WHY THE GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T REGULATE YOUTH ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA

**ENERGY MARKETS 2024** 

VOL 12 • ISSUE 4 • FEBRUARY 2024 • RS 100

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# THE PAINS, PITFALLS & TRIUMPHS OF FIRST GEN ENTREPRENEURS

NEPAL'S TRADE IMBALANCES WITH CHINA

MONEY LAUNDERING PREVENTION IN NEPAL



#### MAPPING HAPPING HAP

CO-FOUNDERS, GALLI MAPS

8655



Seamaster

# PRECISION AT EVERY LEVEL







ANNAPURNA ARCADE DURBAR MARG

## CLASSIC FUSION



Even when big businesses are facing slowdown and SME's are struggling to breathe, we go through expanded challenges of seeing entrepreneurs put behind bars, entrepreneurs going through security issues and facing extortion and threat to life, entrepreneurs taking their life unable to pay back loans, entrepreneurs collapsing under the weight of financial burden. On the other side of the spectrum, we see government and policy makers mired in corruption, lack of clarity on vision and processes, breaking laws that they are supposed to uphold.

The need for this comparison comes from just one simple thought: Is the rule of law not the same for everyone? Does the constitution not guarantee justice?

I am equally aware that, more often than not, this is not a black and white situation. There are so many shades of grey in the interplay of influence between politics and business. Rules are tweaked to pave the vested interest of some businesses, favours are bought and sold, bribes are given and taken, deals are made and broken, power is seized and played, conscience and integrity is on the market to be bought and sold.

To survive in this country what matters most is who you know. Your connections will determine the quality of your life and open doors of possibilities. Needless to say, it will come at the cost of values and integrity.

For business, your access to government and decision makers will leverage your success and buy you big deals. For politicians, your access to money will fund your political aspirations and beget you positions of power and authority.

Politics is tribal. Business is pragmatic. Both aspire for power – one for authority and the other for money. When lines are blurred, they can wreak havoc. In time, the dark side of this association and manipulation is often exposed but all it unleashes is a culture of corruption; and it is always the common man who pays.

com

Charu Chadha editor



## **BIZ INDICATORS**

FOREX MARKET	12-Feb-24	12-Jan-24	Year ago
USD	132.78	132.68	132.35
GBP	167.71	169.18	160.60
Chinese Renminbi (Yuan)	18.46	18.51	19.40
Indian Rupee (INR 100)	160.00	160.00	160.00
Euro	143.30	145.27	141.88
Australian Dollar	-	-	-
GOVERNMENT SECURITIES	Lowest	Highest	Weighted Avg.
Discount rate of T-bill (Subject to latest issuance)			
Treasury bills (28 days)	2.65	3.10	3.03
Treasury bills (91 days)	2.87	3.26	3.20
Treasury bills (182 days)	1.74	3.50	3.29
Treasury bills (364 days)	3.94	4.14	4.07
PRICE INDICES	15-Jan-24	15-Dec-23	15-Jan-23
National Consumer Price Index (base year 2014/15 = 100)	163.52	164.63	155.36

Source: Refinitiv Eikon, Nrb

P = Provisional, R = Revised

Compiled for Business 360° by



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All advertising enquiries should be sent to sales@media9.com.np

Business 360° is published monthly from Kathmandu, Nepal by Media Nine Pvt. Ltd., Kathmandu, Nepal Tel: 4510440 | Email: editorial.b360@media9.com.np All materials@Business 360°

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Publisher – Media Nine Pvt. Ltd. CDO Regd. No 31/069/70 Printed at : Saugat Printers Pvt. Ltd., Tel.: 9849431415 Newstand : Kasthamandap Distribution Pvt. Ltd. Newroad. Tel: 4247241



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Elegance is an attitude

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### IN THE LEAD

# MAPPING THE PATH TO SUCCESS

RAJ BIKRAM Maharjan **& ASHON SHAKYA CO-FOUNDERS, GALLI MAPS** 

WE HAD A CLEAR VISION WHEN WE STARTED OUT AND IT WAS TO COMBINE PRECISION, ACCESSIBILITY AND LOCAL CONTEXT **TO CREATE A MAPPING SOLUTION THAT SERVED** THE MARKET EFFECTIVELY. By Doing So, we aimed TO ENHANCE THE LIVES OF **COUNTLESS INDIVIDUALS** AND STREAMLINE **ESSENTIAL SERVICES.** 





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I BELIEVE THAT WHILE SOME PEOPLE MAY HAVE NATURAL INCLINATIONS TOWARDS LEADERSHIP, IT IS PRIMARILY AN ACQUIRED SKILL. THROUGH EXPERIENCE, LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, INDIVIDUALS CAN CULTIVATE THE QUALITIES AND ABILITIES NEEDED TO BECOME **INFLUENTIAL LEADERS**"

MANISH K KHEMKA Executive Director, BLC Holdings

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# **FACE2FACE**

**"DEVELOPING COUNTRIES DON'T NEED JUST DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS AND** EDUCATION. THEY NEED BUSINESS BECAUSE IT'S **BUSINESS THAT CREATES EMPLOYMENT, CREATES** TAXES AND IT GIVES PEOPLE **OPPORTUNITIES. HOWEVER, I** KNEW FROM MY TIME IN THE **INVESTMENT WORLD THAT** WITHOUT CAPITAL IT WAS **VERY HARD TO DO THINGS. I KNEW THAT A LOT OF POORER COUNTRIES DID NOT HAVE** ENOUGH CAPITAL. I, THUS, THOUGHT I SHOULD SPEND MY LIFE WORKING ON BRINGING **INTERNATIONAL CAPITAL TO HELP BUSINESSES IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES**"

SIR GRAHAM WRIGLEY Founder, Samriddha Pahad



"THE KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA IS BEAUTIFUL. WE CAN BUILD AND PROMOTE HIGH-VALUE TREKKING AND ADVENTURE RELATED TOURISM. BUT DEVELOPMENT MUST CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE WHO RESIDE WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA. RIGHTLY DONE, IT WILL CREATE JOBS, ENHANCE THE VALUE OF THE PROPERTY, INCREASE EXPORTS, EXPAND LOCAL BUSINESSES, ATTRACT NEW OR RELOCATE BUSINESSES, INCREASE TAX REVENUES, AND MORE"

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"I THINK PEOPLE WILL BE SURPRISED AT THE IMPACT THE WOOD HAS ON THE FINAL DELIVERY OF THE FLAVOUR PROFILE; HOW IT MAKES IT MUCH MORE COMPLEX AND HOW IT MAKES IT MUCH MORE CCESSIBLE. I BELIEVE IT IS GOING TO APPEAL MUCH MORE TO THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET OVER AND ABOVE THE CURRENT RANGE OF KHUKRI. I THINK IT IS A REALLY PREMIUM ADDITION TO THE KHUKRI FAMILY"

> CHRISTOPHER ARMES Master Blender, Cask Series - Khukri Rum

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# MAPPING THE PATH TO SUCCESS

Galli Maps, which recently bagged the NYEF Startup Awards, is the brainchild of three friends who realised the necessity of a digital map that would provide detailed information about the location of a place that a person is searching for. It was during the Covid 19 lockdown that Raj Bikram Maharjan, Ashon Shakya and Janam Maharjan decided to start Galli Maps because during the period there was a surge in online delivery services but due to the lack of accurate mapping, it was difficult for delivery people and customers alike.

"We noticed that people had to keep making calls to the delivery person and vice versa to receive their parcels and most of the time you would have to choose the nearest landmark to meet," says Raj. "This is the major reason why we felt the need for a digital map which would incorporate even the smallest alleys and by-lanes of Kathmandu and thus our journey with Galli Maps began," shares Ashon.

Since its inception, Galli Maps has garnered the trust of its users, thanks to its user-friendly interface and precise mapping capabilities.

In this edition of **Business 360**, we sat down with Raj and Ashon, the driving forces behind Galli Maps, to delve into their remarkable journey and gain insights into the startup culture. Excerpts:

# RAJ BIKRAM MAHARJAN & ASHON SHAKYA co-founders, galli maps

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We had a clear vision when we started out and it was to combine precision, accessibility and local context to create a mapping solution that served the market effectively. By doing so, we aimed to enhance the lives of countless individuals and streamline essential services.

### What was the inspiration behind launching the Digital Maps startup?

Raj: In the early days of my involvement in drone mapping, I collaborated closely with local governments. Our focus was on providing them with high-resolution maps, an alternative to traditional satellite maps. These detailed maps proved particularly valuable for house numbering, a critical task for municipalities like Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Kirtipur. By accurately numbering houses, local authorities could efficiently track property taxes. Then when the Covid 19 lockdown period started, e-commerce experienced a sudden surge in demand for delivery services. Parcel delivery, online shopping and other services all pivoted toward home delivery. However, the major challenge was in delivering the packages to customers' doorsteps. People delivering the packages had to spend a considerable amount of time and also money, making phone calls to the customers to get directions. And it was the same for customers too. At times, the situation was such that some customers would cancel the deliveries. E-commerce platforms also grappled with the inefficiencies. When you consider the cumulative hours spent waiting for customers across all deliveries, it amounted to over 100 hours per day. Clearly, there was room for improvement in the last-mile delivery process. By addressing these pain points, we can enhance the overall delivery experience and streamline operations for both customers and e-commerce providers.

At that time, Janam was in Korea and Ashon and I were in Nepal. We began holding talks with each other regarding the challenges faced in accurate mapping and navigation. Janam introduced us to Kakao Maps, a highly precise mapping application widely used in Korea. Unlike Google Maps, which sometimes falls short in Korean accuracy due to national security regulations, Kakao Maps provides exceptional reliability and functionality. Similarly, in China, Baidu Maps emerged as a local alternative. It offered detailed maps and accurate navigation, catering specifically to the Chinese market. My training experience in India revealed yet another homegrown solution called Move Maps, developed by a company called MapmyIndia. These localised map applications were tailored to the unique needs of each region.

Our research unveiled an interesting trend whereby many Asian countries actively create their own map applications, emphasising accuracy and localisation. Recognising this untapped potential in Nepal, we thought we could do something about it. While municipalities possessed house numbers, citizens lacked a platform to easily access this information. Thus, we embarked on a mission to build a comprehensive mapping platform, empowering both local authorities and residents to navigate seamlessly. We had a clear vision when we started out and it was to combine precision, accessibility and local context to create a mapping solution that served the market effectively. By doing so, we aimed to enhance the lives of countless individuals and streamline essential services. Thus, our journey began.

### What are some key features and functionalities of Galli Maps which benefit users?

Ashon: In Nepal, the absence of standardised house numbers poses a challenge for both residents and businesses. However, our map platform has revolutionised the way people navigate and interact with their surroundings. Previously, locating specific addresses was a daunting task due to the lack of house numbers. Now, thanks to the efforts of local municipalities, house numbers are being officially assigned. Our platform serves as a comprehensive repository, allowing users to access all

declared house numbers. Whether you are a resident, a visitor or a delivery person, finding your destination becomes easier. But there are places where houses do not have any numbers. We, thus, developed the 'Galli Code'. When you long-press on a building a unique seven-digit code will appear which is the Galli Code and this acts like a precise location marker. In this way, even if there are no house numbers it becomes easy to send the code and get your deliveries.

The streets in our country are very narrow, in fact in some places there are only alleys, and this creates a lot of problems for deliveries. Previously, if you wanted something delivered then you had to call the delivery person and decide to meet at the nearest landmark which everybody knew about. To solve this issue, we implemented the 360-degree feature. With this feature you can pinpoint the exact house location. You just need to ping your address to the courier person and they will be able to locate your house.

Another area that we have worked on is collaborating with local municipalities. The accuracy of Galli Maps, I am confident is more accurate than other map applications due to this collaboration. We have made a lot of effort to map even the narrowest alleys so that navigating becomes easier for all those who are using our app. Once you start using Galli Maps you will soon realise that we are a trustworthy app.

### Nepal has a unique geographical landscape and you must be planning to expand to other cities. How is your platform going to address those specific needs and challenges of navigation?

Ashon: Our first target is Kathmandu Valley. If we can prove ourselves in Kathmandu, then only will we be going outside. One basic reason why we chose Kathmandu is because it is a densely populated city with numerous alleys and lanes and bylanes.



And, we have been quite successful here. Our next step will be to go to other major cities. Once we cover major cities and they are linked up, we will move on to working with other urban and rural municipalities. We need to take things one step at a time otherwise we will not be able to deliver what we want to. There is a lot of infrastructure development going on, a lot of changes taking place. How do you ensure accuracy and up-to-date information?

**Raj:** We have different ways of collecting data. The first is that we map the places ourselves; we do street mapping. Right now, for street mapping we maintain a target of conducting it once a year but once we have a big enough team, we aim to do it every six months. But actually, even once a year is enough. For the 360 mapping, we have used a bit of artificial intelligence as well through which we update the 360 maps. Another way is we have a direct connection with the municipalities, and the changes, for example if a new house is being built, that house will be added through their system as well. So, through that the house number and the footprint is also added. We have been updating our maps using data we collect ourselves and data given to us by the government organisations.

### How exactly is the mapping done?

Ashon: One mapping that we have started is called drone mapping. In the beginning we did the mapping by using aerial drones. We had to take video footage from areas which we then had to sync with the GPS location, from which we could get a lot of information. So, for the first step that is what we did. Especially for Kathmandu we had to use drone footage to get information for the maps. Secondly, for the 360 maps, we have 360 cameras which we attach to cars or bikes and drive around the roads. While doing this we have to continuously take photos and videos. Photos especially are taken at continuous intervals and then we have to process those photos to create a map.

### Any success stories or testimonials from users who have utilised your digital platform?

Raj: Definitely, there has been appreciation on many occasions from our users. The Indra Jatra that we recently celebrated was a proud moment for Galli Maps. We already had our map. So, what we did was to get in touch with the people who would be travelling with the chariot (rath) or participating with the Lakhey and collaborated with them. We requested them to give us access to their GPS coordinates which were continuously updated on our maps. A lot of people, especially foreigners, downloaded our app then and they could find out the exact location of the chariot and the Lakhey and witness the procession. Literally, there were people



Banning any social media platform is not the ultimate solution. Why specifically ban TikTok? The government has to think about monitoring more than banning. waiting at home and updating themselves through our app so they knew exactly at what time the procession would pass by through their area. Earlier you had to incessantly call someone who was with the procession or just randomly wait for it to pass by. So, the added feature made it much easier for people and we received a lot of traffic as people were posting about it on TikTok and other social media. They made videos about chasing the Lakhey using our maps to navigate. It was a moral booster for us.

### What were the initial challenges when setting up Galli Maps be it on the policy side or infrastructure?

Raj: Our first challenge was building a property database. Another was when we took our project to the municipalities it was quite difficult to convince them. What was happening was that the municipalities had mapped the houses in a particular way and were building their own maps. What happened with that system was that each municipality had their own convoluted way of accessing those maps. Kathmandu Municipality had their own site and Lalitpur municipality had their own as well, which was not viable for the users. In 2002 itself, Kathmandu already had a map. But the general public was unable to use it and it was not updated as well and ended up unused. Now they are starting again. So yes, the first challenge was that it was very difficult to convince government bodies. They did not understand why it was important and what utility it would provide. Later on, when they saw the number of users they started supporting us.

**Ashon:** The first to support us were the people at the Kirtipur Municipality. They had also started mapping out their area but they had not proceeded past a small area, so they called us. We also received immense support from Lalitpur Metropolitan City, and now from Kathmandu Metropolitan City as well. Sunita Dangol, Deputy Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, herself called us to give us suggestions regarding our work.

In the beginning, it was quite difficult to convince the general public as well. Another challenge was one which all startups face in Nepal. Initially, we were very worried about being able to raise the necessary capital but we were lucky to meet a couple of investors who trusted us implicitly and invested in us. A lot of investors in Nepal are still quite old-fashioned. We had an idea but only after implementing it could we generate revenue, which was something difficult to explain to typical investors.

# Has Galli Maps been generating enough revenue in recent times?

Raj: We had planned to start generating revenue by 2024 as we wanted to spend a year refining the product. However, we ended up finishing our work earlier than expected and started generating revenue since October 2023. For the moment. our main revenue source is B2B deals. For example, we work with WorldLink, Foodmandu, Nabil Bank and GoTaxi. Our enterprise customers are our main source of revenue. In the future we plan on using our app, which is free of cost and will remain so in the future too, by having some advertisements. But that again depends on if our user base grows. We are also working on integrating third-party services. If this works out it would be an additional revenue source for us.

#### How do you plan on reaching and engaging a wider range of users to promote the adoption and utilisation of your app?

**Raj:** The first advantage that users have with our app is they can use it to search for amenities, landmarks and hotels, which can cater to a lot of the user base ranging from tourists and travellers to citydwellers. Besides, we are also working with others who have built applications specifically for tourists who want to travel and trek. They are using our map API (application programming interface) in their maps. So, our maps are being used by their user base as well.

### Recently, the government banned TikTok in the country. As young people who are in the technological industry, do you think that was a good move?

Raj: As a budding business, TikTok was a very good marketing platform because of its algorithm. The kind of content we pushed on TikTok led to an organic growth; the kind of organic growth we have not seen on Instagram or Facebook or any other social media. So, it was worth spending time and money in making content, in making awareness videos. and educational videos for our users on TikTok. A lot of our users actually came from TikTok. Definitely, we have some users from Facebook and YouTube, but the majority was from TikTok. When you start a business, you usually start off small and you do not have much financial resources too. So, on TikTok we could have a wider reach despite a small budget. As soon as it was banned, we had quite a difficult time. The government said it had some concerns regarding national security so they had to shut it down. So, it depends on how you want to look at that step - whether as a nation or as an individual.

Ashon: However, any technology that can be used can also be misused. Obviously, there were some who misused TikTok but the ban ended up negatively affecting those who were using it properly. I think that is something the government should pay attention to. Banning any social media platform is not the ultimate solution. If the reason was misuse, then even Facebook is being misused and Instagram even more so. Why specifically ban TikTok? The government has to think about monitoring more than banning.



As users and as an organisation, the algorithm was benefiting us and our users tremendously. The videos we had made to raise awareness were actually reaching our users. We were never engaged in social issues or similar things that were cited as the reason the site had to be banned, because the algorithm showed you things you always engaged in. Instead of banning it the government could have monitored and penalised those who created indecent content or content that were a threat to national peace and security. Shutting down the site completely is not the best move in our opinion.

We can give you a very good example of an in-depth report prepared by a journalist about why India's social media are dying. After TikTok was banned in India many replacement apps sprung up. Their local start-up ecosystem ended up growing. But by 2023, around 90% of them were all dead, and the 10% that survived ended up changing their business model. This happened because when TikTok was banned it created a market gap and to fill that they came up with their own applications, but the question of build quality also mattered. Is the algorithm good? As they were not able to give users what they wanted in terms of build quality and content, especially compared to TikTok and Facebook and other major brands they ended up not living up to the expectations they had created. So, most of these replacement social media sites ended up dying. This shows that banning is not the ultimate solution

### Besides the map feature are there any other features you plan on incorporating in your app?

Raj: For now, we are trying to build the foundation from the ground up. So, our main focus is creating maps because we have to make very accurate maps. On top of the accurate maps, as you said we want to build services or integrate third-party services. We have already come up with a 'Report' feature. For example, if there are potholes, or someone has parked in a location where they are not supposed to, or if there is garbage that has been disposed of in an inappropriate location, as a citizen that at times makes us angry. And oftentimes, we do not know where to lodge a complaint. May be, we have to speak to the municipality people but we do not have the time to visit the office. So, with the 'Report' feature, one can

simply take a picture through the Galli Maps application and that photo goes to the concerned municipality. For instance, if you were to take a picture in Lalitpur Municipality, it will get automatically geo-tagged so that they know what ward and location the report is from. So, depending on whether it is a pothole or an accident, or unsanitary, or a public hazard you can select a category of all the hazards which is sent to the concerned ward. This informs the ward as well about the problems in their area, which they can go and solve immediately. So that is one feature we have already implemented.

Another feature we are coming up with is the 'Event' feature. Our app was heavily used and a lot of people loved it during the Indra



Our aim is to fill the gaps left by Google Maps, not only in Nepal, but in the entirety of South-Asia, and also to introduce additional features compared to Google.

# As a startup, how do you define a startup?

Jatra festival. Similarly, there

a regular basis, almost every

are many events happening on

weekend if not every day. A lot of people have approached us

to include their events as well.

Since there are many who want

their events to be promoted and

also people who are looking for events to go to but do not know

place this feature will be helpful.

If you are an event organiser,

you can create an event in

our application. Once you

have done that our users are

about when, where and what

the event is about: whether

it is a concert, art exhibition,

if you are interested you can

attend it. At present, we only

have a special events section,

but we are coming up with a smaller events section. so

that smaller businesses like

is going on in their area.

privacy of user data?

noticed that when you

restaurants can also list their events so that when people look

up for events, they can see what

How do you ensure the security and

Ashon: You must have

download applications, they

start asking for your phone

We don't do that. The main

demographic who use our

number and email addresses.

maps are foreigners who want

to get to a location, so we try

to keep it hassle free for them.

for example a missing place, or

But if you want to add data,

a business wants to add their

details, if they want to report

create events, for that we ask

them to log in as we need to

not. They might report some

nonsense or they might create

an event that is not real; wrong

information. Regarding privacy

tasked our team to blur out any

faces and registration number

360-degree images we capture.

We will be implementing that

plates of vehicles from the

soon.

issue concerns, we have also

information should not reach

our users. Besides that, we

do not ask our users for any

verify if that user is genuine or

something, if they want to

procession, or a workshop and

informed through a notification

where the events are taking

Raj: To be honest, we also did a bit of research on what actually is a startup. There are so many startup schemes, startup awards and programmes and incubation centres. Hence, it was natural for us to wonder what a startup actually is. Many people said that when you start a business, it is a startup but if I started a hotel would that be a startup? I think there is a difference between a regular business and a startup. We attended a startup training in India conducted by the University of Texas and when we asked this very question their definition of a startup was an organisation which has a repeatable and scalable business. Let's take an example of Facebook. Uber or TikTok which are all tech businesses. Uber is already established in the USA but if Uber wanted to enter the Nepali market, there would be no need for them to start from scratch. Just a few changes would be necessary. So, it is repeatable and scalable worldwide. It is about making a foundation somewhere which you can use wherever you want. Now if you talk about a hotel business like Marriott, they cannot use the building that they constructed in the US in Nepal; they have to build a separate hotel here. That is a regular business. A startup has to be repeatable and scalable. The same business model has to repeat. inDrive's business model is the same in Nepal, India and the US. Uber's business model is the same in the US, Africa and India and it has scaled accordingly. That is the definition we believe of a startup and it also makes sense. What we also have to keep in mind is initially a company may be a startup but once they reach a breakeven point and start generating extra revenue then it turns into a proper running company or enterprise.

**Ashon:** There is also a thing about how long you should call a company a startup. There are some who still refer to eSewa and Pathao as startups but they are fullfledged businesses now. How can you still compare them to other startups? In Nepal, what kind of businesses can be called startups is something that is still unclear. The government has schemes to help startups but it has not clearly defined what a startup is. There is still confusion regarding this. So, we could have a definition based on certain parameters like startups have to be repeatable and scalable, they cannot be older than three years and cannot have more than a certain number of employees.

# Why do you think startups fail most of the time?

Raj: There are various reasons why startups fail but we wouldn't be able to tell you what is the major reason as we have not faced that situation. The basic thing is we have to learn from others' failures as well. However, having said that, our own research shows that 90% of startup businesses fail. Why most of them fail? Firstly, there is something called product market fit. We have seen people building a product but the market does not need it. The product could be amazing but the market does not need it. So, if the product does not fit the market the startup fails in that case. That is one of the major reasons why products fail. Another reason is the team. A team can also dissolve due to disputes and many startups fail due to disputes. In the beginning there is a lot of energy and later the energy goes down. Because of the disputes, it results in startups failing.

**Ashon:** Another reason would be funding. Actually, funding is the major reason, especially in Nepal. In the beginning everybody has an idea, they build a prototype, they raise the seed fund and then they start building products, then they run out of funding. So, they have to go look for another source of funding. As soon as they run out of funds what happens is that their operation ends and if they are unable to acquire funds their startup ends up dying. These are the basic reasons as per our research and experience on why startups fail. We were fortunate to have received seed funding. Currently, we are in the stage to raise a series fund. We have built and refined our product and businesses are using our product now. But we need to scale our mapping job into other cities and for that we need funds. At the moment, we are looking for Rs 3 to 4 crores, which will help us to scale up our mapping task and also increase our user base for 2024 and beyond.

### What do you think about the government talking about promoting startups and having also separated a fund to promote startups?

Raj: There are news articles regarding that time and again and we get all excited. And we personally have applied for the fund on three occasions but to no avail. Nothing progresses after we have filed our application. The startup fund is not being executed properly. People who are eligible are not receiving it. The government had also detailed that a certain amount is to be set aside by banks to be disbursed as loans without collateral and asked the banks to implement it and maybe the banks tried as well. We spoke to a bank and they mentioned they actually did not want to discourage people from starting a startup. Many people say that banks never want to give money to businesses. But banks have bad experiences giving money to startups because there have been so many bad loans, where the money is never returned, or the money that a person availed for a certain reason is misused by the spouse, or some run away to foreign countries if they are unable to pay back the loan, especially since there was no collateral. The percentage of bad loans is very high. So, the banks find it difficult to give out such



loans despite the government mandating it. It is a good initiative by the government but it seems like they have not done their due diligence in researching the issue beforehand or there is just a lack of understanding about the consequences.

# Who do you consider your major competitor right now?

**Ashon:** Overall, our major competition is Google Maps. Every time we introduce ourselves as Galli Maps, we are asked if we are similar to Google Maps. So, Google Maps is a big competition. Obviously, they have such a solid user base. Our aim is to fill the gaps left by Google Maps, not only in Nepal, but in the entirety of South-Asia, and also to introduce additional features compared to Google. **B** 

# OPINION-

# THE PAINS, PITFALLS & TRIUMPHS OF FIRST GEN ENTREPRENEURS

According to the Department of Industry, 37,143 new firms were registered in fiscal year 2017-18, and 52,629 in FY 2018-19. The number dropped in 2019-20 to 48,854. In 2020-21, registrations leapt to a stupendous 83,386. As per the Central Bureau of Statistics 2021, 54.5% of all establishments in the country are owned by young entrepreneurs.

In this edition of **Business 360**, we spoke to some first-generation entrepreneurs who lack the experience and inherited knowledge of business operations, financial resources, networks and guidance to find out what drives them in their journey, what the challenges are, and what success means to them.



AJMERI KHATUN CEO NAQABS



**NIRAJ BHUSAL** FOUNDER TECHSATHI



MEGHA SHARMA MD PRETTY CLICK



SUBASH SAPKOTA CO-FOUNDER DOCTORS ON CALL

# Why did you choose to get into business?

Ajmeri Khatun: Since childhood, I had dreamt of becoming a doctor. But it's life and you don't always end up fulfilling childhood dreams. I ended up sudying IT and surprisingly, I really enjoyed it. I love to delve

deep into any subject matter and research it, and the IT field served my purpose. I found tremendous opportunities to research and explore IT intricacies and technicalities. During the second year of my graduation itself I started to freelance. I was working and earning through Google Adsense and other miscellaneous assignments. In 2016, I opened my own IT firm. I also stopped taking financial help from my family. Instead, I installed wi-fi, solar and generator in my house in Janakpur. But in two years, the house contract expired and the landlord asked us to vacate the place as they wanted to sell the land. I then had to face many challenges. I was a bit at loose ends and in April 2018, my friend and I decided to get into business. We started 'The Nagabs Fashion'. Initially we started it as an online business and we dealt in watches. During the online boosting, we faced some copyright issues but giving up is not in my dictionary. So, we started selling ethnic clothing items. The online business was going well, but in between Nepal experienced an increase in online fraud. I realised that the market required a physical store. We opened our first store in Janakpur. When people started to come and physically get the experience of our clothing, they started to trust us. And in time we opened stores in Thapagaun, New Baneshwor and Pokhara.

