WHY SKILLS, NOT TALENT, WILL SHAPE NEPAL'S ICT FUTURE

CHINA'S GLOBAL REACH

THE REGULATORY BLIND SPOT FOR NO-POACH AGREEMENT IN NEPAL

VOL 14 • ISSUE 3 • JANUARY 2026 • RS 200

BUSINESS 360°

NEPAL'S TECH ECONOMY MISPRICED, NOT HIGH RISK

INSIDE NEPAL'S QUIET SOFTWARE EXPORT BOOM, AND WHAT IT NEEDS TO GO GLOBAL

AS DIGITAL BANKING GROWS, CYBER RISKS DEEPEN IN NEPAL'S FINANCIAL SECTOR

BEYOND BALANCE SHEETS AND NUMBERS

MANISH KHEMKA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLC HOLDINGS
CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL EQUITY FUND

00159
9 772091 215007


DEEPAL
A NEW WAY TO FEEL THE ROAD
TRANSFORMER X

DEEPAL E07 TRANSFORMER X REDIFINES LUXURY

This isn't a vehicle you look at.
It's one you feel. The moment you enter, the world softens.
Sound fades. Light settles.
And calm takes its place.
The Deepal E07 Transformer X is a space designed around you.
Seats that warm, massage, and support - intuitively.
Technology that doesn't impress… it understands.
Luxury here is quiet.
Four seats, each offering massage, heating, and ventilation.
Every passenger in control of their own comfort.
Zero Gravity Mode, creating a feeling of weightlessness - as if the road itself has disappeared.
Wrapped in supple Nappa leather.
Finished with effortless, soft-close precision.
Every detail considered. Nothing excessive.
And when life calls for more, it transforms.
CDC air suspension delivers a ride as smooth as a magic carpet.
Four adaptive modes; SUV, Pickup, Camping, RV - ready to shift from refined city calm to open-air freedom in moments.
The Deepal E07 Transformer X.
Not defined by the destination.
Defined by how you feel getting there.


SWITCH TO
WORLDLINK
WORLDLINK
Wi Fi EXPRESS
अब घरमा
पनि Wi-Fi !
घर बाहिर पनि
Wi-Fi !

ed page

Technology is often framed as a neutral force but in reality it is an amplifier. In markets like ours - young, rapidly digitising and institutionally fragile - technology can either accelerate equality and enterprise or entrench corruption and exclusion. The outcome depends less on the tools themselves and more on governance, incentives and leadership.

At its best, technology is an equaliser. Mobile penetration has outpaced physical infrastructure, enabling digital leapfrogging in banking, education and commerce. Digital wallets and mobile banking have expanded financial access beyond cities, drawing informal workers, migrant families and small traders into the formal economy. For entrepreneurs, cloud services, social media and e-commerce platforms have lowered entry barriers, allowing smaller firms to compete without the capital intensity that once protected incumbents. This is how technology strengthens business ecosystems, by broadening participation.

Technology also improves efficiency and transparency. Digitised supply chains, online procurement and data-driven decision-making reduce friction, cut costs and limit discretionary power, a longstanding weakness in Nepal's economy. For a country reliant on remittances and small enterprises, these are not incremental gains but structural advantages.

Yet the same systems can be manipulated. Weak regulation and low digital literacy create space for abuse. Digital platforms can obscure ownership, facilitate tax evasion and enable financial misconduct as easily as they can promote transparency. Corruption can scale with technology, allowing bad actors to move faster and hide deeper through opaque systems and unaccountable platforms.

Concentration poses another risk. When access to data and digital infrastructure is controlled by a narrow group, corporate or political, inequality widens. Automation without reskilling displaces workers. Innovation without competition produces monopolies, not ecosystems.

The answer is not to slow digitisation, but to professionalise it. Nepal must move beyond adoption toward accountability, clear data governance, enforce able competition rules, provide institutional oversight and broaden digital literacy.

Technology will shape our economic trajectory for decades. Used well, it can drive inclusion and growth. Used carelessly, it will digitise inequality and modernise corruption. The outcome depends on the intention with which it is governed.

Charu Chadha
editor

BIZ INDICATORS

FOREX MARKET	Unit	15-Jan-26	15-Dec-25	YOY (15 January 2025)
INR	100	160.00	160.00	160.00
USD	1	144.18	144.37	138.32
EUR	1	167.94	169.50	141.90
GBP	1	193.88	193.05	168.56
AUD	1	96.31	96.04	85.53
CNY	1	20.68	20.46	18.87
SELECTED MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS		Mid-December 2025	Mid-November 2025	YOY (Mid-December 2024)
Real GDP at Basic Price	%	4.00	4.00	3.40
Gross National Income (GNI)	%	6.70	6.70	6.90
Gross Domestic Product (Current Price)	Rs in billion	6107.20	6107.20	5709.10
CPI (y-o-y)	%	1.63	1.11	6.05
BOP(-Deficit)	Rs in billion	421.90	318.40	225.30

Source: Nepal Rastra Bank

BUSINESS 360°

publisher
media9

directors
hemant golchha
saurabh jyoti
sanket lamichhane

editor
charu chadha

editorial
associate editor
anurag verma
senior reporter
monica lohani
reporter
prashtutee thapa magar

digital
suresh kumar chaudhary
harshvardhan chand
sayug shrestha
suraj bhandari
dipak kumar kurmi
nicolson poudel
brihus neupane

art
senior designer
bikram chandra majumdar
designer
babu maharjan

photography
photographers
sanjay maharjan
ripesh maharjan

sales & marketing
director
sudeep shakya
sr. manager
suren sharma

administration
operations head
vivek risal
office support
bela rana magar
ram kumar tharu

All editorial enquiries should be sent to charu@media9.com.np

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

Publisher – Media Nine Pvt. Ltd.

CDO Regd. No 31/069/70

Printed at : O. P. Press Pvt. Ltd., Tel.: 9851313999
Newstand : Kasthamandap Distribution Pvt. Ltd.
Newroad. Tel: 4247241


A New Dawn In Nepalese Hospitality.

BUSINESS 360°
JANUARY 2026 | VOLUME 14 | NUMBER 3

IN THE LEAD

BEYOND BALANCE SHEETS AND NUMBERS

"IF NEPAL CAN ENSURE POLICY CONSISTENCY ACROSS POLITICAL CYCLES AND MODERNISE ITS REGULATORY FRAMEWORK TO REFLECT PRESENT DAY REALITIES, THE ECONOMY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MOVE BEYOND RESILIENCE TOWARD SUSTAINED GROWTH.

MANISH KHEMKA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLC HOLDINGS
CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL EQUITY FUND

WRITE TO US AT
editorial.b360@media9.com.np

LIKE US ON
Business360nepal

ON THE COVER: MANISH KHEMKA
PHOTOGRAPHER: ANISH ACHARYA
VENUE: MERCURE KATHMANDU
HAIR AND MAKEUP: ASHMITA KANDEL
COVER DESIGN: BIKRAM CHANDRA MAJUMDAR


KNP
NEROLAC
HEALTHY HOME PAINTS FROM JAPAN
रंगिन भोलि प्रतिको विश्वास
हिजो थियो, आज छ, भोलि पनि रहन्छ
12
YEARS WARRANTY*
KNP
NEROLAC
EXCEL
EVERLAST 12
12
YEARS
WARRANTY*

BUSINESS 360°

JANUARY 2026 | VOLUME 14 | NUMBER 3


shanker
PROTON
e.MAS
e.MAS7
INTELLIGENCE THAT ELECTRIFIES
FULL SIZED SUV
At an
UNBEATABLE PRICE
STARTING FROM 46.99 LAKHS*
e.MAS7
*Conditions apply
MOTOR POWER
160KW
RANGE
492 & 585 NEDC (Kms)
LENGTH
4615MM
GROUND CLEARANCE
180MM
NOTHING EVEN
COMES CLOSE

IN THE LEAD

BEYOND BALANCE SHEETS AND NUMBERS

MANISH KHEMKA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLC HOLDINGS
CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL EQUITY FUND

Manish Khemka, Executive Director of BLC Holdings and Chairman of Global Equity Fund, represents a leadership philosophy rooted in patience, systems, and long-term value creation. With over two decades at one of Nepal's most diversified business groups, Khemka has been instrumental in building institutions that prioritise sustainability and structural strength over short-term gains. Originally from Birgunj, his 21-year journey with BLC has shaped a firm belief that enduring growth is driven by robust systems and disciplined governance.

A strong academic foundation underpins his approach to leadership. Khemka has completed executive education in leadership and strategic management at Harvard Business School and a specialised programme in healthcare leadership at Harvard Medical School, an area central to BLC's strategic focus. His engagement extends beyond the firm into national policy and industry platforms. He serves as a National Council Member of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries and chairs its Health Council, while remaining connected to global academic and professional networks including NYEF and the Harvard Association.

Beyond the boardroom, Khemka brings a breadth of interests that reflect a balanced and curious mind. A committed fitness enthusiast, sportsman and golfer, he is also known for his appreciation of fine watches and personal style. Equally significant is his involvement in social and humanitarian initiatives, shaped by a conviction that business success must advance alongside community well-being. As a dedicated poet and author, he has also shared his personal thoughts in his book, 'Rubaru,' to connect with other people who love writing. These beliefs continue to inform his leadership choices and institutional vision, insights he shared in conversation with **Business 360**

What drew you to take on a leadership role at BLC, and what did you see as its core responsibility when you stepped in?

When I joined BLC, it was more of a personal mission than an assignment, but one I accepted with genuine enthusiasm. I was given the responsibility to help build institutions, and that challenge immediately appealed to me.

From the outset, the focus was on creating a system-driven organisation, one that prioritised long-term sustainability alongside broader community growth. My core responsibility was to help build something enduring, rooted in strong systems rather than short-term outcomes. The objective was not merely to run a business, but to shape an institution capable of standing the test of time and contributing meaningfully to the ecosystem around it.

How does your role at BLC differ from your other professional engagements, in terms of mandate and impact?

My roles across different organisations are interconnected and reflect my broader professional engagement. Beyond BLC, I am associated with the Confederation of Nepalese Industries as a National Council Member and Chair of the Health Council, and I remain connected with academic and professional networks such as the Harvard Association.

That said, the nature of my work varies significantly. At CNI, my role is more focused on networking, advocacy, and policy framing - contributing to dialogue and influencing broader policy direction.

At BLC, however, my role is far more execution-oriented. As Executive Director, my responsibility is to ensure that decisions taken at the board level are implemented effectively on the ground. While I continue to contribute strategic and policy perspectives, the emphasis here is firmly on delivery. In simple terms, BLC is where decisions are translated into action.

What have been the biggest strategic challenges at BLC so far, and how have you approached them?

Scalability remains one of the biggest challenges, not just for BLC but for most institutions in Nepal. Moving to the next level often runs into infrastructure constraints, which can significantly limit growth.

Government processes present another reality. Bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory delays are part of the environment we operate in, and in Nepal, you quickly learn that you must work within the system as it exists. Balancing ambition with practical constraints becomes essential.

Human resources pose a further challenge. Despite visible unemployment, finding capable middle management is surprisingly difficult. There is often talent at the top and entry level, but the middle layer remains thin. Our response has been to recruit young graduates, invest in training, and build capacity internally. Similarly, when faced with infrastructure gaps, we focus less on what is missing and more on how to bridge those gaps through practical solutions.

In what ways do you see BLC contributing to Nepal's broader financial and institutional ecosystem?

BLC contributes in several ways. One notable example is Global Equity, Nepal's first private equity and venture capital firm. Another is United Finance, which later merged with Nabil Bank. At the core of these initiatives has always been employment generation and channelling capital toward small and medium enterprises.

Through Global Equity, we provide growth capital to businesses that traditional banks are often hesitant to support. In Nepal, lending tends to be concentrated in low-risk areas such as real estate or vehicle financing. When entrepreneurs approach banks with agricultural or innovative projects, the process often becomes lengthy and uncertain. We consciously take on that risk by backing ideas with strong growth potential but limited access to conventional finance.

Beyond finance, BLC is involved in areas such as agricultural processing, where we work directly with farmers by providing advances and bridging capital gaps. In our distribution businesses, many dealers and wholesalers are SMEs. By extending business credit, we support their growth, job creation, and contribution to the wider economy. Collectively, these efforts strengthen Nepal's institutional and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Looking back at your career, which decision tested your judgement the most, and what did it teach you about leadership?

In Nepal, every day presents a new challenge. Each situation demands its own strategy and execution, and outcomes are rarely predictable. Being part of a diversified group while also engaging with organisations like CNI means we are constantly making decisions under uncertainty.

One decision that stands out was our expansion into healthcare. It was highly capital-intensive, and there were legitimate concerns about timing and risk. After careful deliberation at the board level, we decided to proceed. In hindsight, it was the right decision made at the right time.

A similar debate arose during the expansion of our pharmacy chain. Many questioned the rationale for investing in physical pharmacies as online platforms gained momentum. Today, we operate around 15 pharmacies across Kathmandu, with plans for significant expansion. These experiences reinforced a key lesson: there is never a perfect time to start or expand a business. Leadership often requires creating the right conditions yourself and having the confidence to move forward despite uncertainty.

How has your understanding of risk evolved over the years, particularly in a market like Nepal?

Earlier in my career, I viewed risk primarily through the lens of minimisation, focusing on how much could be reduced or avoided. Over time, working in Nepal taught me the limits of that approach.

In a market like ours, risk is unavoidable. What has changed is my willingness to engage with it rather than resist it. I now focus on understanding its nature, anticipating where it may arise, and finding ways to manage it effectively.

If Nepal can ensure policy consistency across political cycles and modernise its regulatory framework to reflect present day realities, the economy has the potential to move beyond resilience toward sustained growth.

In a market like ours, risk is unavoidable. What has changed is my willingness to engage with it rather than resist it. I now focus on understanding its nature, anticipating where it may arise, and finding ways to manage it effectively.

As a result, my risk appetite has evolved. Today, I see risk not only as a challenge but also as a source of opportunity. Instead of trying to eliminate it, I focus on managing it intelligently and leveraging it to create value.

What aspect of your work would surprise people who only see your public profile?

Most people associate me primarily with corporate work, which is understandable given how deeply involved I am in business operations. What is less visible is my engagement with social and humanitarian causes.

I currently serve as First Vice President of the Lions Club of Kathmandu and am involved in several community-focused initiatives. I have also represented a nutritional committee at the National Planning Commission. These roles reflect a dimension of my work that is quieter but equally important to me. I strongly believe that commerce and community should not operate in isolation, and I see my role as helping build bridges between the two.

In an environment of constant short-term pressure, how do you define sustainable growth?

Nepal is a market where conditions change rapidly. Targets shift, assumptions collapse, and plans often need to be revised mid-course. In my experience, Plan A rarely succeeds; more often, it is Plan C or D or something entirely unplanned that works.

In such an environment, sustainability becomes both more challenging and more critical. At BLC, we believe growth without sustainability is not real growth. It may look impressive in the short term but it does not endure.

We have therefore built sustainability into our systems and decision making processes. Whether in education, healthcare, or agricultural processing, we assess every initiative through a long-term lens. Community development is not incidental for us; it is central to our vision.

What distinguishes strong institutions from merely successful ones in Nepal's business context?

Success and strength are often conflated, but they are not the same. Nepal has seen many institutions grow rapidly and attract attention, only to struggle or disappear later.

Such success is often driven by narrow metrics like rapid expansion, top-line growth, or short-term profitability. When transparency, governance, and stakeholder inclusion are overlooked, that success becomes fragile.

Strong institutions are built for endurance. They may not always be the largest or fastest-growing, but they create lasting impact. They are anchored in sound governance, clear values, and a genuine commitment to long-term stakeholder benefit. Success without strength is temporary; strength comes from depth, not scale alone.

How do you balance commercial objectives with long-term responsibility to customers and the broader economy?

Our starting point has always been clear: profit is an outcome, not the objective. We focus on delivering meaningful value and a better experience to our customers.

When customers derive real benefit, trust follows naturally, and profitability follows trust. This philosophy shapes how we design our products and services, with an emphasis on value creation rather than short-term financial gain.

Our board has been explicit about this vision. Long-term sustainability and customer satisfaction sit at the centre of every decision. If we expect customers to stay with us, we must earn that loyalty through consistency, reliability and genuine value.

Nepal's economy is often described as resilient but constrained. From your perspective, what is holding it back the most right now?

Nepal occupies a strategic position between two global economic engines, India and China. Both are growing rapidly, yet Nepal has struggled to benefit meaningfully from that growth. A key reason is the country's difficulty in aligning long-term national objectives with geopolitical and economic realities.

Over time, political alignment has often swung between our southern and northern neighbours. In attempting to favour one side, we sometimes unsettle the other. This imbalance has prevented Nepal from leveraging its geographic advantage consistently and strategically.

Political instability is another reality. Given the structure of our electoral system, frequent changes in government are almost inevitable. While change in itself is not ideal, the bigger challenge for businesses is the resulting inconsistency in policies.

Policy unpredictability creates deep uncertainty for investors. Businesses plan over long horizons, often 10, 20, or even 30 years. Large investments take time to break even and even longer to generate returns. When policies shift abruptly, such as incentives introduced by one government and withdrawn by the next, entire business models can be disrupted. Once capital is committed, it cannot simply be reversed.

