulence and failures in life, the only thing I would like to suggest is take it as an opportunity. My father said, the failures are the path to the success. There will be storms the life throws at you at times, but practice the art of witnessing as it is without interpreting. The other thing is if a person has everything perfect and has not encountered challenges or is running smoothly then they might not have learned much. They may not be deeply rooted in being.

Further, emerging leaders must be ready to do hard work, be punctual and last but not the least, disciplined. Tough paths make leaders stronger. Once again, learn to look at the situation as they are because if you look at the situation as they are, it will not affect you, however if you try to interpret it, it will affect you.

You have closely worked with bureaucrats and politicians in the past. From that experience, how do you view leadership in the government?

Looking at it from the government perspective, stability is difficult in the government because of the frequent change in leadership. But the upcoming and new generation leaders are very smart, learned, practical and well exposed. The leadership is changing so frequently that you need to start from scratch whenever we need to work closely with them.

Looking at the political side of the country, I do not see a genuine worry for the country. Previously, leaders used to have traits like honesty, loyalty and discipline. Although there are a few good people in politics, in general, I do not see someone who really cares and feels accountable to the citizens and humankind. Having said this, I have a positive perspective for the future because a new breed of politicians have entered the fray and are working aggressively to bring about positive change. **B**

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