Overall, I would say that I didn't choose to get into business, it was a path. However, the journey from a career in IT to business was something that was backed by my dedication, motivation and skills gained from the IT field.

Niraj Bhusal: I think it was somewhat accidental. I had not planned to register a company or start a business. It happened organically. I kept writing articles and eventually companies like Huawei and Samsung started calling me to their events. After that we registered the company, created a team of around five-six people and decided to go commercial with it. Before we started, people perceived the role of tech blogs to be where they could find laptop and smartphone reviews. Our intention was to write about tech ecosystems and so on. We started partnering with events.

As my experience was with community building, we treated the site as a community. We were partners of almost 80% of events in Nepal. We were working as media partners at college level events, national level hackathons, not only in Nepal but in India, Bangladesh, Dubai and Malaysia. Our work was to connect our audience and the companies we were working with. Our team of just six was producing only text, but later we expanded to video reviews as well. We started having segments like Startup Stories, Tech Talks and FinTalk.

Megha Sharma: I have always been passionate about makeup and beauty products and I noticed a gap in the market in Nepal. Many customers were seeking

genuine, branded makeup products but found them to be expensive or inaccessible. Recognising this opportunity, I was motivated to provide a solution by offering authentic makeup products at affordable prices to Nepali customers. I believe that everyone should have access to high-quality makeup products that not only enhance their beauty but also make them feel confident. By sourcing genuine brands and offering them at competitive prices, I aim to make premium makeup products more accessible to a broader audience in Nepal.

My goal is not only to build a successful business but also to make a positive impact by empowering individuals to express themselves through makeup without breaking the bank. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to the beauty industry in Nepal and fulfil the needs of customers who share my passion for makeup.

#### Subash Sapkota: I

pursued Bachelor's in Business Administration then joined a Master's programme but I dropped out. While studying BBA, I was also working part time with eSewa. After working for approximately eleven months, I felt the job would not provide me the financial freedom I was looking for. I wanted to have some level of independence in the work I was doing. Back then, I used to read a lot of books and 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad' gave me a lot of knowledge about financial freedom and the concept of businesses. I realised that I could start a business on my own. My father used to work at Coca-Cola and he had a daily routine of 9 to 5. Observing him, I used to think that he had no control over his life.

Gradually, I developed a feeling that I needed to do something where I would not have to worry about timings or be under someone's schedule. In some of the books that I read; it was mentioned that a job is like a rat race. No matter how fast you run, you will end up being a rat only. What I believed was paying my running bills only will take me nowhere in life. Therefore, I decided to get into business. While also working in eSewa I tried setting up a startup but it used to be very difficult to manage time. Ultimately, I resigned and started investing my full time in planning a business.

# How did you choose the line of business you wanted to set into?

Ajmeri Khatun: When my friend came up with the name 'The Nagabs Fashion', we decided to give meaning to it. Nagabs means hidden. In a way it describes our journey as Nagabs started as a watch business but is now an ethnic clothing business. I have a very keen interest in fabrics. I have also studied and researched the needs and taste of people in ethnic fashion. It is always advisable to do business in the field where you have your expertise and knowledge. When you can research well enough in a particular line, you can ace it. Usually people say that food, housing and clothing businesses never fail. But if you are unable to understand the market and properly research it, then any business will fail. I thought I have to use my capabilities in the business to succeed. That's how I stepped into the clothing line. But I also know that this is not the limit. We aim to come up with more unexpected product lines in the future

Niraj Bhusal: I have always been passionate about technology. I have been a student of computer science since the fourth grade. Even in the 10th grade when we had to choose between accounts and computers, I chose computer science. When I reached +2, I had chosen science at KIST college, where only management students had

# OPINION-

the option to study computer science. Science students had to study biology. After a week of studying biology, I spoke to my coordinator that I wanted to study computer science. He said I had to come back with 12 students who also wanted to study the subject. I came back with 22. That is how much I wanted to study it.

I have been interested in IT all my life. After I completed my +2, I started contributing to Google's many communities. I received a positive response in establishing a community in Dang, my hometown, as a sub-group of GDG Birgunj. I started blogging in 2012. There were hardly five or six people who held dreams of earning from AdSense. It was called nirajbhusal.com.np where my blog was ironically about how to blog. I started another blog called AnNepal, which due to various reasons I had to abandon. But I could not abandon my interest in blogging. So, during 2017-18 I was looking to start blogging again and I hit on the name 'TechSathi' which I started with the intention of being a personal blog, instead it is a business now.

Megha Sharma: After conducting thorough market research and analysis of the potential opportunities in Nepal, I identified the cosmetics market as a promising and under-served niche. Nepal, with its growing economy and increasing consumer spending power, presents a significant opportunity for businesses in various sectors, including cosmetics. Through my market survey and analysis, I found that there was a clear demand for high-quality cosmetic products among Nepali consumers. I saw an opportunity to address this need and fulfil the aspirations of Nepali consumers who desire quality makeup products. Furthermore, the cosmetics industry is known for its resilience and continuous growth, making it an attractive sector to enter. By leveraging my passion for makeup and aligning it with the market demand in Nepal, I am confident that I can establish

a successful business that not only meets the needs of customers but also contributes to the overall growth of the cosmetics industry in the country.

Overall, my decision to choose this line of business was driven by a combination of market research, consumer demand, and my own passion for the beauty industry.

Subash Sapkota: Health has become an integral part of everybody's life. People want to have a secure, safe and healthy lifestyle these days. Unlike other countries, Nepal has not developed a good system of health benefits. Due to this, many youngsters are going abroad to secure their life and only the ageing population is left here. Ageing population goes through a lot of chronic health issues. Their families want to take care of them but they cannot do it as they are busy with their own lives. Having to admit parents for 365 days in a hospital will also not be easy for them. Also, it is not guaranteed that their parents will get the best treatment in the hospital. Hence, we came up with the idea of providing home health care and health services to the elderly population of the country. Firstly, we researched, we sought for the validity of the business idea and for that we first did a pilot exercise with a smaller audience and only later, went to widen our reach.

# Who inspires you in the business world?

Ajmeri Khatun: I look up to successful entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. They have had an incredible life journey and it definitely serves as a motivation for me. But I have not witnessed their life and life decisions closely. However, I have seen my maternal grandfather's life journey and my dedication to thrive and strive is inspired by him. I am from Janakpur but I studied till class 10 in Dhangadhi where I lived with him and got an opportunity to closely

witness his life. He is not a businessman, but he alone successfully leads a family of 27-30 people. He has made sure that all of his children are well-educated and has made them successful doctors and engineers. I really admire him for role as a responsible leader for the betterment of the family. He inspires me to lead in my work and life. Business is incomplete without successful leadership.

My inspiration to stay committed and reach new heights also comes from my mother. She has always been my superhero. In light of the present circumstances of our country, no one is willing to stay here. All the youths are ready to go abroad. But witnessing my mother striving to educate all of us five sisters is incredible. If she can fight to make all of us independent and educated, then why can't I stay in Nepal and fight all the challenges. I was determined to stay in Nepal and do something here. And after setting up the business, when I started doing well, I even asked my dad to return from abroad. For the last 20 years he had been working in Saudi Arabia. I had my business here and I needed help as well so I called my father and he has been working with me in this business. This acts as a catalyst to my zeal to continue expanding my business.

The business world is never easy. It has many ups and downs but what matters the most is how you deal with problems and challenges. My grandfather and mother inspire me to effectively deal with everything life brings on.

Niraj Bhusal: The one who inspired me to start this business was a man named Ryan from the USA. He was a retired security officer. When I was blogging, I would generally host guest posts and would also write as a guest for others. We had a group where we compared which of the blogs received the most interactions, the ones with the most likes would be ranked first and would receive a guest article from every one of the others. That was where I first met him.

He was the main person who pushed me to start TechSathi.

Megha Sharma: I draw inspiration from individuals like Sailesh Sigdyal and Neha Sharma, the co-founders, who have made significant strides in the business world. Their leadership, innovative thinking, and dedication to their respective companies have not only driven success but also inspired others, including myself, to pursue entrepreneurship. Sailesh's vision for the business and his ability to navigate challenges with resilience serve as a testament to the power of determination and strategic thinking. Likewise, Neha's leadership and commitment to excellence have set a high standard for success in the industry. As a budding entrepreneur, I aspire to emulate their qualities of leadership, creativity and perseverance in my own business endeavours. Their achievements serve as a constant reminder that with passion, hard work and a strategic approach, anything is possible in the business world. Having such accomplished individuals as mentors motivates me to strive for excellence and to make a positive impact in the business landscape. I am eager to apply the lessons I have learned from their experiences to my own journey and to contribute to the growth and success of my business.

Subash Sapkota: While I was a student, I used to watch Steve Jobs a lot. He used to be my inspiration back then. I can say that he has had an impact on me. Secondly, I am inspired by Biswas Dhakal who founded eSewa, a digital wallet company. I have seen the transformational changes brought by him in Nepal.

# How difficult or easy was it to organise the investment required for your business?

Ajmeri Khatun: Ever since I have navigated my business Naqabs, I haven't really sought investment. After I shut down



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my IT business, I sold the furniture. So, I had some money from there which I re-invested into Naqabs. With that money, I started the watch business. Since then, I have been able to sustain Naqabs with the money we make. But when my business started to kick off and reach a peak, I realised that my business needed more money. After opening my store in New Baneshwor, I felt the need for additional investment.With my vision to expand my business, I had to take calculated risks and fuel investment. I proposed the idea of investment to my family. Since my business was taking off, they had confidence in me. And that is how I took investment from my family.

**Niraj Bhusal:** In the beginning we did not raise investment from anyone. In the first three months when I was running it, I received some amount from advertisements that helped me kick off the business. I used my personal savings to pay for the domain name. I had thankfully been investing in stocks and shares, the proceeds from which I used in financing a studio we were setting up. So, we have mostly been self-funded.

At the moment we are speaking to an investor with the intention of scaling up the business. We are hoping that having multiple minds and ideas will help with our growth. We had spoken to some other investors but we were never of the same mind. Many have shown interest but with the sole motive of capitalising on our growth. We did not want someone with such short-term set of goals, I wanted someone with whom my vision matched. I think I have met someone like that and we plan on making our operations more large-scale.

# OPINION-



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#### Megha Sharma:

Starting with modest capital, I recognised the potential in the clothing and sari market in Nepal and decided to launch my business venture. With a passion for fashion and a keen eye for market opportunities, I began organising sales of clothes and saris, leveraging the power of social networks and local communities to build initial traction. As the demand for our products grew steadily, I seized the opportunity to establish a physical presence by opening our first store in Civil Mall. This strategic move

not only allowed us to cater to a broader customer base but also enhanced our visibility and credibility in the market. Later, we sold that clothing store and opened our first store of PrettyClick in Civil Mall.

The journey from organising sales to opening our flagship store has been both challenging and rewarding. It required resourcefulness, resilience and a deep understanding of customer preferences and market dynamics. However, with dedication, perseverance and a customer-centric approach, we were able to turn our vision into reality. It has laid a strong foundation for our continued growth and expansion in the competitive retail landscape of Nepal. Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities to further innovate, diversify our product offerings, and enhance the overall shopping experience for our customers. Our journey is just beginning.

**Subash Sapkota:** For the funding, we tried for a loan in the beginning but since we had no collateral, we could not receive any. Then, we decided

to contribute Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 each from our own side. Initially, we just needed a landline and a person to handle the calls for promotional activities. Slowly, we had to expand. We reinvested the profits back into the business. With time, the demand has increased, so has the service. Now, our vision is not to be limited to only the valley but also go beyond. We might need an investor soon.

# What are some initial hurdles you faced as an entrepreneur?

Ajmeri Khatun: My journey was not easy. There were many hurdles that I had to overcome. Initially back in 2016, when I was earning through freelancing and my IT business, I used to invest in the stock market. Whatever I used to earn, I used to invest in the stock market. I had even asked a few of my relatives to invest. But the stock market is unpredictable and all my stocks crashed. I had to face a lot of loss. And the termination of the contract of the IT company made the situation even worse. The loss and the taunts of relatives became overwhelming. To overcome this. I took a loan at a time in my life when everything was going wrong. I tried hard but it all went against me. In 2018, I went into depression. That's when my mother came to my rescue. I realised that I was always pondering on what people would think of me but in reality, it did not really matter. I also realised that I had to make myself strong because people always attack those who are weak. Many people came and said different things but at the end of the day you know what you are doing. Once you start growing, the same people who hurt you will appreciate you. These were very valuable lessons that I have learned.

I then started from zero. With my friend, I started Nagabs towards the end of 2018. But the challenges were still there. Initially the business didn't peak. At this point, I broke all inhibitions and got into social media actively modelling and selling the clothes. I became the face of Naqabs. Coming from a Muslim background, the society judged me for this too. The clothes were ethnic and decent but I was still criticised by people. People would constantly provoke my parents but they always showed their belief in me. After two months of opening the store in New Baneshwor, we had the Covid lockdown. The slowdown in the economy due to the pandemic

impacted a lot of businesses. This January marls three years since I started the store in New Baneshwor store but I have hardly run it for two years. The pandemic was really a challenge but I knew I could not give up. I would recover. I put my heart and soul into selling the products but insufficient delivery services back then were a problem for us. However, things changed and we are doing well now.

Niraj Bhusal: The most difficult thing in the beginning was manpower. If I put out a request for a content writer, I would receive a lot of applications but never from the niche we were in. When we were looking for content writers for something specific like gadgets, we needed someone who understood the subject which was very hard to find. For our segment FinTech, we could not have someone who has never used a digital payment platform. Some were capable at writing but could not speak in front of a camera, while it was the opposite for others.

Another challenge was during the Covid transition period between the first and second phase. We had built a studio in a dedicated flat, invested in furniture and equipment, after which the second phase started. We had a lot of difficulty paying the rent. Not only that, we had been producing a lot of videos during that transition period. Not uploading suddenly ruins the expectations that audiences have of regular uploads which affects YouTube viewership tremendously. YouTube itself ends up forgetting to promote you through their algorithm. Besides these, I don't think we faced many other roadblocks. I believe our intention to follow our passion instead of chasing success helped us the most. We were trying to build a brand instead of chasing profits.

### Megha Sharma:

Undoubtedly, one of the significant challenges I faced in starting my business was navigating through administrative and bureaucratic hurdles. From obtaining licences and permits to dealing with regulatory compliance, there were various obstacles that demanded time, resources and patience. In Nepal's business landscape, administrative processes can sometimes be complex and time-consuming, which can slow down the pace of entrepreneurship. However, I approached these challenges with a proactive mindset, seeking guidance from experienced professionals, legal advisors and government agencies to ensure compliance while minimising delays. Building strong relationships and networking within relevant government departments proved invaluable in streamlining administrative processes and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles.

Subash Sapkota: In the beginning, I used to fear seeing my counterparts having settled jobs, a good source of income and a stable life. Belonging to a family who had never had any involvement in the business sector, there used to be a kind of pressure from my parents. When I first shared my business idea, I vividly remember my parents saying "You have gone out of control...Why don't you try working for big companies like Ncell... Why not go abroad." They even developed trust issues and doubted my abilities. They also did not understand the value of partnership and teamwork. They were very reluctant when I first shared the idea of a partnership business model. It was way too difficult to make them understand these things. At times my friends used to make jokes and were doubtful. Days were tough, I used to work late nights planning the business. At times, I used to feel very low, doubting whether I would succeed. But no matter what, I did not give up.

The other problem I faced was seeking a loan from a bank. They asked for collateral which I could not manage. When we actually started the business, it took so much time to gain trust from clients and our own staff. They used to doubt the sustainability of the company. We used to face a lot of problems related to retention as well. There have been days when salaries were delayed and I received piles of letters of resignation.

Unlike the second or third generation entrepreneurs, the first generation has to struggle a lot and that too all alone. There have been times, when we failed, we were stuck, with nobody to provide mentorship. Working with limited resources and with no backup or any presetups in terms of networking, availing loans, keeping records, governmental documents, financial discipline, audits, etc. is has not been easy. Due to lack of knowledge on proper documentation, we even had to pay government fines.

Now, we have established and expanded. We have a Standard Operating Procedures in place. We have an HR department for hiring. We have a group of nurses and a nurse in charge, and there are medical officials to oversee every nurse. We have adopted technology in every management procedure. We follow a roster to keep the records of nurses, the hourly payroll, etc. Recently, we got ISO certification too.

# What are some qualities in an entrepreneur that can help a business succeed?

Ajmeri Khatun: As an entrepreneur, one must be very focused. One should have set targets. You cannot start a business without knowing what you want to do or where you want to reach. For me, the most important thing is to stop comparing myself with others. Healthy competition is always encouraged and good for business. But if an entrepreneur starts comparing and envying other businesses, s/he will be in a trap forever.

It is also important for an entrepreneur to have strong negotiating and marketing skills. Along with this, one needs to remain honest with their customers. You must build trust.

# OPINION-

Niraj Bhusal: I am sure it is different in every industry, but while producing content for TechSathi I always felt the need to have at least a working knowledge of all the relevant skills required to run the portal. I am interested in photography, so I could always take photos if our photographer was not available. But I could not do that for many other roles in the office. I wish I had learnt about editing videos or at least known how to do some basic things so I could support my team members in times of sickness or leave. If you own a cafe, I believe you should at least have some barista training. The desire to learn is the best quality anyone, not just an entrepreneur, can have.

### Megha Sharma:

Endurance, honesty and hard work are foundational qualities that I believe are crucial for an entrepreneur's success. The journey of building and growing a business is often filled with challenges and uncertainties and it is the endurance to persevere through these tough times that sets successful entrepreneurs apart. Honesty is equally important, not just in dealing with customers and partners but also in internal operations and decision-making. Maintaining transparency and integrity fosters trust, which is essential for long-term relationships and sustainability. Hard work is the driving force behind turning vision into reality. It is the willingness to put in the long hours, to tackle difficult tasks head-on, and to continuously strive for improvement that propels a business forward. Additionally, having an open mind regarding division of labour is crucial. Recognising that one person cannot do everything solely and being willing to delegate tasks to others who are better suited for them is a sign of effective leadership. It allows for the leveraging of diverse skills and expertise within the team, ultimately leading to more efficient and successful outcomes.

In my own entrepreneurial journey, I have found that embodying these qualities has been instrumental in overcoming challenges, building strong relationships, and achieving meaningful growth.

### Subash Sapkota: The

first and foremost thing is that entrepreneurs should be open to change. The main problem of entrepreneurs is they are so sure about their business ideas that they are very reluctant to change or modify. Secondly, an entrepreneur, while planning business ideas, should be very specific in choosing their target audience. Third, s/he must have the ability to make others understand their product. Most entrepreneurs understand their idea but when it comes to pitching the idea to others, they cannot explain well. A business concept and product should be easy to understand by the end users. Also, entrepreneurs must have interpersonal and communication skills. Entrepreneurs should not be afraid to go and approach people for anything. They must be open to talk. Confidence is the key.

# How do you view the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country and in your specific business?

Ajmeri Khatun: A wave of entrepreneurship exists. There are many people willing to enter into business. The entrepreneurship ecosystem is growing but more encouragement is needed. Many young people are discouraged as they do not see the opportunities in staying on in Nepal and starting a business or finding decent employment.

**Niraj Bhusal:** I believe the habit of jumping on trends to make a quick profit has been quite detrimental to the industry. I believe patience is necessary. Just because a business does not work in the first year does not mean it never will. It is important to take your time in developing a brand.

I think you should set some time caps by which you intend to have your business take off. Of course, if it crosses a certain threshold of time where you have not been able to make it work, you should understand it is not working out and stop or change your focus. Getting excited and starting something may result in it not being successful, there is a lot to learn about before. You also have to be prepared for things to go wrong. If you are starting a business where you deliver your products online, you have to imagine your delivery driver's bike getting stolen. Only then can you prepare for such eventualities. You have to think about the challenges. If you only get into it looking solely at the profit the business might end up in loss. Even a huge company like Netflix only started making profit after ten years of functioning.

I also believe there is a lack of cooperation. If you are running a cafe, then it would be in your interest to cooperate with a bakery, instead of making the bakery items yourself. If there are existing companies that already do what you need then you should outsource your work. Or you should at least be able to provide a platform for those who have the experience to do something you have no idea about.

Megha Sharma: The entrepreneurial ecosystem in our country is undoubtedly challenging, with numerous hurdles stemming from inconsistent policies, widespread corruption and bureaucratic red tape. These factors not only hinder the growth of businesses but also discourage aspiring entrepreneurs from pursuing their dreams. Inconsistent policies create uncertainty and make it difficult for businesses to plan and invest for the long term. Moreover, navigating through a maze of bureaucratic procedures often leads to delays and

increased costs, further burdening entrepreneurs, especially those with limited resources. The prevalence of corruption adds another layer of complexity to the business environment, as it creates barriers to fair competition and undermines trust in institutions. Entrepreneurs may find themselves entangled in corrupt practices simply to navigate through regulatory hurdles or secure necessary permits, compromising their integrity in the process. Despite these challenges, I believe there are opportunities for positive change and improvement in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. By advocating for transparent and accountable governance, promoting policies that support entrepreneurship and innovation, and fostering a culture of integrity and ethical business conduct, we can create a more conducive environment for businesses to thrive

Subash Sapkota: The firstgeneration entrepreneur is only capable of talking about the ecosystem when they get into the business domain. Initially, we do not focus on the business ecosystem because we do not feel we are counted. Those who are established and renowned are leading all the chambers and forums in the country. The first generations are still struggling to be recognised in such groups. If we get a chance to represent ourselves, be visible and heard, then things can be different. There are two types of entrepreneurs, one is inside the radar and one outside of it. The entrepreneurial ecosystem will not impact the people outside the radar.

# In the current economic situation, how are you working on sustaining your business through the existing challenges?

Ajmeri Khatun: In addressing the current economic situation sustaining



With dedication, perseverance and a customer-centric approach, we were able to turn our vision into reality. It has laid a strong foundation for our continued growth and expansion in the competitive retail landscape of Nepal. Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities to further innovate. diversify our product offerings, and enhance the overall shopping experience for our customers. Our journey is just beginning.

MEGHA SHARMA Managing Director Pretty Click



one's business seems precarious. But we are sustaining and fighting the challenges. We are regular with our customers and business. We continue to show our presence through both the digital and physical mediums. We also continue to maintain transparency in our products and our customer interactions. And most importantly, I believe that we walk with the market. The market does not have the money but it has the need. We identified this need and we created demand in the market.

To be honest, there is nothing like a lockdown or crisis that can stop you from doing your business. At times, even if you get sick for around six months, your business will go into loss. So, it is all about how you view the crisis. You must have the belief you can do it. With god's grace we are sustaining well despite the Covid 19 and lockdown. It is our regularity, punctuality and our market presence through which we are able to fight the sluggish economy.

#### Niraj Bhusal: Every

company during periods of trouble looks at which sector of theirs is working at a loss. This invariably ends up in cost-cutting measures on the product and staff. The objective being achieving the maximum profit from minimal manpower. The primary aspect that receives a cost-cutting measure is the marketing. In Nepal, especially the same sponsors are spotted in almost all e events, we have a very small market. Our customers are either Nepalis or Non-Resident Nepalis, so a major challenge is that our audience market is small as well. Speaking in the context of other countries, it is possible to sustain yourself through just a platform like Google through ads. But the same is not true for a Nepali business where even if they receive one million views, they will not get the same amount of money.

Another major challenge that every business in Nepal faces is the brain drain, the

# **OPINION**



Those who are established and renowned are leading all the chambers and forums in the country. The first generations are still struggling to be recognised in such groups. If we get a chance to represent ourselves, be visible and heard, then things can be different. There are two types of entrepreneurs, one is inside the radar and one outside of it.





number of people leaving Nepal. At most, what we can do is be hopeful and try our best not to cut costs so much. To motivate the people integral to our organisation, instead of paying a salary, we give them a share of the profits so that then they feel responsible and work even harder.

Megha Sharma: In light of the existing challenges in our entrepreneurial ecosystem, we have adopted a strategy focused on making decisions on a day-to-day basis and implemented flexible working norms. This approach allows us to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and navigate through the uncertainties inherent in the business environment. By making decisions on a day-to-day basis, we are able to stay agile and responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities. This means continuously evaluating market conditions, customer feedback and internal operations so that our decisionmaking process is an informed one. It also enables us to prioritise tasks and allocate resources more effectively, ensuring that we remain focused on the most pressing issues at hand. In addition, implementing flexible working norms has been instrumental in sustaining our business amidst the existing challenges. This includes allowing remote work arrangements, flexible hours and cross-functional collaboration across teams. By empowering our

employees to work in ways that suit their individual preferences and circumstances, we are able to foster a more productive and motivated workforce. Furthermore, maintaining open lines of communication and fostering a culture of transparency has been key to ensuring that everyone in the organisation is aligned and informed about the decisions being made. This helps to build trust and resilience within the team, enabling us to overcome obstacles together and drive the business forward. While the challenges we face may be daunting, we are confident that our proactive approach to decision-making and flexible working norms will help us sustain and grow our business in the face of adversity. By remaining adaptable and resilient, we are positioning ourselves for long-term success in the ever-evolving entrepreneurial landscape.

#### Subash Sapkota: We

are now focusing a bit more on cost control mechanisms. We are following strategically contingent models. For example, we are shifting towards an installment model of payment among clients so that we can sustain ourselves in the long run. Adapting to technology in everyday operations has made it easier for the smooth running of the organisation with limited human resources.

# Any policy level change that could help you?

Ajmeri Khatun: Certainly, there are a lot of things that can be done at the policy level. Policies for better education and awareness are also important. In businesses like ours, sales and marketing is very important. Better education will definitely help people gain better marketing knowledge which they can use to grow their business. Another thing would be encouragement. The policies should be crafted in such a way that it will benefit the business, government and the country as well. If such benefits are shown, we would be further encouraged to do more in business. And if there would have been a proper pattern of taxation then it would be helpful for businesses like ours. Export and import businesses do require a proper taxation system which is not very well conducted at present.

Nirai Bhusal: When we were starting, the process of registering a business was very obtuse. It has become much easier now that it is online. Even processes related to taxes have become easier. If you comply with the rules that the government has created, it is not difficult to succeed. The policies set by the government to help startups has been a bit misunderstood. The government or any bank will not give you a loan depending on your vision for the company but rather on how much you have earned in the past year. To get money in terms of your vision, you need to find an investor. Comparing the process of getting a business like mine started I have noticed that it has definitely become easier.

### Megha Sharma:

Implementing consistent and entrepreneur-friendly policies is paramount to overcoming the challenges we face in our entrepreneurial ecosystem. Consistent policies create a level playing field for entrepreneurs, allowing them to make informed decisions and plan for the future with confidence. When regulations are clear, transparent and consistently enforced, it reduces the risk of compliance issues and enables businesses to focus their resources on innovation and growth. Policies that would help streamline licensing procedures, tax incentives for startups, access to finance, and support for skills development and innovation can be given priorities. Creating an environment that fosters innovation, creativity, and risk-taking, governments can catalyse economic growth, job creation and social development.

Entrepreneurship is a vital driver of prosperity and progress, and it is essential that policymakers recognise its importance and take proactive steps to support and nurture it.

#### Subash Sapkota:

The biggest challenge is funding. Easy availability and accessibility of loans through subsidised loan techniques is necessary. Second, just like 'Idea Bank' of India, if the government could also start something similar in Nepal, it would have been better.

The second biggest problem is mentoring. Therefore, mentoring from a policy level could help. Here, the focus should not be only generating entrepreneurs, the focus should be nurturing entrepreneurs and bringing them to the forefront. The government could also introduce a team for validating ideas. To prioritise the entrepreneurship model, initiatives similar to 'Make In India' would be best suited.

Lastly, entrepreneurs must be made aware of the governmental policies they are obliged to follow.

# Are you a part of any network like FNCCI, CNI or bilateral chambers? Why or why not?

Ajmeri Khatun: No, I am not a part of any network like FNCCI, CNI or bilateral chambers. Currently my entire focus is on my business. First and foremost, I aim to expand and set up my business and reach new heights. And I believe that it is crucial for me to give my time and dedication to my business at this point. But in the future, I am definitely looking forward to such opportunities.