Beyond inconsistency, many policies are outdated, designed decades ago in a very different economic and social context. The world today is rapidly changing, driven by technology, globalisation, and evolving expectations. Just as parenting methods from one generation may not work for the next, policies from a previous era cannot effectively govern today's dynamic, digital economy.

Even when new policies are introduced, ambiguities persist. Stakeholders interpret them differently, and enforcement authorities often apply them inconsistently. This creates confusion and unpredictability for businesses trying to operate responsibly.

If Nepal can ensure policy consistency across political cycles and modernise its regulatory framework to reflect present day realities, the economy has the potential to move beyond resilience toward sustained growth. Without such measures, uncertainty will continue to hold it back more than any external constraint.

What role should banks and financial institutions realistically play in supporting productive sectors rather than speculative activity?

This requires a significant shift in both policy thinking and institutional mindset. Banks are naturally driven by profitability, which is not inherently wrong. However, this focus often directs capital toward lower risk, asset backed activities, rather than productive but riskier sectors.

In Nepal, this imbalance is clear. Large business groups can access hundreds of crores in loans, while a small farmer or entrepreneur trying to start a venture such as kiwi farming struggles to secure even modest credit. From a bank's perspective, lending to established groups feels safer and more convenient, especially under pressure to balance risk and return.

This is where private equity and venture capital institutions become essential. Banks cannot - and should not - directly fund high-risk early-stage ventures under current regulatory frameworks. But they can allocate a portion of their capital to professionally managed PE and VC funds with the expertise to assess and manage these risks. These intermediaries can bridge the gap between capital and end users more effectively.

Regulatory support is crucial for this model to work. The central bank and government need to create space for banks to invest in these funds, possibly through public-private partnership models. Countries with strong startup ecosystems, in Asia and beyond, accept that failure is part of innovation. Without that acceptance, risk-taking is stifled. Supporting productive sectors requires building systems that absorb risk intelligently, not avoiding it altogether.

How do you see Nepal's financial sector evolving over the next decade, especially in terms of governance and transparency?

Technology has already begun reshaping Nepal's financial sector. The rise of fintech has made banking more inclusive, decentralised and accessible. Digital platforms have reduced entry barriers and brought more people into the formal financial system.

However, governance and transparency remain critical concerns. On the surface, the sector appears transparent, but in practice, layers of opacity persist. Recent challenges in development banks and financial institutions have exposed weaknesses in risk assessment and lending practices. In many cases, decisions were influenced by vested interests rather than sound financial judgement.

Technology alone cannot solve these issues. Digital systems improve transparency only if the intent behind them is genuine. If people seek to manipulate systems, they will find ways to do so, regardless of technological advancement.

True transparency must start at the board and management level. Banks deal with public money, and that responsibility cannot be taken lightly. When boards push aggressively for short-term returns and rapid balance-sheet growth, management often responds by taking hidden risks. These risks surface years later, when loans become non-performing. For Nepal's financial sector to mature, accountability must become as important as profitability.

Are we doing enough to channel capital toward entrepreneurship, manufacturing and value-adding industries in Nepal?

At present, the answer is no. While entrepreneurship and startups are increasingly discussed, capital remains concentrated in relatively safe and familiar sectors such as real estate, hydropower, and hospitality.

Even venture capital and private equity funds, despite higher risk tolerance, often invest in safer projects. Truly early-stage entrepreneurs and small manufacturing ventures still struggle to access capital. This highlights the critical need for policy reform.

If Nepal wants to foster value creation, it must actively support mechanisms that channel funds to SMEs and early stage businesses. This requires not only financial instruments but also regulatory clarity, risk sharing frameworks, and a cultural shift toward accepting entrepreneurial failure as part of progress.

Which economic reform would you prioritise if you had the government's ear for one year?

Policy consistency would be my top priority. Businesses can adapt to political change, but they cannot operate under constantly shifting rules. When incentives are introduced by one government and withdrawn by the next, long-term planning becomes nearly impossible.

Investment decisions are made over decades, not budget cycles. Sudden policy reversals disrupt entire business models and discourage future investment. Beyond consistency, policies also need to be updated more frequently. Many regulations were designed for a very different era and struggle to address today's economic realities.

Clear, modern, and consistently applied policies would do more for Nepal's economy than any single incentive package. Without them, even well-intentioned reforms lose their impact.

When you look ahead, what would you like your professional legacy to stand for?

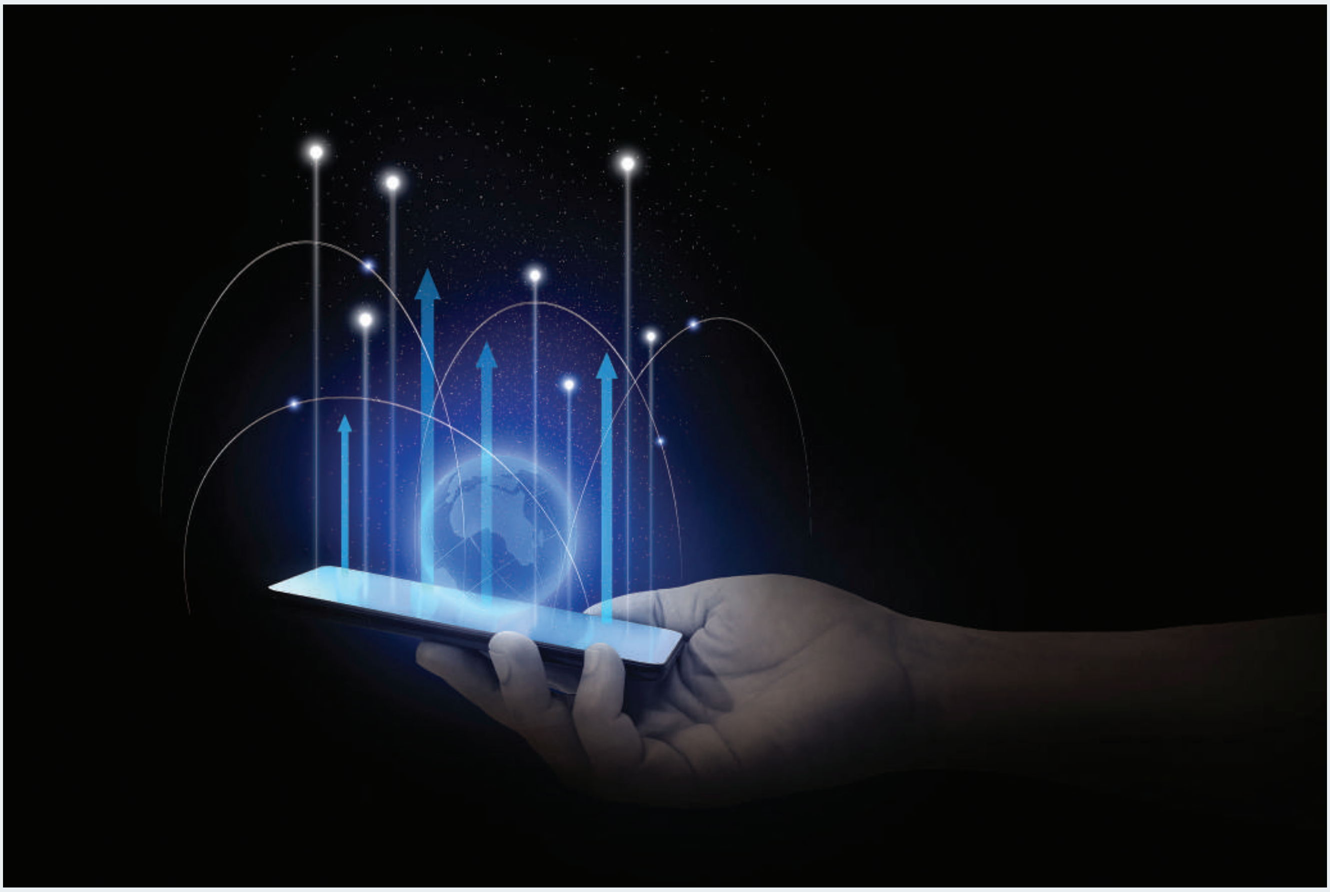
I would like my legacy to be guided by ethics and values. Above all, I want to be remembered for helping build bridges between commerce and community.

I want my work to reflect impact, bringing people from the margins into the mainstream, and helping those already in the mainstream grow further. Numbers matter, but they are not the full story.

Ultimately, I hope my legacy represents meaningful and lasting contribution. As a Nepali, I want to see my country confident, prosperous and hopeful. If my work plays even a small role in that journey, I would consider it a life well spent. **B**

As a Nepali, I want to see my country confident, prosperous and hopeful. If my work plays even a small role in that journey, I would consider it a life well spent.

NEPAL'S TECH ECONOMY MISPRICED, NOT HIGH RISK



In an era where global capital prioritises scale and speed, Nepal presents a paradox. Despite strong technical talent, growing digital capabilities and founders already serving international markets, the country remains undercapitalised. This disconnect raises a critical question: is Nepal genuinely a high-risk frontier market, or is it mispriced due to outdated perceptions that fail to reflect the resilience and global exposure of today's entrepreneurs?

To examine this, **Business 360** spoke with four leaders from Nepal's technology ecosystem: **Bipin Budhathoki**, Founder of Tech Bato; **Biraj Singh Thapa**, Associate Professor at Kathmandu University; **Saroj Adhikari**, CEO of Cloud Mandap; and **Saroj Raut**, CTO of Trackon Nepal. Their insights suggest that what investors often categorise as "risk" is, in reality, evidence of adaptability and execution under constraint. Nepali founders have built globally competitive products with limited capital, navigating policy gaps and structural challenges, conditions that traditional investment frameworks struggle to assess accurately.

As Nepal reaches a pivotal moment, the discussion shifts from survival to scale. In an economy no longer bounded by domestic market size, participants emphasise the role of patient, informed capital in building a self-sustaining innovation ecosystem, one that supports inclusion, resilience and long-term national competitiveness.

REDMI Note 15 Series

It's titan tough

- 6500mAh battery with 100W HyperCharge
- 2.5-meter drop resistance IP66/IP68/IP69/IP69K Rating
- New 200MP ultimate-clarity camera
- 6.83" 1.5K CrystalRes All-Curved display

Buy and get great offer

REDMI Note 15 5G

REDMI Note 15

REDMI Buds 6 Play

@ Rs.999

~~Rs.1,999~~

REDMI Note 15 Pro 5G

REDMI Note 15 Pro+ 5G

REDMI Buds 8 Lite

@ Rs.1,999

~~Rs.3,999~~

Enjoy this exclusive offer from 19th January through 14th February.

TÜV SÜD Product Certification — Water-resistant Endurance ★★★★★

TÜV SÜD Product Certification — High Battery Endurance in Cycles — 1600 —

SGS ★★★★★ Premium Performance — Crush resistance | Drop resistance | Bending resistance

Easy Finance

9 MONTHS

0% EMI

Only Citizenship Needed

Powered by Xiaomi HyperOS

The country is not risk-prone; it is incorrectly priced. Entrepreneurs here are internationally networked, technically strong and highly resourceful. They build products with limited budgets, infrastructure and government support. What is perceived as risk is often resilience and agility.

BIPIN BUDHATHOKI
Founder, Tech Bato

Is Nepal genuinely a high-risk frontier market, or simply mispriced due to outdated perceptions?

Biraj Singh Thapa: Nepal is often labelled a high-risk market, and to some extent that perception is understandable. However, the risk here is contextual rather than unmanageable. Much of this view is rooted in outdated narratives that no longer reflect current realities. Today's Nepali entrepreneurs are digitally capable, globally exposed and highly resourceful. They have built resilient businesses despite capital scarcity, weak policy support and structural constraints. That, in itself, demonstrates that while risk exists, it is measurable and reducible. In many cases, Nepal is less "high-risk" and more mispriced.

Bipin Budhathoki: Nepal is frequently described as a high-risk frontier market, but that assessment is increasingly irrelevant. The country is not risk-prone; it is incorrectly priced. Entrepreneurs here are internationally networked, technically strong and highly resourceful. They build products with limited budgets, infrastructure and government support. What is perceived as risk is often resilience and agility.

Saroj Raut: Nepal is mispriced, not inherently high risk. The frontier-market label reflects an outdated reality defined by political instability, infrastructure gaps and limited capital. Today, founders are building to global standards, operating on cloud infrastructure and serving international clients. Many have trained or worked in major tech hubs before returning or starting businesses here. The digital revolution has changed where and how innovation happens, but traditional risk frameworks have not caught up. What investors often see as risk is largely information asymmetry.

Saroj Adhikari: The "high-risk" label attached to Nepal is increasingly a legacy perception. During my time at Success Academies in New York, we demonstrated that rigorous systems and high standards can deliver world-class outcomes regardless of geography. That experience informs my work at Cloud Mandap, where we are building an innovation hub focused not only on technical skills but also on corporate readiness for global markets.
Nepal is no longer a frontier; it is emerging as a sub-hub. Global firms operate capability centres just one time zone away, and companies like SecurityPal manage Silicon Valley clients from Kathmandu. The risk lies not in talent capability, but in the lag between global perception and the level of innovation already happening locally.

What kind of scale and innovation becomes possible when smart, patient capital enters the ecosystem?

Biraj Singh Thapa: Nepal requires stronger coordination to build a functioning ecosystem where stakeholders grow collectively rather than competing for survival. When patient capital enters such an environment, founders gain the freedom to think long term investing in research, talent development, institutional strength and scalable products. Capital that combines patience with purpose can help shape the ecosystem through mentorship, academia–industry linkages and policy engagement. In Nepal, smart investment is about enabling systemic growth, not just generating returns.

Bipin Budhathoki: Through products like WPLekhak and Tech Bato, I have seen what innovation is possible even with limited capital. With access to smart capital, such innovation can scale faster and compete regionally or globally. However, capital must come with responsibility. Investors should go beyond financial returns to focus on governance, mentorship and long-term value creation. Nepal's ecosystem needs partners, not extractors.

Saroj Raut: Founders in Nepal have already proven they can build sustainable businesses under severe constraints. When capital scarcity is no

Nepal is often labelled a high-risk market, and to some extent that perception is understandable. However, the risk here is contextual rather than unmanageable. Much of this view is rooted in outdated narratives that no longer reflect current realities. Today's Nepali entrepreneurs are digitally capable, globally exposed and highly resourceful.

BIRAJ SINGH THAPA
Associate Professor, Kathmandu University

longer the primary bottleneck, the transformation potential is significant. Good capital enables long-term thinking, investment in R&D, stronger infrastructure and better talent retention. Investors are not just funding companies; they are shaping the country's economic future. The goal must extend beyond returns to building a self-sustaining innovation economy that creates jobs and retains talent.

Saroj Adhikari: Operating in capital-constrained environments builds resilience, but moving from resilience to scale requires capital that understands long-term engineering fundamentals. At Cloud Mandap, we focus on automation and scalable architecture that deliver long-term efficiency. Smart capital should help institutionalise excellence by bringing global governance and technical mentorship, transforming startups into reliable enterprises capable of competing internationally.

Nepal is no longer a frontier; it is emerging as a sub-hub. Global firms operate capability centres just one time zone away, and companies like SecurityPal manage Silicon Valley clients from Kathmandu. The risk lies not in talent capability, but in the lag between global perception and the level of innovation already happening locally.

SAROJ ADHIKARI
CEO, Cloud Mandap

OPINION

The small-market argument is outdated. Cloud infrastructure, digital payments and global distribution allow Nepali startups to serve international customers from day one. The domestic market becomes a testing ground, not a ceiling. Nepal's geographic position between two major economies further strengthens its strategic value.

SAROJ RAUT
CTO, Trackon Nepal

Is Nepal early for investors, or already late?

Biraj Singh Thapa: Nepal is at a critical inflection point. Talent migration and missed opportunities are real concerns, but the market remains early enough for first movers to shape sectors and governance structures. In a global economy shaped by climate priorities and AI-driven change, Nepal's strategic location and renewable energy resources offer long-term, high-return opportunities for investors who act now.

Bipin Budhathoki: Nepal remains in an early stage, particularly in sectors such as edtech, fintech, AI and climate technology. The greater risk lies not in entering too early, but in entering too late, after the most capable talent has already moved on.

Saroj Raut: Nepal is both early and running out of time. The first-mover advantage is real, but the window is narrowing. Each year of delayed investment accelerates brain drain and undervalued exits. The upside exists because proven founders and viable models are already present, while infrastructure is still evolving. Investors who act now stand to gain outsized returns.

Saroj Adhikari: Nepal is in a "golden window"- early enough for asymmetric upside, yet mature enough to demonstrate proof of concept. Talent migration should be seen as global circulation rather than pure loss. At Cloud Mandap, we are building systems that make staying in Nepal intellectually and financially competitive by aligning education with global industry standards.

Do traditional concerns about Nepal's small domestic market still apply?

Biraj Singh Thapa: The distinction between local and global markets is increasingly blurred. What matters is the cost-quality equation, not domestic market size. Nepal offers cost efficiency, rapid digital adoption and openness to innovation. Diaspora capital and regional funds can play a catalytic role by connecting local capability with global demand.

Bipin Budhathoki: Concerns about market size are no longer decisive. Startups can operate globally from inception. Diaspora and regional investors should act as ecosystem partners, helping bridge trust and access to global markets.

Saroj Raut: The small-market argument is outdated. Cloud infrastructure, digital payments and global distribution allow Nepali startups to serve international customers from day one. The domestic market becomes a testing ground, not a ceiling. Nepal's geographic position between two major economies further strengthens its strategic value.

What does responsible investment look like in Nepal?

Biraj Singh Thapa: Responsible investment should align profit with inclusion, resilience and long-term societal benefit. Nepal already has talent, resources and market access, but lacks coordination. Investors should prioritise capacity building and ecosystem development, while governments must move beyond regulation toward facilitation and partnership.

Bipin Budhathoki: Responsible investment can help reduce inequality and expand access to technology, supporting sustainable national growth.

Saroj Raut: Technology amplifies existing systems. Responsible capital must actively support ventures that expand access - whether through fintech, edtech, agritech or healthtech - and invest in ecosystem infrastructure such as accelerators and mentorship. Success should be measured not only in returns, but in jobs created, skills developed and long-term economic sovereignty.

Saroj Adhikari: Responsible investment should focus on equitable automation, technology that elevates rather than replaces people. At Cloud Mandap, our aim is to build infrastructure that enables businesses across Nepal to compete globally. This is about more than technical skills; it is about resilience, inclusion and national capability. B


HOTEL SHANKER
Old World Elegance
MEETINGS FRAMED IN HISTORY
Host your meetings in a setting where royal architecture inspires modern conversations.
Lazimpat, Kathmandu | 977 1 4510151/152 | shankerhotel.com.np, sales@shankerhotel.com
WWW.SHANKERHOTEL.COM.NP

FEATURE

Inside Nepal's Quiet Software Export Boom, and What It Needs to Go Global

Text: Monica Lohani

For years, Nepal underestimated one of its fastest-growing export sectors. While public attention remained fixed on traditional handicrafts and low-margin merchandise, a far more scalable industry was quietly earning foreign currency: software and IT services.

By the time the government formally recognised information technology as a priority export in the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy (NTIS) 2023, the sector was already well underway. A landmark study by the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) revealed that in 2022 alone, Nepal exported $515.4 million worth of IT products and services, without meaningful incentives, branding support or tailored policy frameworks.

The revelation caught policymakers off guard. IT exports had quietly outperformed most traditional goods, contributing roughly 1.4% of GDP and accounting for 5.5% of foreign exchange reserves. More importantly, they signalled a structural shift: Nepal had found a globally competitive export that was digital, scalable and largely immune to geography.

A Landlocked Country Finds a Sea-Locked Economy

Unlike traditional exports dependent on imported raw materials and thin margins, software services are almost entirely intellectual property produced in Nepal. Nearly every export dollar stays in the domestic economy. By 2022, the sector's value was nearly

Highlights

Policy Recommendations: How Nepal Can Scale Its Software Exports

- **Formalise Without Penalising**
  Create simplified compliance and tax frameworks for freelancers and SMEs to encourage formal reporting without discouraging participation.
- **Enable Direct Export Branding**
  Allow IT firms to sell and brand products internationally without routing through third parties.
- **Improve Export Data Systems**
  Modernise banking and reporting mechanisms to distinguish software exports from remittances.
- **Invest in Product Ecosystems**
  Support venture funding, IP protection and global go-to-market programmes for product-led startups.
- **Align Education With Industry**
  Strengthen practical, project-based learning and industry collaboration to sustain talent pipelines.
- **Treat Software as Strategic Infrastructure**
  Recognise IT exports as a long-term economic pillar, on par with hydropower and tourism.

three times that of refined soybean oil, then Nepal's top merchandise export, and far exceeded earnings from carpets and textiles.

This discovery reshaped government ambition. In the 2024/25 budget, Nepal declared a "Decade of Information Technology," targeting Rs 3 trillion ($22.5 billion) in IT exports over ten years and pledging to create 500,000 direct jobs, a strategic attempt to convert chronic brain drain into digital retention.

"It's quiet because most of it happens outside formal channels," says Saroj Raut, CTO of Trackon Nepal. "People are building skills, reputations and global client bases without publicity. The real export figure is likely far higher than what shows up in official data."

Industry estimates suggest momentum is accelerating. By 2023/24, software exports were already approaching $1 billion, supported by a workforce exceeding 80,000 professionals working remotely, freelancing or through export-oriented firms.

The Invisible Economy Problem

Despite its scale, much of Nepal's software economy remains statistically invisible. Freelancers and small firms often receive foreign payments as remittances to avoid complex regulatory and tax compliance, masking the sector's true size.

"The income is legal, but it's misclassified," says Gaurav Pandey, President of NAS-IT. "Without accurate data, policy design becomes guesswork."

Formalising payment channels and improving export reporting are now priorities. While the government's long-term ambition is $22 billion in exports, industry leaders consider $5–6 billion by 2034 a realistic intermediate milestone. By some estimates, Nepal has already crossed the $1 billion mark in 2025.

What Nepal Really Exports

Contrary to assumptions, Nepal's software exports are not limited to low-value outsourcing. While entry-level services exist, many firms deliver complex, high-value work: full-stack development, cloud architecture, data analytics, cybersecurity, AI services and long-term product maintenance.

Nepali teams increasingly operate as embedded extensions of global companies rather than transactional vendors.

"The challenge isn't capability, it's branding and trust," Pandey explains. "Global clients trust known brands. Nepali firms often build the product, but someone else sells it."

Companies such as Leapfrog Technology, TechKraft, CloudFactory and Logpoint Nepal illustrate this evolution. Nepal is exporting not just labour, but reliability, systems thinking and long-term collaboration.

Why Nepal Is Competitive

Cost matters, but it is not decisive. Nepal's competitive advantage lies in adaptability, strong English proficiency, growing exposure to global tools and a workforce motivated by limited domestic opportunities.

"There's a parallel economy here," says Raut. "Thousands of professionals earn in dollars and euros while living in Nepal. It barely shows up in official numbers."

Remote work, global freelancing platforms and self-directed learning have enabled Nepal to integrate into the global digital economy without large-scale state intervention, a rare phenomenon among developing countries.

Policy Is Catching Up, Slowly

Recognition has improved, but regulation still lags. Firms face uncertainty around taxation, export branding, foreign currency access and overseas investment.

"F1Soft builds international-grade software, but regulatory barriers force it to sell through third parties who rebrand and export it," Pandey says. "That value should come directly to Nepal."

As with startups a decade earlier, the pattern is familiar: the private sector innovates first; policy follows later.

COST MATTERS, BUT IT IS NOT DECISIVE. NEPAL'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE LIES IN ADAPTABILITY, STRONG ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, GROWING EXPOSURE TO GLOBAL TOOLS AND A WORKFORCE MOTIVATED BY LIMITED DOMESTIC OPPORTUNITIES.

"THERE'S A PARALLEL ECONOMY HERE," SAYS RAUT. "THOUSANDS OF PROFESSIONALS EARN IN DOLLARS AND EUROS WHILE LIVING IN NEPAL. IT BARELY SHOWS UP IN OFFICIAL NUMBERS."

"The billion-dollar milestone was achieved despite policy constraints," Pandey adds. "With the right framework, the sector could scale much faster."

Services Today, Products Tomorrow

Most exports remain service-based. While services generate steady income, products create scale, intellectual property and global brand equity.

Transitioning to product-led growth will require patient capital, legal clarity and international market access, conditions still evolving in Nepal.

Whether Nepal can make that leap will define the next phase of its software economy. **B**

FEATURE

As Digital Banking Grows, **Cyber Risks Deepen in Nepal's Financial Sector**

Text: Pushpa Raj Acharya

Nepal's rapid transition toward a digital economy has transformed the financial landscape, delivering unprecedented efficiency through mobile banking, e-wallets and real-time payment systems. However, this post-Covid 19 digital surge has also exposed serious vulnerabilities, as the development of robust cybersecurity infrastructure has struggled to keep pace with increasingly sophisticated threats. From repeated fraudulent card transactions to high-profile system breaches, the financial sector now faces a critical juncture where technological convenience must be balanced with rigorous security protocols.

Addressing these escalating risks requires a multifaceted approach that includes stronger board-level governance, advanced technical safeguards and heightened client awareness. As cyberattacks grow more complex and increasingly AI-driven, banks and financial institutions are under mounting pressure to strengthen internal controls and comply with evolving regulatory standards.

Recently, a client of Himalayan Bank experienced repeated fraudulent transactions on a virtual dollar card. Despite 22 attempted transactions, the bank's card department failed to detect the suspicious activity. Under normal circumstances, card transactions are blocked after three incorrect attempts; however, this safeguard did not activate even after the client lodged formal complaints via email and phone. The fraudulent transactions continued until the bank eventually blocked the card.

This incident underscores the urgent need for a technology-enabled, risk-based and regulatory-driven system to protect clients from financial fraud.

Commenting on the incident, Bhaskar Dahal, Head of the Card Department at Himalayan Bank, stated that the hacker executed a high volume of small, repetitive transactions and that the bank initiated recovery efforts immediately once the issue came to its attention.

As risks evolve in both form and complexity, banks and financial institutions (BFIs) in Nepal have been strengthening risk mitigation measures, particularly against technology-driven threats. The expansion of digital banking, mobile wallets, online remittances and real-time payment systems has introduced new vulnerabilities. Bhuvan Kumar Dahal, former President of the Nepal Bankers' Association (NBA), noted that BFIs remain cautious of such risks and have made substantial investments in technology to prevent cyber threats.

"However, client awareness is equally critical in preventing such scams," Dahal added. "BFIs have been actively educating customers on safeguarding themselves without exposing confidential information."

A recent incident at Sanima Bank further highlights the growing sophistication of cyber fraud. Bank employees identified an online survey form circulating under the bank's name and logo, falsely offering participants a reward of Rs 10,000. The form contained suspicious links designed to steal sensitive client data and was widely shared across Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms

via unverified accounts. In response to this unauthorised use of its identity, Sanima Bank alerted the Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police for investigation and issued public notices and emails to raise customer awareness.

The bank has urged customers not to click on suspicious links or share sensitive information such as one-time passwords (OTPs), passwords, PINs, bank account details or card information.

Sujeet Dhakal, Assistant CEO and Chief Risk Officer of Sanima Bank, emphasised that banks never request confidential details through social media, phone calls or messages. He urged customers to remain vigilant and verify information only through official channels. BFIs continue to operate 24/7 customer help centres to support their clients.

Cyber threats targeting financial transactions in Nepal have intensified significantly, driven by the rapid post-Covid 19 shift toward digital banking services such as e-wallets and mobile banking, which has outpaced the development of robust cybersecurity infrastructure. Cyberattacks on financial institutions have increased sharply. In the fiscal year 2024/25 alone, reported online fraud cases amounted to Rs 835.9 million, according to Nepal Police.

Board governance and strategic risk mitigation in the digital era

Cyber risks now represent one of the most significant threats to the financial sector and have become a top priority for boards seeking to protect systems and safeguard clients. In boardrooms across financial institutions, discussions on system resilience, client awareness and fraud prevention have taken centre stage. According to Upendra Prasad Poudel, former Chairperson of Nabil Bank, "Banks and financial institutions have invested heavily in strengthening their systems and training human resources to mitigate the risks of fraudulent transactions."

A notable example is the SWIFT-related hacking incident at NIC Asia Bank, which exposed critical vulnerabilities within the financial system. The case revealed serious internal control weaknesses, including reports that an employee associated with the SWIFT function had used a private email account. This highlighted significant gaps in cybersecurity discipline, staff awareness and system governance.

The 2017 SWIFT hack involved the unauthorised transfer of approximately Rs 460 million during the five-day Tihar holiday. A joint investigation by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) and KPMG identified major IT security lapses, including weak staff practices and poor IT management, such as allowing personal email use on secure systems. Despite these shortcomings, the bank was able to recover most of the funds by promptly alerting international correspondent banks.

Similar cyber heists have occurred internationally. In February 2016, hackers attempted to steal nearly $1 billion from Bangladesh Bank's account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York using fraudulent SWIFT messages. They succeeded in transferring $101 million, of which $81 million was laundered through Philippine casinos, while $20 million was recovered from a blocked transaction to Sri Lanka.

In Nepal, several board-level committees are mandated under the Banks and Financial Institutions Act (BAFIA), 2017 and the "Provisions related to corporate governance" outlined in Unified Directive-6 issued by NRB. These include the Audit Committee, Risk Management Committee, Remuneration Committee and the AML/CFT Committee.

The Risk Management Committee is chaired by a non-executive director, with the Chief Risk Officer serving as member secretary. The convenor of the Audit Committee acts as an ex officio member. As per NRB's Unified Directive-6, the committee meets every three months.

Over time, financial transactions have become increasingly technology-dependent. While technological advancement has modernised payment systems and enhanced efficiency, it has also enabled businesses to expand operations, scale services and improve competitiveness.

In this context, financial institutions have identified three major categories of risk: market risk, human resource risk and IT risk. IT risk includes cybersecurity threats such as phishing, ransomware, data breaches and malware; system failures due to hardware or software malfunctions; data management risks involving data loss or privacy non-compliance; and vendor-related risks.

Payment service providers and operators face similar challenges and are also working to enhance their security frameworks. The Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police has reported a growing number of complaints related to payment service providers (PSPs).

Data privacy concerns and regulatory challenges in an AI-driven ecosystem

Data privacy violations and unauthorised data sharing have emerged as major risks in the era of surveillance capitalism, which has become deeply embedded in the modern economy. Transactional cyber risks persist in Nepal's increasingly digital ecosystem, further compounding these challenges. For instance, client data stored on e-commerce platforms, ride-hailing services and other digital applications is often used across multiple contexts without the users' knowledge or consent.

Recently, Nepal Telecom came under scrutiny not only for providing gateway services for bulk messaging but also for allegedly allowing entities involved in these messages access to telecom data. This has raised serious concerns about data privacy, regulatory oversight and the potential misuse of sensitive subscriber information. Nepal Police recently arrested Nirdesh Sedhai for sending bulk messages containing sensitive content urging approximately five million people to join protests, using the Nepal Telecom gateway under the name "NT Alert."

While regulated sectors have aligned their systems and processes with legal requirements, and possess comparatively stronger legal and technical frameworks to address cyber risks, rising threats - particularly AI-driven attacks - continue to pose serious challenges. According to Deepak Raj Awasthi, Superintendent of Police and spokesperson for the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau, these emerging risks are testing the resilience of even well-regulated systems. **B**

Highlights

- **Online fraud losses reached Rs 835.9 million in FY 2024/25**, driven largely by digital banking and e-wallet scams (Nepal Police).
- **Banks and payment service providers are prime targets**, with phishing, fake links and impersonation scams most common.
- **Low digital literacy and human error** (OTP sharing, fake surveys) remain major vulnerabilities.
- **Cyber threats are outpacing regulatory and technical capacity**, despite IT risk directives from Nepal Rastra Bank.
- **AI-enabled fraud is emerging**, increasing the scale and sophistication of cybercrime in Nepal.


C10
ALL ELECTRIC
PREMIUM SUV
CLTC Range
530 KM
Ground Clearance
190 mm
Motor Power
160 kW
C10

FEATURE

Why Skills, Not Talent, **Will Shape Nepal's ICT Future**

Text: Prashtutee Thapa Magar

As digital transformation reshapes economies worldwide, the future of innovation depends not only on the availability of ICT career opportunities but also on how effectively talent and skills are cultivated. In the technology sector, talent may open the door, but it is skills developed through sustained practice and real-world experience that determine long-term success.

"Talent provides an initial inclination or comfort with technology, such as logical thinking or problem-solving," says Shreeyanch Shrestha, Founder and CEO of Samparka Digital Loyalty. "Skills, however, determine how far someone progresses."

Natural aptitude can make learning easier, but it is rarely sufficient on its own. Talent may offer a head start, but continuous learning and skill-building are what enable professionals to stay relevant in an industry defined by constant change.

"In ICT careers, skills are more important than talent," says Umesh Subedi, Co-founder of Skill Shikshya. "While talent may offer an initial advantage, the technology sector evolves rapidly and demands continuous learning. Skills can be developed, refined and adapted over time, allowing professionals to remain relevant and progress in their careers."

Merit, Mindset, and Mobility

The ICT industry is increasingly merit-based, rewarding effort, adaptability and results rather than background or formal credentials alone. Many professionals enter the field from non-traditional paths and succeed by continuously upgrading their skills.

"From my experience, your ability to solve problems, adapt to new technologies and deliver value matters more than raw talent," says Bibek Subedi, Co-founder of Vrit Technologies. "We hire for learning capacity and work ethic, not just natural ability."

Technology evolves so quickly that skills which were valuable five years ago may already be outdated. Developers who invest in continuous improvement, Bibek notes, consistently outperform those who rely solely on innate ability.

This philosophy is particularly relevant in Nepal, where the ICT ecosystem is growing but still faces a gap between education and industry readiness. According to Umesh, many motivated and educated applicants lack practical experience and exposure to real-world projects, a gap that inspired the creation of Skill Shikshya.

"When hiring for ICT roles, I prioritise problem-solving ability, learning agility and cultural fit," says Bibek. "Technical skills can be taught, but the mindset to break down complex problems and the hunger to learn cannot."

Skills Beyond Code

Success in the ICT career pipeline requires more than technical expertise. Adaptability, collaboration and ownership are increasingly critical as teams work across disciplines and borders.

According to Bibek, cultural alignment plays a major role in long-term performance. Professionals must thrive in collaborative environments, take initiative and think beyond assigned tasks. The ability to understand the broader impact of one's work often separates high performers from the rest.

"Without adequate skills, individuals may feel overwhelmed or discouraged," says Shreeyanch. "But with proper guidance, structured learning and hands-on practice, skill gaps can be closed."