Niraj Bhusal: No, I am mainly a part of Google's Volunteering company. We do have a group of friends who are in similar industries like Offering Happiness's Santosh Pandey and Neeraj Kafle, my friends from Mero Kishan and many others, we have a lot of weekly-monthly informal gatherings where we discuss a lot, but I have never been a part of any organisation as such. I would only go to a committee as such if I felt I could add value to it. If there is someone who has more than ten years

of experience than me, I think they would be a better choice than me. I could just meet those people for advice. I don't have to actually sit on the board. I also feel if you have an interest in such things, it often gets political.

Megha Sharma: While we greatly value the contributions and support provided by established networks such as FNCCI, CNI, and bilateral chambers, our business operates independently and is not currently affiliated with any formal associations. As an independent entity, we take a self-reliant approach to managing our operations and navigating the challenges of the business environment. While we recognise the benefits of belonging to industry networks and associations. we have chosen to focus on developing our internal capabilities and leveraging our own resources to drive success. This independent approach allows us the flexibility to tailor our strategies and solutions to the specific needs and circumstances of our business. While we remain open to collaboration and partnership opportunities, we are confident in our ability to thrive and succeed through our selfreliance and entrepreneurial spirit. Moving forward, we are committed to continuing our journey as an independent business, while also exploring opportunities for collaboration and engagement with industry stakeholders and relevant organisations to further our growth and impact.

Subash Sapkota: We were able to receive the first position in the first award ceremony conducted by NYEF and were also able to come in the top eight finalists of the startup award conducted by CNIYEF, but we are not involved as a member in any of them. Currently, we are a member of a campaign called 'Make in Nepal – Swadeshi'. **B** 

# **BUSINESS SUTRA**

# FAITH & WEALTH CO-TRAVELLERS

RAM TEMPLE IN AYODHYA GIVES NEW PUSH TO RELIGIOUS TOURISM



▲ Basant Chaudhary is a Poet, Writer, Chairman of BLC and Basant Chaudhary Foundation. (feedback@basantchaudhary. com)

The consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22 is being described as a civilisational change by the Lord's devotees and adherents of Sanatan Dharma, popularly known as Hinduism. Astute watchers of politics and statecraft, however, perceive the event as a new dimension of realpolitik.

Come what may, the immediate impact of the incomplete shrine's opening can be experienced in the sudden blossoming of hitherto sleepy Ayodhya's economy. Religion and spirituality apart, Ayodhya's citizens are finding their pockets bulging. A Ram Rajya of sorts seems to be setting in.

Studies and estimates by global brokerage firm Jefferies show that \$10 billion has already been invested by the governments of India and Uttar Pradesh in infrastructure like new airport, refurbished railway station, townships, urban development projects, highways and roads, civic services, hospitality, travel ancillaries, etc. Further, the government plans to produce enough solar power to meet the entire needs of Avodhva by year 2028. To begin with, 150 acres of land has already been allocated to India's largest public sector power generation company for the purpose.

No wonder then that real estate prices have skyrocketed in Ayodhya as the town is now expected to receive 50-100 million pilgrims and religious tourists annually. Lord Ram's birthplace is bursting at its seams accommodating the surge of the faithful since the January 22 pran pratishtha of Ram Lalla's idol depicting him as a five-year-old child. The Ram temple trust, administration and the police are being put to severe test by the fervour of lakhs of pilgrims pouring in from across India and abroad.

Let us not forget that the Lord's wife Sita belonged to our very own Nepal. Numerous priests and devotees from our country are reaching Ayodhya with gifts for their most famous and revered daughter and sonin-law.

The multiplier effect of the faith-driven activity is visibly boosting Ayodhya's economy bottom upwards. The citizenry is benefiting at all levels. The Ram Temple has so far cost the independent temple trust Rs 1,800 crores - all collected through private contributions and donations. Existing and upcoming hotels are busy hunting talent for 20,000 vacancies at various levels. Much more is bound to follow before the construction of the 75-acre temple complex gets completed by Fiscal Year 2025.

Religious tourism in India is projected to cross the \$443-billion mark by FY 2033, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8%. The room for growth is immense as overall tourism contributes only 6.8% to the GDP which is way below tourism's share in most emerging and developed countries. But it needs to be noted that religious travel currently forms the biggest segment of tourism in India.

I have personally seen how religion can transform the socio-economic pattern of a place provided things are handled with care, devotion and selflessness. As a government-appointed officebearer of the Pashupatinath Temple trust in Kathmandu, I was actively involved in the maintenance, renovation and development of the renowned shrine and its premises for a considerable period.

At a time when the human soul is getting wearied by the scorching pace of modern life, places of worship and spiritual uplift can serve as healing touch. Money and gadgets are failing to ensure our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The mind and the spirit are breaking down. It is no surprise that the world

Religious tourism in India is projected to cross the \$443-billion mark by FY 2033, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8%. The room for growth is immense as overall tourism contributes only 6.8% to the GDP which is way below tourism's share in most emerging and developed countries. But it needs to be noted that religious travel currently forms the biggest segment of tourism in India.

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market for psychotropic drugs exceeded \$20 billion in FY 2022. Can internally devastated humans manage to be effective economic performers? So, why shouldn't business and religion be co-travellers in the journey of life?

Sanatan dharma (eternal righteousness) or Hinduism suggests four purusharthas (objectives or goals) for human beings – Dharma, Artha (prosperity or economic values), Kama (pleasure, love and desire) and Moksha (liberation and self-realisation). Why can't action and renunciation be companions in the spirit of nishkam karma?

I often wonder why proximity between faith and business is often eyed with suspicion when both can inspire each other. After all, humankind has been witness to this phenomenon for ages, across faiths and continents.

Islam supports individual economic freedom, right to private property along with the need to serve the common good. Let us not forget that Prophet Muhammad was a merchant. Over two million Muslims from 160 countries reached Mecca for Haj in 2023. Saudi Arabia's prince Mohamad bin Salman's Vision 2030 includes promotion of religious tourism to overcome the kingdom's dependence on petroleum revenue. Saudi haj tourism market is estimated to grow at 7% CAGR. Over three million hajis are expected to visit Mecca each year by FY 2032, adding \$350 billion to the country's coffers.

According to America Magazine's the Jesuit Review 2022, financial income from commercial investments, real estate management and self-generated services like hospitals, universities, etc. accounted for 65% of the \$887-million income in FY 2022 for the Vatican. Donations for different Vatican projects earned 24%.

Even senior secondary students of economics would be aware of the roots of capitalism in the Christian Catholic thought and faith. The Catholic Church of the Middle Ages (13th century) added religious value to hard and good manual work, separated the creator from the creature, and accorded respect to the market. Work, thus, became not merely a necessity but also gained moral significance, emphasising collaboration and unity for greater good of humanity.

Isn't it time to draw religion and economics closer? **B** 



# **RAGE FITNESS**

CARDIO KICKBOXING I MMA FIGHT SHAPE I MUAY THAI BODY COMBAT I SPINNING TRX TRAINING I BODY PUMP STEP IT UP AEROBICS I ZUMBA BOXING I YOGA I BODY BUILDING CIRCUIT TRAINING STRENGTH TRAINING & CONDITIONING PERSONAL TRAINING & GROUP CLASSES



Central Plaza, Naxal | Email: ragefitness@live.com



# NEPAL'S TRADE MBALANCES WITH CHINA

epal has a long history of trade with China, especially with Tibet via mountain passes. The story of importing salt from Tibet and exporting rice there carries the history of bilateral trade relations between the two neighbours. Nevertheless, China is the second largest trading partner of Nepal in the current context. China's dominating presence in the world market with export goods led the country to be the world's second largest economy and global manufacturing hub. The global supply chain without China is unimaginable. However, whether Nepal has benefited from bilateral trade with China despite being an immediate neighbour and the long-standing trade and economic relations is a pressing issue.

While citing the data of Nepal-China trade in the first half of this Fiscal Year 2023-24, Nepal has imported goods worth Rs 147.39 billion, whereas exports to China stand at a dismal Rs 1.60 billion; a huge imbalance. Nepal's export to China is only 1.08% of its imports from China.

According to Nepal Trade Portal, China provides zerotariff treatment to about 8,000 goods originating in Nepal that are exported to China. "These goods make up nearly 95% of the total exports of Nepal to China," says the portal hosted by Trade and Export Promotion Centre under the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies on behalf of all government agencies. However, Nepal has not been able to utilise the facility for a large number of products granted under the duty-free quota-free (DFQF) market access.

The trade deficit of Nepal with China has been on an increasing trend as Nepal has not been able to boost exports to the northern neighbour by enhancing the country's production capacity. Rising import of consumable goods has posed a threat of not only being a consumer market of Chinese manufacturers but also losing our production base. "The intermediate goods we import from China and the rest of other trading partners supports in boosting production in the country or in value addition of the services," sa Laxman Bahadur Basnet, Former Executive Director of Nepal Intermodal Transport Development Board (NITDB). "In the context of Nepal-China trade, the portion of commodities in the import basket of intermediate goods is around 50%," he added.

Although China has granted zero tariff entry facility to over 8,000 Nepali products since 2009, Nepal has not been able to bring the trade deficit down by capitalising on the facility. Nepal's alarming trade deficit with China is a matter of concern and the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies has been in frequent correspondence with its Chinese counterpart to provide market access to a few goods that have competitive and

comparative advantage. The list includes 495 products, stating that Nepal has not been able to use the DFQF facilities granted by China. "The DFQF facility is offered on products such as parts of ship which Nepal has no expertise to develop," said Purushottam Ojha, Former Secretary of the Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, adding, "Agro and forest products including medicinal herbs which Nepal has strength to export in the Chinese market could not meet sanitary and phytosanitary criteria."

### Non-tariff barriers in trade with China

Nepal is an agrarian country, and it has comparative and competitive strength in non-timber forest products (NTFP) as well, however, due to the non-tariff barriers of Chinese quarantine such products have not been able to enter the Chinese market. Citing an example of Nepal's

### Top 10 commodities Nepal imports and exports from/to China

Imports		Exports		
Commodity	Amount of import in 6 months (Rs in billion)	Commodity	Amount of export in 6 months (Rs in million)	
Telecommunication Equipments and Parts	14,210.6	Woollen Carpets	232.5	
Readymade Garments	12,347.4	Handicraft (Metal and Wooden)	187.5	
Other Machinery and Parts	11,544.6	Noodles	140.9	
Textiles	9,779.9	Readymade Garments	78.4	
Electrical Goods	8,261.2	Pashmina	21.8	
Chemical Fertiliser	6,381.5	Other handicraft goods	18.7	
Computer and Parts	5,210.2	Rudraksha	16.9	
Apple	3,681.6	Readymade Leather Goods	14.4	
Transport Equipment & Parts	2,168.3	Agarbatti	13.2	
Medical Equipment & Tools	1,391.8	Tea	0.8	

(Trade statistics of first half of 2023-24, Source: Department of Customs)

citrus fruit export agreement with China, the requirement of pest-free area product impaired Nepal's export potential to China.

"The consignment must comply with the protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export of citrus fruits from Nepal to China and it must be free of any quarantine pest concern to China. That requires a quarantine certificate indicating producing area, the orchard and the packing house," according to MoICS.

Nepal's lack of competitiveness coupled with non-tariff barriers has hit Nepal's export potential hard. On the other hand, to protect human, animal and environmental health, countries like China have developed stringent tariff barriers, mutual recognition agreement (MRA) to harmonise Nepal's lab with Chinese standards is critical, say trade experts.

#### Deadly proposal of Free Trade Agreement

Despite the numerous agreements in the past to boost trade relations with China, Nepal's trade deficit with China is widening. In the meantime, China has proposed a free trade agreement (FTA) with Nepal, presenting an economic analysis which says it will benefit Nepal's GDP with 4.8% expansion.

However, the feasibility study of the proposed FTA with China conducted by the MoICS has drawn a conclusion that the FTA could bring a decline of 0.24% in Nepal's economy, unless Nepal is able to bring Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China to enhance production and competitiveness along with robust connectivity that lowers the logistics cost of trade. Otherwise, the move of providing tariff concession to Chinese goods under FTA will not only hurt the government's revenue, it could destroy the country's already weakened production base due to free flow of cheaper goods from the northern neighbour.

Nepal is further preparing to sign BIA (Bilateral Investment Agreement) with China instead of FTA. "Investment in the production sector and infrastructure is our priority and if we can bring investment from China in those sectors it will help to improve our competitiveness along with addressing supply-side constraints and boost exports," a highly placed source at MoICS told Business 360.

Nepal and China have already signed a few agreements to strengthen economic ties between the two nations. However, the effectiveness of these agreements is often questioned. Trade and Payments Agreement; Agreement on Management of Ports in Nepal China Border Areas; Transit Transport Agreement, Trade and Other Related Matters Agreement; Letter of Exchange on Zero-tariff are a few agreements signed with China. Apart from this, Nepal-China's Tibet Trade Facilitation Committee (NTTFC) is the bilateral mechanism to hold discussions on trade related affairs

Most of the country's trade with China takes place via sea, though trade via land route was also picking up before China's unilateral decision to close the land route during the earthquake and later during the Covid 19 pandemic. China's unilateral decision of opening and closing down ports for indefinite periods bleeds traders white.

In March 2016, Nepal and China signed the Transit and Transport Agreement. Two years after the agreement, signing the agreement implementation protocol China allows Nepal to use Chinese ports namely, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang, apart from three land ports in Lanzhou, Lhasa and Shigatse for trade with third countries. However, third-country trade via China is yet to take place as traders say it is not economically feasible to trade with third countries through China. Further, modalities and procedures are not clear for bringing the agreement into practice. Former Commerce Secretary Ojha said that the transit facilities provided by China is highly appreciated as this facility has provided a ventilation to Nepal if it does face disruptions in supply lines from the southern neighbour.

Along with being the second largest economy and global power, China has come up with its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), under which Trans Himalaya connectivity is a fascinating narrative set by the Chinese side but it seems like a geopolitical gimmick as nothing has progressed on that front and the poor road conditions along the northern belt speak of the reality. **B** 





# "DEVELOPING COUNTRIES DON'T NEED JUST DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS AND EDUCATION. THEY NEED BUSINESS BECAUSE IT'S BUSINESS THAT CREATES EMPLOYMENT, CREATES TAXES AND IT GIVES PEOPLE OPPORTUNITIES. HOWEVER, I KNEW FROM MY TIME IN THE INVESTMENT WORLD THAT WITHOUT CAPITAL IT WAS VERY HARD TO DO THINGS. I KNEW THAT A LOT OF POORER COUNTRIES DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH CAPITAL. I, THUS, THOUGHT I SHOULD SPEND MY LIFE WORKING ON BRINGING INTERNATIONAL CAPITAL TO HELP BUSINESSES IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES"

Ever since visiting Nepal and India in 1981, Sir Graham Wriglev had wanted to work in international development. So, 13 years ago, he quit his business career and decided to 'retrain' for a new career by completing an MSc in **Development Economics** at SOAS. Since then, he has worked in a variety of roles with SMEs and microfinance organisations in sub-Saharan Africa, Nepal and the poor states of North India, with a personal goal of helping these companies become sustainable and help their countries' economic development.

Wrigley's first career was in business. He was a founder partner of Permira and a member of the firm's management board as it grew into one of the world's leading private equity firms, with over \$20 billion under management. Prior to that he worked for Bain & Co. He was also Chairman of CDC, the UK Government's private sector development arm.

Wrigley was knighted in the 2020 Queen's Birthday honours list for services to international development spanning 32 years. He works with several charities, including Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust UK, where he serves as Chairman, and has volunteered for them for over 35 years. He is also the Founder and donor of Samriddha Pahad since 2009.

Excerpts of a conversation with the exceptionally committed and visionary Sir Graham Wrigley on why he founded Samriddha Pahad, the challenges of working in Nepal, and how he measures the impact of his work.

#### When did you first come to Nepal and how did you decide to work in philanthropy here?

The first time I came to Nepal was 1981. I was in between school and going to Cambridge and I travelled around India and Nepal. I had £1 a day for nine months. I had always read about the mountains and I used to climb a little bit in England and I wanted to come see Mount Everest. I went up around Mount Everest and around Pumori.

One day, I was sitting on a wall outside the Khumjung School and I got talking to this quite big, old guy, probably in his 60s but he felt old to me. I was only 18 then. I got talking to him for about 45 minutes and he asked, what have I been doing? And I basically, like what young people do, boasted about how I had climbed peaks that were 6,200 metres tall. He said it must have been fantastic and must have been hard. And I again boasted that it was hard but I had done it and went on to speak about climbing mountains. It was only later when the man had left that a Sherpa who was with me asked if I knew who I was talking to. I had been boasting to Edmund Hillary, the man to conquer Mt Everest for the first time, for 45 minutes. I also realised I was standing in front of a school that was built by Hillary. I was so embarrassed I just couldn't walk up to him and apologise. After Cambridge, I started raising money for the Himalayan Trust, which is Hillary's charity set-up. I organised these balls in London called the Yeti Balls, and we gave him money to say this is

because I was so impressed by what he had done for the community in Khumjung.

I had always felt a bit guilty when I went in my gap year before university and I took another year travelling. I didn't do any volunteering. I just did training and travelling. I always told myself at the time, I'd be more useful as a volunteer when I am older, so I'll do it after my career.

So really, it were those two things. Meeting Edmund Hillary, being inspired by him, and thinking that actually maybe I could do things a bit differently after I have made some money, had my career, that I could do something in development.

#### When did you decide to start Samriddha Pahad? What are its core principles?

That was something much later. I went to university in the 80's and then I started working for Bain & Co. Later, I co-founded a private equity firm called Permira, which is quite a big business. We started from not much but by the time I left the company it was handling \$20 billion in assets. I was one of the six persons running Permira. During my time at Permira, I decided I really wanted to do this second career. I thought I'd been very fortunate and I could have the time if I retired early. So, in 2006, I stepped down and then I went to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and studied Development Economics. My father at that time was a research scientist and my mother was a teacher, and I thought why not get involved in international

development, may be in the health or education sector.

However, it soon dawned on me that I wouldn't be adding any value because there were already teachers and doctors who had studied those subjects and I was not getting any younger. I was 43 years old at that time. So, I started thinking of what different thing did I have in me. I realised the different thing that I had was the 20 years of learning about business and investments. Moreover, developing countries don't need just development and public healthcare systems and education. They need business because it's business that creates employment, creates taxes and it gives people opportunities. However, I knew from my time in the investment world that without capital it was very hard to do things. I knew that a lot of poorer countries did not have enough capital. I, thus, thought I should spend my life working on bringing international capital to help businesses in lowincome countries.

I then started working on SME investing and also on microfinance. If you remember, back in late 2000, microfinance sector faced a crisis and I did my dissertation that asked whether microfinance would be the new subprime. I wanted to learn about microfinance and I read about Grameen. I wanted to work in India, so I started visiting the country regularly and meeting lots of microfinance firms like SKS Microfinance and Spandana Sphoorty Financial. I thought it was a good thing but then I realised that they were moving too fast and going to the same

places. They were competing with each other in Mumbai and particularly in Bangalore and Andhra Pradesh. It was unregulated, irresponsible lending.

I then found Cashpor Micro Credit, which was a not-for-profit Section 25 company. It made profits but could not distribute it to the shareholders. It could only give away charitable funds and services. It was founded by David Gibbons in the 90's. It was growing but it got in a bit of trouble at that time. The company then decided to go to places where there was no other microfinance company but there was a need for money. It started working from Varanasi in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It was amazing and I started working with them. I was on the board and I put in some money and recruited a team of people to help them. This experience inspired me to work in the microfinance sector in Nepal.

I had been coming to Nepal for many years as I was working with the Himalayan Trust where we focused on just education and health. And I thought actually in these remote areas you need access to finance. In 2009-10, I commissioned some people I had been working with at Cashpor and an Indian consultancy company to work with RMDC, which was being led by Shankar Man Shrestha. I remember visiting his office and there was a map on the wall with small dots marking the places where there was access to microfinance but everything was in the Terai region. This was obvious because microfinance then and till now is largely group-based lending and it works if you have got a loan officer who can cover 300 to 400 loans. Up in the mountains you can't get on your bike and go from village to village.

There was no access to microfinance in the mountain region of Nepal and we started working on that. I then got to know Ashoke Rana, CEO of Himalayan Bank, and he was very helpful. We looked at the mountain communities in Pakistan, Colombia, Peru, just anywhere where there was access to finance issues in mountain areas. We then thought of coming up with something called mountain finance.

#### What's your guiding philosophy?

The first one was to do things where I knew we were being additional. An additional is a development word for doing things other people wouldn't do. We wanted to help encourage the private sector. Secondly, we wanted to be friends with the private sector and banks. Thirdly, we went to certain areas and did a twoby-two matrix to see if there was potential for economic development. We then asked ourselves are there banks there at the moment? If the answer was yes, we wouldn't go there. Also, if there was no potential for economic development we wouldn't go there. We would go to those areas where there were no banks but there was a potential for economic development.

The next principle we followed was we should work off the Nepalis, although we learned from different models of ways of doing it. And the key insight we had was that in mountain areas, Grameen based lending didn't work. There were lots of cooperatives in Nepal and we felt we should focus on working with institutions that already existed. We developed a screening model with RMDC and visited different areas and screened almost a thousand cooperatives. Some were not being run properly, some were political and some had corruption issues. And there were some genuine ones who needed assistance and with whom we could work. We then developed technical training packages and started working with them to create what they needed. We would work with those cooperatives for sometimes six months, sometimes two years, and then

we would take them to banks like Himalayan Bank and Nabil Bank. These banks couldn't go to these areas as the loans were too small. By us going there and packaging them together we could end up with a \$100,000 loan and then that would be lent out

My other goal was eventually to hand this over, because we set up Samriddha Pahad as an INGO funded by a charity that I set up in the United Kingdom. We then transferred it over to a Nepali company, a social business and it is chaired by Prithvi Bahadur Pandé, Chairman of Nepal Investment Mega Bank. We have some great members on the board and a fantastic CEO in Sanjeev Neupane. There are lots of people who claim credit for starting this concept of mountain finance but I honestly think we were one of the pioneers in making this happen.

At present, with mobile telephony a lot of people can get access to finance and banks can set up branchless structure. But we still have around 25,000 clients working in, I think, about 115 cooperatives and they have all paid their money back. A lot of people, a lot of bankers, didn't trust the mountain people. I know from my life, the mountain people are some of the most trustworthy.

#### What are the challenges of working in Nepal and how do you overcome them?

I have done other things too in Nepal. I was the chairman of British International Investment when we set up office. I am no longer chairman as it was for a fixed term. We now have over \$100 million invested. I am not criticising Nepali culture but getting things done here takes a pretty long time. I feel some people are somewhat untrusting of international partners. I understand the reasons for it but it all adds time. Getting permits to set up business is time consuming and banking approvals also take a long time. For hydropower, it at times takes forever. It is a very difficult thing. It's a tragedy

for Nepal because I really do believe that Nepal can be the Saudi Arabia of hydropower. This really does need to change.

I did mention time but the enabling environment of most things is the biggest problem which is the infrastructure. So, what we are doing in Kanchenjunga is working on a small scale development project. How do we get clean water and heating to the area before the tourists come? Tourism is being promoted in the region but water and heating are prerequisites. And if we don't provide heating facilities, then the locals could cut down the trees. So that's a challenge. The next thing is related to the manufacturing of carpets, which is an export commodity, and there is not enough power. There are always outages and that is terrible. Even the schools and hospitals don't have access to electricity. I remember being here between the two earthquakes and there was actually a blockade, when there was no fuel and no power.

# How do you measure the impact of your work in Nepal?

Within Samriddha Pahad. we have looked at how many people were given access to finance. We did a baseline of what happened to that income over time and it grew quite significantly to 75%. When you give people access to money in areas where they don't have any, it's profound. If you take education and health, the other areas where I work on through the Himalayan Trust, then we technically look at the results of the schools and also the ratings by the teachers and the parents and the attendance rates. On the health side, we look at mortality rates. We have a baseline and we compare it with the national average.

For the Kanchenjunga project that Samriddha Pahad is involved in, we will look at how many tourists are coming and how we can manage that without harming the environment. Then we will look


at what is going to happen to incomes in the whole area. And we think that in 10 years' time we could bring an extra \$30 million to the country through British International Investment. The current team is doing it, not me. But for every investment they have a set of metrics specifically related to that thing.

#### Any defining moment in your work here or any story that you would like to narrate during the course of your work here?

This year is the 70th anniversary of the first ever ascent of Mount Everest. We were at Khumjung School and this is with the Himalayan Trust New Zealand, Himalayan Trust UK and Himalayan Trust Nepal. A lot of great Sherpa personalities have studied there. We have also opened the Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Museum and Elder Care Centre there. Things are happening there and it is a satisfying feeling. And now we are working in the Kanchenjunga region. When you see the people that you have helped reach great heights there is no feeling better than that.

#### You mentioned the Kanchenjunga project quite a number of times. What exactly does it involve?

If you look at the tourism scene during the pre-Covid time in Nepal, then around 70,000 people visit the Everest region annually and approximately 150,000 go to the Annapurna region. However, the Kanchenjunga area received only 600 to 800 tourists annually. Literally, nobody goes there. But mind you it is a beautiful place and that is an opportunity. What we are trying to do is seize on the opportunity whilst mitigating threats. There are opportunities to develop the area into a tourism hub. We want to develop lodges there, high-end lodges which are of high quality and not the \$20-a -day type of lodges. I believe Western tourists should be paying top dollars when they go to a national park in Nepal too. For instance, if you went to the Yosemite National Park in California you would be paying thousands of dollars for five days. So, here too the charges should be accordingly which will in turn help in bearing the cost for preserving the environment. So, we are building the infrastructure. We are trying to make clean water

available so that people do not have to bring in plastic bottles. We want to bring in renewable energy so people don't have to avail heating by cutting down trees. That is our plan.

## How do you raise the financial resources for the work you do in Nepal?

I have been funding it but Himalayan Bank and Nepal Investment Mega Bank will be putting in money. However, we are looking for other partners and we will always look for the local communities to contribute too. Because one of the principles of Samriddha Pahad is to work with the communities. We are working very closely with Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Project who are also contributing. That is a joint venture. **B** 





#### "THE KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA IS BEAUTIFUL. WE CAN BUILD AND PROMOTE HIGH-VALUE TREKKING AND ADVENTURE RELATED TOURISM. BUT DEVELOPMENT MUST CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE WHO RESIDE WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA. RIGHTLY DONE, IT WILL CREATE JOBS, ENHANCE THE VALUE OF THE PROPERTY, INCREASE EXPORTS, EXPAND LOCAL BUSINESSES, ATTRACT NEW OR RELOCATE BUSINESSES, INCREASE TAX REVENUES, AND MORE"

Kangchenjunga is the third highest mountain in the world. It lies between the state of Sikkim in India and Taplejung district of eastern Nepal. The name Kangchenjunga has been derived from four Tibetan words – Gangs, Chen, Mzod, and Inga – which means 'the five treasures of the mountains'.

Sherpa was born and raised in Gyabla, Taplejung – an area that in 2024 requires you to walk on moderately hard trail for two days from Phungling municipality. Phupu Chowang Sherpa is an individual who has worked hard to become the person he is - it took him the courage to walk the uncharted path of leaving home and family to build his fortune back in the 70s. His mission to make something of his life took him to Solukhumbu and that was where he found his calling in the world of Nepali tourism and hospitality.

Decades later and having travelled the world and built a moderate fortune, Sherpa returned home to Gyabla on a quest to give back to his birthplace the knowledge he had built. He wanted the scarce and often overlooked population of Kanchenjunga to witness and experience the comforts of the modern world and along with it, the prosperity of modern business and commerce.

He built his first hotel here and for weary trekkers and travellers who walk the hidden trails of Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, this place is a respite where you get warm food, clean bed and hot water. You also get the warm hospitality of Sherpa who treats you to the stories of the region over cups of impeccably brewed coffee and a concoction of coffee with homemade liquor that is his own unique recipe, if you are lucky.

He worries that Taplejung has not received the state attention as it should despite being a prosperous and rich region in water and minerals. He is concerned that modernisation may come in but at the cost of the indigenous groups who may be displaced from their homes and from the prosperity that should rightfully be theirs.