Entering the ICT sector without perfect preparation is not necessarily a disadvantage. What matters most is the willingness to learn.

"The real risk isn't entering with inadequate skills," Bibek explains. "It's entering without the willingness to develop them."

At Vrit Technologies, junior developers who initially lacked experience have succeeded through mentorship, clear expectations and exposure to real projects. Those who expect to progress without effort, however, quickly become bottlenecks to their own growth.

The Power of Early Exposure

Early exposure to technology plays a critical role in strengthening the ICT career pipeline. Familiarity with digital tools at a young age reduces fear, builds confidence and encourages experimentation.

"At Skill Shikshya, we put this into practice through our junior coding platform, Young Crafts Academy," says Umesh, "where children engage with ICT concepts early."

Such exposure helps young learners discover interests and potential career paths before making major commitments. It also fosters curiosity, creativity and digital confidence, laying the groundwork for long-term growth.

Education remains a vital foundation, providing theoretical knowledge, analytical thinking and an understanding of core ICT concepts. However, its impact is greatest when combined with practical application.

"Learning to write code and learning to build scalable, production-ready systems are very different," Umesh notes. While education teaches fundamentals, real-world projects teach responsibility, quality and problem-solving under constraints.

Bridging Education and Industry

One of the most pressing challenges in Nepal's ICT ecosystem is the disconnect between academic instruction and industry expectations. Traditional curricula often struggle to keep pace with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain.

This gap can be narrowed through modernised curricula, project-based learning, and most importantly, internships and apprenticeships.

"In ICT, we learn best by doing," says Umesh. "Internships allow learners to apply knowledge, make mistakes and improve in real environments."

Bibek agrees. "The mindset shift is profound when students move from writing assignments for grades to writing code that real users depend on. Suddenly, quality, performance and user experience matter."

At Vrit Technologies, interns are placed on live projects, paired with mentors and given clear objectives, accelerating their transition from learners to professionals.

Scaling Talent in a Challenging Market

Beyond individual development, structural challenges remain. Limited infrastructure, outdated curricula, lack of mentorship and financial constraints continue to slow progress, particularly in developing economies.

According to Bibek, scaling ICT businesses in Nepal also presents market-level challenges, including talent retention, access to growth capital and limited local demand for advanced technology solutions.

"Many Nepali businesses are still hesitant to invest significantly in technology," he says. "That's why many ICT companies focus on international clients, where quality solutions are better understood and valued."

Sustainable growth, Bibek argues, comes from hiring for attitude and investing in long-term development rather than chasing short-term expertise.

Building a Sustainable Pipeline

A strong ICT career pipeline is not merely about producing developers. It is about building an ecosystem that supports continuous learning, innovation and progression from education to mastery.

"The pipeline creates a clear progression from learning to practice," says Shrestha. "It ensures professionals are not only technically competent but capable of solving real-world problems."

Nepal's digital future depends on investing in local talent through early exposure, hands-on experience, industry collaboration and a culture of continuous learning.

"The ICT field will keep changing," Shreeyanch concludes. "People who focus on fundamentals, build projects, stay curious and learn how to learn will always remain future-ready." **B**

Highlights

ICT Workforce & Employment in Nepal

- Nepal's **ICT sector remains a small share of total employment,** estimated at **around 0.35% of the national labour force**—among the lowest in the region.
- According to **World Bank estimates**, investment in ICT between 2017–2023 supported the creation of **about 6,746 jobs** in IT service exports.
- The government aims to expand this significantly, with targets to generate **1.5 million direct and indirect ICT jobs** over 2024–34 as part of the Digital Nepal/IT decade strategy.

Gender Representation in ICT

- Women are **substantially underrepresented** in Nepal's ICT workforce: only **7.88% of ICT company employees are women and as low as 0.5% in ICT-enabled firm**s, despite making up over half of the population.
- Women's participation in ICT leadership roles further declines, with **only about 19.55%** of women in managerial/executive positions within the sector.

Sector Growth Indicators

- The ICT sector's contribution to GDP is still modest but growing: projections estimate it at around **1.94% of national GDP in FY 2024/25**.
- Broader digital and ICT employment growth is tied to the **rapid expansion of internet adoption and workforce upskilling**, even as formal measurement of ICT jobs remains limited in national labour surveys.

CG | CEMENT

A Product of CG Cement Group

सम्राट सिमेन्ट

CG-SAMRAT

The Largest Cement Company of Nepal

जग देखि जुगसम्म

"Respecting Lumbini's spiritual and cultural essence is central to the resort's development. Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa is designed to complement, not compete with, the deeper meaning of the destination through spaces that embody peace, balance and mindfulness"

Vijayananmaran Shanmugam
Vice President - Operations & Asset Development
Lumbini Palace Resort

A seasoned hospitality leader with over 25 years of global experience, Vijayanamaran Shanmugam is a specialist in pre-opening excellence and operational turnarounds. Having held pivotal leadership roles with major international chains including Accor, IHG and Starwood, he has successfully managed complex assets across Nepal, India and the Middle East.

Numerous accolades including being honoured as the 'Best Emerging General Manager of Nepal' and recognised as an IHG 'Next Generation Leader' are testaments to his focus on operational precision and professional excellence.

Currently the Vice President of Operations & Asset Development at Lumbini Palace Resort, Shanmugam is spearheading the property's landmark rebranding into the Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa, Marriott's first venture outside Kathmandu Valley.

In this edition of **Business 360**, Shanmugam discusses the strategic vision behind this transformation, the integration of eco-luxury wellness and his commitment to elevating Lumbini into a premier global destination. Excerpts:

Lumbini Palace Resort has signed a management deal with Marriott International. What drove this decision, and what does Marriott bring that aligns with your long-term plans?

The decision to partner with Marriott International reflects a strategic vision to elevate Lumbini Palace Resort to global recognition while honouring the spiritual and natural significance of Lumbini. The region calls for hospitality that meets international standards while remaining authentic, mindful and culturally rooted.

Marriott brings world-class operational expertise, a trusted global brand and access to discerning travellers seeking meaningful, experience-driven stays. Their leadership in luxury resorts, wellness hospitality and sustainable practices aligns seamlessly with our ambition to develop a refined eco-luxury and wellness destination.

Rebranding as Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa is more than a name change; it marks a transformation in guest experience, service standards, design and international visibility positioning Lumbini as a premium destination for leisure, wellness and cultural exploration while supporting regional tourism and community growth.

This will be Marriott's first property outside Kathmandu Valley. From your perspective, how significant is this step for both Lumbini and Nepal's hospitality sector?

This development is a landmark moment for both Lumbini and Nepal's hospitality landscape. Marriott's first property outside Kathmandu Valley signals growing global confidence in emerging destinations that offer depth, authenticity and cultural richness.

Lumbini embodies values of peace, reflection and mindful living, attracting travellers seeking more than conventional sightseeing. Introducing a globally recognised brand allows the destination to evolve while maintaining its essence, offering world-class comfort alongside serenity, wellness and cultural sensitivity.

For Nepal's hospitality sector, this move sets a benchmark for quality and operational excellence, encourages decentralised tourism growth, attracts international investment, and demonstrates that Nepal can offer globally competitive, meaningful hospitality experiences beyond the capital.

How do you see this rebranding changing the perception of Lumbini, not just as a pilgrimage site but as a tourism destination?

Rebranding as Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa expands Lumbini's narrative from a pilgrimage focused destination to a multidimensional tourism hub. While spiritual journeys remain central, the resort introduces refined leisure, wellness and high-quality hospitality experiences.

This broader positioning appeals to wellness seekers, experiential travellers, destination wedding guests and international visitors who value comfort, design and service excellence. The presence of a globally trusted brand fosters confidence, encourages longer stays and invites immersive engagement with the region.

The resort presents Lumbini as a destination where tranquility meets sophistication, blending heritage, nature, wellness and contemporary luxury, while remaining respectful of its deeper cultural significance.

The project includes unique features: a water-based resort concept, wellness facilities and eco-friendly elements. What kind of guest experience are you ultimately trying to create?

The experience at Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa is designed as a journey, one that unfolds through water, wellness, nature and thoughtful design. As Nepal's first five-star water-based resort, it features musical fountains, immersive 3D water screens, boating experiences, mini cruises and dedicated water-based dining and spa venues creating a setting that feels both futuristic and tranquil.

Wellness forms the heart of the resort, extending beyond luxurious spa offerings to include organic living, naturotherapy and environments that naturally encourage mindfulness and balance. Meditation zones, open landscapes and wellness-focused design allow guests to disconnect and reconnect seamlessly.

Sustainability underpins every layer. As a Green Certified (Gold) eco-resort, the property integrates international environmental standards while delivering multi-specialty experiences in wellness, sports, culture and leisure. The ultimate goal is to provide an immersive, memorable and meaningful stay where global hospitality standards meet serenity, innovation and purpose.

Lumbini holds deep spiritual and cultural significance. How are you ensuring that luxury development respects and complements the essence of the birthplace of Lord Buddha?

Respecting Lumbini's spiritual and cultural essence is central to the resort's development. Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa is designed to complement, not compete with, the deeper meaning of the destination through spaces that embody peace, balance and mindfulness.

The resort incorporates meditation zones, cultural centres and a thoughtfully curated Buddha Theme Park featuring mini stupas and a Buddha museum, allowing guests to engage with heritage in a meaningful way. Architecture and landscaping are intentionally restrained and harmonious, ensuring that luxury feels calm, understated and reflective.

Service philosophies reinforce this approach, emphasising attentiveness, respect for the environment and quiet excellence. By combining cultural sensitivity, sustainability and global luxury standards, the resort enhances Lumbini's spiritual atmosphere while preserving authenticity for generations to come.

What kind of economic impact do you foresee locally, in terms of employment, skills development and opportunities for local suppliers?

The resort is expected to generate substantial local economic benefits. Employment opportunities will span hospitality operations, wellness, maintenance and management, creating both entry-level and long-term career paths for surrounding communities.

Skills development is a key focus. Local talent will gain exposure to global best practices through structured training, mentorship and operational guidance, building a stronger, more capable workforce for the wider hospitality sector.

Additionally, the resort actively integrates local suppliers, from organic agriculture to handicrafts, into its operations. This approach strengthens the local economy, promotes inclusive growth and preserves regional character while supporting sustainable development.

Sustainability is increasingly central to tourism. How are you balancing growth, environmental responsibility and proximity to a heritage zone like Lumbini?

Sustainability is a guiding principle for Lumbini Marriott Resort & Spa, particularly given its location near a globally significant heritage site. Growth is designed to be thoughtful, enhancing the destination without overburdening its environment or cultural fabric.

The resort is a Green Certified (Gold) eco-resort, adhering to international standards for energy efficiency, water management, waste reduction and responsible resource use. Design, landscaping and guest experiences are carefully calibrated to feel harmonious and respectful, complementing rather than intruding on the heritage zone.

By combining environmental stewardship with luxury tourism, the resort demonstrates that growth, responsibility and cultural sensitivity can coexist protecting Lumbini's legacy while providing exceptional guest experiences.

You have also indicated plans related to public investment and long-term expansion. How does this project fit into the broader growth strategy of Lumbini Palace Resort?

This project is a cornerstone of Lumbini Palace Resort's long-term growth strategy. The partnership with Marriott International and the transition to a five-star positioning represent a phased and strategic approach to building a resilient, future-ready hospitality platform rooted in global standards.

By strengthening governance, operational systems and brand credibility, the resort is laying a solid foundation for sustainable expansion. These efforts enable continued reinvestment in infrastructure, talent development and innovation, ensuring long-term operational excellence and consistency.

Looking beyond a single property, the broader vision encompasses multi-specialty tourism, wellness, sports and curated experiential offerings. Together, these initiatives position Lumbini Palace Resort as a professionally managed, scalable enterprise, one that is well-equipped to contribute meaningfully to Nepal's evolving tourism economy over the long term. **B**

CHINA'S GLOBAL REACH

DR JAKE SCOTT IS A POLITICAL THEORIST SPECIALISING IN POPULISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICAL CONSTITUTIONALITY. HE HAS TAUGHT AT MULTIPLE BRITISH UNIVERSITIES AND PRODUCED RESEARCH REPORTS FOR SEVERAL THINK TANKS.

Pivoting to the Middle East.

For China, the world's second-largest economy, the past year's economic fortunes have been characterised across three dimensions: declining domestic demand; increased tensions in the Pacific; and strategic repositioning in the Middle East. Each of these dimensions have combined to force China to re-evaluate its longstanding economic policies.

The ways in which China has come under pressure from, and responded to, the tariff policies of President Trump has led to some diagnoses of China as being on the verge of collapse due to a headline of slowing growth. In reality, the industrial nature of the nation remains high, be it industrial output, scale, or mobilisation, allowing China to continue producing at an elevated level.

However, as Damian Ma and Lizzi Lee explained for Foreign Affairs, China's role as the workshop of the world is under question as it attempts to balance its economy and encourage domestic demand in the face of declines at home. In fact, this appears to be a primary goal of Beijing's leadership, who declared at the Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC) in December 2025 that "Task One of China's 2026 economic work" is to "adhere to domestic demand as the main driver and build a strong domestic market."

It is not only poor demand at home for the products of the nation's factories that is damaging to the economic prospects of the country, but is now considered to be a security and strategic weakness. So much so that in the Chinese Communist Party's own intellectual journal Quishi, President Xi Jinping argued in December that expanding domestic demand is "necessary for maintaining the long-term, sustained, and healthy development of my country's economy, and also for meeting the people's growing needs for a better life."

As Lizzi Lee also wrote with Jing Qian for Foreign Policy, China's economic model has been predicated on state-directed industrial investment kick-starting processes that lead to mass production, with domestic consumption as an eventual, but not targeted, outcome. This has meant that there is an imbalance in the Chinese economy with mass production leading to an over-supply, while low incomes and poor wage growth are leading to an under-demand. When this occurs in an economy with low growth in wages, tight household budgets, and limited surplus capital for companies to reinvest, it leads to a negative spiral of suppressed prices, an inability to hire workers, and even lower profits to reinvest.

> **"Over the past 25 years, China's economic engagement with the Middle East has evolved from straightforward energy procurement into a broad, state-backed commercial presence.**

It's no surprise, then, that "for the first time, the CEWC [in December] highlighted an income-raising plan for urban and rural residents." It is a structural, and not a singular, phenomenon: the Chinese system remains extremely effective at producing capacity, but less effective at converting that capacity into broad household income gains and sustainable domestic consumption.

It is within this context of declining domestic demand that China has been forced to respond to Trump's tariffs. Were the domestic economy resilient enough with rising household incomes or increasing capital, the tariffs might pose less of a threat, but as it stands, their impact was predicted to exacerbate this tension even further. Amelia Lester's 2025 end-of-year roundup summarised neatly the global context: Trump's tariff escalations created global disruption and uncertainty, and Beijing's response was shaped by the assumption that volatility itself was part of the US negotiating posture. In this context, however, China has seen the opportunity to exploit the global volatility that comes with both the disruption of tariffs, and the seeming end of America's interventionism (a view that the opening of 2026 has seemingly reversed, at least initially).

As a result, China has looked elsewhere for opportunities to offset its structural economic issues, and has found willing and waiting partners in the Middle East, principally in the Gulf States.

China's engagement with the region is in no way new: over the past 25 years, China's economic engagement with the Middle East has evolved from straightforward energy procurement into a broad, state-backed commercial presence. In the early 2000s, relations were dominated by long-term oil and gas supply deals, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Iran, designed to underpin China's industrial growth. From the 2010s onward, as has been well-recorded, this deepened into infrastructure finance, construction, and logistics, especially under what has come to be known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Chinese firms building ports, industrial parks, power plants, and telecoms networks across the Gulf and Levant.

But while China has long been a major trading partner and energy customer for Middle Eastern states, the past year has seen economic engagement increasingly paired with, and buttressed by, diplomatic positioning, conflict mediation rhetoric, and an explicit ambition to shape the region's political environment.

Official Chinese messaging published at the end of 2025 is particularly telling: it frames China not merely as a partner for mutually-prosperous development, but as a stabilising force advocating dialogue, multilateralism, and political solutions to regional conflicts, an especially attractive offer for states in a period of what looks to be withdrawing US hegemony. The language marks a departure from earlier Chinese insistence on strict non-interference, replacing it with what Beijing presents as "constructive involvement" grounded in economic cooperation.

At the start of 2026, China's Middle East policy was articulated around a simple but significant premise: development and security are inseparable. Chinese officials are increasingly arguing that economic stagnation, reconstruction delays, and uneven development are not secondary effects of conflict but core drivers of instability.

"While China has long been a major trading partner and energy customer for Middle Eastern states, the past year has seen economic engagement increasingly paired with, and buttressed by, diplomatic positioning, conflict mediation rhetoric, and an explicit ambition to shape the region's political environment.

Rather than abandoning its economic focus, China has recast it as the foundation of peace itself. There is a clear merging of domestic and international rhetoric here: trade and economic prosperity is an essential component of security and stability, and not merely a route to development.

Central to this strategy has been the re-casting of the BRI as a geopolitical as well as economic framework. Not only this Initiative, but China has sought to embed further projects within a broader architecture of global initiatives, including its Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI). As a region particularly unstable but increasingly prosperous, the Middle East offers an obvious testing ground for this integrated model, where development finance, political dialogue, and multilateral engagement reinforce one another. **B**

Source: fee.org

The Regulatory Blind Spot for No-Poach Agreement in Nepal

Aakriti Kharel is a Trainee Associate in the Corporate Department at Pioneer Law Associates, and specialises in the energy, infrastructure and employment sectors.

Over the last two decades, competition law has undergone a significant transformation. Traditionally, competition law focused almost exclusively on product and service markets, targeting cartels, price-fixing, bid-rigging and market allocation among sellers. However, following the Silicon Valley no-poach conspiracy, a landmark case that exposed anticompetitive practices in the labour market by high-tech companies, the applicability of competition law in the labour market emerged as a nascent concept. Several jurisdictions like the USA, Japan, Hong Kong and Portugal have released public documents condemning no-poach agreements, but its legality remains a question mark in other jurisdictions.

A no-poach agreement broadly refers to an arrangement between two or more employers under which they agree not to solicit, recruit, hire or employ each other's employees. These agreements can take various forms, ranging from reciprocal arrangements to restrictions imposed by one employer on hiring a counterparty's employees, restrictions on mere solicitation to outright prohibition on employing counterparty's employees.

At the core, these deals limit worker mobility, downsize labour market competition, and sometimes extend beyond mere non-solicitation to outright bans on employment. While the proponents might argue these provisions protect investments in training or trade secrets, several jurisdictions view them as tools to stifle competition in labour inputs.

Are no-poach agreements anticompetitive practice?

A competitive labour market is generally characterised by multiple employers competing to hire workers, a large pool of workers with comparable skills, competitive wage-taking behaviour, and free mobility of labour. In such a setting, employees are paid market-equilibrium wages and can move to better-paying firms if wages are suppressed. No-poach agreements undermine these conditions by restricting employers from hiring or soliciting each other's employees. By eliminating competition for talent, these arrangements suppress wages, restrict labour mobility and distort competition in the labour input market.

From an economic perspective, no-poach agreements operate as monopsony power in the labour market, where there is a single buyer in the market, restricting competition. While monopsony was traditionally associated with a single dominant employer, modern economic analysis recognises that coordinated conduct among multiple employers can produce similar effects. By agreeing not to hire or solicit each other's employees, employers effectively behave as a single buyer of labour. For affected workers, the practical choice of alternative employers disappears, even though multiple firms formally exist. This loss of competition weakens workers' ability to negotiate higher wages, better benefits or improved working conditions. Existing labour market frictions such as high switching costs, limited information, search difficulties and regulatory barriers already restrict worker mobility. No-poach agreements exacerbate these conditions by contractually limiting employment opportunities, further entrenching employer power and suppressing labour market competition.

Recognising these harms, several jurisdictions have treated no-poach agreements as a form of anti-competitive conduct. In the United States, the Department of Justice considers naked no-poach agreements to be per se violations of competition law, while ancillary restraints are assessed under the rule of reason. Naked no-poach agreements are stand-alone arrangements between competing employers whose sole purpose is to restrict the hiring or solicitation of each other's employees, without being connected to any legitimate business collaboration. In contrast, ancillary no-poach restraints arise within the context of a broader, lawful commercial relationship, such as a joint venture or franchise arrangement, where the hiring restriction is intended to support a legitimate business objective. Such restraints are assessed under the rule of reason, meaning their legality depends on whether they are reasonably necessary and whether their pro-competitive justifications outweigh their anticompetitive effects.

The European Union applies an 'object or effect' (similar to that of the US) under Article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and India evaluates such agreements based on their appreciable adverse effect on competition, balanced against any pro-competitive justifications. These approaches reflect a growing consensus that labour markets should be protected from cartel-like restrictions in the same manner as product and service markets.

Can Nepal's competition law catch no-poach sneaks?

Section 3 of the Competition Promotion and Market Protection Act, 2063 prohibits agreements entered into with the object of restricting or limiting competition in relation to goods and services. Section 3(3) further provides that any agreement made in violation of this provision is automatically void. If said to fall under section 3, this structure indicates an object-based or per se approach, under which certain agreements are unlawful by their nature, without requiring a detailed analysis of their effects.

However, this provision applies only to goods and services and does not define the term 'service'. It is therefore unclear whether restrictions in the labour market fall within the scope of Section 3, under the scope of 'service'. While courts could interpret 'service' broadly to include labour markets, comparative practice generally treats labour markets as a distinct category rather than classifying them as services. If courts adopt a strict or literal interpretation of Section 3, no-poach agreements may fall outside its scope altogether.

That said, competition law in principle does not distinguish between different types of markets, and there is no economic justification for treating labour markets differently from markets for goods or services. A purposive interpretation of the Act, guided by its preamble and its objective of protecting competition and consumer welfare, could therefore support the application of competition law to labour market restraints. If no-poach agreements restrict labour mobility in a way that reduces innovation, efficiency, or product quality, the resulting harm may ultimately be felt by consumers in downstream markets. In such cases, courts may be inclined to assess no-poach agreements using an effects-based or rule-of-reason approach, despite the apparently object-based structure of Section 3.

In the absence of clear judicial precedent or regulatory guidance, the application of Nepal's competition law to no-poach agreements remain uncertain and will largely depend on how courts interpret the scope and purpose of the Act.

Section 517: The silent guardian against employee poaching traps?

Section 517 of the National Civil Code, 2074 (Civil Code) of Nepal renders void any contract that restrains a person from exercising a lawful profession, trade or business, unless such restraint is permitted by law. The Civil Code also invalidates contracts that are contrary to law, relate to matters prohibited by law, or pursue an illegal objective. For a contract to be enforceable, its purpose must therefore be lawful and consistent with public policy.

In the context of no-poach agreements, Nepali law does not expressly state whether such arrangements are illegal or contrary to law. However, strong arguments can be made that no-poach agreements impose unreasonable restrictions on labour mobility by limiting workers' access to employment opportunities and their ability to exercise a lawful profession. Because these agreements are typically concluded between competing employers and not with the consent of employees, they are difficult to justify on pro-competitive grounds, particularly when they operate as naked horizontal restraints. As a result, no-poach agreements may be vulnerable to being declared void under Section 517 of the National Civil Code.

Conclusion

In Nepal, no-poach agreements continue to remain uncertain as neither the competition law nor the civil code address them expressly. While the Competition Promotion and Market Protection Act may offer a possible avenue for scrutiny, its applicability to labour market restraints remains unclear due to its focus on goods and services. By contrast, Section 517 of the National Civil Code provides a more direct basis to question no-poach arrangements, as it invalidates contracts that unreasonably restrict the lawful exercise of a profession or trade. Until courts or regulators provide clearer guidance, the treatment of no-poach agreements will remain unsettled, and there needs to be legal clarity to ensure that labour markets are not insulated from competition principles. **B**

Nepal at the Heart of Global Climate Injustice

Purushottam Ojha is Former Commerce Secretary, Government of Nepal. He is also a Consultant on Trade, Transit, Investment and Private Sector Development.

Across the world, governments are locked in relentless competition to achieve higher economic growth, ensure equity and deliver prosperity to their people. Increasing production and productivity, staying competitive, and integrating goods and services into global markets dominate policy priorities. Yet the social and environmental costs of this race – labour exploitation, ecological degradation and climate vulnerability – are routinely sidelined. This growth model is increasingly proving to be both unsustainable and unjust.

The idea of sustainable development entered global discourse in the 1970s, notably at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm which formally linked development with environmental protection and led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This linkage gained renewed momentum in 1992 with the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), alongside landmark

conventions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Today, the consequences of ignoring those early warnings are unmistakable. Intensifying wildfires in California, floods and landslides in South Asia and Africa, and devastating hurricanes in the Caribbean have caused immense loss of life, property and livelihoods. These climate-induced disasters have also disrupted agricultural production, threatening food security and global supply chains.

Nepal, despite its negligible contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, is among the countries most exposed to climate risks. Rising temperatures are accelerating glacial melt in the Himalayas, pushing snowlines upward and increasing the risk of glacial lake outburst floods. Events such as the Seti River disaster in 2012 and the Trishuli River surge in 2025 highlight the growing vulnerability. Erratic rainfall patterns have compounded these risks. Intense downpours in September 2024 caused widespread destruction along river corridors in Kathmandu Valley, while recurring heat waves in the Terai continue to undermine agricultural productivity.

Climate change is already affecting Nepal's food systems, drinking water sources, irrigation, hydropower generation and biodiversity. Yet, the country lacks the technical capacity and financial resources required to effectively adapt to these challenges. This asymmetry – between responsibility and impact – lies at the heart of the global climate injustice.

To its credit, Nepal has long recognised the importance of sustainable development. As early as the Eighth Plan (1992–97), the country committed to balancing agricultural development with environmental protection. The current Sixteenth Plan (2024–29) builds on this foundation by prioritising biodiversity conservation, green economic growth and climate resilience. Ambitious targets include increasing the forest sector's contribution to GDP from 3% to 5%, raising climate-responsive budgeting from 6% to 20%, enhancing forest density and significantly expanding carbon sequestration through renewable energy and forest management. Community forestry initiatives have already helped increase forest cover to about 45%.

> GREEN GROWTH IS NOT A LUXURY FOR NEPAL; IT IS A NECESSITY. BUT ITS SUCCESS DEPENDS AS MUCH ON GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AS ON NATIONAL COMMITMENT. WITHOUT EQUITABLE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, THE PROMISE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RISKS REMAINING AN ASPIRATION RATHER THAN A LIVED REALITY.

However, national efforts alone are insufficient in the absence of robust global cooperation. Nepal has received limited support from international mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, primarily for adaptation measures. While a USD 45 million agreement with the World Bank under carbon trading initiatives offers some relief, uncertainty over long-term international commitment remains a serious concern.

This concern has been amplified by shifting political narratives in developed countries. The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement and its disengagement from key international climate and renewable energy institutions undermine collective global action. Such decisions disregard the lived realities of billions of people facing intensified climate risks – food insecurity, biodiversity loss, extreme weather events and rising economic costs.

At this critical juncture, developed countries – particularly those with the highest historical responsibility for ecological damage – must demonstrate leadership. Supporting adaptation and resilience in least developed and climate-vulnerable countries is not charity; it is a matter of global responsibility and shared survival.

For Nepal, green growth must translate into concrete, livelihood-centred strategies. Priority should be given to the cultivation, processing and sustainable use of non-timber forest products to generate rural employment and export income. Private forestry and sustainable hardwood production should be promoted, with appropriate recognition of forests as productive economic assets supporting manufacturing industries.

At the same time, the transition to clean energy must accelerate. Incentives for electric vehicles, wider adoption of electric appliances, and large-scale investment in renewable energy – initiated decades ago but still underdeveloped – are essential. Expanding access to clean energy in rural and remote areas can reduce fossil fuel dependence, create local jobs and improve living standards.

Green growth is not a luxury for Nepal; it is a necessity. But its success depends as much on global solidarity as on national commitment. Without equitable international cooperation, the promise of sustainable development risks remaining an aspiration rather than a lived reality. **B**

Brand Building in Nepal is Changing, Fast

Pratik Aryal is the Founder of 88 collective. He has been engaged in marketing activity and education since 2007. He is currently providing strategic marketing consultancy to businesses, associations and individuals who seek organized change.

For years, marketing decisions in Nepal were driven by bhaichara and word-of-mouth insights from wholesalers in New Road or Kalimati. Today, that model is quietly but decisively changing.

As mobile penetration and internet access expand, technology is becoming the backbone of marketing strategy. Brands are no longer guessing. They are listening, measuring and adapting.

Here's what that shift looks like in practice:

Product development is now data-led

Nepali FMCGs and startups are using social listening on platforms like TikTok and Instagram to spot trends early. The rise of health-conscious products in Kathmandu wasn't intuition; it was visible in data. Even packaging decisions are being tested using 3D prototyping before launch.

Pricing is moving from rigid to dynamic

Traditionally, pricing followed a cost-plus model with little flexibility. That is changing. Airlines and boutique hotels are already using dynamic pricing tools that factor in demand, seasonality and events like Dashain. Retail is slowly following.

Supply chains are finally going digital

Tracking goods across Nepal is easier than ever. Tech-driven logistics, GPS tracking and better connectivity are closing the gap between producers and consumers. The next step is full integration from POS data triggering warehouse restocks to production planning, reducing dead stock and freeing up working capital.

Promotion is shifting from reach to precision

Is the era of highway hoardings ending? Maybe. With Facebook and TikTok, brands can now target specific audiences - mothers aged 25–40 in Butwal interested in sustainable fashion. For a market with limited budgets, precision beats mass exposure.

But here's the challenge:

How many ads, influencer posts and sponsored videos do you scroll past every day? We have entered an age of content overload and limited attention. Listening has become more important than broadcasting.

Marketing is now measurable

This is the real game-changer. Marketers can track the full customer journey, from click to payment. Digital marketing in Nepal has quickly evolved into performance marketing, where CMOs must constantly analyse topline growth, margins and pipelines, not just impressions.

What's next?

Nepal's infrastructure is still catching up, but the shift toward tech-enabled marketing is irreversible. The real gap now is not tools, it's data literacy and decision-making culture. Leaders must learn to trust data over tradition.

I have intentionally avoided going deep into AI (that's another conversation entirely), though I'll admit, yes, I used AI to refine this post.

In today's digital Nepal, the strongest brands won't be the loudest.

They will be the ones that listen best, adapt fastest and build with precision. **B**

50TH

nanglo

EST. 1976

ANNIVERSARY

FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE

As we celebrate our 50th year, we would like to thank all of you, our generous patrons for your support. We are grateful to you for choosing us to celebrate your most cherished moments with. Your continued support is the reason we are here to this day.

We are proud to have started from humble beginnings as a small pub and have grown into a company that has withstood the tides of time. Our intention has always been to serve you, your family and friends with good food and warm hospitality – this philosophy remains. We hope to serve you for another fifty years and continue to be a part of your lives and the milieu of this city that we love.

THE NANGLO FAMILY

THE LAWN RESTAURANT

The Chinese Room

beed's take on the market


Image: freepik

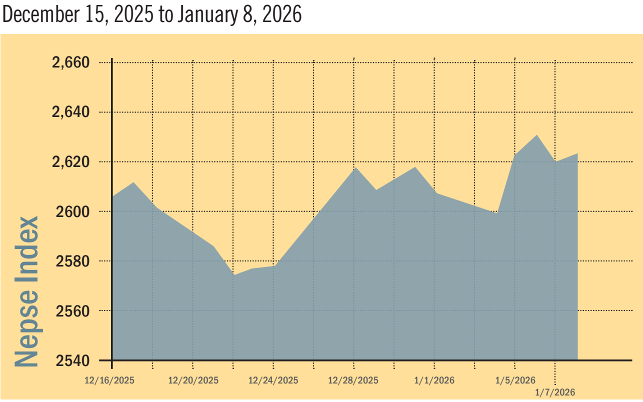
The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) index increased by 38.93 points (+1.50%) to close at 2,640.54 points during the period from December 15, 2025 to January 8, 2026. The index gained momentum early in the period but failed to sustain the upward trend, falling to an intra-day low of 2,568.94 points on December 23. The market then reversed, reaching an intra-day high of 2,662.66 points on January 6. Finally, the index closed at 2,640.54 points on January 8. Market turnover declined 1% compared to the previous review period, which had seen an 11% decrease. The rise in the index along with relatively steady turnover indicates early signs of improving market sentiment. *(see figure 1)*

During the review period, all sub-indices recorded gains except the Life Insurance sub-index which was the weakest performer. Manufacturing and Processing, Development Banks, and Finance sub-indices recorded the strongest gains during the period.

Manufacturing and Processing sub-index (+6.75%) had the highest gain largely driven by strong price appreciation in several newly listed companies including SY Panel Nepal (+Rs 790.10), Sagar Distillery (+Rs 208) and Shreenagar Agritech Industries (+Rs 178.9). Development Banks sub-index (+2.33%) ranked second driven by increase in the share prices of Narayani Development Bank (+Rs 383.9), Miteri Development Bank (+Rs 46.8) and Lumbini Bikas Bank (+Rs 28.4). The Finance sub-index (+4.06%) also gained led by Manjushree Finance (+Rs 96), Multipurpose Finance Company (+Rs 84.8) and Goodwill Finance (+Rs 33.9).

Figure 1: NEPSE Index during the review period

December 15, 2025 to January 8, 2026



Source: Nepal Stock Exchange

Additionally, Hotels and Tourism sub-index (+2.27%) went up with key contributors being Bandipur Cablecar and Tourism (+Rs 68), Taragaon Regency Hotel (+Rs 18) and Soaltee Hotel (+Rs 11). Commercial Banks sub-index (+2.18%) stepped up with appreciation in the share price of Siddhartha Bank (+Rs 47), Sanima Bank (+Rs 30) and NIC Asia Bank (+Rs 17.9).

The Others sub-index (+1.28%) trended upward as well supported by appreciation in two power producers - Jhapa Energy (+Rs 140) and Pure Energy (+Rs 129.9) as well as Muktinath Krishi Company (+Rs 63), an agriculture-based company. The Non-Life Insurance sub-index (+1.28%) gained at a similar percentage, driven by the appreciation in the share prices of Prabhu Insurance (+Rs 28.2), Himalayan Everest Insurance (+Rs 26.9) and Neco Insurance (+Rs 11.5).

Microfinance sub-index (+1.13%) followed with gains in the share price of Swastik Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha (+Rs 559), Asha Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha (+Rs 91.1) and CYC Nepal Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha (+Rs 56.7).