In conversation with Phupu Chowang Sherpa, a man who deeply loves the mountains, we delve into a few aspects of the potential of developing and promoting the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in Taplejung for trekking and tourism. Excerpts:

## What is the tourism potential of the Kanchenjunga area?

Though Kangchenjunga has the potential for trekking, not many people visit the area unlike the Everest and Annapurna regions. According to statistics of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, a total of 858 people went to Kangchenjunga for trekking in 2022. The government has introduced certain rules and regulations like every trekker must have a trekking permit for the Kangchenjunga region. The rules and regulations made for adventurous activities change with changing time and needs. For Kangchenjunga, two permits are required - one is the Kanchenjunga Restricted Area Permit and the other is the Kangchenjunga Conservation Permit. Only authorised trekking agencies can apply for the Kangchenjunga trekking permit after submission of several documents from the Department of Immigration. The procedure to obtain a permit is lengthy and difficult. Contrast this with trekking in Annapurna Base Camp where we had close to 16,000 trekkers in 2022.

#### What are the highlights of trekking in Kanchenjunga and what is holding the region back in terms of tourism development?

A trek in the Kangchenjunga provides ample opportunities

to experience the culture of the region. Local people residing in the area are from different ethnic groups such as Limbu, Rai and Sherpa with distinct languages, customs and cultures. Traditionally, the people of Kangchenjunga have been involved in agriculture, agroforestry, horticulture and animal husbandry, however ecotourism is gradually being adopted by the locals. Tourism businesses like homestays are also just starting.

Although new tourism concepts are evolving many people are reluctant to change and adapt to the new ways of economic involvement. The traditional way of thinking is deeply rooted and needs to be eradicated by creating awareness and setting up training facilities.

Tourism has always been associated with the economy. It is an undeniable fact that one of the main sources of income for countries with an import-based economy is tourism. Tourism directly impacts the GDP and living conditions of people. If we really want to uplift the people then tourism is the best option.

Back in 1984, when I went to Namche Bazaar it was not what it looks like today. And that was only possible as many locals started getting involved in ecotourism. When people are economically sound, then only can they think out of the box and do something creative.

As of today, 800 to 900 tourists visit the Kanchenjunga region on an annual basis and if we compare this to other places, we are way behind. We need the government and industry stakeholders to help build the tourism ecosystem for Kanchenjunga in a holistic way. The other aspect lacking for the Kanchenjunga region is promotion and advertising. There is an abundance of travel bloggers and vloggers in Nepal, who are great resources for the nation when it comes to making destinations visible, however, very few attempts have been made in the Kanchenjunga region. We have an airport in Phungling but flights are not regular. People lose many days in travel just to get here. The government remains apathetic when it comes to tourism promotion. It is really disheartening,

## What are the possibilities in your opinion?

The Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is beautiful. We can build and promote high-value trekking and adventure related tourism. But development must create opportunities for those who reside within the conservation area. Various committees have been established among the villagers who are responsible for the rationale use and conservation of resources. It is difficult to survive inside a conservation area, but we must see this as great opportunity for people to learn about sustainability.

Rightly done, it will create jobs, enhance the value of the property, increase exports, expand local businesses, attract new or relocate businesses, increase tax revenues, and more.

I started a hotel in Gyabla. Later, I invested in two more hotels, I also have a yak farm in Lelep, Ghunsa. The reason why I am doing this at my age is to set an example for others and encourage them to start something that promotes their identity and culture. Yak farm is our traditional business which most people have already forgotten.

Many people ignore the available opportunities and have started migrating to foreign lands. I hope to serve as an inspiration to those who have lost hope and are unable to uplift from their living conditions. **B** 

## WHY THE GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T REGULATE YOUTH ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA

When it comes to online youth safety, parents, not politicians, should be making the call.



DR KIMBERLEE JOSEPHSONL IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BUSINESS AT LEBANON VALLEY COLLEGE IN ANNVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, AND A RESEARCH FELLOW FOR THE CONSUMER CHOICE CENTRE. Parents and politicians have been expressing concerns over youth online safety since online life began. Now, proposals for mandatory age verification are being brought before state lawmakers

and are gaining serious ground. For instance, Florida's Republican-led House recently passed legislation that requires 'many platforms to prohibit anyone younger than 16 from creating an account' and requires social media companies 'to terminate accounts for users in the state under 16'. Florida's law feels reminiscent of the Parental Advisory warnings passed in the 1980s and the video game bans of the 1990s. Such age-based restrictions ignore the fact that children develop at different speeds and that the purpose for online activities can vary greatly.

Take, for example, Malal Yousafzai, who began blogging about the injustice in her country when she was only 11 years old. Yousafzai narrowly survived a bullet to the head after being targeted by the Taliban for speaking out both online and offline about the suppression of children in Pakistan. In recognition of her fight for the right of all children to an education, Yousafzai became the youngest recipient in history, at the age of 17, to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

On the other end of the world, James Stephen 'Jimmy' Donaldson, aka MrBeast, began YouTubing at the age of 13 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Today, MrBeast is one of the world's most prolific and influential content creators with a staggering 235 million subscribers.

Rather than have politicians take on a nannv-state stance for social media use. parents and caregivers should be encouraged to play a greater part in their child's online development.

Whether it is cleaning up the world's oceans or providing support for children in need of medical care, MrBeast puts his money where his mouth is, to the tune of \$100 million in 2023 alone.

Clearly, the internet is an empowering tool for some teens, and Florida's bill seems stifling for the MrBeasts and Yousafzais of the world.

It should also be pointed out that some of the most innovative companies we benefit from today were created by teens who tested the bounds of the internet early on and unencumbered. Steve Jobs met Steve Wozniak when he was only 14 and after much exploration and tinkering, Apple Computer Inc came to be when Jobs was just 21.

Mark Zuckerberg began toying around with computer programming at age 11 and went on to launch Facebook when he was 19. If only he knew how often in the future, he would be grilled by Congress for all he accomplished



and that one day he would be put on trial and blamed for the 'online child sexual exploitation crisis'. Indeed, just this past week, Zuckerberg, representing Meta, along with X's Linda Yaccarino, Snapchat's Evan Spiegel, and Discord's Jason Citron, faced accusations for endangering children via their social media platforms. It is worth noting, however, that the average user age of those on Meta and Discord is between 25 and 34, and the average age of users for Snapchat falls between 18 and 34.

Now, this is not to say these platforms do not pose any problems for children; truly, there are many concerns. But instituting greater government restrictions on internet users and social media sites is problematic on many levels, and below are a few quick reasons why.

#### 1) Social Media Synchronisation

What constitutes social media is evolving quickly and how one logs on can also vary widely. Given that consumers want frictionless transactions, companies are eager to comply. Platforms and apps now have single sign-on systems and syncing capabilities, and registering for new services is made easy when transferring data from an existing account. As such, parental consent will either be able to be easily bypassed or become an increasingly repetitive request (similar to cookie permission popups).

#### 2) Verification Means Data Collection

If there is an age restriction for site access or if parental permission needs to be granted, then there must be a means of proving it. Therefore, sensitive data will be collected to confirm the identity of both children and their parents, and there is no guarantee that that information can be kept safe. According to the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, for the past several years, the FBI has knowingly abused American civil liberties by misusing data through the collection of personal communications.

#### 3) Permission May Be Problematic

Critics of mandatory parental consent have argued that getting permission is sometimes easier said than done. We should not assume that every child has a stable household or supportive parents. Access to social networks can be crucial for those in foster care or student exchange programmes, and those in need of support and community outside of the home. Moreover, depending on background and citizen status, you may have parents who still feel lost navigating digital protocols or insecure about uploading personal forms of documentation.

Although there are some truly devastating drawbacks that have been associated with social media use. we must remember that not all vouth use social media in the same way and parenting, not politics. is what is needed most today.

#### **Duty of Care versus Being Device Aware**

Rather than have politicians take on a nanny-state stance for social media use, parents and caregivers should be encouraged to play a greater part in their child's online development. By placing the government as the gatekeeper, it downplays the purpose of parental involvement and authority and this is a concerning matter given that studies show strong 'parenting mitigates social media-linked mental health issues'.

Equipping parents to help children safely navigate the online realm should be prioritised over the instituting of precautionary policies. Options for improving child safety online are readily available, and there are a variety of tools and techniques that can be leveraged. And, if parents are having significant concerns over their child's online activities, the simplest (but potentially hardest) solution is to just prevent device use.

So, as debates over age and access proliferate, it would be good to consider all problem areas that may arise with stricter online protocols. And although there are some truly devastating drawbacks that have been associated with social media use, we must remember that not all youth use social media in the same way and parenting, not politics, is what is needed most today. **B** 

Source: fee.org



http://www.b360nepal.com/

### INNOVATION



## "We aim to research different types of plastics now. We want to figure out the homogeneous and heterogeneous plastics and research on various other products that we can make from these"

Plastic is an inevitable element used in most households and workplaces; however, a lot of it goes to waste. But to prove that plastic is not just waste but a resource, Milan Bohara, a computer science graduate, and Sashi Kiran Thapa, a business management graduate, cofounded Kleanit Upcyclers.

"It was during our time at Truman State University in the United States during talks we realised that we were both problem solvers and we shared similarities in our thought processes," says Thapa. Bohara adds that both loved travelling and during one trip to California they noticed a sign which stated 'This road is made from plastic.' "This intrigued us a lot and after returning from the trip we started doing some research on plastic and realised the limitless possibilities of plastic as a resource," shares Bohara, adding, "We decided to return to Nepal in 2021 and start Kleanit Upcyclers the very same year."

Kleanit Upcyclers is a problem-solving company that works on plastic waste using efficient technology. The co-founders collaborate with companies like Blue Waste to Value to collect scrap resources. They also source scrap from Prashanna Plastic Balaju and other informal scrap resourcers building a wide network in waste resources and management. "We use the melting technology to convert these scraps into useful lumber," says Thapa, further explaining that they do not burn the plastic scraps but rather melt

and reshape them. Just the way that potters mould clay, they mould plastic to create lumbers, benches, machines, flower pots, glasses, bracelets and notebook covers.

"While studying abroad we came across various technologies that helped promote sustainable development," mentions Bohara. Identifying this limitless possibility, they wish to replicate and innovate similar technologies in Nepal to help achieve sustainable development.

Though they have gained recognition for their work, both share that the journey has not been easy. Initially, they used to research and try out various experiments using the locally available resources at home. "After the initial phase of experiments, our major concern was availing the required machines, however, thanks to Mahabir Pun we have been provided space at the National Innovation Centre and funding to make our own machines," shares Bohara, adding that they are still based at the NIC and continuing with their research and development. He candidly reveals that in the initial period of their research when they did not have money, some team members deserted them. "However, we persisted because we believed in our idea."

It was after two years of rigorous research they were ready to market their products but again finding the market was a hurdle as they had no market connection. "Also, it was difficult to blend our products with the daily lifestyle of people as people interpret plastic as waste and despite recycling, they are hesitant to purchase it," says Bohara.

But perseverance is key, and the duo were untired in their determination to meet with success. They met Nabin Bikash Maharian. Co-founder and CEO of Blue Waste to Value, who helped them gain some market traction. They installed around 12 two-storey benches made from plastic waste in Kupondole, Lalitpur. Similarly, they installed other benches in Kamalpokhari, Chandragiri, Budhanilkantha and Dang. Moreover, their flower pots have been used as tokens of love at various events. "It gives us immense pleasure to say that through all this perseverance, research, and innovation we have been able to convert 25,000 kg of plastic waste into useful products till date. This certainly is an achievement for us as we walk towards the path of sustainability," exclaims Bohara.

Thapa acknowledges the importance of customer gratification in their business. "We constantly aim to deliver quality products that are affordable and our delivery is always on time," he says, adding they are able to achieve this with the help of technology. "We research various innovative technologies being introduced abroad to help facilitate efficiency as customer satisfaction is paramount for us along with sustainability," he adds.

During the conversation. both co-founders spoke of some memorable moments during their work. "Initially, during our research, the lumbers were getting stuck in the machine and one day I used excessive spray on the machines. To my surprise, the lumbers came out exactly the way they should. I call this my Eureka moment." shares Bohara. Thapa adds that as a non-engineering student, when he saw the first prototype of their machine it gave him immense joy. "I will probably never forget that moment," he states

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Currently, both are looking into ways to expand their business. They aim to scale the business and continue exploring plastics. "We aim to research different types of plastics now. We want to figure out the homogeneous and heterogeneous plastics and research on various other products that we can make from these," shares Thapa. "Innovation is something that we are going to continue and explore as in our field innovation has no boundaries," concludes Bohara. B

#### LEGAL EAGLE

## Legal Dynamics Of Company Secretary Appointments In Nepal



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In recent years, Nepal has experienced a notable regulatory change pertaining to the appointment of Company Secretaries (CS) in both public and private entities. This article delves into the legal mandates and complexities associated with appointing Company Secretaries in Nepal. It also delves into the exploring the nuances of their roles, appointment processes and the evolving trend of outsourcing secretarial services.

#### Appointment Requirement of Company Secretary

The legal requirement for appointing a company secretary is contingent upon the nature and characteristics of a company, as mandated by the Companies Act. 2063 (2006) (the Act). Under the Act, companies, both private and public, with a paid-up capital of Rs 10 million or more are required to appoint a company secretary. Consequently, all public and private limited companies with a paid-up capital of at least Rs 10 million must comply with this requirement.

In the context of a nonprofit-distributing company, which is not obligated to maintain paid-up capital, there is no mandatory requirement for the appointment of a company secretary.

#### **Eligibility of Company Secretary**

The Act requires eligible company secretaries to be Nepali citizens with a recognised professional certificate in company secretaryship from an institution, whether national or foreign, duly recognised by the prevailing law for such certification. Candidates must have a minimum of two years of relevant work experience. Alternatively, eligibility for the position of company secretary includes holding a Bachelor's degree in law, management, commerce or economics.

along with three years of work experience in the relevant field or in company management. Therefore, a foreign national or non-resident Nepali with foreign citizenship/passport cannot be company secretary. A person cannot simultaneously serve as the company secretary for multiple companies.

#### Appointment Process of Company Secretary

The Companies Act does not specify the appointment process for a company secretary, leaving the authority vested in directors as provided under the charter documents of the concerned company. Also, while appointing the company secretary as an employee, delegating this power to officers like administrative



heads or managers is considered impractical, given the pivotal role of directors in ensuring a strategic and shareholder-oriented approach to appointments. This practice aligns with the Supreme Court's recognition of the unique nature of company secretary positions, as evidenced in the Chilime Jalavidhyut Company Ltd vs. Labour Court case. In this case, the court emphasised the distinct responsibilities and appointment procedures governed by the Companies Act, underscoring that decisions ordering permanent employment for a company secretary are against the accepted principles of company law. The court's ruling underscores the importance of the position and clarifies that such matters do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Labour Officer under the Labour Act, 1992. This analysis highlights the significance of adhering to legal frameworks and the strategic considerations involved in appointing company secretaries.

#### Company Secretary as Employee or Consultant

Even though there is legal mandate to appoint company secretary, the legislative framework lacks comprehensive guidelines on the selection process, leaving crucial aspects open-ended. The law grants boards of directors the authority to decide on the process of appointing company secretaries and defines their roles and responsibilities. This flexibility, while advantageous, poses challenges, requiring boards to align these roles with the company's strategic goals while ensuring regulatory compliance.

#### **Company Secretary as an Employee**

Delving into the intriguing question of whether a company secretary should clock in as an employee or just a consultant, the law remains tight-lipped, giving companies the freedom to take their pick between the two. This flexibility allows them to access professional services without the fixed commitment of an additional employee. Similarly, a wellestablished corporation might opt for the services of a seasoned chartered secretary, bringing in external expertise for specialised tasks. This dynamic approach ensures that companies can tailor their approach to company secretarial duties based on their unique circumstances and requirements.

When appointed as an employee, a company secretary will be subjected to the managerial role specifically managing day-today operations and ensuring compliances of the company. As an employee, the company secretary enjoys benefits under the local labour laws. These benefits include provident fund, gratuity, insurance, leaves and social security, among others. Any breach of duty or employment terms may result in employment-related consequences including the disciplinary action of up to termination. Additionally, in the event of a vacant position, the board can appoint any qualified employee as a new secretary, potentially limiting professional independence and effectiveness.

#### **Company Secretary as a Consultant**

Companies in Nepal are redefining the traditional norms of hiring company secretaries. Beyond the conventional practice of engaging an individual, businesses now explore the option of hiring a corporate company secretary or outsourcing secretarial services to professional firms. This innovative approach offers companies the flexibility to hire on a case-to-case basis through service agreements, steering away from the commitment of employing a full-time person. It proves particularly beneficial for organisations facing budget constraints, allowing them to access cost-effective secretarial services.

Outsourcing secretarial tasks to professional firms is gaining traction, providing companies with efficient solutions to meet statutory obligations. This trend fosters positive relationships with service providers, as organisations can tailor contracts to specific needs, such as tapping into financial law expertise from a law firm. In this form of appointment, the rights and responsibilities of the company secretary are no longer a one-size-fits-all scenario. Instead, they are meticulously defined and agreed upon in contractual agreements between parties.

#### Conclusion

The legal dynamics surrounding the appointment of company secretaries in Nepal are evolving, reflecting the need for clear guidelines in the legislative framework. While the law mandates the appointment of company secretaries, it leaves critical aspects open to interpretation, creating challenges for companies and boards of directors. The dual options of hiring a company secretary as an employee or engaging a consultant provide flexibility but also pose unique considerations.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Chilime Jalavidhyut Company Ltd vs. Labour Court case underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the company secretary's role and the importance of adhering to the specific procedures outlined in the Companies Act. As companies navigate these legal complexities, a balanced approach to appointment, whether as an employee or consultant, is crucial to ensuring effective governance and regulatory compliance in the Nepali business landscape. B



## Khukri.

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*"ITHINK* **PEOPLE WILL BE SURPRISED AT THE IMPACT THE WOOD HAS ON THE FINAL DELIVERY OF THE FLAVOUR PROFILE; HOW IT MAKES IT MUCH MORE COMPLEX AND HOW IT MAKES IT MUCH MORE** ACCESSIBLE. **I BELIEVE IT IS GOING TO APPEAL MUCH MORE TO THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET OVER AND ABOVE THE CURRENT RANGE OF KHUKRI, I THINK IT IS A REALLY** PREMIUM **ADDITION TO THE KHUKRI FAMILY**"

Christopher Armes Master Blender, Cask Series - Khukri Rum



Christopher Armes, Master Blender of Cask Series at Khukri Rum, has been working in alcoholic beverages since 1982 when he joined Grand Metropolitan. While at Grand Metropolitan, he undertook various roles where he was involved in launching two cognac brands and varietal wines. Armes, later, joined Diageo as the project support director where he played a global support role, managing the central laboratories and pilot plant within the United Kingdom. Over the years, Armes went on to become the Technical Director for Innovation looking after product innovation and process development.

It has been five years since he has been associated with Khukri Rum ensuring that the product stands true to the iconic brand position it holds. Khukri Rum is produced by The Nepal Distilleries and has captured the taste and imagination of people across the country since 1959. It is also available and appreciated globally by rum connoisseurs who vouch for its distinct taste.

Khukri Rum is soon launching a Cask Series which will be limited in supply that is generating some attention and anticipation among rum and single malt whisky drinkers. So, while Christopher Armes was recently in Kathmandu, **Business 360** caught up with him to learn about his association with Khukri Rum, the limited-edition cask series and his views on the wider alco-beverage sector. Excerpts:

## What are some special skills that a blender must have?

It is the ability to remember taste. Obviously, you have to have the ability to taste and describe. And I think it is the ability to link taste preference to consumer liking. One of the biggest difficulties is that I have my taste preferences and consumers will have their taste preferences and they may not necessarily be the same. So, it is about removing that innate personal bias around it. The best descriptor that I can have is a term used which is called smooth. One man's smoothness is another man's harshness. And my description of smooth is different to other people's definition of smooth. So, trying to understand your own personal bias and consumer bias is a challenge. Hence, remaining neutral about your own personal preferences is important.

I think having had an understanding of taste preferences across markets has been helpful for me. When I was working for Diageo, I was lucky enough to experience products in China, India, Australia. Understanding the differences between what people would like and dislike is really important. So, it is about being commercially aware of what you are doing blend wise.

## How do you actually ascertain the taste preferences of the people?

It might sound awful but the basic level is about just going into local bars and drinking more local products. But also, when you do market research, experimenting with blends gives you an opportunity to try out new ideas, new blends which stretch consumer exposure to different types of products. So, when I do market research on new blends, I will deliberately put blends which have got more of one character or less of a character to see how consumers react. However, consumers are not great at telling you what they like about products. They are just good at telling you whether they like something or dislike it. So, creating a stretch of liquids enables me to determine what people like and dislike in product types.

#### How long have you been associated with Khukri Rum and what do you think distinguishes Khukri Rum from other spirits?

I have been associated with Khukri Rum for five years. While talking about Khukri Rum, there is an interesting blend of characters within Khukri that I do not see in other blends. There is a subtle blend of rums, fruitiness and harshness, balanced off with what I call dried fruits like prunes, raisins and sultanas. There is also a nice caramel note that you get from molasses. This is new and a unique taste profile in its own right. Part of that is just because of the raw materials used in Nepal.

In reality, the Khukri Rum blend was developed 63 years ago and I have nothing to do with it. There is a nice combination of pungency and dried fruits and smoothness and sweetness that you do not see in a lot of Caribbean rums.

#### What factors make a high-quality rum and does Khukri meet those standards?

What factors make a highquality rum is an impossible question to answer because high quality is determined by what you like and what you do not like. Most people will say that high quality means complex, a relatively rounded flavour profile, one that does not jump out at you. When I am judging a product profile, I would say, 'does it deliver up front'. Is the first taste nice? Is the last taste nice? And is there a contact between the first and last taste? For me. Khukri Rum delivers on that front. It is not going to be everybody's taste but it delivers premium cues in terms of how it delivers a profile

#### You mentioned earlier about Caribbean rums. So, is the blending process different for different types of rums?

It is the distillation process that is different for different rums. There are pot stills and continuous stills and you have got what's known as thumpers where they put condensed liquids and redistill it. So, there are different processes for rums and you can see that on Caribbean rums whereby you have light Caribbean rums and heavy Caribbean rums which are made in a very different way. Heavy Caribbean rums are done more by pot stills and the light ones by continuous stills. Khukri Rum is somewhere in the middle.

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#### In these five years of association with Khukri Rum how do you think has its taste evolved?

The taste of Khukri Rum has not evolved at all. What we have made sure is that it is a consistently good quality rum. The quality of the rum is the same as it was when I joined.

#### Khukri Rum is about to introduce special limited edition. Could you please tell us about it?

That was in my brief when I was brought in to help with Khukri. When I spoke to the owner, we had a conversation that revolved around how do we bring a more premium and luxury feel to Khukri Rum. How do we bring premium variants to Khukri Rum. The early days were about how do we bring cask maturation or cask finishing to Khukri Rum and this is the first edition of those experiments. We started off with a range of different cask variants, some of them closer in, some of them further out. So, we have got shorea robusta casks, charred and uncharred. Charred means you burn inside and create charcoal on the inside, and in uncharred, you do not do that. We have used European oak casks and I have been coming back for the last five years tasting those rums down. I have been coming back every so often over the last five years tasting them and identifying when is the right time to take the liquid out of the cask and bottle it. And this is the first one.

#### It is said that the process of rum undergoing ageing isn't entirely consistent? The same rum put in two 'identical' casks can yield very different rums years later. What are the skill levels required to adjust each batch's blend?

That is the same with any age spirit. Each cask can be different. So, you have to have a number of casks and then part of my role is to taste each and every cask on a regular basis. And then we sit around and say, these casks are suitable and these are not. If they are not suitable, then it means they need to be normally aged for longer. We have selected a certain number of casks which



have the right character that I believe are ready to drink now. The rest of the casks are sitting in the warehouse waiting for another day. The whiskey people do exactly the same thing, so it is not just with rum. That is the skill of what we do.

If it was as easy as to put in one cask site and say we have got 20 casks and at the end of five years all 20 casks are the same, then I would not have a job. So, my job is to make sure that we take all the casks that are consistent within a broad parameter of things and then say those ones are ready and those are not. And every now and then you get one cask that is much better than the rest of them and then you cannot say that this cask is so good we will do this as a single cask addition.

## When making the casks how do you decide on the wood to be used?

That is where we have the experimentation. I have a minimum number of casks I believe are right to make a decision on. And we have laid down shorea robusta casks. charred and uncharred first. Then we lay down some oak casks, European oak casks, other casks like bourbon casks, sherry casks, a whole raft of different types of casks, all of which we will look at in two, three or, four years' time to see which ones are appropriate for release. Every distillery will go through the same process. All the Caribbean rums have had a head start on us, so they

know whether bourbon casks or sherry casks work for them. So most Caribbean rums are aged in bourbon casks because that gives a sweetness from bourbon. A lot of whiskey casks are sherry casks because the sherry gives sweetness. Khukri is a different rum, so its interaction with the cask will be different. The climate here is different, so the temperature range is different, it is cold and hot. The humidity is different. So, all those parameters mean the rum ages in a different way. So, whilst we can take learnings from other countries, we still have to go through the learning experience of a smaller number of casks and then see how they work. There may be some experiments that never see the light of day.

#### Ageing rum is a complex process to master; what are some of the things that you look at?

I primarily look into taste. Does the wood act in a positive way and does the climate act in a positive way? There are two types of reactions that happen with maturation. One is called additive and that is the wood impact on the rum. So, when you taste woody notes from the cask that is additive. Then there are subtractive reactions which are oxidation and evaporation. Oxidation and evaporation are determined by the climate or the environment that you are maturing the rum in.

In the Caribbean the temperature never gets down

to six and seven degrees but in Nepal it does. So, in Nepal you get a much wider range of temperature difference. As a consequence, the maturation process in the negative and the positive is different. It is the same in India. For example, in India the temperature is consistently higher, so it matures quicker than it would do in Nepal. Sometimes it is a benefit and sometimes it is not. You only know by trying.

#### How do you view the popularity of rum growing in the days ahead? What are some trends in rum drinking we can look forward to?

Rum is becoming increasingly popular globally; that is one trend. Premiumisation is another trend. People are drinking more premium rums, more unique rums. So, for me, Khukri Rum has an opportunity for the export market, the international market because it is uniquely Nepali and it has a unique profile, so it fits one major trend. The cask editions will only enhance the reputation of rum from Nepal.

#### Can we expect something novel for Khukri Rum from you in the near future?

Primarily, we are experimenting on cask editions. So, there will be new editions coming out, either primary maturation or secondary maturation. By primary, I mean fresh virgin casks, secondary casks are refill. Each behave in a slightly different way. Beyond that, I cannot divulge more.

#### Anything that you would like to add?

With the limited edition we have got with the shorea robusta casks that are charred, I think people will be surprised at the impact the wood has on the final delivery of the flavour profile; how it makes it much more complex and how it makes it much more accessible. I believe it is going to appeal much more to the international market over and above the current range of Khukri. I don't know what price points they are looking at, but for me at least, I think it is a really premium addition to the Khukri family. B



## Unleashing the Future BRACE YOURSELF FOR THE NEXT-GEN









## Energy Markets 2024

B360 Correspondent

Energy products observed varied fluctuations in 2023. After opening at \$80.40 per barrel, crude oil plunged to a record \$63.69 per barrel in May, lowest since January 2022. However, bullish momentum took over thereafter and prices rebounded to \$95.02 in September. Crude oil closed 2023 at \$71.38 per barrel. Having witnessed a bullish 2022, natural gas experienced a downward trend in 2023. Opening at \$4.455 per MMBTU, natural gas nosedived for a couple of months before recovering at the end of the vear to close at \$2.524 per MMBTU. So far, 2024 has displayed a mixed trend with crude oil experiencing a bullish January while natural gas plunged further. What will 2024 bring to the energy sector? Here are a few factors driving the energy products in 2024.