Remaining sub-indices posted gains below 1% during the review period. The gain in the Hydropower sub-index (+0.51%) was supported by capital appreciation in Sanvi Energy (+Rs 155), Him Star Urja Company (+Rs 77) and Sayapatri Hydropower (+Rs 71). Trading sub-index (+0.23%) achieved minimal gain due to an increase in Salt Trading Corporation (+Rs 216).

Life Insurance sub-index (-2.01%) was the only sub-index to decline during the review period as Guardian Micro Life Insurance (-Rs 60.9), Life Insurance Corporation (Nepal) (-Rs 49.1) and Nepal Life Insurance Company (-Rs 46) experienced share price depreciation. *(See table 1)*

News and Highlights

During the review period, Nabil Bank completed the allotment of 8% Perpetual Non-Cumulative Preference Shares (PNCPS) worth Rs five billion through a private placement to

Table 1: Sub-indices during the review period

December 15, 2025 to January 8, 2026

	15-Dec-25	8-Jan-26	% Change
NEPSE Index	2,601.61	2,640.54	1.50%
Sub-Indices			
Commercial Bank	1,346.68	1,375.98	2.18%
Development Bank	5,345.99	5,575.07	4.29%
Hydropower	3,332.07	3,349.06	0.51%
Finance	2,289.77	2,382.65	4.06%
Non-Life Insurance	10,776.29	10,914.03	1.28%
Others	2,319.71	2,349.50	1.28%
Hotels and Tourism	6,892.28	6,892.28	0.00%
Microfinance	4,878.29	4,933.63	1.13%
Life Insurance	13,180.32	12,915.30	-2.01%
Manufacturing & Processing	8,233.85	8,789.50	6.75%
Trading	3,782.91	3,791.75	0.23%

Source: Nepal Stock Exchange

institutional investors. This is the first irredeemable non-cumulative preference shares issued after the introduction of relevant policy provisions by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) and Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON). As PNCPS is classified as Additional Tier I Capital under Basel III, it provides BFIs with a cost-efficient instrument to meet capital requirements.

In addition, NRB introduced a new instrument, NRB Bond 2083, to manage excess liquidity in the banking system. Issuance of this one-year bond, which carries semi-annual interest payments, started on December 29, 2025. As of January 8, 2026, NRB has completed six issuances totaling Rs 130 billion.

SEBON approved the Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) for four companies during the review period, including two hydropower companies, one manufacturing and processing company, and one company from the hotels and tourism sector. SEBON approved the IPOs of Super Khudi Hydropower (Rs 310 million) and Shikhar Power Development (Rs 320 million) with Global IME Capital appointed as the issue manager for both offerings. The IPO of Palpa Cement Industries, amounting to Rs 750 million, was also approved, with Nabil Investment Banking as the issue manager. In addition, SEBON approved the IPO of Hotel Forest Inn, which plans to raise Rs 400 million, with NIC Asia Capital as the issue manager. Further, SEBON added one company from hotels and tourism sector, Nagarkot Resort, to the IPO pipeline. The company intends to raise Rs 150 million through a public offering.

Outlook

During this review period, the regulators facilitated the successful issuance of two new instruments, PNCPS and NRB Bond 2083. These regulatory measures, aimed at addressing high cost of capital, excess liquidity, and weak loan demand, can contribute to strengthening market stability and investor confidence. **B**

This is an analysis from beed Management. No expressed or implied warranty is made for the usefulness or completeness of this information, and no liability will be accepted for the consequences of actions taken based on this analysis.

"THE IDEA FOR MALLANET CAME FROM A VERY PERSONAL SPACE. THE NAME ITSELF - DERIVED FROM MY SURNAME 'MALLA' AND 'NET' FOR NEURAL NETWORK - FELT LIKE PUTTING MY OWN STAMP ON IT"

SAHAJRAJ MALLA
INVENTOR OF MALLANET
STUDENT AT KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
DATA & RESEARCH SCIENTIST

"The idea for MallaNet came from a very personal space. The name itself - derived from my surname 'Malla' and 'Net' for neural network - felt like putting my own stamp on it," says Sahajraj Malla, the inventor of MallaNet.

Malla developed MallaNet, an AI model capable of recognising handwritten Devanagari script, to assist people who struggle with handwritten documents, old records and everyday forms. As someone with mild dyslexic traits, he found it difficult to read the visually rich but complex Devanagari script. His goal was to build a tool that could convert messy handwriting into clear digital text, making information more accessible, not just for himself, but for many others facing similar challenges.

"I built MallaNet as a convolutional neural network with branching to capture both large- and small-scale features, residual connections to enable deeper learning without losing information, and specialised capsule layers to preserve spatial relationships between character components," Malla explains. "Devanagari has complex curves, joint letters and marks placed above or below characters. This architecture helps the model understand those intricate relationships better than standard designs."

According to Malla, training MallaNet took several hours across multiple runs using Google Colab with a T4 GPU. He used PyTorch as the primary framework due to its flexibility and suitability for rapid experimentation. Key preprocessing steps included normalising images for consistent size and brightness, centring characters correctly, and applying augmentations such as slight rotations and shifts. These steps made the model more robust to real-world handwriting variations.

"To debug errors, I analysed confusion matrices to identify common misclassifications, visualised activation maps to see what the model 'noticed' in failing cases, and ran targeted tests on problematic characters," he says. Based on these insights, he fine-tuned the network architecture and adjusted data augmentations accordingly.

One of the biggest challenges in building MallaNet was the sheer variability

MALLANET WAS CREATED TO MAKE HANDWRITTEN DEVANAGARI SCRIPTS EASIER TO READ AND UNDERSTAND. SAHAJRAJ MALLA'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH DIFFICULTY READING DEVANAGARI - AND WITNESSING OTHERS FACE THE SAME CHALLENGE - MOTIVATED HIM TO BUILD AN AI SYSTEM THAT MAKES HANDWRITTEN DEVANAGARI MORE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE.

in handwriting. Individuals write the same character in dramatically different ways, and some characters differ only by minor strokes or dots. Malla also aimed to keep the model computationally efficient. He addressed these challenges through extensive experimentation, refining multi-scale feature extraction and training on thousands of real handwritten samples.

"There were plateaus where the model consistently confused very similar characters, which slowed progress," Malla notes.

Characters that differ only by small curves, dots or stroke placement - especially consonants with similar shapes and varying matras (vowel signs) - proved particularly difficult. Refining how features from different scales were merged, and carefully weighting those features, significantly improved the model's ability to distinguish these challenging cases.

Another key improvement came from replacing complex capsule filters with a more homogeneous capsule filter. According to Malla, this preserved fine stroke details without blurring, which is essential for distinguishing visually similar characters. The change also helped achieve high accuracy with fewer computational resources.

MallaNet has wide-ranging potential applications. It could help digitise old Nepali manuscripts, automate government form processing, speed up archival work, or enable instant reading of vehicle number plates. It can also support automated grading of handwritten exams and power educational applications. For people with visual impairments, MallaNet could enable text-to-speech tools, while for those with reading difficulties, it enhances accessibility and inclusion.

Malla also believes that with fine-tuning, the model could be adapted for other scripts such as Bengali, Tibetan or Thai. "The core ideas for handling complex strokes and spatial relationships transfer well across these scripts. It could play a role in preserving and digitising regional languages," he says.

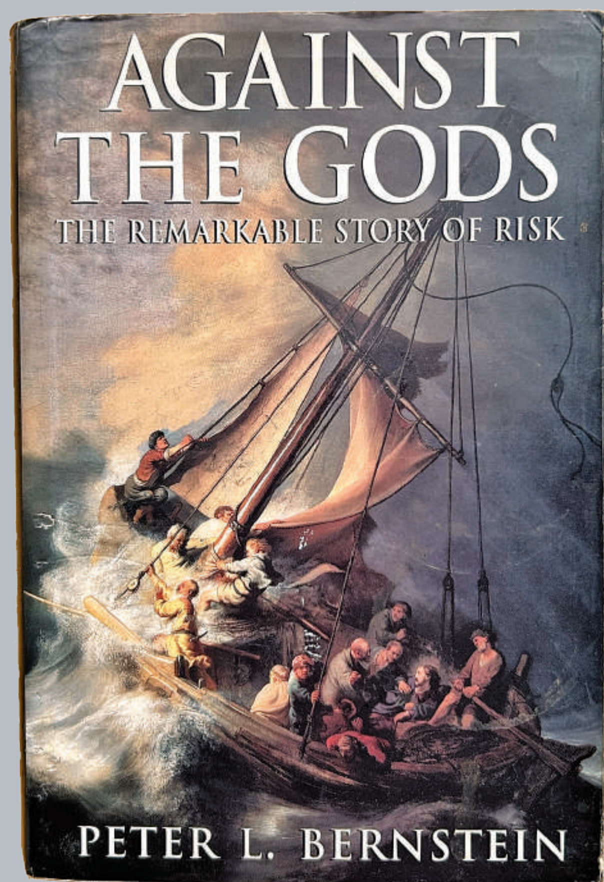
Looking ahead, Malla plans to further enhance MallaNet by adding attention mechanisms to better handle joint letters, optimising the model for mobile devices and expanding it to recognise full handwritten sentences rather than individual characters.

"If I were to rebuild MallaNet today, I would integrate modern transformer architectures for better contextual understanding, train on much larger and more diverse datasets, and optimise it for real-time performance on smartphones," he concludes. **B**

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk

Author: **Peter L. Bernstein**



With the stock market breaking records almost daily, leaving longtime market analysts shaking their heads and revising their forecasts, a study of the concept of risk seems quite timely. Peter Bernstein has written a comprehensive history of man's efforts to understand risk and probability, beginning with early gamblers in ancient Greece, continuing through the 17th-century French mathematicians Pascal and Fermat and up to modern chaos theory. Along the way he demonstrates that understanding risk underlies everything from game theory to bridge-building to winemaking. **B**

The Data Economy: Nepal's Next Frontier for Monetisation and Sovereignty

Text: Prajwal Nepali

Nepal is quietly sitting on an asset class that grows every day, compounding in value the more it is used: Data. Every mobile top-up, QR payment, ride request, government form, satellite image, clinic visit, shipment scan, classroom login and hydropower sensor reading creates 'digital exhaust' that can be refined into better services, new revenue and stronger governance. The global winners of the last decade did not only build apps; they built data advantage: high-quality datasets, talent that can turn raw information into decisions and rules that keep citizens' trust.

For Nepal, the data economy is not a luxury topic; it is a practical path to reduce dependency, improve state capacity, and create exports that do not require trucks crossing borders. Nepal's GDP is still relatively small in absolute terms at about USD 42.9 billion in 2024 so even modest data-driven productivity gains can move the needle nationally.

The timing is unusually favourable because Nepal's connectivity base is becoming mass-market. Nepal Rastra Bank's Payment System Oversight Report (2023/24) notes that 4G/LTE coverage reaches 741 of 753 local levels, smartphone penetration is about 72.94%, and census-linked indicators show internet access is still uneven at the household level (around 38% of households), which highlights both progress and the inclusion gap that policy must close. The same report points out that the price of mobile data fell sharply from about USD 2.25/GB in 2019 to USD 0.27/GB in 2024, a structural shift that changes what businesses can deliver profitably outside Kathmandu. When data becomes cheap and smartphones are common, sectors that used to run on paper can jump to digital workflows, producing usable datasets by default if Nepal designs the right incentives and infrastructure.

Payments show what 'data as infrastructure' looks like in practice. Nepal's digital payments growth is not only a fintech story. It is a national dataset forming in real time, capturing consumption patterns, SME cashflow rhythms, seasonal demand, creditworthiness signals and even supply-chain bottlenecks. Reporting on a central bank document, The Kathmandu Post described how, over the past three fiscal years, the number of digital payment transactions rose by 43.5% and transaction value grew on average by 23.7%, with QR usage expanding rapidly as acceptance points spread from malls to micro-दुकानदार. This matters because a high-trust, high-coverage payment layer becomes a platform for credit scoring, fraud prevention, tax simplification, targeted subsidies and exportable payment technologies so long as privacy protections and competition rules prevent the system from turning into surveillance or monopoly rent.

Monetisation, however, should not be misunderstood as 'selling citizens' personal data'. Nepal's real opportunity is to monetise value created from data while keeping personal information protected and locally governed. The most defensible revenue streams come from anonymised and aggregated insights, subscription analytics for enterprises, data-driven software products, and 'data-enabled services' such as precision logistics, credit underwriting tools, risk models for insurers, predictive maintenance for hydropower, and demand forecasting for tourism and retail.

There is also a strong case for data exports that respect sovereignty: Nepali firms can build Nepali-language AI tools, speech and OCR models for Devanagari and local scripts,

compliance-grade customer support automation, and domain datasets in areas where Nepal has unique strengths (mountain safety, micro-hydropower operations, trekking logistics, disaster response, cross-border remittance behaviours). These are high-margin exports because what crosses borders is code and models, not container loads.

Sovereignty is the other half of the equation and Nepal's own recent history shows why it cannot be an afterthought. In September 2025, Nepal's government blocked major social media platforms for failing to register locally, triggering major public backlash and raising global attention on who controls digital public squares, what accountability should look like, and how quickly 'platform power' can become a national governance issue. Whatever one's view of that policy, the episode underlined a hard truth: when core digital services, identity layers, communications channels and data flows are external, the state and citizens both become dependent on decisions made elsewhere. A serious data economy strategy aims to keep Nepal interoperable with the world while ensuring that critical datasets, enforcement capacity and dispute resolution are not outsourced by default.

Nepal already has important building blocks for a sovereignty-first approach but they need to be aligned into a coherent 'data governance stack'. The Constitution explicitly recognises a right to privacy that covers 'document, data, correspondence' and related matters, making data protection a constitutional concern rather than a mere policy preference. Nepal also has the Privacy Act, 2075 (2018), which includes provisions on collection, processing and use of personal information, though implementation capacity and clarity around modern data practices remain ongoing challenges. Meanwhile, multiple analyses note that Nepal's evolving draft legislation around information technology and cybersecurity has included privacy-related provisions, and that parts of these proposals remain under debate or not yet enacted highlighting the need for clear, enforceable rules that businesses can comply with and citizens can trust.

Policy strategy should start by defining which datasets are 'strategic national assets' and how they can be accessed safely. A practical model is to treat certain high-value datasets: land and cadastral records, business registries, education credentials, health supply chains, disaster risk maps, hydrology and weather readings, mobility and road safety statistics as infrastructure, not departmental property. The state can then enable controlled access through modern mechanisms: secure data exchanges, audit trails, tiered permissions and standardised APIs, paired with strong penalties for misuse.

Nepal's Digital Nepal Framework explicitly positions digital transformation as a national pathway to socio-economic growth and a knowledge-based society, and newer iterations and discussions signal a push toward more structured digital ecosystem. The key is to move from 'digitising services' to 'designing data systems', so that every digitised workflow also improves national intelligence and service quality.

Infrastructure choices will determine whether Nepal captures value or leaks it. If most Nepali data is stored and processed abroad by default, Nepal pays a recurring 'data rent' through cloud bills, loses local jobs and weakens enforcement leverage in disputes. Nepal has long recognised the importance of state-controlled digital infrastructure; government data centre initiatives under public agencies demonstrate that the concept of centralising and securing critical government data is not new. But the next phase requires hybrid thinking: a resilient domestic backbone for sensitive government and national-scale datasets, combined with certified private-sector clouds and regional partnerships for elasticity, disaster recovery and cost efficiency. The goal is not isolationism; it is bargaining power having credible domestic capability so Nepal can negotiate cross-border data arrangements from strength.

A data economy also demands talent and market structures that keep value inside the country. Nepal should prioritise three pipelines at once: data engineering (how to collect and structure data cleanly), applied AI (how to build models that deliver measurable outcomes), and data governance (how to keep systems lawful, secure and auditable). The central bank's own reporting highlights both the opportunity and the risk: as digitalisation reaches the grassroots, cybersecurity and digital financial literacy become just as important, because fraud and weak security can destroy trust faster than any marketing campaign can build it. This is where Nepal can create a 'trust premium' for its tech sector: companies that can prove privacy-by-design, strong security practices and responsible AI will win enterprise and government contracts locally and become credible exporters in a world tightening digital rules.

If Nepal executes well, the data economy can strengthen national finances in ways that feel almost invisible but are deeply transformative: less leakage in procurement, better targeting of subsidies, reduced fraud, improved tax compliance with lower administrative burden, smarter infrastructure planning and faster disaster response. It can also create a new export category, Nepali-built analytics products, AI services, compliance tooling and sector-specific platforms helping diversify beyond remittances, which remain a large macroeconomic pillar.

World Bank data shows remittances are a significant share of Nepal's economy, and recent World Bank reporting continues to highlight how remittance inflows shape external balances and household resilience. The strategic point is not to replace remittances overnight; it is to build an additional engine of foreign exchange and high-skill employment that scales with brains and bandwidth, not with migration pressure.

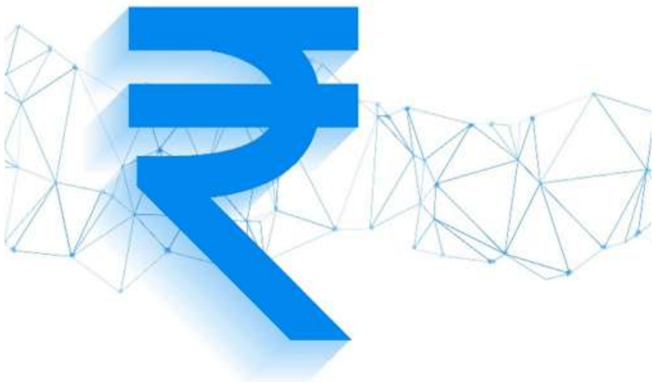
Nepal's next frontier is therefore not just 'more apps' but a national deal with its citizens and businesses: 'Share data in well-governed systems and in return you get better services, stronger rights and a fair share of the value created'. That deal requires clear consent norms, strong privacy enforcement, independent oversight, transparent procurement and competition rules so that no single platform becomes an unavoidable toll booth. It also requires measurable outcomes: reduced service delivery times, lower fraud rates, cheaper credit for SMEs, safer roads, smarter energy dispatch and a public sector that can plan using real evidence.

Countries do not become sovereign in the 21st century only through borders and armies. They become sovereign through control of critical information flows. If Nepal builds its data economy intentionally monetising insights, not identities, it can turn digital growth into durable national power. **B**


PADMA
JYOTI
GROUP
HONDA
ELEVATE
BOLD &
Beautiful
ELEVATE

To Peg or Not to Peg

Suman Joshi is a former banker turned private equity investor who has helped shape Nepal's alternative investment ecosystem.



Nepal's economic story has been premised on a script heavily shaped by our neighbourhood. Geography, trade patterns and political history are structural features of the Nepali economy. Perhaps nowhere is this reality more obvious than in the quiet but consequential matter of the Nepal-India currency exchange rate peg.

This peg has been around since the 1960s. It has been revised multiple times, usually in response to balance of payments stress or exchange rate misalignments. Over the years, the peg has settled at NPR 1.6 per INR 1, becoming something of an anchor not just for traders and bankers, but also for households who instinctively benchmark value in relation to India.

As Nepal grapples with pressure from rising import costs, a stubborn current account deficit and a difficult geopolitical environment, the question why haven't we revisited the peg in a more fundamental way keeps getting debated. Does keeping it actually serve Nepal's long-term strategic interest, especially when the Nepali rupee floats against other convertible currencies?

The obvious answer is straightforward: the peg has survived because it has been the least risky option for an import-heavy under-developed economy with weak buffers. Yet, the deeper answer is more nuanced and central to Nepal's broader economic evolution.

The Peg's Enduring Logic

Roughly two-thirds of Nepal's trade either goes directly to India or passes through India primarily due to logistical reasons. Most of our essential goods, from fuel to food to pharmaceuticals, move through Indian ports, railways and roads. Our largest source of imported goods is India. Our biggest source of informal cross-border trade is, again, India.

In a perfect world, Nepal would have a diversified export base, large reserves, deep financial markets and a truly independent central bank with decades of proven credibility. But Nepal's reality is a massive trade imbalance with a single partner and extremely narrow foreign exchange market. A peg provides discipline and predictability. It anchors inflation expectations and reduces exchange rate risk in the majority of cross-border transactions.

This is not unusual for small economies. Hong Kong pegs to the US dollar. Several middle eastern economies peg to the dollar. Smaller African economies peg to the euro. Pegs survive because they work; until they don't. And the burden of proof always rests on those arguing for a change.

Floating but Anchored

One may argue that Nepal already allows the Nepali rupee to float against other major currencies, so why not unshackle ourselves fully? The argument sounds logical on the face of it but it misses the core mechanics.

Nepal's 'floating' rates against USD, EUR, GBP and others are not necessarily the product of supply and demand in the domestic forex market. They are derived rates: banks look at the INRUSD rate, apply Nepal's fixed NPR-INR peg to calibrate the rates for NPR against other currencies. There is no real floating market behind these calculations.

This means Nepal effectively runs an anchored exchange rate system. The rupee's relationship with the Indian currency determines almost everything else. That has been the default and a design choice.

Political Debate

Foreign exchange discussion often veers into a territory that sounds political, as if currency regimes are symbols of national sovereignty. Many Nepalis ask whether the peg reinforces geopolitical dependence. It's a fair question. Currency pegs inevitably tie your monetary policy to the policy of the anchor country. If the anchor country raises rates, you feel it. If the anchor experiences inflation, you import some of it. If the anchor faces a financial shock, your currency trembles. In our case: when India sneezes, Nepal gets flu.

But the uncomfortable truth is that geopolitical dependence isn't created by a currency peg, and breaking a peg will not magically produce strategic independence. A country's economic autonomy is built on diversified trade, fiscal discipline, robust domestic production, strong and credible institutions, etc. More than anything else, currency regimes are tools. And tools should be judged by how well they work, not by what they are perceived to represent.

Windows and Perils

There was a context in the 1990s when de-pegging perhaps looked plausible. Those who didn't live through the early 1990s cannot fully appreciate how different Nepal felt then. The 1990 Jana Andolan had cracked open political space. The economy was liberalising rapidly, faster in some respects than India. Import licence raj was dismantled, tariffs were being slashed, the financial sector was modernising + expanding, foreign investment rules were easing and a new generation of private enterprises was emerging. At the same time, on the other hand, India was wrestling with its own balance of payments crisis. The Indian rupee was under stress, foreign reserves precariously low and the country had to pawn gold to keep the ship afloat.

It was one of those rare windows where it looked like Nepal might leapfrog economically ahead of its neighbours. Against that backdrop, Nepal's peg began to feel less like stability and more like a lost opportunity.

My own thinking back then tilted toward de-pegging or at least radically re-engineering the peg. If Nepal was reforming faster, opening sooner and diversifying more boldly than India, why chain our monetary fate to an anchor that was itself struggling? In fact, the central bank and the ministry of finance were understood to have engaged in reviewing the peg in some form.

But these conversations lost momentum as history chose a different script. Nepal's early reform momentum fizzled. Political instability crept in. Institutions weakened. And as the decade progressed, the first signs of the insurgency began to simmer. The window for a bold monetary experimentation closed almost as soon as it appeared.

Fast-forward to 2006. The Maoist insurgency ended and Nepal entered a hopeful but fragile peace. People were exhausted: emotionally, financially socially. They had sacrificed too much and gained too little. We needed a confidence boost. Something symbolic yet practical. Something that could lower prices, make households breathe easier and signal that peace wasn't just political theatre but a turning point for ordinary Nepalis.

A favourable re-pegging, i.e., strengthening the NPR relative to the INR, could have delivered precisely that. Cheaper imports. Lower inflation. A sense that the country was resetting, rebalancing and rewarding its citizens for a decade of suffering. A peace dividend. While economists will tell you that exchange rate adjustments don't magically create real income, post conflict economics rarely follow theories and textbooks, sentiments and expectations matter.

However, the macro-economic fundamentals were too weak. Reserves were shaky. Institutional credibility was questionable. More importantly, the end of insurgency was followed by a prolonged period of wrangling over a new constitution, which eventually got done only after the massive earthquake injected a sense of urgency.

> IN TRYING TO ESCAPE THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF GEOPOLITICS, NEPAL MUST NOT FORGET THAT RELATIVE ECONOMIC STABILITY IS ONE OF ITS HARDEST-WON ASSETS. THE PEG, AS SUCH, IS NOT THE CHAIN HOLDING NEPAL BACK. THE CHAIN IS ITS STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS. AND WHILE A PEG MAY APPEAR OLD-FASHIONED, THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH OLD-FASHIONED TOOLS AS LONG AS THEY DO THEIR JOB.

Today, our nation is neither the reformist dream of the early 1990s nor the hopeful Nepal of the post-conflict era. Today, we face a more mundane challenge: an economy stuck in structural rot, a demoralised private sector, weak productivity and institutions that deliver little. Our state machinery is transactional at the top, confused at the bottom laced with corruption and weak governance all around.

Today, I view the peg with a more sober, pragmatic lens. Because, unhooking the rupee from the Indian currency in the current context would result in economic turbulence. With shallow markets and limited reserves, the NPR would experience sharp movements. Even if the fundamentals ultimately favoured stability, the early days would be turbulent. And inflationary pressure could be insurmountable. Most of Nepal's imports are essentials with inelastic demand. Even a small depreciation of 10-20% would raise domestic prices overnight. And since cartels and intermediaries already exploit any excuse to raise prices, the inflation shock would likely be larger than what pure economics predicts.

The Real Work Lies Elsewhere

I am now older and wiser to understand that if Nepal wants real monetary autonomy someday, the path does not begin with the exchange rate. It begins with hard structural reforms: the sort politicians and bureaucrats have failed to deliver because they lack glamour and take years to show results. To address Nepal's desire to gain monetary autonomy, we must implement the following strategies to (a) Strengthen the export base.

Nepal's export sector, encompassing hydropower, tourism, food processing, niche manufacturing and computing capacity powered by clean energy, holds significant potential as a path to generate more foreign currency, thereby reducing its dependence on remittances. (b) Build sustainable reserves. A robust reserve buffer serves as a safeguard against economic shocks in a floating currency regime. Nepal has experienced periods of low reserve levels, which have posed risks to its financial stability. (c) Modernise foreign exchange markets. Nepal's foreign exchange markets require modernisation to enhance their functionality and efficiency. This involves developing robust forwards, swaps and hedging tools. Additionally, it is essential to establish direct pipelines to global platforms, enabling Nepal to access global market opportunities and enhance its competitiveness.

In trying to escape the gravitational pull of geopolitics, Nepal must not forget that relative economic stability is one of its hardest-won assets. The peg, as such, is not the chain holding Nepal back. The chain is its structural weakness. And while a peg may appear old-fashioned, there is nothing wrong with old-fashioned tools as long as they do their job.

Managed Crawl

But it is certainly not necessary to cling to the peg forever simply because it's familiar. Nepal should absolutely revisit the peg when we need to but only out of confidence based on economic fundamentals.

When we do embark on that journey of serious structural reforms, we can think of a sensible middle path which could be a rule-based adjustable peg or crawl: a system that keeps the rupee tied to the INR but allows small, transparent adjustments over time. It keeps us anchored but gives us room to breathe. It lets us correct misalignments gradually, rather than through sudden shocks. And it allows the central bank to manage the currency regime more proactively.

Why am I Sharing This Evolution of Perspective?

Because Nepal's currency debate is not just about economics. It's a story of changing national moods, changing contexts and changing possibilities. In the early 90s, Nepal felt ahead of the region, so de-pegging made sense. After the conflict, Nepal needed a peace dividend, so re-pegging made sense. Today, Nepal needs stability and discipline, so maintaining the peg makes sense. For now, the peg endures because Nepal itself is still figuring out what kind of economy it wants to be. Nepal will earn monetary autonomy the day it earns true economic resilience. Not a day sooner.

And we will get there. But only if we do the hard, unglamorous work first. **B**

Private sector urges government to defer Nepal's LDC graduation

Nepal's private sector and government bodies are split over the country's graduation from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a developing country in November 2026. The private sector is asking the government to defer the move, warning that the economy is not prepared for the shocks that would follow graduation. Business leaders, economists and policymakers raised their concerns at a series of policy dialogues organised by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) in Kathmandu on November 28, citing that the loss of LDC-specific international support could hit key industries at a vulnerable moment.

Participants observed that Nepal's production capacity, competitiveness and investor confidence are still low, although graduation is a significant milestone representing increases in human assets and decreased economic vulnerability. The private sector emphasised that micro, small and medium-sized businesses are struggling as a result of recent internal disturbances, such as slowing growth, Gen Z protests, excess liquidity and protracted post-pandemic recovery.

Panellists from the private sector said that goods reliant on imported raw materials like soyabean and palm oil, continue to skew Nepal's export basket. Traditional exports that already struggle with high logistics costs and infrastructure obstacles, such as black cardamom, carpets, clothing and pashmina, are worried about losing concessional financing, duty-free and quota-free facilities, and preferential market access.

Industry leaders, including FNCCI Senior Vice President, Anjan Kumar Shrestha, and CNI President, Birendra Raj Pandey, argued that Nepal needs a meaningful transition period similar to what Bangladesh is exploring. They urged the government to request at least a three-year deferral or extended transition window to restore investor confidence, implement overdue reforms and strengthen export resilience. They highlighted that the private sector contributes over 80% to the GDP and employment, stating that confidence crisis in business would affect the whole economy.

Garment Association Nepal President, Pashupati Dev Pandey, said the question is not when to decide to graduate but how ready the country is. "This is a little challenging at the moment when even the government is considering suspending existing support such as export cash incentives," he stated.

Nepal Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Balram Gurung said, "Nepal needs to improve its competitiveness because it lags behind other nations that export carpet."

Exporters and manufacturers said production costs in Nepal remain up to 30% higher than competitors in India and Bangladesh due to high transport expenses, inadequate labs, road blockages, unreliable energy and outdated technologies. Without improvements in quality, productivity and technological upgrading, several leaders warned that Nepal's products may lose their foothold in markets such as Europe and the US.

Government representatives acknowledged the multiple shocks Nepal has faced since the graduation decision – earthquake, Covid 19 pandemic and recent domestic unrest – but emphasised the need to prepare rather than retreat.

Darshana Shrestha of FWEAN emphasised that while graduation is a source of pride for the nation, the private sector is concerned about whether the loss of preferential market access will raise the price of Nepali goods which are already high because of low competition.

Experts at the event offered mixed views. Some economists argued that both the government and private sector have failed to diversify into higher-value industries and new opportunities suited to Nepal's geography and resources, and cautioned businesses against dwelling solely on past setbacks, urging greater innovation and focus on emerging sectors such as ICT. Others suggested that while deferral may not be necessary, extending the post-graduation transition period could help smoothen the shift.

Underscoring the need to increase productivity and ensure scalability across sectors, Dr Kalpana Khanal, Senior Research Fellow at the Policy Research Institute, said that Nepal still struggles with an investment gap and surplus liquidity. She further underlined that Nepal must aggressively negotiate with trading partners and seek to extend its trade regimes to lessen the effects of LDC graduation.

Concluding the discussion, SAWTEE panellists Madhu Kumar Marasini, Senior Fellow at SAWTEE, and Rabi Shankar Sainju underscored the need for a clear national roadmap, stronger stakeholder coordination, diversification of products and markets, and targeted measures to enhance the competitiveness of SMEs.

CNI urges public, private sector cooperation as Budget Watch finds weak implementation of budget

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), on December 2, held a public-private dialogue titled 'How to leap forward in industrial development?'. At the event, CNI released a Budget Watch assessing implementation of the Fiscal Year 2025/26 budget in its first quarter.

At the programme, CNI President, Birendra Raj Pandey, urged stronger cooperation between the public and private sectors to ensure effective budget implementation and to prioritise industrial development to build a self-reliant economy.

"The government's fiscal policy is most important for the development of the overall economy. Other policies must become supportive to achieve the goals specified by the fiscal policy, meaning the budget," Pandey said noting that while many of CNI's policy suggestions are included in the budget, implementation often falls short. "We have been providing policy suggestions on behalf of the private sector in the budget. Our policy suggestions are also included in the budget. That gives us enthusiasm. But when the implementation phase comes, budget implementation is very weak."

Pandey urged policymakers to study how comparable economies have advanced and to ensure stable policies that protect and encourage manufacturing. "If policies are stable, manufacturing industries are protected, and the establishment of industries is encouraged, we can also move ahead in a short time through industrialisation," he said.

The Budget Watch finds implementation of the budget for FY 2025/26 weak in its first quarter. The report shows just 2.7% of 74 monitored measures were fully implemented and more than half showed no progress.

The CNI monitored 74 budget points related to the private sector and the economy and reported that 51% (38 points) showed zero progress, 46% (34 points) showed partial implementation, and only 2.4% (two points) were fully implemented. The organisation described overall progress for

ROYAL TULIP

Kathmandu

About Us

Royal Tulip Kathmandu, a five-star hotel by Louvre Hotels, is located in Gwarko, Lalitpur, just 3.5 km from Tribhuvan International Airport. Offering 308 luxurious rooms and suites, the hotel provides exceptional facilities for both relaxation and business events.

Facilities

- 308 Luxurious guest rooms and suites
- Fitness centre and spa
- All day dining restaurant
- Largest meeting rooms
- 10 Event venues from 850 to 11000 sq. ft.
- Hybrid Lounge and Bar
- Premier MICE destination
- Immersive stay experience

CONTACT US

+977-01-5254300 | info@royaltulipkathmandugwarko.com | Gwarko, Lalitpur


vianet
SAMBA SPEED
इन्टरनेट Pack
Dual Band राउटर सहित
Mesh को साथ घर भरि WIFI
viaTV २००+ च्यानलको मनोरंजन
For more details:
015970644
१०० Mbps
वार्षिक
रू ८,५००
कर सहित
साथै
१ महिना FREE

NRB, IFC sign MOU to develop climate finance strategy for Nepal

Nepal Rastra Bank and International Finance Corporation have signed a memorandum of understanding to develop a climate finance strategy for Nepal. The MoU was signed at a programme organised at the NRB office on December 14 in the presence of NRB Deputy Governor, Bam Bahadur Mishra.

Daya Ram Sharma, Executive Director of the Office of the Governor on behalf of NRB, and Gregory Smith, Manager of Country Advisory and Economics for IFC in South Asia, signed the MOU.