#### OPEC

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) moved the markets in 2023. Looking back, the activities aligned with two out of three daily price movements. However, due to changing dynamics, the value of OPEC is declining as other productions around the world are increasing. OPEC is reporting US production hikes of 1.2 million barrels per day by the end of the year when demand is dropping. With OPEC and **OPEC+** member nations agreeing upon production cuts till March 2024, traders will search for clues for the ensuing future. Will OPEC agree on adequate cuts supporting oil prices or will the financial markets lose the OPEC stronghold that had prevailed since time immemorial?

#### **El Nino and Natural Gas**

Weather patterns have influenced heating demand

and prices of natural gas. It is widely accepted that El Nino will be the major factor to watch in 2024. According to an El Nino event, the surface water of central and eastern Pacific Oceans will become warmer than normal leading to fluctuations in pressure, wind and rainfalls. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (USA), a 54% chance is there that El Nino event will end up 'historically strong', ranking it in the top five.

This evolving weather pattern is creating drier-thanaverage conditions across the northern tier of the US while wetter-than-average situations are expected in Northern Alaska and parts of the west and south. As per natural gas consumption figures, the previous year ended with warmer-than-normal temperatures. Strong storage and record production levels have intensified the bearish movement in the prices of natural gas. Will the estimated 'historically strong' El Nino continue to exert selling pressure on the natural gas prices in 2024?

#### **Rebounding Jet Fuel**

Since Covid 19 hit the airline industry, jet fuel demand has lagged behind, estimated to be down by more than 10% in 2023 from pre-pandemic numbers. Total airline capacity climbed by 0.3 billion, a significant hike of 15.8% in the winter period compared to 2022. Robust carrier growth from China, Korea and Hong Kong had supported this bullish growth. It has set the example for change in 2024 with jet fuel set for a sharp rebound. Air travel demand is estimated at 4.7 billion passengers in 2024, exceeding the record level of 4.5 billion set in 2019 as per the forecasts by International Air Transport Association (IATA). These changing dynamics could repeat this year as refiners adjust their productions to meet growing demand.

#### Brent Crude Related Pricing

The previous year marked a record year for the US in terms of production and exports. Cargos of WTI Midland were added to the Brent assessment in the middle of 2023 with the European counterparts importing more

light sweet US crude oil than the North Sea suppliers. This transformation links the Brent benchmark to US crude oil and explicitly makes the role of WTI as setting the global prices. European refiners have commenced pricing supply directly linked to WTI. However, producers who have historically linked their oil sales to Brent are exploring implications of WTI on their generated revenues. Likewise, the impact on Asia should not be ignored. The Asian region imported record levels of US oil despite competition from Russian producers.

#### Conclusion

The factors above are a few from a long list of evolving dynamics in 2024. As the saying goes the only constant in life is change, energy markets will garner endless opportunities and challenges for organisations, consumers and investors. No matter what the significance of the energy markets in your life, 2024 is set to have something for everyone. **B** 





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#### BEED TAKE

## beed's take on the market



During the review period of December 28, 2023 to January 28, 2024, the Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) index grew by 25.56 points (+1.24%) to close at 2,094.46 points. It reached its highest point on January 16 at 2,175.17 points.

While the market showed a strong upward movement leading up to the peak, it could not sustain the upward movement. The second quarter performance of the listed companies, particularly financial institutions, failed to

#### Table 1 Sub-indices during the review period (December 28, 2023 to January 28, 2024)

	December 28, 2023	January 28, 2024	% Change
NEPSE Index	2,068.90	2,094.46	1.24%
Sub-Indices			
Commercial Bank	1,191.94	1,163.42	-2.39%
Development Bank	3,946.50	4,085.18	3.51%
Hydropower	2,387.00	2,624.69	9.96%
Finance	1,773.47	1,801.56	1.58%
Non-Life Insurance	11,412.61	10,977.16	-3.82%
Others	1,568.40	1,739.54	10.91%
Hotels and Tourism	5,683.08	5,494.63	-3.32%
Microfinance	3,670.31	3,785.37	3.13%
Life Insurance	11,369.98	10,673.14	-6.13%
Manufacturing & Processing	5,932.87	5,780.99	-2.56%

Source: Nepal Stock Exchange

Figure 1 NEPSE Index during the review period (December 28, 2023 to January 28, 2024)



Source: Nepal Stock Exchange

meet investor expectations, leading to a sharp decline in the second-half of the review period. However, the total market volume during the review period increased by 48% to reach Rs 109.18 billion.

During the review period, five sub-indices landed in the

green zone and the remaining five in the red zone.

Other sub- index (+10.91%) was the biggest gainer as the share value of Muktinath Krishi (+Rs 586.4), Sonapur Minerals and Oil (+Rs 67.9) and Nepal Reinsurance (+Rs 59) increased substantially.



Moreover, Himalayan Reinsurance started trading during the review period, closing at Rs 645. Hydropower sub-index (+9.96%) was second witnessing a rise in the share prices of Mid-Solu Hydropower (+Rs 206.09), Tehrathum Power (+Rs 170.7) and Trishuli Jalvidyut (+Rs 130).

Development Bank subindex (+3.51%) followed suit with growth in the share prices of Karnali Development Bank (+Rs 33.1), Sindhu Bikash Bank (+Rs 32.9) and Miteri Development Bank (+Rs 27). Microfinance sub-index (+3.13%) also rose as share value of Samaj Microfinance (+Rs 280.8), Gurans Microfinance (+Rs 216.9), and Ganapati Microfinance (+Rs 179.1) went up. Similarly, Finance sub-index (+1.58%) went up as share prices of Multipurpose Finance (+Rs 23.5), Samriddhi Finance (+Rs 15.1) and both Reliance Finance and Pokhara Finance (+Rs 15) increased.

Amongst the losers, Commercial Bank sub-index (-2.39%) saw the smallest dip with decline in share values of NIC Asia (-Rs 39), Laxmi Sunrise (-Rs 25.9) and Siddhartha Bank (-Rs 20.1). Manufacturing and Processing sub-index (-2.56%) followed suit with decline in share prices of Unilever Nepal (-Rs 4,199), Bottlers Nepal Terai (-Rs 886.7) and Himalayan Distillery (-Rs 219).

Hotels and Tourism subindex (-3.32%) also witnessed a decline as the share prices of City Hotel (-Rs 53.8), Taragaon Regency (-Rs 45.1) and Chandragiri Hills (-Rs 38) dropped. Non-Life insurance sub-index (-3.82%) witnessed a decrease in the share value of Rastriva Beema (-Rs 1,100), Nepal Insurance (-Rs 105) and NLG Insurance (-Rs 47.9). Finally, Life Insurance subindex (-6.13%) was the biggest loser with decline in shares prices of Citizen Life Insurance (-Rs 82.2), Life Insurance Co Nepal (-Rs 73) and Prabhu Mahalaxmi (-Rs 67).

#### **News and Highlights**

Nepal Insurance Authority has revised investment guidelines for reinsurance, nonlife, life, and micro-insurance companies, allowing them to purchase 15% of shares of a public company. It is an increase from the previous 5%. Further, insurance companies will also be able to invest in both institutional and ordinary shares through the revision.

The Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON) has granted approval for the initial public offering (IPO) of Reliance Spinning Mills (Manufacturing and Processing) for 770,640 units of shares for qualified institutional investors. Global IME Capital has been appointed its issue manager. SEBON has also included IPOs of two manufacturing and processing companies under preliminary review: Shaurya Cement Industries (Rs 4.23 billion) and Maruti Cement (Rs 3.21 billion). Nabil Investment Bank has been appointed as the issue manager for both. SEBON has also included the IPO of Annapurna Cable Car worth Rs 310 million under preliminary review, with Muktinath Capital serving as the issue manager. Additionally, Barun Investment worth Rs 247.5 million, with Global IME as its issue manager has been placed for review.

#### Outlook

The second quarter results of the listed companies, financial institutions in particular, have had an impact on investor sentiment. However, investors are taking a waitand-watch stance as market interest rates have continued to decline and are predicted to do so even further. It is likely that the market will continue to be volatile, so investors must exercise caution. **B** 

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## **BIZ.QUOTES**

I always did something I was a little not ready to do. I think that's how you grow. When there's that moment of «Wow, I'm not really sure I can do this,» and you push through those moments, that's when you have a breakthrough.



– MARISSA MAYER Former President And Ceo, Yahoo

**Read a lot.** The daily industry news, analysis, scientific research, anything and everything that's related to your field.



 LILIA STOYANOV Ceo, Transformify

You don't lead by pointing and telling people some place to go. **You lead by going to that place and making a case.** 



– KEN KESEY American novelist

Don't be intimidated by what you don't know. That can be your greatest strength and ensure that you do things differently from everyone else.



– SARA BLAKELY Founder, Spanx

#### BITSNBYTES

## Is Online Medical Consultation Catching Up in Nepal

The global healthcare landscape in recent years has witnessed a significant transformation, with technology playing a pivotal role in shaping the way medical services are delivered. This paradigm shift is not limited to developed nations alone; the transformation is taking place even in the serene mountainous terrain of Nepal.

Nepal faces geographical challenges that often hinder the establishment of robust healthcare infrastructure. particularly in remote areas. However, the advent of online medical consultation platforms has ushered in a new era, offering people an alternative and innovative means to access essential healthcare services. These platforms are helping break down barriers to healthcare in regions where traditional facilities are limited or non-existent. The impact of online medical consultation platforms in Nepal extends beyond mere accessibility; it introduces a paradigm of convenience and efficiency.

Individuals residing in remote areas, where reaching a healthcare facility might involve arduous journeys, now have the opportunity to consult with qualified healthcare professionals at the click of a button. This transformative shift not only saves time but also proves invaluable in emergencies. The seamless integration of technology into healthcare not only addresses the challenges posed by Nepal's diverse topography but also reflects a commitment to ensuring that healthcare is a fundamental right accessible to all, irrespective of geographical constraints. In light of the transformative role of online medical consultation platforms in Nepal, we explore some



prominent online medical sites in the country that have been instrumental in providing essential health and medical services to the population.

#### eSewa Care

eSewa Care, a health care package curated by eSewa, offers customers a comprehensive range of health benefits at an incredibly affordable annual cost of just Rs 360. With benefits exceeding Rs 1 lakh, subscribers gain access to a spectrum of health services, including free consultation on dental health and a Rs 500 discount on dental scaling, promoting dental well-being without financial strain. The package extends its reach to holistic health with up to a 20% discount on hair and beauty spas, encouraging self-care practices. Additionally, eSewa Care provides subscribers with accidental

insurance coverage of up to Rs 230,000, ensuring financial protection in unforeseen circumstances.

#### **Doctors on Call**

Doctors on Call (DOC) Nepal stands out as a prominent home healthcare service provider, introducing an innovative concept to the health sector by offering hassle-free, convenient and high-quality healthcare facilities directly to individuals' homes. This forward-thinking approach involves a team of experienced and qualified medical professionals, including doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians, nurses and health assistants, collectively working to transform the healthcare environment. This modernised method of care, facilitated by DOC, brings health services right to the doorstep of individuals, ensuring comfort

and accessibility for both patients and their loved ones through a simple phone call or message. DOC encompasses a wide range of services, spanning physiotherapy, nursing, doctor consultations, laboratory services, as well as the provision of necessary equipment and surgical assistance, embodying a comprehensive and convenient healthcare solution.

#### **Hamro Doctor**

Hamro Doctor, the pioneering online healthcare service provider in Nepal, revolutionises the traditional healthcare landscape by offering patients the opportunity to consult certified medical professionals and access a multitude of healthrelated services online. With a mission to simplify and widen healthcare accessibility in the country, Hamro Doctor



provides detailed, personalised, research-based and certified information, including expert opinions from qualified doctors. Commonly utilised for understanding medical conditions, receiving diagnoses, exploring treatment options and seeking recommendations for future therapeutic conditions, Hamro Doctor serves as a virtual community facilitating live chats and discussions between doctors and patients for enhanced convenience. The platform's comprehensive facilities empower patients to comprehend their health, make informed decisions and connect with the best doctors and treatments. Additionally. Hamro Doctor enables individuals to maintain a digital record of their medical history and profiles, eliminating the inconvenience of carrying physical files and reports from one healthcare provider to another.

#### **Cura Health**

Cura Health emerges as a partner for seamlessly managing healthcare appointments with hospitals, laboratories and doctors, presenting itself as a comprehensive one-stop solution for diverse medical needs. Offering unparalleled convenience, Cura Health allows users to effortlessly book lab tests from the comfort of their homes, facilitating blood sample collection from a location of their choice. The platform goes beyond mere appointment scheduling by providing a user-friendly interface to explore available doctors, view their details, check appointment slots and execute online payments, cancellations and rebooking with ease. Notably, Cura Health is at the forefront of innovation in the medical health-tech space by introducing both free and paid telemedicine services, incorporating audio and video calls. This pioneering approach not only enhances accessibility to healthcare professionals but also reflects Cura Health's commitment to leveraging technology for the holistic wellbeing of its users.

#### Nepmeds

Nepmeds stands as your dedicated digital healthcare partner, offering a comprehensive suite of services to address your health needs. This innovative platform facilitates the assessment of health issues, connecting users with the right doctors, enabling the booking of diagnostic tests and vaccinations, and providing easy access to essential medicines. Nepmeds goes beyond mere transactions by offering features like health record storage, fitness guidance and insights on leading a happier life. The commitment to affordability and accessibility is evident in their provision

of genuine medicines at competitive rates, coupled with user-friendly payment options. Functioning as a one-stop solution, Nepmeds caters to a diverse range of healthcare requirements, offering a wide array of medicines from different manufacturers, including generic medicines, over-the-counter products, wellness items, vitamins, diet/ fitness supplements, Ayurveda products, pain relievers, diabetic care kits, baby/mother care products, beauty essentials and surgical consumables. The rise of online medical consultation platforms in Nepal signifies a positive shift towards a more accessible and patient-centric healthcare system. As technology continues to advance, these platforms are likely to play an increasingly vital role in ensuring that individuals across the country have timely access to healthcare services. B

#### BOOK OF THE MONTH

## Scale: The Universal Laws of Life, Growth, and Death in Organisms, Cities, and Companies

#### Author: Geoffrey West



Visionary physicist Geoffrey West is a pioneer in the field of complexity science, the science of emergent systems and networks. The term "complexity" can be misleading, however, because what makes West's discoveries so beautiful is that he has found an underlying simplicity that unites the seemingly complex and diverse phenomena of living systems, including our bodies, our cities and our businesses.

Fascinated by aging and mortality, West applied the

rigor of a physicist to the biological question of why we live as long as we do and no longer. The result was astonishing, and changed science: West found that despite the riotous diversity in mammals, they are all, to a large degree, scaled versions of each other. If you know the size of a mammal, you can use scaling laws to learn everything from how much food it eats per day, what its heart-rate is, how long it will take to mature, its lifespan, and so on. Furthermore, the efficiency of the mammal's circulatory systems scales up precisely based on weight: if you compare a mouse, a human and an elephant on a logarithmic graph, you find with every doubling of average weight, a species gets 25% more efficient—and lives 25% longer. Fundamentally, he has proven, the issue has to do with the fractal geometry of the networks that supply energy and remove waste from the organism's body.

West's work has been game-changing for biologists, but then he made the even bolder move of exploring his work's applicability. Cities, too, are constellations of networks and laws of scalability relate with eerie precision to them. Recently, West has applied his revolutionary work to the business world. This investigation has led to powerful insights into why some companies thrive while others fail. The implications of these discoveries are far-reaching, and are just beginning to be explored. Scale is a thrilling scientific adventure story about the elemental natural laws that bind us together in simple but profound ways. Through the brilliant mind of Geoffrey West, we can envision how cities, companies and biological life alike are dancing to the same simple, powerful tune.

## **FEATURE**

# MONEY LAUNDERING PREVENTION IN NEPAL

Text: Pushpa Raj Acharva



he House of Representatives on February 7 endorsed the Bill to Amend Laws Related to Prevention of Money Laundering and Promotion of Business Environment after a year of it being registered in the parliament.

Various provisions of different laws have been amended along with the endorsement of this Bill which includes Import and Export (Control) Act, 1950; Ship Registration Act, 2027 (1971); Land Revenue Act, (1978); Tourism Act, (1978); The Building Act, (1998);

Nepal Rastra Bank Act, (2002); Insolvency Act, (2006); Securities Act, (2007); Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, (2007); Asset (Money) Laundering Prevention Act, 2008 and Offence related to Assets and Goods (Freezing and Confiscation) Act- 2003. Likewise, other acts amended

by the Bill comprises of Mutual Legal Assistance Act, (2014); Organised Crime Prevention Act (2014); Electricity **Regulation Commission** Act, (2017); National Penal (Code) Act, (2017); National Criminal Procedure (Code) Act, (2017); Cooperatives Act (2017); Foreign Investment

and Technology Transfer Act, (2019) and Insurance Act (2022).

Prior to the amendment of this act, the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) – Financial Action Task Force (FATF) style regional intergovernmental body – had identified some weaknesses in measures adopted by Nepal on asset (money) laundering prevention.

The Mutual Evaluation Report with APG published in September 2023 has underlined limitations in laws concerned with preventing money laundering. "Nepal's legal framework to implement Targeted Financial Sanctions (TFS) has moderate shortcomings with regard to terrorism financing and major shortcomings with regard to proliferation financing (PF). Financial Institutions displayed a varving understanding of their TFS obligations with commercial banks, large development banks, large nonbank remitters, and other larger FIs conducting automated screening. Other FIs and all Designated Non-Financial **Businesses and Professions** (DNFBPs) are not conducting adequate TFS screening. No funds have been frozen pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolutions."

Nepal was under APG monitoring due to the country's chances of getting exposed to terrorism financing and proliferation financing, and managed to narrowly escape from grey listing with the commitment to pass the aforesaid Bill from the parliament to address the shortcomings highlighted by the APG. The annual meeting of APG on Money Laundering was held in Canada from July 9-14, 2023 which had provided Nepal a year's period to fulfil its commitment till October 2024. The measures Nepal is going to adopt through endorsement of the Bill from the parliament has quashed the risks of 'grey listing'.

Being placed on the grey list has tangible consequences for a country's economy and financial system, including restriction on cross-border transactions or opening L/Cs for cross-border trade, which will lead to difficulties for a state obtaining credit as well as limit inward foreign investment, according to experts.

After endorsement of the Bill from the parliament, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Dhana Raj Gurung, said the country has avoided the risk of falling in the grey list by endorsing the Bill from the parliament. Though Nepal has enacted the Asset (Money) Laundering Prevention Act, 2008 and set up a separate department then under the Ministry of Finance, it was in the monitoring list of APG since 2009 to 2014 due to its weaknesses in abiding with compliances.

## Shortcomings identified in APG review

The APG review recommended 10 different actions for the country to be removed from the monitoring list including passing of the aforesaid Bill.

After passing the Bill, it is recommended that Nepal should expedite implementation and significantly enhance the capacity of impacted competent authorities to undertake their new and/ or modified AML/CFT functions along with enhancing public and private sector's understanding of Nepal's AML/CFT risks by updating its terrorism financing risk assessment.

Further, assessing the money laundering/terrorism financing risks associated with legal persons and arrangements, and conducting more focused money laundering risk assessments on corruption, tax evasion, human trafficking, narcotics offences, environmental crime and border-related crimes are also necessary.

"Law enforcement agencies, investigative authorities and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) should prioritise the investigation and prosecution of money laundering associated with all high-risk predicate crimes at a level consistent with Nepal's overall money laundering risk," says the AML/ CFT Measures in Nepal: Mutual Evaluation Report.

In addition, the report suggested that Nepal Rastra Bank's new AML/CFT Supervision Division should be appropriately resourced to deliver supervision across all NRB supervised FI sectors. Supervision should be riskbased and prioritised for commercial banks and other higher risk financial institutions supervised by NRB.

It has also an eye on casinos and the largely unregulated cooperatives sector. "Nepal should significantly enhance risk-based AML/CFT supervision of cooperatives, casinos, dealers in precious metals and stones, and real estate agents as well as implement Targeted Financial Sanctions (TFS) for terrorism financing without delay and ensure TFS implementation by FIs and Designated Nonfinancial Businesses and Professions."

Similarly, it has recommended that Financial Intelligence Unit's goAML division should be given additional human and financial resources to expedite full adoption and operation of goAML and suggested to enhance implementation of all preventative measures by conducting a range of activities (including sanctioning where appropriate) to ensure all financial institutions and DNFBPs enhance their application of risk-based customer due diligence and enhanced or specific measures, apply mitigating measures commensurate with their risks, enhance Financial Intelligence Unit and regulatory reporting, and apply internal controls.

Additionally, the APG recommended that the Department for Management of Proceeds of Crime (DMPC) should receive significantly greater human and institutional resources to undertake its function and receive cooperation and coordination from all competent authorities to enhance the country's ability to effectively deprive criminals from their ill-gotten gains.

The APG report further says Nepal should streamline its mutual legal assistance (MLA) response coordination mechanisms, and establish policies, procedures and standard operating procedures (SOPs) that support law enforcement agencies and investigative authorities to prioritise the use of MLA and other forms of international cooperation in money laundering/terrorism financing and high-risk predicate crime cases.

#### Inconsistency

Erstwhile Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government in 2018 had pulled the Department of Money Laundering Investigation under the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM) from the Ministry of Finance. This sort of inconsistency in setting up the institution caused a dilemma in the function of different mechanisms identified by the strategy. Though the institution is under the National Strategy and Action Plan on Preventing Asset (Money) Laundering, a national review council has been formed led by the Finance Minister and comprising of the Attorney General, Chief Secretary, Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, Secretary of the Ministry of Finance as members, and Coordinator of the National Coordination Committee as member secretary.

Similarly, there is another mechanism called Regulator Coordination Mechanism, which comprises of the regulator of the financial sector led by the Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank. Though the Ministry of Finance is responsible for dealing with financial sector regulators, it is quite unjustifiable that the Department of Money Laundering Investigation is kept under the OPMCM. The department is responsible for probing money laundering cases. So far less than 100 cases have been filed at the court following the probe. **B** 

#### 360 PROMOTION

# 'I chose the Citroën eC3 because of its premium looks and attractive price'

Since the government's decision to reduce tax on electric vehicles (EVs), a lot of Nepalis are going for EVs. Currently, there are different models of EVs ranging from Rs 1.5 million to Rs 25 million in the Nepali market. Ajay Shrestha, proprietor of Siddhi Enterprises and JS Enterprises, has recently bought the Citroën eC3. Here's what he has to say about his choice to go electric:

## What made you choose Citroën eC3?

It has a premium look. The Citroën eC3 looks and feels premium both externally and internally. It has good space inside. The ground clearance is quite good for roads in Nepal and most importantly this is the only premium-looking EV in this budget.

## What do you love the most about Citroën's design and features?

Its SUV looks, comfortable seats, and of course, infotainment system. Additionally, it is very spacious.

#### In your view, what sets Citroën apart from other brands? What difference did you feel when driving other cars and driving the Citroën eC3?

It's very smooth. The handling of the Citroën eC3 is very easy and comfortable. It's fully automatic and that's what makes the driving more comfortable. Also, the performance and torque generation of the Citroën eC3 is impressive. French DNA equipped Citroën eC3 gives a trust and a luxury driving experience on a good budget. It's a value-for-money car.



#### How would you describe the driving performance and handling of the Citroën eC3?

It's very easy and comfortable. Although we can't get the claimed range in real-life driving, we can easily achieve 230km to 260km range with a single charge which is quite impressive. I haven't faced any problem driving uphill or off-road so far.

#### Any standout safety features in Citroën?

The most interesting feature is it doesn't move automatically unless the driver ties up the seat belt and all the doors are closed properly. You have to force move it. Besides that, the signals and warnings are pretty clear.

## What do your friends or family say about Citroën?

My friends and family really like it as they can have

very comfortable space, leg room, personal bottle holder, charging port, etc for them. And of course, they enjoy the music while driving with Citroen.

#### How does the maintenance cost for Citroën compare to other cars? Have you noticed any changes in your expenses since switching to the Citroën eC3?

I have definitely felt a very huge difference in my expenses. I have driven almost 9,000km with the Citroën eC3 and so far, my maintenance cost is zero. Besides that, I have saved a huge amount on petrol. Previously, I would spend between Rs 12 and Rs 15 for 1 km while driving a petrolpowered car, but with this, it's down to Re 1 per kilometre. As my daily average travel range is 100 km a day. I nearly save Rs 30,000 to Rs 35,000 per month only on fuel expenses. If anyone is planning to buy a

car on EMI that saving might cover your EMI.

#### How satisfied are you with Citroën's customer service and dealership support?

I am satisfied with the dealership's support. They are welcoming and it's always a good vibe to be there. The most attractive part of them is they are not manipulative. They do not force sell the car. Their service centre is also supportive and ready to help you whenever you need assistance.

#### Would you suggest a Citroën to friends or family considering a new car? Why or why not?

I would definitely recommend the Citroën eC3 because it's a

compact SUV with all the needed features that come with attractive price. I agree that the features given could be better or more but with this price, it can be considered. Moreover, it looks huge and perfect for a family for a city drive and also for nearby destinations.

## How would you sum up your overall experience with driving a Citroën?

I feel good driving the Citroën eC3. It's handy and comfortable. I also feel great as I am using the resources of my own country while driving it.

Shangrila Motors, the authorised distributor of Citroën vehicles in Nepal, has introduced a new electric model, Citroën eC3 – a seamless fusion of French-born and Made-in-India craftsmanship – to the market.

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#### Entrepreneur Sameer Maskey's company to be listed on US Stock Exchange, NASDAQ

Fusemachines Inc, a company established by entrepreneur of Nepali origin Sameer Maskey, is set to be listed on the US Stock Exchange, NASDAQ. The company recently entered into a definitive merger agreement with CSLM Acquisition Corp, which has paved the way for the AI solutions provider to make its debut on NASDAQ stock exchange.

Following the merger, the company's equity valuation is estimated to be worth \$200 million, according to Maskey, who is also the CEO of the company. The company will be publicly traded on NASDAQ under the name 'Fuse', and the business combination deal with CSLM Acquisition Corp is expected to be completed by the end of the second quarter of the fiscal year 2024.

The board members of both companies have already approved the deal, and it will be listed on NASDAQ following approval from stakeholders and the completion of the legal process.

Maskey, who is also an Associate Professor at Columbia University, established Fusemachines in 2013. The company is headquartered in New York, USA, and operates across Nepal, Canada and the USA. Of the total 450 employees working at Fusemachines, 350 are based in Nepal, with the majority being outsourced from Nepal.

According to Maskey, it is a significant milestone for the company to be listed on NASDAQ and become a publicly traded company. "I am confident that the company, after partnering with CSLM, will make significant strides in the field of Artificial Intelligence in the future," he said.

#### Global economy set for weakest half-decade performance in 30 years



As the world nears the midpoint of what was intended to be a transformative decade for development, the global economy is set to rack up a sorry record by the end of 2024 – the slowest halfdecade of GDP growth in 30 years, according to the World Bank's latest Global Economic Prospects report.

By one measure, the global economy is in a better place than it was a year ago: the risk of a global recession has receded, largely because of the strength of the US economy. But mounting geopolitical tensions could create fresh near-term hazards for the world economy. Meanwhile, the medium-term outlook has darkened for many developing economies amid slowing growth in most major economies, sluggish global trade, and the tightest financial conditions in decades. Global trade growth in 2024 is expected to be only half the average in the decade before the pandemic. Meanwhile, borrowing costs for developing economies - especially those with poor credit ratings - are likely to remain steep with global interest rates stuck at four-decade highs in inflationadjusted terms.

Global growth is projected to slow for the third year in a row – from 2.6% last year to 2.4% in 2024, almost threequarters of a percentage point below the average of the 2010s. Developing economies are projected to grow just 3.9%, more than one percentage point below the average of the previous decade. After a disappointing performance last year, low-income countries should grow 5.5%, weaker than previously expected. By the end of 2024, people in about one out of every four developing countries and about 40% of low-income countries will still be poorer than they were on the eve of the Covid pandemic in 2019. In advanced economies, meanwhile, growth is set to slow to 1.2% this year from 1.5% in 2023.

"Without a major course correction, the 2020s will go down as a decade of wasted opportunity," said Indermit Gill, the World Bank Group's Chief Economist and Senior Vice President. "Near-term growth will remain weak, leaving many developing countries especially the poorest - stuck in a trap: with paralysing levels of debt and tenuous access to food for nearly one out of every three people. That would obstruct progress on many global priorities. Opportunities still exist to turn the tide. This report offers a clear way forward: it spells out the transformation that can be achieved if governments act now to accelerate investment and strengthen fiscal policy frameworks."

To tackle climate change and achieve other key global development goals by 2030, developing countries will need to deliver a formidable increase in investment - about \$2.4 trillion per year. Without a comprehensive policy package, prospects for such an increase are not bright. Per capita investment growth in developing economies between 2023 and 2024 is expected to average only 3.7%, just over half the rate of the previous two decades.

The report offers the first global analysis of what it will take to generate a sustained investment boom, drawing from the experience of 35 advanced economies and 69 developing economies over the past 70 years. It finds that developing economies often reap an economic windfall when they accelerate per capita investment growth to at least 4% and sustain it for six years or more: the pace of convergence with advancedeconomy income levels speeds up, the poverty rate declines more swiftly, and productivity growth quadruples. Other benefits also materialise during these booms: among other things, inflation falls, fiscal and external positions improve, and people's access to the internet expands rapidly.

"Investment booms have the potential to transform developing economies and help them speed up the energy transition and achieve a wide variety of development objectives," said Ayhan Kose, the World Bank's Deputy Chief Economist and Director of the Prospects Group, "To spark such booms, developing economies need to implement comprehensive policy packages to improve fiscal and monetary frameworks, expand crossborder trade and financial flows, improve the investment climate, and strengthen the quality of institutions. That is hard work, but many developing economies have been able to do it before. Doing it again will help mitigate the projected slowdown in potential growth in the rest of this decade."

The latest Global Economic Prospects also identifies what two-thirds of developing countries - commodity exporters specifically - can do to avoid boom-and-bust cycles. The report finds that governments in these countries often adopt fiscal policies that intensify booms and busts. When increases in commodity prices boost growth by one percentage point, for example, governments increase spending in ways that boost growth by an additional 0.2 percentage point. In general, in good times, fiscal policy tends to overheat the economy. In bad times it deepens the slump. This 'procyclicality' is 30% stronger in commodity-exporting developing economies than it is in other developing

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economies. Fiscal policies also tend to be 40% more volatile in these economies than in other developing economies.

The instability associated with higher procyclicality and volatility of fiscal policy produces a chronic drag on the growth prospects of commodity-exporting developing economies. The drag can be reduced – by putting in place a fiscal framework that helps discipline government spending, by adopting flexible exchangerate regimes, and by avoiding restrictions on the movement of international capital. On average, these policy measures could help commodity exporters in developing economies boost their per capita GDP growth by as much as one percentage point every four or five years. Countries can also benefit by building sovereign-wealth funds and other rainy-day funds that can be deployed quickly in an emergency.

#### Gross foreign exchange reserves increase 14.8% to Rs 1,767.04 billion

As per the Current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation of Nepal based on five months' data ending mid-December, 2023/24, published by Nepal Rastra Bank, the yearon-year (y-o-y) consumer price inflation moderated to 4.95% in mid-December 2023 compared to 7.38% a year ago. Food and beverage category inflation stood at 5.10% whereas nonfood and service category inflation stood at 4.84% in the review month.

Under the food and beverage category, y-o-y price index of ghee and oil, vegetable and meat and fish sub-category decreased 13.66%, 8.37% and 0.13% respectively in the review month. The y-o-y price index of spices sub-category increased 37.22%, fruit 13.37%, sugar and sugar products 13.24%, cereal grains and their products 11.30%, milk products and eggs 10.59%, and pulses and legumes 10.56%. Under the non-food and services category, y-o-y price index of transportation subcategory decreased 2.48% in the review month. The y-o-y price index of recreation and culture sub-category increased 12.84%, miscellaneous goods and services 11.03%, education 8.92%, furnishing and household equipment 5.24%, and clothes and footwear 4.96%.

The y-o-y consumer price inflation in Kathmandu Valley, Terai, Hill and Mountain region stood at 5.42%, 4.26%, 5.42% and 7.46%, respectively. Such inflation in these regions was 6.56%, 8%, 7.32% and 6.48%, respectively a year ago.

According to the NRB report, during the review period, merchandise exports decreased 6.1% to Rs 63.21 billion compared to a decrease of 34.6% in the same period of the previous year. Destination-wise, exports to India decreased 11.3% whereas exports to China and other countries increased 322.3% and 2.3%. Exports of zinc sheet, particle board, juice, polyester yarn and thread, readymade garments, among others increased whereas exports of palm oil, soyabean oil, tea, woollen carpet, rosin, among others decreased.

In the review period, merchandise imports decreased 3.4% to Rs 642.21 billion compared to a decrease of 20.7% a year ago. Destinationwise, imports from India and other countries decreased 1.3% and 28.4%, respectively while imports from China increased 32.8%. Imports of readymade garments, MS wire rod, bars, and coils, electrical equipment, textiles, aircraft spare parts, among others increased whereas imports of gold, crude soyabean oil, crude palm oil, petroleum products, rice/paddy, among others decreased.

The report states that total trade deficit decreased 3.1% to Rs 579 billion during the review period. Such deficit had decreased 18.8% in the corresponding period of the previous year. The exportimport ratio decreased to 9.8% in the review period from 10.1% in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Meanwhile, remittance inflow increased 27.6% to Rs 613.25 billion in the review period compared to an increase of 23% in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, remittance inflows increased 24.5% to \$4.62 billion in the review period compared to an increase of 13.1% in the same period of the previous year.

In the review period, the number of Nepali workers, both institutional and individual, taking first-time approval for foreign employment stood at 173,555 and those taking approval for renew entry stood at 104,037. In the previous year, such numbers were 236,779 and 115,948 respectively.

The current account remained at a surplus of Rs 140.23 billion in the review period against a deficit of Rs 41.21 billion in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, the current account registered a surplus of \$1.05 billion in the review period against a deficit of \$322.2 million in the same period last year.

Capital transfer decreased 17.2% to Rs 2.87 billion and net foreign direct investment (FDI) remained a positive of Rs 3.92 billion. In the same period of the previous year, capital transfer amounted to Rs 3.47 billion and net FDI amounted to Rs604.9 million.

The central bank report states the Balance of Payments (BoP) remained at a surplus of Rs 210.59 billion in the review period against a surplus of Rs 45.87 billion in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, the BoP remained at a surplus of \$1.58 billion in the review period against a surplus of \$346.8 million in the same period of the previous year.

Meanwhile, gross foreign exchange reserves increased 14.8% to Rs 1,767.04 billion in mid-December 2023 from Rs 1,539.36 billion in mid-July 2023. In US dollar terms, the gross foreign exchange reserves increased 13.6% to \$13.31 billion in mid-December 2023 from \$11.71 billion in mid-July 2023.

Of the total foreign exchange reserves, reserves held by NRB increased 15.6% to Rs 1,556.25 billion in mid-December 2023 from Rs 1,345.78 billion in mid-July 2023. Reserves held by banks and financial institutions (except NRB) increased 8.9% to Rs 210.79 billion in mid-December 2023 from Rs 193.59 billion in mid-July 2023. The share of Indian currency in total reserves stood at 21.6% in mid-December 2023.

Based on the imports of five months of 2023/24, the foreign exchange reserves of the banking sector are sufficient to cover the prospective merchandise imports of 14.1 months, and merchandise and services imports of 11.8 months.

#### Unlocking Nepal's Investment Potential: Collaborative Strategies for Economic Growth



Office of the Investment Board, Nepal (OIBN) investment promotion agency and national public-private partnership (PPP) agency along with collaborative partner KPMG in India, organised a workshop on 'Unlocking Nepal's Investment Potential: Collaborative Strategies for Economic Growth', on January 26, in Kathmandu. The workshop was held as a pre-event of Nepal Investment Summit (NIS) 2024 that is proposed to be held on April 28-29 this year.

The workshop delved into enhancing investment climate in Nepal through legal, procedural and regulatory reforms as well as innovative approaches to facilitate private investments including foreign





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direct investment (FDI) to unleash the country's full potential among the policy makers, private sector, development partners and experts.

Addressing the workshop, Finance Minister and Vice Chairperson of Investment Board Nepal, Prakash Sharan Mahat, said that the country is pursuing fresh investments in every sector of the economy as the country's potential is largely untapped and under utilised. "As green investment has become a buzzword in recent days, there are no better investment destinations except Nepal as we emit insignificant pollution and carry potential to serve clean and renewable energy to other countries of the region to minimise emissions in line with their targets," Mahat said, adding, "Similar potentials are long awaiting to be unlocked in the sector of tourism, agri-business and ICT."

Vice Chairperson of National Planning Commission, Min Bahadur Shrestha, highlighted that private investments are crucial for the sustainable and inclusive growth trajectory for the irreversible graduation of Nepal to the league of developing countries by 2026.

Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal, Baikuntha Aryal, underlined that prompt response based on the feedback of foreign investors investing in Nepal as well as the private sector is crucial to spreading the message among potential investors that their investments in Nepal won't be a loss.

Investment Board Nepal CEO, Sushil Bhatta, highlighted that NIS 2024 will provide a platform to onboard serious, potential and capable investors in the country's investment landscape. "With its serious efforts, the government has been reviewing various policies, laws to provide favourable and better investment climate for unleashing Nepal's full potential in various sectors including development of strategic infrastructure in different sectors like clean transport, road, tourism, ICT, manufacturing and mining, among others," he said.

Nepal Rastra Bank Acting Governor, Neelam Dhungana Timsina, shared information regarding the provisions of recently amended FDI and Foreign Loan Bylaws, which removed the provisions of preapproval of the central bank to bring in FDI.

Yezdi Nagporewalla, CEO of KPMG in India, said, "The forthcoming Investor Summit is poised to provide potential investors with a comprehensive understanding of Nepal's potential, empowering them to actively participate in the nation's developmental goals. Having been involved in successful implementation of many similar engagements across geographies, we appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the Government of Nepal. We look forward to leveraging our extensive expertise and playing a pivotal role in the journey towards prosperity".

World Bank hosts event on hedging strategies for managing risks, sustainable finance Participants discussed derivatives instruments and international experiences with the use of financial instruments to address different market risks including interest rate, currency, liquidity and commodity price risks. They also discussed the benefits of and the critical steps needed to set up a national hedge program from a fiscal risk management perspective.

"The Ministry of Finance is interested in working with the World Bank on a detailed cost-benefit study to evaluate the potential advantages of adopting a hedging mechanism to manage financial risks," said Ram Pramod Yadav, Under Secretary, Ministry of Finance. "There is a need to implement financial instruments in new projects on a pilot basis to help practitioners and policy makers understand the significance of structure approaches in mitigating risks from uncertain market conditions."

Participants discussed the technical support the World Bank can provide to set up relevant knowledge exchange programs, as well as the bank's various lending instruments. "The World Bank is

committed to working with



The World Bank in coordination with the Ministry of Finance held a two-day learning event recently on 'Managing Risks and Sustainable Finance'. The event was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Public Debt Management Office, Financial Comptroller General Office, Nepal Rastra Bank, Nepal Bankers' Association, Nepal Insurance Authority, Confederation of Nepalese Industries, and other financial sector professionals.

the Government of Nepal to strengthen the country's risk management strategies and set up a hedging programme to manage financial risks," said Fabio Aparecido Da Silva, Sr Financial Officer at the World Bank. He emphasised the need to develop a regulatory framework and build capacity to ensure that hedging strategies serve as effective tools for managing risks. "I welcome the idea

of implementing hedging

mechanisms to address market volatility on commercial terms, which could help prevent undue fiscal pressures on the nation," said Bam Bahadur Mishra, Deputy Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank. "Endorsing market-driven solutions is key to efficiently managing financial risks, fostering sustainability and navigating challenges, especially considering the country's resource limitations."

"The absence of sovereign ratings is a contributing factor to the high cost of borrowing for Nepal from international financiers. Leveraging the currency peg with India could address the absence of a transactable Nepali rupee sovereign bond yield curve, as many transactions can be priced based on the long-term Indian rupee-USD curve," said Joseph Silvanus of Dolma Consulting. "Hedging serves as a good risk mitigating tool, and Nepal stands to gain by accessing the World Bank's IDA window to uphold a robust balance of payments."

Integrity Icon Nepal 2023: Celebrating honesty and excellence in government service



Integrity Icon Nepal 2023 event concluded on January 13 honouring and celebrating five government officials who have demonstrated exceptional honesty in their work and promoted integrity within the government.

This year's Icons include Neera Adhikari, Director of the Department of Women and Children in Pulchowk, Lalitpur; Pratik Rai, Administrative Officer at Jhapa District Administration Office; Rabina Maharjan, Principal of Manamaiju Secondary School in Tarkeshwar Municipality, Kathmandu; Padma Nath Atreya, Horticulture



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Development Officer at the Temperate Horticulture Development Centre in Marfa, Mustang district; and Hema Thapa, Nursing Incharge at Narayani Hospital in Birgunj, Parsa district.

During the ceremony, each Icon was bestowed with a unique title based on suggestions from those who have availed their services. Adhikari was honoured with 'Integrity with Inspiration'; Rai with 'Integrity with Excellence', and Maharjan with 'Integrity with Courage'. Atreya received 'Integrity with Humility' while Thapa was awarded 'Integrity with Compassion'.

Former Speaker Damannath Dhungana extended his congratulations to all five icons and shared, "There is a sense of despair throughout the country. The primary cause for this is the corruption perpetrated by the political parties that govern the country. Only a competent bureaucracy can mitigate corruption. This underscores the significance of the Integrity Icon campaign."

Integrity Icon is the initiative of Accountability Lab Nepal to actively promote the development of accountability mechanisms by identifying exemplary government officials. The organisation has continued with the Integrity Icon campaign for the past 10 years.

#### Daayitwa, Governance Lab and NACA take initiative to promote evidence-based decisions



Daayitwa, Governance Lab and Nepali Academics in America (NACA), have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote evidence-based decisions through research and partnerships between the Nepali diaspora and the public sector, with an aim to empower youth and promote inclusive prosperity. This formal agreement is a milestone in institutionalising youth voices to strengthen Nepal's governance system.

The tripartite MoU was signed by Dr Gyan Nyaupane, Chairperson of NACA, Dr Pukar Malla, Chairperson of Daayitwa and Dr Nisha Onta, Executive Director of Governance Lab in presence of Susit Dhakal, Executive Director of Daayitwa and other Daayitwa and Governance Lab representatives.

The agreement outlines joint programme implementation, research collaborations, stakeholder engagement, information dissemination, financial administration, risk-sharing and intellectual property rights regarding shared documents. It marks a significant effort to combine expertise and resources toward advancing evidence-based policy making and youth empowerment in Nepal. The collaboration aims to support the professional growth of Nepali youths and diaspora, enhance their skills, and contribute to society's upliftment through research, capacity building and leadership development by leveraging Daayitwa and Governance Lab's contextual understanding and NACA's network of Nepali intellectuals.

#### Nepal, India sign four agreements relating to network expansion, trade, water resources, power trade



The seventh meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission concluded by signing four agreements on January 4. The meeting reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and cooperation. The two countries signed agreements relating to bilateral network expansion, trade, water resources, and power trade. The agreements were signed in the presence of Foreign Minister, Narayan Prakash Saud and Indian External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amrit Bahadur Rai, informed that Nepal and India signed an agreement on Indian grant assistance for the implementation of high-impact community development through government agencies or corporations.

Other agreements signed by the two countries include long-term energy trade; cooperation between Nepal Electricity Authority and National Thermal Power Corporation on development of renewal energy; and between Nepal Academy of Science and Technology and New Space India on launch of Nepali satellite.

As per power trade agreement, Nepal will export 10,000 MW of electricity to India in ten years. Meanwhile, a 132kV interstate transmission lines – Raxaul-Parwanipur, Mainahiya- New Nautanawa, and Kushaha-Kataiya were inaugurated on January 4 itself. The transmission lines were jointly inaugurated by Foreign Minister, Saud and his Indian counterpart, S Jaishankar.

The Indian government has announced Rs 10 billion grant assistance to Nepal for its postquake reconstruction.

#### CNI asks government to make legal reforms to improve economy

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) has submitted a detailed report along with recommendations to be carried out in the legal framework for the country's economic development. CNI President, Rajesh Kumar Agrawal, submitted the report to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on January 8. The report was also shared with Speaker Devraj Ghimire and Chief Secretary of the government, Baikuntha Aryal.

The CNI has recommended amendment to 28 Acts and Regulations, scrapping of five Acts and introducing three new ones. It has stated that reforms in the law were inevitable for making the economy robust.

According to Agrawal, the research report was prepared following intensive consultations with legal experts, industrialists, stakeholders, thematic experts and others. Comparative study was also conducted by taking references from different countries.

Agrawal shared that the recommendations are related to Industrial Business Act, 2076; Industrial Business Regulations, 2078; Income Tax Act, 2058; Company Act, 2063; Forest Act, 2076; Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, 2075 and others.

#### AIDIA signs pact with Vivekananda International Foundation to enhance diplomatic relations



The Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) and Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) officially inked a memorandum of understanding on January 3, in New Delhi. The MoU, signed by Sunil KC, Founder of AIDIA, and Dr Arvind Gupta, Director of VIF, establishes a robust framework for collaboration with a primary focus on enhancing cooperation in the field of international relations. This strategic partnership is poised to fortify the relationship between the two organisations and foster joint initiatives in addressing global challenges. This partnership reflects the shared vision of both institutions to play a substantial role in enhancing the diplomatic relations between Nepal and India.

VIF, founded by Ajit Doval, who is currently the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India,





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is an independent and nonpartisan think tank based in New Delhi. It is dedicated to fostering high-quality research, comprehensive studies, and serving as a platform for constructive dialogue and conflict resolution. VIF was established in December 2009.

AIDIA is a Kathmandu based independent, nonpartisan, foreign policy think tank founded in March 2014. It conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue debate and discussion.

#### Corporate Club Nepal honours outstanding companies at HRM Nepal Awards 2023

Corporate Club Nepal, a subsidiary of Growth Sellers, held the 'HRM Nepal Awards for Corporate Excellence 2023' and 'HRM Nepal Awards for Distinguished Service 2023' in Kathmandu, on January 26. Minister for Foreign Affairs, NP Saud, was chief guest at the event.

Eighteen companies received the 'HRM Nepal Awards for Corporate Excellence 2023', and seven others were recognised with the 'HRM Nepal Awards for Distinguished Service 2023'. The awards were designed to acknowledge organisations and individuals contributing to the country's economic and social development through their work in Nepal's private sector.

The HRM Nepal Award for Corporate Excellence 2023 in the Manufacturing sector was bagged by Yashoda Foods while among Financial Institutions the winner was Nabil Bank. In the Insurance segment, MetLife Nepal won the award and among ISPs, Worldlink Communications received the award. From among IT companies, Leap Frog Technology, Inc bagged the award and from among hotels, Chandragiri Hills Resort won. In the health sector. Dhulikhel Hospital was announced the winner and in the FinTech sector IME Pay won the award. Magnus Pharma was the

winner in the pharmaceutical segment and Dabur Nepal among MNCs. Gorkha Tea Estate won the award among agribusinesses and Bhoj Deals among e-Commerce firms. The award in the construction sector was won by Nepal Adarsha Nirman Co and in the capital market sector the winner was Nabil Investment Banking. From among MSMEs, Kanchanjunga Tea Estate won while Bakas Renewable Energy won in the Green Initiative sector. The HRM Nepal Award for Corporate Excellence 2023 - Leadership (Female) was presented to Sonika Manandhar and in the male category, Bijay Rajbhandary won.

The winners for the Awards for Distinguished Services 2023 were Smart Paani in the social enterprise sector and Chiya Ghar among start-ups. Vijay Kumar Shah won the Lifetime Achievement award while Lily Thapa won the Institution Builder award. The award for Outstanding Contribution went to Kiran Pushtakalaya and Martin Chautari. The award for Outstanding Contribution to the Society was presented to National Innovation Centre.

#### NIMB Ace Capital signs agreement with Mount Everest Power Development



NIMB Ace Capital and Mount Everest Power Development have signed a Securities Issuance and Sales Manager Service agreement for the issuance of 2,580,000 ordinary shares of Mount Everest Power Development to local residents and the general public residing in the projectaffected areas. The allocated shares will be 30% of its issued capital. The agreement was signed by Arjun Prasad Poudel, Chairman, Mount Everest Power Development and Sachindra Dhungana, General Manager, NIMB Ace Capital.

Mount Everest Power Development has been constructing the Dudhkunda Khola Hydroelectricity Project with a capacity of 12 megawatts using water from the Dudhkunda river. More than 80% of the construction work of the project which is located in Solukhumbu district has been completed.

Under the agreement, NIMB Ace Capital will provide the services of Securities Issuance and Sales Manager in all operations related to the public issue and management of ordinary shares of Mount Everest Power Development.

#### Finance Minister stresses digitalisation in customs administration



Finance Minister, Prakash Sharan Mahat, has emphasised the necessity for the digitalisation of customs administration to boost its effectiveness. At an event organised by the Department of Customs to commemorate the 72nd International Customs Day, Finance Minister Mahat reiterated the need for collective efforts to establish a robust customs administration by utilising available technology, international standards, and best practices.

In his assessment, the customs administration has not been proactive in adopting new innovations in customs service. The minister stressed the importance of prioritising the use of advanced technology in customs service to enhance its effectiveness and transparency.

Shobhakant Paudel, Director General of the Department of Customs, highlighted the need for professionalism and integrity in customs service. He stated that the department is prepared to transition to a paperless, faceless and contactless system in customs service by upgrading customs infrastructure.

Revenue Secretary, Ram Prasad Ghimire, pointed out that the customs administration is not merely a revenue collection mechanism, but plays a vital role in making domestic and foreign trade orderly and systematic. He urged for further improvements in the customs administration.

On the occasion, Finance Minister Mahat launched the service for electronic signatures, inaugurated the customs museum, and released the 'Customs Souvenir'.

#### Goldstar Shoes Executive Director Rana appointed Honorary Consul of Iceland in Nepal



Vidushi Rana, Executive Director of Kiran Shoes (Goldstar Shoes), has been appointed the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Iceland for Nepal. Rana was presented with the letter of credential transfer by Dilip Kumar Paudel, Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on January 4. The Government of Iceland appointed her as the honorary consul to enhance the diplomatic relations between the two countries. In her capacity as the Honorary Consul, Rana has envisioned fostering cooperation and mutual understanding between Nepal and the Republic of Iceland, particularly in the areas of tourism, cultural exchange, business, and investment.



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#### Hero MotoCorp appoints CG Motors as distributor in Nepal

Building on its vision to provide world-class experience and products to its customers across the globe, Hero MotoCorp, the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters, has appointed the diversified CG Motors as its distributor in Nepal.

Hero MotoCorp forayed into Nepal in 2014 and over the years has established itself as a leading player in the country, with overwhelming response for its iconic brands such as the Super Splendor and Xpulse 200 motorcycles. Nepal is one of the key markets for the company in Asia.

Chaudhary Group, a prominent leader in Nepal's business landscape, operates an expansive network of over 160 companies and 123 brands worldwide, backed by a dedicated team of more than 15,000 employees. The group's operations include the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry, financial services, energy and infrastructure development, hospitality sector and cuttingedge electronics sector. Chaudhary Group continuously showcases its commitment to innovation and excellence across various fields.

Hero MotoCorp and CG Motors will set-up a state-ofthe-art greenfield facility for assembling products in Nepal. This reflects the company's commitment to the country, as the operations will bring new investments and create job opportunities. The facility will be located in Nawalpur district and have a capacity of 75,000 units per annum. Operations will begin from March 2024.

Commenting on the collaboration, Sanjay Bhan, Head – Global Business, Hero MotoCorp said, "We are excited to partner with Chaudhary Group in Nepal. With their vast expertise and diversified business knowledge, Chaudhary Group will provide an enormous fillip to our operations here. Nepal is an extremely important market for us and it is our continuous endeavour to provide the best products, services and experiences to our customers here. In the near future, we plan to further strengthen our operations across the country and introduce a slew of new products that will excite the market. We are confident of expanding our presence in the market with our new partner and look forward to solidifying this collaboration."

Nirvana Chaudhary, Managing Director, Chaudhary Group said, "We are thrilled to announce our collaboration with Hero MotoCorp, who are globally recognised as the leading manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters. This partnership marks CG Motors' ambitious re-entry into the automotive market, leveraging Hero MotoCorp's renowned products and services. Our deep understanding of the local market dynamics will be instrumental in driving business growth. We look forward to the establishment of a cutting-edge assembly unit, confident that this alliance will significantly strengthen and redefine the brand's presence in the country."

Hero MotoCorp's comprehensive product range in Nepal, consists of a wide portfolio, from entry-level to premium two-wheelers comprising of Xpulse Twins (Xpulse 200 and Xpulse 200T), Xtreme range (Xtreme 160R and Xtreme 200R), Splendor range (Super Splendor and Splendor+), Glamour and HF Deluxe motorcycles. In addition to the motorcycles, the company has an exciting scooter range, including Destini 125, Maestro Edge, and Pleasure+.

Hero MotoCorp's emerging mobility brand, VIDA, Powered by Hero, is also expanding its presence outside India and will soon launch its electric scooter VIDA V1 in many countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America.

#### The Soaltee Kathmandu partners with Gham Power Nepal for greener future



The Soaltee Kathmandu partnered with Gham Power Nepal to fit a 506-kilowatt solar power system on the hotel's rooftops and parking area. This initiative is set to replace 196 kilolitres of diesel and cut carbon emissions by 995 tonnes over the next 15 years.

Not only will the installation result in considerable savings on electricity bills for the luxurious hotel, but it also marks a significant step in increasing energy efficiency and actively reducing the carbon footprint.

The Soaltee Kathmandu and Gham Power jointly organised a press meet to discuss the topic, 'Making Greener Cities Together', to promote the adoption of solar power in commercial sectors on January 25. The focus was on strengthening the reliability of the national power grid, reducing carbon footprint, and replacing environmentally damaging alternatives like fossil fuel with cost-effective and stable energy solutions.

The programme was attended by government officials, representatives from international and national financial institutions, renewable energy organisations, public and private companies, and other stakeholders.

The successful completion of The Soaltee Kathmandu's solar project marks a milestone and signifies a promising future for sustainable energy in Nepal. This landmark initiative demonstrates the potential of collective action, innovation, and a shared commitment to a greener and more sustainable future. The solar panel installation is part of The Soaltee Kathmandu's Sustainability Project, which includes other initiatives to position the hotel as a leader in

sustainability practices within the hospitality sector.

#### NIMB Ace Capital appointed Securities Issuance and Sales Manager for Yeti Brewery



NIMB Ace Capital has been appointed as the Securities Issuance and Sales Manager for the forthcoming issuance of ordinary shares through the book building of Yeti Brewery. Sanjeev Sarraf, Managing Director of Yeti Brewery and Sachindra Dhungana, General Manager of NIMB Ace Capital, have formalised this partnership by signing an agreement.

Yeti Brewery manufactures and markets renowned beer brands such as Arna BCLB, Yeti BCB, YB BC, Shikhar BCB, Kingfisher BCB, and others.

Under the terms of the agreement, NIMB Ace Capital will oversee all aspects related to the public issuance and management of Yeti Brewery's ordinary shares through the book-building method. This collaboration signifies a commitment to a seamless and successful securities issuance process.

#### Industry Minister Rijal, MP Chaudhary lay foundation stone for industrial village in Parasi



Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Ramesh Rijal and MP Binod Chaudhary laid the foundation stone for an industrial village in Bardaghat Municipality-5 of Nawalparasi (West of Bardaghat



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Susta) district, on January 26. The village is being built under the initiative of MP Chaudhary, who represents Nawalparasi Constituency No. 1. He pledged to establish an industrial village in Parasi during his election campaign, a commitment he has fulfilled within a year.

The foundation stone was laid following budget management, project construction, contracts and other preparations. The project has progressed with the allocation of budget for the village and local level preparations in the current fiscal year.

The industrial village, known as the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) village, aims to utilise the entrepreneurship of local youths and skills based on local raw materials. The village is being built in the Khajura Khola area on about 18 bighas of land. An estimated Rs 170 million will be spent on this project, which is aimed to be completed within the next three years.

On Chaudhary's initiative, Rs 40 million has been released and Reliance Builders and Suppliers JV has been awarded the contract for the project's construction. Infrastructure construction will be completed this year. If the project progresses, an additional budget will be released within the current fiscal year 2023/24.

Engineers of the Chaudhary Foundation will directly support the project, while Chaudhary's secretariat officials will continuously monitor the project. The goal is to ready an industrial village within three years and connect Parasi district to industrial development.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Rijal stated that the industrial village will contribute to the industrialisation and economic development of the region. He also said the government is ready to cooperate with the private sector and will take initiatives to improve policies for industrial development.

MP Chaudhary stated that the industrial village is a crucial step in fulfilling the promises he made during the election. "I believe the SME village will exemplify entrepreneurship and play a key role in fostering entrepreneurship among the youth of Nawalparasi," he said. "The industrial village will welcome small and medium entrepreneurs and youths with innovative ideas. This will elevate the innovative programmes of the local vouth to a new level," Chaudhary added. "We are promoting entrepreneurship training for youths and will arrange seed capital for them." He also assured that he and his team will provide continuous support and oversight to ensure the project's completion. Chaudhary emphasised that merely setting up an industrial village is not sufficient; it must be vibrant and active. He asserted that this village will not be allowed to remain devoid of industry like the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and other villages.

#### Nabil Bank launches entrepreneurship loan scheme for returning migrants



Nabil Bank launched 'Nabil Skilled Migrant Entrepreneurship Loan' to offer financial assistance to returnee migrants and their families on January 25. At the launch programme, Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security, Sharat Singh Bhandari, unveiled the government's plans to observe the National Migration Decade from next year. The government also intends to declare the Internal Migration Decade from 2081 to 2091 BS, according to Minister Bhandari.

A task force is currently developing the national migration policy, he informed. The Minister stressed the government's duty to protect the domestic workforce by promoting job creation within the country. He also mentioned that an internal employment information system is being developed.

Despite the significant contribution of foreign employment to the country's GDP, the outflow of workers has created issues in the domestic labour market. The scarcity of job opportunities domestically has led to youths seeking employment abroad. The minister acknowledged the government's struggle to create a conducive environment for returning foreign migrants to utilise their skills and capital at home.

Nabil Bank CEO, Gyanendra Prasad Dhungana, stated that the scheme will aid returnees in establishing income-generating businesses and enterprises. The loan, available at a soft interest rate and minimal service charge, uses the proposed project as collateral. The bank offers this loan at an interest rate of 1.5% with a limit of Rs 100 million. It is available in four different categories, and the loan repayment period is 10 years.

#### Hydroelectricity is a key to reducing trade deficit: DPM Shrestha



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Narayan Kaji Shrestha, has underscored the importance of hydroelectricity as a key tool for reducing trade deficit and propelling the country towards prosperity. He affirmed that the government has prioritised this. Addressing a programme organised to mark the 24th anniversary of the Independent Power Producers' Association, Nepal (IPPAN) in Kathmandu on January 18, Minister Shrestha expressed that the nation's energy sector can only advance through initiatives from both the government and private sector.

He emphasised the necessity of increasing domestic energy consumption, stating that the government is striving to reduce the trade deficit by selling surplus power. He reiterated the government's commitment to creating an investment-friendly environment in the energy sector.

"The government has prioritised economic prosperity, social justice, and good governance," he stated and mentioned that an Investment Summit is scheduled for April during which relevant bodies will be consulted for legal and structural enhancements to attract foreign investment in the energy sector. He noted that despite an agreement to export 10,000 MW of electricity to India over the next decade. the primary focus remains on increasing domestic power consumption.

On the occasion, Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Shakti Bahadur Basnet, highlighted the private sector's contribution of 60% to the country's energy sector. He asserted that the national goal of building a prosperous Nepal can only be achieved through a partnership between the government and private sector. He reiterated the government's commitment to addressing private sector's demands and moving forward with the appropriate needs. The energy minister shared data showing that energy production has increased from 800 MW to 3,000 MWover the past decade, and electricity now reaches 98% of households.

Minister Basnet urged for a fresh perspective to bridge the gap in energy production between the monsoon and dry seasons. He stressed the need to expedite ongoing projects, prioritise reservoir-
based projects, and advance the concept of energy mix. He stated that the government views the energy sector not merely as infrastructure but also as a fundamental pillar for economic prosperity. He encouraged the private sector to invest without hesitation. He assured the private sector not to be overly concerned about power purchase agreement (PPA) issues and said the ministry will facilitate in creating an environment conducive to that.

Likewise, IPPAN President Ganesh Karki stated that the country's energy sector is on a progressive trajectory and called on the government to address issues related to PPA. He also drew the government's attention to addressing the security challenges of the energy sector.

#### NRB Governor Adhikari advises ADBL to diversify services

Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Governor, Maha Prasad Adhikari, has urged Agricultural Development Bank Ltd (ADBL) to increase its investment in the agricultural sector and focus on replacing imports. Speaking at the 57th anniversary of the ADBL, he encouraged the bank to use the available financial resources to boost agricultural production, minimise imports and promote exports.

"The agricultural sector has enormous potential. It can help bridge the gap in supply and price chains. It can extend its reach to farmers and workers who lack financial services and the marginalised community," he said. He also emphasised the need for the bank to diversify its services.

Nepal Banker's Association President, Sunil KC, said the bank is adopting sustainable banking practices and that these should be further promoted.

ADBL Chairman, Ram Sharan Pudasaini, said the bank has achieved professional success despite a sluggish economy both nationally and globally. "The bank is capable of successfully managing potential systemic risk in the banking sector," he said. According to him, the bank's special concerns are poverty alleviation, the development of small farmers, rural and agricultural development, and microfinance services for rural and impoverished communities.

The bank was established in 2041 BS. To mark its anniversary, it announced an 11% cash dividend and 2% bonus share for its shareholders from the profit of the fiscal year 2021/22. In the last fiscal year, its operating profit was Rs 4.82 billion, with deposit collections exceeding Rs 199 billion and loan disbursements calculated at over Rs 182 billion. The portion of bad loans in the last fiscal year was 2.78%. Its issued and paid-up capital amounts to Rs 18.62 billion, with 51% of its shares owned by the government.

#### National Statistics Office launches Degree of Urbanisation in Nepal report



National Statistics Office launched the Degree of Urbanisation in Nepal report prepared by adopting the Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA) methodology, to classify Nepal's settlements at the ward level into Urban, Peri-Urban and Rural areas based on the threshold of population, population density, rasterised built-up area and contiguity of the characteristics on January 2.

The DEGURBA classification results for 2011 and 2021 Census data, contextualised in Nepal using three categories, show that the urban population has significantly increased from 22.31 % to 27.07% between 2011 and 2021. Likewise, the peri-urban population has also increased from 39.19% to 39.75%. Further, the rural population has decreased from 38.5% to 33.19% in the last ten years.

According to the report, majority of the population still resides in peri-urban areas that are regarded as 'urban', while in character urbanising. Yet, the rural population is still one-third, while based on the trend, the migration from rural areas to peri and urban areas provides an insight into pressure on the urban areas to accommodate and for the rural areas to retain the population.

Further, based on the distribution of three-category classification in the ecological region, the rural population is concentrated in the Hill (66%) and Mountain regions (16%). Peri-urban population is concentrated in the Tarai region (85%) and urban population is concentrated in the Hill region (53%), which is skewed due to Pokhara Metropolitan and Kathmandu valley, followed by the Tarai region (39%).

The analysis of the threecategory classification result against the municipalities demonstrates that in the rural municipalities, 58% of the population is in the rural cluster within 2,412 wards, while 36.1% is mostly in peri-urban areas (664 wards) and 5.9% of the population in the urban areas (139 wards).

In urban municipalities, only 28.4% of the population is in urban areas (591 wards), the majority that is 46% are in the peri-urban areas (1.285 wards) and still 25.4% in the rural cluster within 1,244 wards. Similarly, in sub-metropolitan cities, 39% of the population is in peri-urban areas and 53% are living in urban categorised areas. Likewise, in metropolitan cities, 17% are in peri-urban areas, 2.3% still in areas of rural characteristics and 80.7% in urban areas. The comparison indicates in urban municipalities, the main characteristic of the settlement

is still peri-urban and a significant population in the rural landscape.

The total number of wards in rural municipalities is higher (3,685) when compared to the urban and peri-urban areas, noting it contains only 33% of the total population.

The population, when classified at the provincial level using the three-category classification, shows that the distribution of urban and peri-urban population (total 66.8%) is relatively skewed. The highest population concentration is in Madhesh Province (19.9%), followed by Bagmati Province (14.6%) and the lowest in Karnali Province (1.2%).

The data shows an imbalance in the distribution of urban population with the highest concentration in Tarai province - in Madhesh and Lumbini. In Madhesh province, the majority of the wards (971) are of peri-urban characteristics. Bagmati is the second most urban province, where there are 672 rural wards in comparison to 449 wards in peri and urban areas. In Karnali province, 637 wards are of rural characteristics with 75 wards of urban and six of peri urban characteristics.

In accordance with the constitution, with the restructuring of the state into a three-tiered government, Nepal comprises 753 local units or municipalities. Among them, 293 are urban municipalities (including metropolitan and sub-metropolitan cities) and 460 are rural municipalities.

In the current context, with the categorisation of the urban municipalities, metropolitan and sub-metropolitan cities as urban areas, the difficulty in policy formulation is apparent. The predominance of areas with rural characteristics within metropolitan, sub-metropolitan, and urban municipal areas and on the other side, the expansion of market centres in rural municipalities as small towns, underscore the necessity to contextually analyse and further redefine the dimensions of urbanisation in Nepal.

#### B360 / NATIONAL

#### Himalaya Jet delegation meets British Ambassador Fenn, discusses collaborative opportunities



A delegation from Himalaya Jet, on January 25, met with British Ambassador to Nepal, Rob Fenn, to explore potential collaborations and reinforce ties between the airline and the United Kingdom. The delegation included representatives and advisors from Himalaya Jet, along with officials from the British Embassy. According to a press statement issued by Himalaya Jet, the meeting, which took place at the British Embassy in Kathmandu, served as a platform for productive discussions on various facets of the airline industry, including regulatory frameworks, bilateral agreements, and opportunities for connectivity between the UK and Nepal.

Raju KC, Managing Director of Himalaya Jet for Nepal, expressed his enthusiasm about the meeting, stating, "Our discussions with the British Embassy were fruitful and promising. We explored potential avenues for enhanced cooperation, discussed potential partnerships and considered initiatives that could mutually benefit the airline and passengers travelling between our countries."

Officials from the British Embassy acknowledged the positive contributions of Himalaya Jet to the aviation sector and expressed their interest in fostering collaboration that aligns with the shared interests of both parties.

The meeting also addressed matters related to the promotion of tourism, trade and cultural exchange. Both parties acknowledged the importance of robust aviation links in facilitating economic growth and strengthening connections between people, the statement said.

As Himalaya Jet continues to explore opportunities for growth and collaboration, the airline remains committed to providing passengers with efficient and high-quality travel experiences.

#### NYEF Kathmandu Chapter concludes NYEF Startup Awards 2023



Nepalese Young

Entrepreneurs' Forum (NYEF) conducted the Startup Award 2023 in Kathmandu on January 12. Baikuntha Aryal, Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal, was the chief guest.

NYEF, this year received 150 applications from across the country, for the programme, which aimed to develop a business ecosystem in Nepal through exposure, mentorship, and investment.

In her welcome remarks, NYEF National President Sahara Joshi, said, "We are gathered here to celebrate and empower remarkable startups, not just the seven finalists pitching the ideas today but also the top 20 that were selected and 150 startups who applied for the startup award this year." "Startups today are the big enterprises of tomorrow. Encouraging startups and the startup ecosystem is a significant opportunity for youths to stay and work in the country," she added.

The judging panel for the idea pitching session included Lotus Holdings Director and CEO Ajit Shah, Vianet Communications CEO Sewa Pathak, and Laxmi Group Executive Director Niranjan Shrestha. The top seven finalists pitched their ideas in the session one by one. The startups included Bibaabo, Blanxer, Bhoomithan, Galli Maps, Quickfox, Dursikchya and Pet Mama.

NYEF, Kathmandu Chapter President Saakha shared her views on the policy formation regarding startups in Nepal. She said, "Even though many policies have been formulated. very few of them are actually implemented. This is partly because those of us who are running businesses haven't had the opportunity to observe policy formulation. Our lack of active involvement is causing this divide." She urged the government to involve young people in policy making.

Durshikhya received the Social Enterprise Award, Pet Mama received the Audience Pick Award and also became one of the runners-up for the Startup award title. Likewise, Quickfox was another runnerup while Galli Maps won the title.

#### 16th periodic plan targets 100 percent literacy rate in country

The 16th five-year periodic plan, which is in the drafting stage now, has set a goal to ensure 100% literacy rate in the country. The government has set a target to increase the literacy rate to 100% in the age group of five years and above within the next five years.

The concept was put forth in a discussion held on January 8-9 on the draft of the 16th periodic plan. According to the National Planning Commission, currently, the literacy rate in the ages of five and above is only 76.2%. The target is being set to increase literacy to 100% by the end of the 16th plan or the fiscal year of 2027/28.

The plan has also put forward a target to ensure access to the internet in all schools to improve teaching and learning. Though there is access to the internet for teaching and learning in urban schools, it has not been in the reach of all schools across the country. The internet access rate now is 35.9% and it will be increased to 100% in five years.

However, the targets set in the draft have yet to be finalised, said NPC member Ramesh Chandra Paudel. The NPC has also pitched an idea to increase the education sector budget to 17%.

#### Ncell completes 10th year of Ncell Scholarships and Excellence Awards



Ncell, giving continuity to its much-coveted programme, conferred Ncell Scholarships and Excellence Awards to the outstanding students of five different faculties of the Institute of Engineering (IoE), Pulchowk Campus on January 26, under its corporate social responsibility. This is the 10th year of their collaboration with IoE. Civil, Electrical, Electronics and Communication, Computer, and Mechanical Engineering are the five faculties that have been incorporated into this programme. The scholarships and excellence awards were handed over to students at a special ceremony organised at Ncell ICON, the headquarter of the company in Lainchaur, Kathmandu along with the faculty of the IoE and family members of the students.

This year, from the year 2023, a total of 18 Ncell Scholarships were conferred to topper students from first year, second year and third year. Similarly, six students who graduated from the five faculties securing the highest marks received the Ncell Excellence Awards.

Addressing the Ncell Scholarships and Excellence Awards handover programme, Jabbor Kayumov, CEO and MD of Ncell said, "At Ncell, we are humbly honored to be driving this recognition that will inspire every young person and student to continue doing their best. We firmly believe that empowering the next generation is not just a responsibility but a commitment to fostering innovation, progress, and positive change. Your achievements not only make all of us proud but also serve as a source of inspiration for future generations."

The scholarships and excellence awards programme were instituted in 2014, aiming to encourage technical education and recognise young talents who have demonstrated extraordinary academic excellence. Every year, Ncell Scholarships are provided based on annual scores of first, second and third year. Both scholarships and excellence awards are worth Rs 100,000 each.

#### Vaidya Energy inaugurates second Ather Experience Centre in Jhamsikhel



Vaidya Energy, the sole distributor of Ather Energy, a trailblazer in the electric mobility sector, inaugurated its state-of-the-art Experience Centre (EC) in Jhamsikhel on January 20. This follows the successful inauguration of a service centre in Tinkune last week, and the latest centre is poised to transform urban commuting with sustainable solutions.

The new Experience Centre is designed to provide a seamless and futuristic electric mobility experience. With an immersive environment, customers can explore the full range of Ather electric scooters, get a firsthand experience of cuttingedge technology, and learn about the company's vision for a sustainable future. Furthermore, Vaidya Energy plans to open another such centre in Pokhara by February and in Chitwan, Butwal and Itahari within the next four months.

Ather Energy Nepal is committed to strengthening the charging infrastructure across the country. They plan to install a total of 10 chargers in Kathmandu, ensuring easy access to charging facilities. In addition, each of the upcoming cities - Pokhara, Chitwan, Butwal, and Itahari - will receive four chargers, contributing to a robust network that enables Ather Electric Scooter riders to confidently explore every corner of the country with sustainable and accessible infrastructure

Ather Electric Scooter has pushed the boundaries of electric mobility, offering eco-friendly and innovative solutions. Their electric scooters are designed for a new generation of riders who demand style, performance, and sustainability.

The Experience Centre in Jhamsikhel symbolises not just a physical space but also a commitment to building a community of likeminded individuals who are passionate about the future of transportation. Customers can experience the future of urban mobility and witness the next generation of Ather electric scooters that are set to redefine the commuting experience.

#### Energy Minister Basnet emphasises need to increase electricity consumption



Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Shakti Bahadur Basnet, has underscored the need to increase electricity consumption within the country. Addressing a discussion programme on the promotion of electric cooking stoves organised on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Electric Cooking Stove National Campaign in Lalitpur on January 25, Minister Basnet said the electric stove is useful for every Nepali from the economic, social and environmental viewpoint.

At the discussion programme with the theme. 'Let us increase the use of electric stove: Let us contribute to improving health', Minister Basnet said that the government has emphasised the production of maximum hydroelectricity as it is the basis for the country's prosperity. He suggested enlisting the participation of private sector also by providing it with subsidies and concessions in the production of hydropower for the campaign's success. He called on all sides to be serious regarding climate change impacts, including in the agricultural sector.

Secretary at the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Gopal Prasad Sigdel, said the government's attention is centred on promoting and increasing the use of electric cooking stoves to substitute the import of liquefied petroleum gas through the 16th periodic plan that commences from next fiscal year.

National Association of Community Electricity Users-Nepal (NACEUN) Chairman Narayan Gyawali shared that together with various organisations, they have been making efforts to make the campaign meaningful and successful.

#### CTEVT holds 'National Seminar on Promoting and Ensuring Permeability in the Education System of Nepal'

The National Seminar on Promoting and Ensuring Permeability in the Education System of Nepal, took place on January 17 in Kathmandu marking a milestone in understanding international experiences and advancing discussions on contextualising permeability in Nepal's education system.

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT)/National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) organised the seminar in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Science and Technology (MoEST). The Nepal Vocational Qualifications System Project - Phase II (NVQS P-II), a joint initiative between the Nepali and Swiss governments, supported the seminar. NVQS P-II assists the CTEVT in implementing the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF), which the Government of Nepal approved on May 20, 2020. The NVQF is a comprehensive national framework for certifying individuals' skills and competencies acquired through training or practical experiences, enabling them to access higher-level skills and enter national and international labour markets for better earnings.

The seminar featured distinguished speakers and experts who provided valuable perspectives on international experiences on permeable education systems and the urgency of a permeable education system (basic, higher and TVET system) in Nepal.

#### B360 / NATIONAL

#### Government signs agreement with ADB to receive \$160m concessional loan, \$6m grant



The government has signed a loan agreement of \$160 million and a grant agreement of \$6 million with the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Finance Secretary Krishna Hari Pushkar and ADB Country Director for Nepal, Arnaud Cauchois, on behalf of their respective sides, signed the agreement at the Ministry of Finance on January 17.

The 'Urban Resilience and Livability Improvement Project' will be implemented in Pokhara Metropolitan City, Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City, and Lumbini Sanskritik, Devdaha, Sainamaina, Siddharthanagar, and Tilottama municipalities of Rupandehi district.

ADB's Country Director for Nepal said the project will help concerned municipalities in their infrastructure development, tourism recovery and reform. He also said the project will boost the economic activities, leading to revenue increase, digital transformation and capacity building

#### WWF Nepal installs 14.4kW Solar Irrigation Plant in Lalitpur

WWF Nepal, in collaboration with partners, has installed a 14.4 kW Solar Irrigation Plant (SIP) that lifts water from the Bagmati River, providing year-round irrigation for agricultural fields in Pyutar, Lalitpur district. A total of 54 households with 15.26 hectares of irrigated land in Bagmati Rural Municipality have benefitted from the irrigation plant.

The SIP has also achieved a feat with net metering, which is connected to the national grid and exports surplus energy and imports energy during shortfalls. The project, 'Multiactor partnerships (MAPs) for implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with 100% RE for all in the global south' or '100% RE MAP', aims to introduce and consolidate MAPs with a 100% RE target in three countries: Nepal, Uganda and Vietnam.

The WWF team organised a field exposure visit with media persons to Pyutar on December 29, 2023.

The visit started with an introductory session on the project where Rubina Karki, Programme Associate, Climate and Energy, WWF Nepal, briefed about the visit and the project. This project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and is run in Nepal by Prakriti Resources Centre, according to Karki.

"We want to spread more awareness related to climate change and renewable energy in Nepal and that is why we need our media partners to be the mediator to take the knowledge to everyone. This capacity-building programme will not only help you to gain knowledge about the project but also broaden the concept of renewable energy as a whole and the opportunities in Nepal," she explained.

A local partner, Ritavrat Joshi, Senior Programme Officer, MinErgy, stated, "We gave WWF our project proposal. The plant consists of three major sections. One is solar. The other one has a tank at the top and is well down and connected to Bagmati River. The plant has been connected with Rastriya Prasaran Grid, which allows the electricity produced here to be both provided to and taken from the Grid. As a result, energy is not wasted, and irrigation is still possible in the absence of sunlight."

Rajan Sapkota, member of Sichai Pariyojana Samiti, asserted, "Currently, the plant can only assist 34 households while others in the remote distance are unable to receive the service since the local government has not completed fitting pipes."

NIICE hosts talk on 'Gendered Disinformation: A Threat to Democracy'

Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) organised a talk titled 'Gendered Disinformation: A threat to democracy' in Lalitpur on January 16. The talk was organised to discuss how misleading gender and sex-based narratives deter women from participating in the public sphere. More than 50 individuals including civil society members, representatives from different platforms, and media persons were present at the event.

"Raising awareness of gendered disinformation among people present in this room is not enough, it is necessary to reach people across Nepal, particularly in rural areas," said the moderator Rajneesh Bhandari, Founder and CEO of Nepal Investigative Multimedia Journalism Network (NIMJN).

Guest speaker Dilrukshi Handunnetti, Founder and Director of Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), Sri Lanka, shared her insights on the disinformation faced by women entering the public sphere. She highlighted that misleading information often forces women, especially those in political careers, to deny their representation. Handunnetti further explained, "Women leaders are frequently portrayed as enemies and victims without agency." She provided examples from Ukraine, India and Sri Lanka, illustrating how women leaders have been subjected to fabricated sexualised information and images during elections, leading to their defeat.

Data shows that globally 42% of women politicians have encountered extremely humiliating or sexually charged images of themselves online. Political leaders, those who are highly visible in the media and those who advocate for feminist issues have often faced such issues.

Handunnetti, citing some of the international campaigns such as Reclaim the internet and NotTheCost in UK; ByteBack-International Federation of Journalist (IFJ); Web WithoutViolent in Germany, emphasised the importance of advocating for these issues and creating not just an equal but equitable society.

NIICE is an independent, apolitical and non-partisan think tank based in Nepal working on freedom, democracy and a world free from conflict.

#### Norvic International Hospital hosts book talk on 'Atomic Habits'



Norvic International Hospital organised a programme featuring a special talk on 'Atomic Habits', an international best-selling book by James Clear, on January 20. Dr Bharat Rawat, Senior Cardiologist and Lifestyle Coach from Medanta Hospital in Indore, India, was the speaker at the programme.

James Clear is recognised as one of the world's leading experts on habit formation. In his book, he reveals practical strategies that teach people to form good habits, break bad ones and master the tiny behaviours that lead to remarkable results.

The talk was attended by more than 200 individuals, including doctors, medical consultants, entrepreneurs, media representatives and various personalities from different walks of life. The event was opened by Charu Chadha, Editor, Media 9.

Delivering the essence of James Clear's book. Dr Rawat broke down the book in such a way that those who have not read the book could easily understand the concept of Atomic Habits. He described the term 'atomic' as a small amount of matter with immense power and habit as a practice. "When small things are practised daily, they become a habit and ultimately an automatic habit", Dr Rawat explained. He quoted Aristotle, "We are what we repeatedly do." He shared that small and continued efforts help one grow. He offered various tips and techniques to guit unhelpful habits and develop helpful ones.

He further emphasised the importance of creating a favourable environment to build habits and tracking the work one is doing. However, he also cautioned that too much tracking can be counterproductive. This book has also highlighted the human tendency to overvalue numbers and undervalue anything that is ephemeral. Rawat said, "Just because you can measure something does not mean it is the most important thing and just because you cannot measure something does not mean it is not important at all."

Rawat concluded with some downsides of forming habits. For example, becoming rigid in one particular habit might make a person more automatic and machine-like. He further said, "Your identity creates 'pride' that encourages you to deny your weak spots and prevents you from truly growing." He insisted on being flexible and not brittle.

Renowned cardiothoracic surgeon - Dr Bhagwan Koirala, National Cardiac Centre Founder and Chairman - Dr Om Murti Anil, Dwarika's Group President Ambica Shrestha and Norvic International Hospital Executive Director - Manish Khemka were among the distinguished personalities who actively participated and contributed to the talk programme.

Norvic International

Hospital Managing Director, Megha Chaudhary, in her closing remarks referring to Dr Rawat, said, "Beyond your medical expertise, your role as a lifestyle coach has been transformative. You have not only treated illnesses but educated people and motivated them towards healthier and more fulfilling lives. As you talk about Atomic Habits, we are reminded of your belief in the power of small changes that add up to significant life improvements."

## TVS NTORQ hits 100,000 sales milestone in Nepal



The sales milestone for the TVS NTORQ 125cc has reached 100,000 units, announced Jagdamba Motors, the sole authorised distributor of TVS Motor Company in Nepal. The flagship model, TVS NTORQ, has won the hearts of Nepali customers in a short span, establishing itself as a leader in the highly competitive scooter market since its launch in 2018.

Sahil Agrawal, Managing Director of Jagdamba Motors, shared, "We are thrilled to announce that NTORQ has crossed the 100,000 mark in such a short time. I would like to thank all the NTORQ customers who made this milestone possible."

The TVS NTORQ boasts a seamless blend of bestin-class power, pick-up and performance, catering to a wide customer range. The NTORO Drum is an affordable variant, while the recently launched TVS NTORO XP takes innovation and technology to the next level by combining power with advanced features like 60+ Smart Connect features, Voice Assist, ride mode, RTFI technology that also offers great mileage. With its winning

combination of smart technology, powerful performance, and sporty design, NTORQ has become the top choice among riders. This remarkable milestone of 100,000 NTORQs on the road is a testament to its unmatched appeal and the strong bond with the riding community. The TVS NTORQ is available with a monthly EMI of Rs 3,999.

#### BYD unveils new showroom in Lalitpur



BYD, a world leader in electric vehicles, has inaugurated its new showroom in Lalitpur Metropolitan City. This showroom launch represents a significant step in BYD's growth strategy, demonstrating the latest

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developments in electric vehicle technology and reinforcing its dedication to sustainable transport. The showroom offers a comprehensive solution for customers, including vehicle exchange, financing, and a fast charging station, ensuring convenience for potential buyers and underscoring BYD's commitment to accessible and efficient charging infrastructure. Eco Drive Automobile, the authorised distributor of BYD Auto Industry, in Lalitpur, commenced operations at the showroom on January 17. The state-of-the-art showroom is designed to provide customers with a unique and immersive experience, showcasing BYD's innovative electric vehicle range, including Nepal's first sporty electric SUV, BYD ATTO 3, and versatile BYD Dolphin. With the addition of this newly opened showroom, BYD now boasts 12 showrooms. nine service centres, and 15 charging points in Nepal.

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#### **B360 / NATIONAL**

Late Khagendra Bahadur KC's 'Kranti and the Coup: A Personal History, 1945 -1963' launched



'Kranti and the Coup: A Personal History, 1945 – 1963', a personal memoir by late Khagendra Bahadur KC and translated into English by Prawin Adhikari, was unveiled at the Nepali Army Officer's Club in Kathmandu, on January 13.

Published by Sutra, an imprint of Quixote's Cove, the book intricately crafts a compelling narrative of the unparalleled shift of political power in Nepal, viewed from an extraordinarily privileged perspective. The book revives a segment of recent Nepali history that remains largely unknown to the majority of readers.

At the launch, Professor Khagendra Prasad Bhattarai, former Vice Chancellor of Pokhara University, expressed his admiration for the research that late KC had invested in writing this book. Prof Bhattarai drew attention to anecdotes from the book about King Tribhuvan, which led Chandra Shamsher Rana to confide in his brothers and sons about the potential impact on the Ranas' future. "An anecdote about how a seven-year-old King Tribhuvan plotted to achieve his goals provides a glimpse into the future king, a detail I have not encountered elsewhere," shared Professor Bhattarai.

The book commences with an account of Chandra Shamsher, yet it portrays Bishweshwor Prasad (BP) Koirala as the hero. Kedar Bhakta Mathema, former Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, also former Ambassador to Japan, shared, "KC describes Koirala as a talented political leader with integrity and charisma, who outshines all other leaders. Yet, like all Shakespearean heroes, Koirala had his flaws he lacked courtly refinement. could be stubborn, and was often tactless - traits that are necessary for political leaders." Mathema further said. "It's not merely a chronicle of events from the Rana period. It is filled with the author's reflections, comments, and anecdotes. The linguistic approach gives the book a novel-like feel due to the various episodes and anecdotes." He also commended the book for making history approachable to readers of all ages.

Kranti and the Coup, priced at Rs 1,000, is available at major bookstores around the city and worldwide.

Author KC was a beloved family man, an adored teacher to generations of students at Tribhuvan University and Patan College, and a keen observer of the upheavals in contemporary Nepali life. As the 'English secretary' to Minister General Babar Shumsher Rana, KC was in the very eye of the storm during the epochal transition that brought Nepal out of the dimness of a medieval reality into the modern world in the 1950s.

Translator Adhikari is the author of 'The Vanishing Act' and an assistant editor at La.Lit, a literary magazine. He has translated works of fiction between Nepali and English such as 'The Long Night of Storm' by Indra Bahadur Rai and 'The Vegetarian' by Han Kang, written screenplays, and published retellings of folk tales

#### The British College and Canada's Seneca College sign MoU



The British College (TBC) in Kathmandu has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Canada's, Seneca College. This partnership allows TBC students to transfer credits to Seneca from their second year. It opens up opportunities for them to pursue higher education in Canada.

The agreement was formalised by TBC CEO, Rajen Kandel and Seneca President, David Agnew at Seneca College, on January 22. The MoU not only facilitates a smooth transition for TBC students to Seneca College but also strengthens the relationship between the two institutions. It encourages cultural exchange and collaboration in research and development.

#### Indira IVF's inaugural centre opened in Nepal

Indira IVF, recognised as India's leading network of IVF hospitals, has opened its inaugural centre in Kathmandu. It is a frontrunner in delivering cutting-edge fertility solutions. Embarking on the healthcare journey in Nepal, Indira IVF stands resolute in tackling the profound challenges of infertility that tightly grip the region. They share that navigating the emotional terrain of infertility is already taxing and the poignant reality is that many Nepali couples are compelled to travel to India for quality care. This arduous journey only amplifies their burdens and financial constraints

Dr Neha Homagai, Centre Head and IVF Specialist, Indira IVF Nepal, said, "The consequences of infertility in Nepal are deeply impactful, stretching far beyond the inability to conceive. Couples experience immense distress, feeling excluded and incompetent. The repercussions of childlessness are more pronounced in developing nations compared to western societies."

"Indira IVF's expansion into Nepal aims to bridge the gap in accessible, affordable, and specialised infertility treatments. The clinic is committed to providing comprehensive care, alleviating the psychological and emotional distress associated with infertility, and empowering individuals and couples on their journey towards parenthood," remarked Dr Ajay Murdia, Founder and Chairman, Indira IVF

Operating over 120 centres across India with a dedicated team of over 2,400 individuals, Indira IVF conducts more than 40,000 IVF procedures every year in India. The organisation's triumph can be credited to its ongoing commitment to investing in technology, particularly evident in the field of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) treatments.

## SAMSUNG

# Galaxy S24 Ultra

## Galaxy Al 袾 is here





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#### **BESIDES BUSINESS**

#### TOP PICK

**"I KNOW THE WORLD IS CHANGING AND IT IS CHANGING** FOR GOOD. BUT IN **OUR TRADE, WHEN WE DO TEXTILES** AND FABRICS AND **GARMENTS, I REALLY THINK YOU CANNOT BUY IT ONLINE. YOU HAVE TO SEE CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT THE OUALITY OF THE TEXTILE. YOU HAVE TO FEEL** IT. YOU HAVE TO LIKE IT FROM YOUR **EYES, NOT FROM** SOMEBODY ELSE'S PERSPECTIVE.



#### Shailendra Shankar Proprietor, Wonderfabs

Shailendra Shankar is the proprietor of Wonderfabs, a forerunner business dealing in fabrics and fashion wear of the highest quality for over 30 years. His clientele runs across the country from individuals (local and from overseas) to boutiques and fashion houses. After arriving in Nepal for a short visit, Shankar, originally from Delhi, fell in love with the country. Wonderfabs was originally run by his uncle and Shankar took on the responsibility and the legacy 24 years ago. A commendable taste in prints and fabrics, Shankar has a loyal clientele that relies on his insights into the market trends and fashion culture. An astute businessman. he understands quality,

salesmanship and the power of referrals which has grown his business over the years despite the competition. Wonderfabs is located centrally in Bishal Bazar, New Road and the up market. Babar Mahal Revisited.

In this edition of **Business 360**, Shankar talks about his top picks in brands and beliefs on running a business.

#### **Top Mobile Applications**

Instagram: Everybody finds their solace on Instagram, I use it for inspiration. In our trade, you cannot be continuously creative. You have to look for inspiration from other people's accounts. Besides that, I like to create content as well. I don't rely on anybody or any agency to do it for me, because the thing I believe is good, I usually promote that on my Instagram account.

X: I use a lot of Twitter, as we called it earlier. Now it's called X.

**News apps:** Besides that, I like to upgrade myself with all the current affairs with news applications. I prefer the Times of India and New York Times to keep me updated with everything constantly.

#### Favourite clothing brands

I use Nicobar regularly. You get nice Indian clothes which are quite contemporary. I usually wear that during pujas and festivals. I also use it more like a housing brand. I use a lot of their glasses and dinnerware.

I like Uniqlo because it's more affordable and it keeps

me simple. The quality is also very good.

#### Startups you think will make it big or have a lot of potential

In Nepal, I particularly think that there are a few brands which are doing well. One particular brand I would like to see going places is Pari and Shae that usually does everything for homewares. They do certain things like handmade kids' toys, candles, and jewellery, and their pottery is very nice.

Then a particular brand who's doing very well in our industry is Oodni.

Then I see Hobby Lobby doing very well. I think in the future, they'll go places.

#### **Bucket list travel destination**

I love travelling, but I am mostly bound to my Indian roots. I would definitely like to travel more. I have travelled once to Kerala. I have travelled many times to Jaipur. I love Rajasthan.

I recently had a trip to Singapore which I enjoyed a lot, maybe because of my kids.

In Nepal, I would like to visit Rara Lake. That is one of the things I really want to do. Mustang is my all-time favourite. I always keep myself updated about the place. Which hotel is doing well, which hotel has very nice accommodation and so on. Recently one of my friends also went there and he was all praises about Mustang. So, it is one of the two places I would like to visit very soon.

#### A brand that inspires you

There is this particular brand in India called ShopNOIB (No In Between) and they have done what we all aspire to do in the future. They are climbing the ladder really fast and have always been an inspiration.

#### **Preferred perfume**

Sunehre Din from Forest Essentials. I love it. It stays with you for the whole day.

#### **Online or physical shopping**

I know the world is changing and it is changing for good. But in our trade, when we do textiles and fabrics and garments, I really think you cannot buy it online. You have to see certain things about the quality of the textile. You have to feel it. You have to like it from your eyes, not from somebody else's perspective. You have to really believe in it and then you buy it. Online is a medium that may be very good for people buying groceries and buying things that you have bought hundreds and thousands of times. But I really think that you don't know whether what is shown in the picture is going to be delivered or not. So online is not my portal. It will never be.

#### Go-to eating spot

There used to be a very nice restaurant, Ghar-E-Kabab at Hotel Annapurna but unfortunately, it's closed. Most restaurants otherwise are very good. There are certain Thakali restaurants like Daura Thakali which is upcoming. Trisara is always going to be my top pick among cafes.

There's the recently opened Penthouse where the food is very innovative and the drinks are particularly nice.

#### Gadgets you use the most

I think it is my phone. And then my TV remote.

## Women-run businesses you think deserve accolades

There have been a lot of women that have been an inspiration. One in particular is Lotika Chadda of Nepal Woman Crafts who's been doing well very consistently.

## Essential piece of advice you have received

I have been told persistently that in my trade you can't say what you really think and you have to be a little bit manipulative with words. But if I feel that something is not right, I won't say that it's right. It is the same for my trade. If I don't believe in certain things, I won't let the other person buy it. Unless they are adamant on buying it, then I cannot do anything but I will not manipulate a sale just for the sake of selling.

#### Entertainment

My source of entertainment have recently become OTTs (Over the Top media services). The stuff on OTTs, especially the documentaries, have become very nice. It has been a very good medium to watch these shows. Other than entertainment, to a certain extent it imparts knowledge as well

I like Netflix a lot. And I like Apple TV because you tend to see certain things which are very nice, content wise. I recently watched 'Wild Wild Country', regarding Osho.

#### Is expensive necessarily better

If I have to think about my trade and business, yes, expensive is better, but only if it is durable. If it will last for a long period of time, and you are getting compliments for that, then expensive is fine. But if you are buying a Louis Vuitton bag and if you are carrying it in every social event, people will start noticing. The brand should not define you; you should define the brand. Wonderfabs has always been a place where people have defined and created the niche of this brand, instead of us. They always inspired us to buy newer, better things which are interesting and suit their personality. And that's why Wonderfabs has been doing really well for the past 34 vears now.

I do not like anything which is exorbitantly expensive, although I am not against people who are buying those exorbitantly expensive things. I like brands which are more affordable and reflect my personality of simple living.

## Important qualities when choosing a brand

Quality and sustainability are very important, whether it is clothing or gadgets or shoes. Things have become expensive in this world. It's a fast-moving world and we have to buy things that would stay a bit longer than usual.

I don't believe in fast fashion. Companies like H&M and Zara have been using cheap labour in Bangladesh and other underdeveloped countries. They have been paid a very idiotic amount for someone's whole day of work. And the product is not even that durable. It looks nice but it is not very durable stuff. It is fast fashion. It is a waste of our natural resources, which we need for the future generations to come.

## A recent brand experience that has impressed you

Onitsuka. I initially found the brand a little expensive. But I have been wearing these shoes for some time. It was my first purchase in this particular area, but so far it's very comfortable. It defines that price. They have many in different styles. Each one for a different occasion. The one I am wearing is really comfortable. I have been wearing it for a very long time and it's working well.

#### What attracts you to a product

Colours and the quality. If something catches your eye, it is a bit difficult to distract yourself from that. So colours are the one particular thing that keeps me focused.

## A mentor or a guru who has inspired you

My guru will always be my uncle, Sandeep Mishra. He taught me things, when I was particularly naive about this trade. He taught me everything about life, about trade. He's been a very positive force in my career.

#### **Favourite pastime**

I am a simple person and an extrovert. I like to talk to people. I like to know about their views on many things. Essentially, I like meeting people. It always gives me a very nice feeling.

## Personal and professional motivation

My family has always been my motivation for everything. Besides that, the place. I really like Nepal a lot. I came here for just a small stint for a couple of days, it's been 24 years and I am not counting now. It is this place that has always motivated me, the people have always motivated me. Nepali people are not aggressive. They are very welcoming people. That is one particular thing that I like about Nepal. **B** 

## HI 5

#### "I STARTED QUESTIONING MYSELF ON WHETHER WHATEVER I WAS ACHIEVING WAS FOR ME ONLY OR WAS IT FOR ME AND MY PEOPLE. I REALISED THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MEANINGFUL ACHIEVEMENT AND AN ACHIEVEMENT SOLELY FOR THE SAKE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT"



Hempal Shrestha, a strong supporter of information technology as a critical component of societal progress, has significantly contributed to technological development in Nepal. "I am a researcher, educator, consultant and lawyer. I provide consulting and advisory services to tech companies and IT projects, both national and international, on legal tech issues. I am more of a social-tech researcher," he says.

Over the years, Shrestha

has been involved in various jobs in his professional journey beginning as Head of Department for Information Management at St Xavier's College in 2003 and as Programme Officer - Asia region, Bellanet, the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

To diversify the use of free and open source in Nepal, Shrestha along with other open-source enthusiasts initiated a community of practice known as Free/ Open-Source Software (FOSS) Nepal, following the open space methodology. Later, he practiced the open space of community building and knowledge sharing in various organisations and communities across South and East Asia.

Intending to bring about positive change in the techentrepreneurial ecosystem of Nepal and share learnings from his entrepreneurial endeavours, Shrestha along with key industry leaders co-founded a not-for-profit called Nepal Entrepreneurs' Hub (NEHUB) in 2015. At NEHUB, Shrestha mentored the ICT Award in Nepal and led the ICT Award as the jury coordinator from its initial phase. He has also been a member of the jury of the Manthan South Asia and mBillionth South Asia Awards multiple times.

Shrestha has developed the system analysis of the Social

2019 for the government. To realise the mission of digital transformation, he initiated Digital Samvad to initiate an open dialogue focusing on the social-economic transformation of the general public. To assist the federal development of Nepal and with a motive to institutionalise digital tools as enablers for policy discourse, he co-initiated ICT Foundation Nepal during the Covid 19 pandemic. In this edition of **Business** 360. Shrestha shares with us

Security Fund and co-authored

the Digital Nepal Framework

the five experiences that have impacted his work and life.

#### Education away from home

After completing my lower secondary education in Tanahun, I was sent to India for further education as good educational facilities were available only in Kathmandu then and they were very expensive. My thought process, the way I perceive things are highly influenced by my learnings in India. Moreover, the fact that my family understood the importance of quality education was a blessing to me.

In India, I not only got my college degree but also acquired the overall societal knowledge in a more holistic approach. While studying there I started questioning myself on whether whatever I was achieving was for me only or was it for me and my people. I realised the distinction between meaningful achievement and an achievement solely for the sake of accomplishment. I understood what land means, which I think I would have never understood if I was in Nepal.

#### The belief that technology is the only possible enabler

During my graduation, information technology (IT) was gradually picking up. I started believing that IT would do positive to the environment. I

wanted to build an ecosystem that could contribute positively. During those times, IT used to be seen from a business perspective only. People had very little information regarding how IT can actually cause a social revolution. I started an initiative called 'IT Plus' within the college premises and gained a lot of exposure. I came to know that knowledge is wealth, and independence is what we need. The sense of the need to create a good entrepreneur ecosystem where IT can have its significant role led me to pursue an education in IT and work in this field

Nepal Entrepreneurs' Hub is one that was established in order to bring into attention that innovation and technology will be the backbone of the transformation that takes place in local communities. I am glad that I could actually bring a positive to the environment and contribute to the generations of entrepreneurs who want to scale up and build an entrepreneur mindset. Connecting enterprises with technology has really helped us to create prosperity.

#### International exposure and engagement with community

I was in my late 20's when I received an opportunity to explore the world. I met so many people, learned from them, learned about international development, culture, society and the entire Nepal and many other countries. During my travels, many of my foreign friends would ask me to live abroad but I have never felt like leaving the country. The realisation of what actually was my purpose of living always used to bring me back to Nepal. Perhaps, I learned through that exposure and did as much work as I could do innovatively in the Nepali ecosystem.

I have experience of working in establishing a good social community of technical people. I learned that if you

have trust, clarity of purpose, and good intentions then any work gets easier. If you are not clear about the work you are doing, then conflict arises and it may affect your personal, professional, social and many other aspects of life.

Various communities have taught me every personal, professional and social aspect of life acts differently in different situations. Separating personal, professional and social things has helped me achieve the bigger goals in life. If you are a friend, you will know more about my personal things, a little bit about my professional things, and much more about my social things. If you are my family, you will know everything about my personal things, you might know a little bit about my professional thing, you might know something about my social thing but you might never understand. Therefore, distinguishing my relationship with friends, family and society and the different levels of support from them has helped me grow.

You will meet people who may want to exploit you, you will meet people who want to build you, you will meet people who will break you but never mind them and continue with people who build you and keep an okav relation with the rest.

#### Sincere commitment and follow through

My attribute to be sincere has helped me achieve a lot. Whatever I have, I sincerely fulfil my responsibilities. We have multiple hats but wear only one at one time. For me, sincerity is more of creating an impact rather than contributing only. In my case, I received exposure because my family had a sincere commitment to educate me. I had a sincere commitment to come back and work. I continued with that commitment and tried to learn and build my knowledge base. I do remember the days when

there used to be loadshedding in Nepal. During those times, we had to manage our daily routine accordingly. We used to work during nights to finish the work on time when there was still electricity. That sincere commitment created a platform which gave me exposure. The opportunity and exposure that I received; I gave a sincere follow through.

#### **Presence of good mentors**

I may sound unrealistic but throughout my life, I have been guided by the best of mentors. From school teachers to professors, from colleagues in higher positions to national and international bosses, they have inspired and motivated me so much. I have learnt to be committed. I have learnt to keep a good positive circle around me to stay happy and healthy. They have taught me to be good to everyone but if somebody messes up then develop the capability to set that off. Another thing I have learned is that simplicity should be a quality not an attribute. I have been able to incorporate that in myself.

I would like to mention two poets Kabir Das and Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, the people I admire so much. Kabir says that you must always keep those people close who criticise you so that you can improve further. From him, I have learned to acknowledge the criticism positively and move strongly. On the other hand, Dinkar inspires me to become a capable person first, so that even when you excuse or forgive others for their wrongdoings, it is not considered incapability or weakness.

I have a few bosses who have really grilled me. That's the learning. At times, we make blunders and get lost but we learn from that. There are good people and I am able to maintain a good relationship with them and keep them close to me. B

## **GET FIT**

## **YOGA TO STAY YOUTHFUL**



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

Yoga is a great way to stay healthy and fit and has the added benefit slowing the ageing process if you continue your practice along the years. Here are a few reasons that substantiate why:

 Balance is a major component of many of the yoga poses – the warrior, the triangle and the tree pose that most of you must be familiar with. Our ability to balance requires the use of both our body and our brain which yoga practice allows. The balancing poses used in yoga help us to sync communication between the right and left hemispheres of the brain also improving our agility.

- As we age, most people complain of increased aches, pains and stiffness. Yoga creates flexibility. With regular yoga practice, you will find greater comfort in your body as you advance in your years. Regular practice helps lengthen the spine, improve nerve conduction to all organs and generally allows greater flexibility.
- Yoga builds strength slowly and safely. Weight bearing poses such as the downward dog, cobra and plank reduce the chances of fractures as you age. With regular practice, you will build strong muscles and also see increased bone density.
- Breathing is equal to life and however simple it may sound; we often don't breathe right. Yoga practice increases your lungs capacity to bring in life force as you focus on your breath. Increased and improved breathing increases overall energy, helps lower blood pressure, improves digestion and circulation and reduces stress levels.
- Body awareness is crucial as you age. Yoga teaches you to live more mindfully. It helps

in our mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing besides physical health. It trains you to notice yourself more carefully and take corrective measures.

I would encourage anyone, whatever your age, to join a yoga class now. Just make sure that you are learning from a certified professional. Even if you are starting your practice on your own through books or video tapes, please ensure that whatever you are doing feels right - do not at any point rush yourself towards advanced stages of practice, your body has to ease into it and enjoy it. Start practicing and enjoy what yoga offers you in so many ways. Remember, yoga is more than asanas and breathing techniques, at its core, it is a way of life. B

**BODY AWARENESS IS CRUCIAL AS YOU** AGE. YOGA TEACHES YOU TO LIVE MORE MINDFULLY. IT **HELPS IN OUR MENTAL, EMOTIONAL** AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING **BESIDES PHYSICAL** HEALTH, IT TRAINS YOU TO NOTICE YOURSELF MORE CAREFULLY AND TAKE CORRECTIVE MEASURES.



## **THROUGH THE MYSTIC EYE**

## **COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS**



▲ Sadhguru. Ranked amongst the fifty most influential people in India, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and a New York Times bestselling author Sadhguru has been conferred the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India in 2017, the highest annual civilian award, accorded for exceptional and distinguished service.

**Questioner:** Throughout life, in school, in office, everywhere we are constantly being compared with others around us. Why are such comparisons being made? Why are we not appreciated for who we are?

Sadhguru: There are certain areas of life where our whole learning process only exists because of many things that have happened in the past. You can write the ABC because someone else also wrote the ABC before you. By yourself you would not have written the ABC. So, what you can do is not just coming out of you. What you can do is coming out of the experience of humanity. Writing the ABC is coming out of the experience of language of thousands of generations of people.

Every other thing that you can do is also like this. It is not only coming out of you; it is coming because of everyone's contribution to you. Invariably, comparison becomes a necessity because if there is no comparison, you might be doing something silly in your life but you would think you are doing great. Hasn't it happened to you often enough? You thought you were doing fantastic. Then someone came by and they were doing things in such a way that you felt like an utter idiot. So, this comparison is needed otherwise everyone who is doing idiotic things will think he is a king by himself.

The comparison is perfectly okay, but it is not about you, it is only about what you can do. It is just about your actions. In activity, all of us are differently capable. If we do not have benchmarks, we cannot improve our activity. Not everyone is driven by a passion to do what they are doing where they will anyway do their best. They need some benchmarks. There is nothing wrong with this. Otherwise, every day you will start from scratch and reinvent the wheel

Only if you have a problem in knowing that someone is doing better than you will this comparison be a problem. You should not have a problem that someone is doing better than you. I am always seeking someone who can do things better than me because then my life will become easy. I don't want to live with dumb people who cannot do things as well as me. If they can do things better than me, my life gets easier, better, and more beautiful. But if you are a horrible tyrant, you do not want anyone to do better than you. This is a silly way to

exist. This foolishness has come into you because you are always trying to measure the person, "Am I bigger than him? Am I smaller than him?" – because your whole effort is somehow to sit on top of the heap.

The reason your parents or your corporate sector is goading you is simply because they are not interested in doing things well, they are only interested in being number one. They are not interested that you might run a hundred metres in seven seconds - nobody did seven seconds yet - they are only interested that you must be one inch ahead of the rest of the pack. This problem arises because you have a horrible sense of insecurity about yourself. Your whole life is invested in looking a little better than someone else. This is a wasteful life because most probably you will not succeed and definitely you will not explore the full potential of who you are. You will be miserable whether you succeed or not, because constantly trying to stay ahead of someone is a miserable way to exist. The insecurity that someone may pull you down and exceed you is a horrible way to exist.

The most fundamental thing is to fix your way of experiencing life. If you are joyful by your own nature, then, whatever you do, you will not

get into this unhealthy state of life within yourself. You can go and participate in any kind of competition; you will do the best you can because you are already blissful. Even if you come last, it is still beautiful because you have done your best. You will know the joy of action only when you are blissful by your own nature. If you are doing action to squeeze happiness out of the life around you, then once in a way when there is a flash of success you are elated, but when it does not happen you will be miserable.

We are trying to plunge into the process of life without setting up the fundamental foundation that is needed for one to live a healthy life. The first and foremost thing that a child knows is how to be joyful, the moment his stomach is full he is joyful. Even an infant knows this. Only when he is hungry, he yells, the rest of the time he is joyful. This is the fundamental fabric of life. Nature is clearly telling you this state of being joyful is necessary for you to live a healthy life. This has to be firmed up, established, insured. You have to insure your joy first and then get into activity. Then it does not matter whether your activity goes up and down, you will not go up and down. B







### I BELIEVE THAT WHILE SOME PEOPLE MAY HAVE NATURAL INCLINATIONS TOWARDS LEADERSHIP, IT IS PRIMARILY AN ACQUIRED SKILL. THROUGH EXPERIENCE, LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, INDIVIDUALS CAN CULTIVATE THE QUALITIES AND ABILITIES NEEDED TO BECOME INFLUENTIAL LEADERS"

Manish K Khemka is the Executive Director of BLC Holdings, one of Nepal's leading business conglomerates. His journey weaves through a tapestry of industries including healthcare, education, FMCG, banking and finance, beverages, agriculture and packaging. His tenure has seen the inception and success of pioneering ventures and leadership of multifaceted teams. As the Chairman of Global Equity Funds, he spearheads venture capital and private equity initiatives, chartering new territories in Nepal's financial landscape.

Khemka is a Harvard Business School graduate. His academic journey has endowed him with a profound grasp of global leadership, strategic management and financial acumen. Recently, he further honed his expertise through a leadership programme in medicine at Harvard Medical School, strengthening his ability to synergise business with healthcare innovations in Nepal.

He also represents the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) at the National Planning Commission's nutritional committee and also presides over the CNI's health council. His affiliations extend to the NYEF, Harvard Club of India, Harvard Association of Nepal, and Lions Club of Kathmandu, among others.

Beyond his corporate pursuits, he finds solace and creative expression in fashion, horology and sports. As a passionate poet and writer, he has bared his soul in his anthology, 'Rubaru', connecting with readers who share his zeal for the written word. In this edition of **Business 360**, Khemka speaks about various aspects of leadership.

#### How do you define leadership?

"Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others"- John C Maxwell. In this spirit, I perceive leadership as inspiring and influencing others towards a common goal. It involves setting a clear vision, motivating and empowering team members, and making decisions that drive the organisation forward.

#### Is leadership inborn or acquired?

I believe that while some people may have natural inclinations towards leadership, it is primarily an acquired skill. Through experience, learning and personal development, individuals can cultivate the qualities and abilities needed to become influential leaders.

## Is there any leader that you look up to?

Reflecting on the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes." Indian Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi's leadership also resonates with this principle. His visionary outlook and commitment to transforming India through decisive and inclusive initiatives are a powerful embodiment of transformative thoughts and action. Modi's journey from a humble beginning to the pinnacle of leadership underscores the profound impact of determination, strategic thought and a peoplecentric approach to governance. I take up these learnings and it has assisted me in my leadership journey.

## What are the effective qualities of a leader?

Echoing Simon Sinek's words, "Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge." I believe influential leaders demonstrate strong communication skills, empathy, resilience, strategic foresight, the ability to empower others, and a commitment to integrity and ethical behaviour.

## How important is a team for a leader?

As Michael Jordan, a paragon of teamwork and excellence, once said, "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win the championship". A leader's success is symbiotically tied to their team's cohesion and collective efforts. A strong team provides diverse perspectives, expertise, and support necessary for achieving shared objectives.

## How do you view leadership in the present and future generations?

Leadership will continue to evolve in the present and future generations, with increasing emphasis on adaptability, inclusivity and sagacity to navigate complex global challenges, including technological advancements and sustainability concerns.

#### How does one influence people?

Drawing from Dale Carnegie's wisdom, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." Influence stems from genuine engagement with others, exemplary conduct, fostering trust, and aligning with the motivations and aspirations of those around you.

## One incident that tested your leadership and how you handled that.

Leading in Nepal often involves navigating the turbulent waters of policy inconsistency, with shifts in governance frequently prompting strategic recalibrations. My leadership has been tested and strengthened by these challenges many times, fostering a culture of resilience and adaptability within me and my team.

## Have you faced any failure, and what did you learn from it?

Early in my career, I started a business initiative that did not yield the expected results. This experience taught me the importance of thorough research, astute risk management, and the indispensable value of embracing failure as a stepping stone to success.

## What aspects of your personality have helped you serve various roles?

In the words of Dwight D Eisenhower, "The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible." My integrity, coupled with a strong work ethic, resilience, and an unquenchable thirst for learning, has been the foundation of my success in various leadership roles. These traits have enabled me to navigate diverse sectors' complexities and lead with conviction and confidence. **B** 



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