As outlined in the MoU, IFC will provide technical assistance to NRB to develop climate finance in Nepal. A draft climate finance strategy and its roadmap will be prepared, and a framework will be developed for the phased implementation of the strategy. IFC will also conduct training and capacity-development programmes to enhance the capacity of NRB and the wider financial sector in the formulation and implementation of the climate finance strategy.

The project is expected to promote the mobilisation of financial resources for climate adaptation while addressing climate-related financial risks in Nepal. The project will operate until September 2028.

NRB's Banks and Financial Institutions Regulation Department Executive Director, Ramu Paudel; Director Govinda Prasad Nagila; Acting Director of the Office of the Governor, Suman Neupane; IFC's Resident Representative for Nepal, Rathnija Arandara and other officials were present at the programme.

the first quarter as weak.

The report compares the current quarter with the previous fiscal year, showing a slight improvement in zero-progress items from 57% last year to 51% this year, while partial implementation rose from 38% to 46% and full implementation fell from 4.8% to 2.7%.

Sectoral analysis shows the industry sector carries the most weight, with 27 monitored points: 17 at zero progress, nine partially implemented, and one fully implemented. Other sectors monitored include energy, infrastructure and urban development (14 points), tourism (9), the financial sector (8), agriculture and herbs (7), IT and innovation (6), and education and jobs (3).

Key findings of the Budget Watch include stalled measures on industrial development and investment such as implementation of reduced industrial zone rents, amendments to land ceilings to allow industries and housing companies to buy land beyond existing limits, laws permitting foreign investors to lease buildings or apartments, provisions allowing 25% of export income to be invested abroad, and legal provisions on sweat equity for startups. Partial progress was recorded on the draft Company Bill 2082, a reduction in Special Economic Zone rent, and implementation of the Use of Domestic Goods directive 2081.

On fiscal and monetary matters, the report records zero progress on amending working capital loan guidelines to make them more flexible for industries. It notes full implementation of the Trusted Traders (Authorised Economic Operator) procedure 2082 and the start of its application process, and partial progress on automated customs valuation in Biratnagar and Birgunj. The CNI also flagged no study on multi-rate VAT and no progress on data exchange with India to curb revenue leakage.

Infrastructure projects have also been affected, the report says, with construction of Integrated Check Posts stalled – attributed to recent floods and the Gen Z protests – while the procedure for blending bio-ethanol in petrol has been sent to the Cabinet.

CNI attributes the weak performance to several factors, including the Gen Z movement, the formation of a new government with a different mandate and priorities, budget cuts for projects that were unprepared or low priority, confusion over certain programmes and the impact of recent floods.

The Budget Watch is a public-private dialogue conducted by CNI in collaboration with the Society of Economic Journalists Nepal.

NRB cuts bank rate to 5.75%, policy rate to 4.25% in Q1 Monetary Policy review

Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has maintained a cautiously flexible monetary stance in its first quarterly review of monetary policy for Fiscal Year 2025/26. It has announced a package of interest-rate cuts and regulatory relaxations to support economic recovery after recent Gen Z protests and natural disasters.

The central bank has cut the bank rate (upper bound) from 6% to 5.75% and the policy rate from 4.5% to 4.25%, while keeping the

Nepal, Germany mark 50 years of technical cooperation

Nepal and Germany marked the golden jubilee of technical cooperation with the theme 'Woven through time, shaping tomorrow together' at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) premises on December 5. The event highlighted key milestones in energy, health and sustainable economic development through Nepal-German technical collaboration. The partnership, which began with Bhaktapur's heritage preservation in the early 1970s, has expanded through GIZ's work in infrastructure and urban development, industrial and entrepreneurial development, agriculture and forest management, peacebuilding and conflict transformation and post-earthquake reconstruction. It has grown into one of Nepal's longest-standing international collaborations in energy, health and sustainable economic development.

Chief guest at the event, Minister for Finance, Rameshore Prasad Khanal, described the 50-year partnership between Nepal and GIZ as a story of trust, cooperation and shared aspirations. Reflecting on GIZ's contributions over the decades, he said, "GIZ has been more than a development agency; it has been a committed partner in Nepal's pursuit of sustainable growth, social inclusion and the wellbeing of our people." The minister called for deeper collaboration in renewable energy, public health, decentralisation, sustainable infrastructure, inclusive economic growth and improved revenue systems.

In his address, German Ambassador to Nepal, Udo Eugen Volz, underlined how the past 50 years have transformed the cooperation: "What started with restoring temples now provides digital solutions. What began with preserving the past now includes preparing for the future," he said.

Paulina Campos Monteros, Country Representative of GIZ Nepal, said, "We see ourselves as facilitators and long-term partners, bringing technical expertise and practical solutions, developed hand-in-hand with government, civil society, the private sector and communities. Our role is to connect actors, support innovation and help turn ideas into systems that last."

The programme included a panel discussion reflecting on 50 years of the Nepal-Germany partnership and outlining the vision for future cooperation. Panellists emphasised the importance of local ownership, inclusive partnerships and long-term commitment to achieve sustainable results for communities across Nepal.

deposit collection rate (lower bound) unchanged at 2.75%. The measures are intended to reduce the cost of funds, ease liquidity and encourage lending.

NRB has raised credit limits for households and microfinance borrowers. The personal overdraft limit has been doubled from Rs 5 million to Rs 10 million, and the cap on collateral-based loans from microfinance institutions has been increased from Rs 700,000 to Rs 1.5 million. The central bank has also removed the rule that required institutional fixed deposit rates to be at least 1% lower than individual fixed deposits.

Targeted relief measures allow banks to restructure loans for businesses in flood-affected districts by charging only 10% interest on restructured loans, provided restructuring is done once. Borrowers affected by the Gen Z protests may restructure loans until January 2026, and a payroll protection scheme permits loans at base rate + 0.5% to cover staff salaries.

NRB's macroeconomic snapshot for the first quarter shows strong external stability but weak domestic demand. Consumer inflation fell to 1.47% from 4.82% a year earlier, mainly due to negative food inflation. Remittance inflows rose 35.4% to Rs 553.31 billion, and foreign exchange reserves covered 16.4 months of goods and services imports. Exports surged 89.6% while imports increased 19.8%. Private sector credit grew by only 1.5%, well below the 12% annual target, and non-performing loans rose to 5.26% from 4.42% a year ago.

The review also introduced sectoral and governance reforms. Banks operating in metropolitan areas may rationalise branches to improve efficiency amid rising digital transactions. The central bank will introduce an anti-bribery and corruption policy to strengthen governance and accountability in financial institutions.

In the share market, the single obligor limit on share loans has been removed, and the holding period for banks' share investments has been reduced to six months.

NRB said that, despite robust external buffers, the domestic economy needs support to offset the effects of protests and natural disasters. The policy adjustments are designed to revive credit growth and help the economy move towards the central bank's 4% inflation target.

Gross forex reserves increase 14.1% to Rs 3,055.52 billion

According to the Current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation of Nepal based on four months data ending mid-November of 2025/26 published by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the year-on-year (y-o-y) consumer price inflation stood at 1.11% in mid-November 2025 compared to 5.60% a year ago.

Food and beverage inflation decreased 3.32% whereas non-food and service inflation stood at 3.69% in the review month. During the same period in the previous year, the price indices of these groups had increased 9.10% and 3.65%, respectively.

The average inflation stood at 1.53% in the fourth month of the current fiscal year compared to 4.59% a year ago.

As per the report, under the food and beverage category, y-o-y price index of ghee and oil sub-category increased 5.25%, non-alcoholic drinks 3.61%, and milk products and eggs 1.97%, while y-o-y price index of vegetable sub-category decreased 14.43%, spices 7.85%, and pulses and legumes 5.36%.

Meanwhile, under the non-food and services category, y-o-y price index of miscellaneous goods and services sub-category increased 15.17%, education 7.56%, clothes and footwear 6.29%, tobacco products 4.84%, and furnishing and household equipment 4.55%, while y-o-y price index of insurance and financial services sub-category decreased 0.23%.

During the review month, y-o-y price index in rural areas increased 0.66%, while in urban areas, it rose 1.26%. Based on provinces, in the review month, y-o-y consumer price inflation in Koshi Province was 1.80%, Madhesh 1.73%, Bagmati 0.81%, Gandaki 0.37%, Lumbini 1.27%, Karnali 1.08% and Sudurpashchim Province 0.26%.

In the review month, y-o-y consumer price inflation in Kathmandu Valley, Terai, Hill and Mountain region stood at 1.16%, 1.24%, 0.88% and 1.06%, respectively.

The NRB report states that during the four months of 2025/26, merchandise exports increased 77.5% to Rs 93.50 billion compared to a growth of 4.2% in the same period of the previous year. Destination-wise, exports to India and other countries increased 113.9% and 2.9%, respectively whereas exports to China decreased 56.2%. Exports of soyabean oil, cardamom, palm oil, jute goods, and shoes and sandals, among others, increased whereas exports of zinc sheet, particle board, tea, woollen carpets, and handicraft goods and other handicrafts, among others, decreased in the review period.

In the review period, merchandise imports increased 18.7% to Rs 609.45 billion compared to a growth of 0.2% a year ago. Destination-wise, imports from India, China and other countries increased 6.6%, 28.5% and 48.9%, respectively. Imports of crude soyabean oil, gold, chemical fertiliser, transport equipment, vehicle and spare parts, and silver, among others, increased whereas imports of hot rolled sheet in coil, edible oil, garlic, oil seeds and pulses products, among others, decreased in the review period.

The total trade deficit increased 12% to Rs 515.96 billion during the four months of 2025/26. Such deficit had decreased 0.3% in the corresponding period of the previous year. The export-import ratio increased to 15.3% in the review period from 10.3% in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The central bank has mentioned that remittance inflows increased 31.4% to Rs 687.13 billion in the four months of 2025/26 compared to an increase of 9.4% in the same period of the previous year. During mid-October to mid-November, remittance inflows stood at Rs 133.82 billion. In the same period of the previous year, such inflows were Rs 114.31 billion. In US dollar terms, remittance inflows increased 25.3% to $4.88 billion in the review period. Such inflow had increased 8.2% in the same period of the previous year.

The number of Nepali workers, both institutional and individual, taking first-time approval for foreign employment stood at 145,973 and taking approval for renew entry at 127,837. In the same period of the previous year, such numbers were 147,478 and 94,105, respectively.

Meanwhile, the current account remained at a surplus of Rs 279.65 billion in the review period. Such surplus was Rs 147.78 billion in the same period of the previous year. In US dollar terms, the current account registered a surplus of $1.99 billion in the review period against a surplus of $1.10 billion in the same period of the previous year.

In the review period, net capital transfer amounted to Rs 6.21 billion. In the same period of the previous year, such transfer amounted to Rs 2.47 billion. Similarly, in the review period, Rs 2.49 billion foreign direct investment (equity only) was received. In the same period of the previous year, foreign direct investment inflow (equity only) amounted to Rs 5.76 billion.

Balance of Payments (BOP) remained at a surplus of Rs 318.40 billion in the review period. Such surplus was Rs 205.83 billion in the previous year. In US dollar terms, BOP remained at a surplus of $2.26 billion in the review period compared to a surplus of $1.53 billion in the same period of the previous year.

Meanwhile, gross foreign exchange reserves increased 14.1% to Rs 3,055.52 billion in mid-November 2025 from Rs 2,677.68 billion in mid-July 2025. In US dollar terms, the gross foreign exchange reserves increased 10.3% to $21.52 billion in mid-November 2025 from $19.50 billion in mid-July 2025.

Of the total foreign exchange reserves, reserves held by NRB increased 12.8% to Rs 2,724.66 billion in mid-November 2025 from Rs 2,414.64 billion in mid-July 2025. Reserves held by banks and financial institutions (except NRB) increased 25.8% to Rs 330.85 billion in mid-November 2025 from Rs 263.04 billion in mid-July 2025. The share of Indian currency in total reserves stood at 21.9% in mid-November 2025.

Based on the imports of the four months of 2025/26, the foreign exchange reserves of the banking sector are sufficient to cover the prospective merchandise imports of 20.8 months, and merchandise and services imports of 17.4 months.

CAN Federation unveils Nepal-India digital corridor framework

Federation of Computer Association Nepal (CAN Federation) has unveiled the conceptual framework for the Nepal-India Digital Corridor, a regional initiative designed to strengthen digital cooperation, accelerate innovation and position Nepal and India as leading digital hubs in South Asia.

The framework was developed under the leadership of Chiranjibi Adhikari, Senior Vice President of CAN Federation and an ICT policy expert. Adhikari's decades-long contribution to Nepal's digital ecosystem, including policy drafting, digital governance frameworks, national ICT advocacy and industry development, played a central role in shaping the initiative.

The corridor aligns Nepal's IT Decade (2024–2034) with India's global leadership in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). The vision emphasises creating a resilient, integrated and innovation-driven regional digital ecosystem focused on shared growth and prosperity.

Key components of the framework include cross-border fintech expansion leveraging UPI-Nepal interoperability for instant, secure and low-cost transactions; startup and innovation cooperation to boost incubation, venture capital access and joint product development; and talent mobility with mutual recognition of training, certifications and ICT qualifications.

The plan also calls for enhanced cybersecurity collaboration through real-time threat intelligence exchange between npCert and CERT-In and joint cybersecurity drills; AI and research partnerships for Nepali language models and collaborative R&D between Indian and Nepali institutions; priority investment in Tier-3 data centres, fibre-optic redundancy and cloud-ready infrastructure in Nepal; and policy harmonisation on data protection, digital identity and e-commerce to facilitate cross-border digital trade.

Adhikari said, "The Nepal-India Digital Corridor is not just a technological initiative, it is a shared economic vision. Our goal is to create a seamless digital ecosystem where innovation thrives, opportunities expand, and Nepal positions itself as a global IT outsourcing and innovation hub. Together, Nepal and India can build a digital future that benefits millions."

CAN Federation said the corridor will support Nepal's target of generating 1.5 million IT jobs and achieving $3

Study warns Nepal's conservation policies threaten communities by prioritising infrastructure

A new study published in the journal, Earth System Governance, warns that Nepal's national conservation policies are increasingly prioritising large-scale commercial and infrastructure interests, such as hydropower, over the economic and safety concerns of local communities. This concerning trend risks undermining the social foundation of Nepal's globally recognised conservation success, according to the research conducted by an international team.

The analysis, which involved examining 111 laws and policies and conducting interviews with 19 experts, found a growing disparity between the legal framework and the reality for people living near Protected Areas (PAs). Recent policy changes, including a working procedure allowing PA land for infrastructure and a Supreme Court decision that cleared the Langtang Khola hydropower project, show a clear shift toward commercialised, infrastructure-led conservation.

While policies mention 'ecosystem services' (nature's benefits), the associated 'ecosystem disservices' – the costs borne by communities – are largely absent from binding PA laws. These disservices include crop damage, livestock predation, fires, disease risks and restrictions on traditional livelihoods, such as stone-mining in the Gaurishankar Conservation Area.

Nepal's tripling of its tiger population is cited as a global milestone, yet this success has come with an immense human cost. For example, 36 people were killed by tigers in Bardiya National Park over the past five years due to a lack of adequate safety and risk-mitigation measures for forest-dependent communities.

Lead Researcher, Daya Raj Subedi, stated that PA laws miss the wider costs communities face and that integrating the recognition of both nature's benefits and costs is essential to demonstrate clear net societal gains from conservation investments. Co-author, Dr Prajal Pradhan, emphasised the global relevance of anchoring the integration of ecosystem benefits and burdens in legally binding laws to specifically protect indigenous and local communities.

The study recommends that the Government of Nepal immediately establish a National Ecosystem Accounting System within the National Statistics Office to formally integrate ecological contributions and true community-level costs into national economic planning. It further recommends revising PA Laws to formally define and address ecosystem disservices beyond the narrow scope of human-wildlife conflict, ensuring proper risk mitigation and compensation for local populations. The findings ultimately stress the urgent need for conservation policy to shift its focus from maximising infrastructure development to ensuring social justice and equity for the communities who are the true frontline stewards of Nepal's biodiversity.

billion in IT service exports, while deepening collaboration with India across fintech, cybersecurity, AI and digital governance.

Established in 1992, CAN Federation is Nepal's largest ICT umbrella organisation, representing professionals, students, startups and ICT enterprises across all seven provinces and 74 districts. The body has been instrumental in drafting the country's first IT policy, initiating National ICT Day and guiding major digital transformation strategies.

WWF convenes stakeholders for inception of Swachya Sagarmatha Project

WWF Nepal and Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) convened key government representatives, local authorities, development partners and community organisations at the inception workshop of the 'Swachya Sagarmatha: Sustainable Waste Management for Clean Himalaya Project', on December 12.

Swachya Sagarmatha is a three-year initiative aimed at strengthening sustainable waste management systems including e-waste handling across the Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) and its buffer zone.

The project will be implemented by WWF Nepal in close partnership with SPCC, Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality, Sagarmatha National Park Office, Buffer Zone Management Committee, and local waste management groups. Funded by the Thomas L Kempner, Jr Foundation, the initiative aligns with the Environmental Pollution Control and Sustainable Waste Management Plan 2023 of the rural municipality.

"Everest is more than a mountain; it is our national pride and a shared responsibility. The long-standing work of SPCC, which began as a small pollution control project, and initiatives like the Sagarmatha Community Agro-Forestry Project show that lasting conservation is only possible when communities, government and partners come together with committed governance. It is our national duty to safeguard the natural and cultural heritage of Sagarmatha and I wish this project all the best and look forward to see its impact," said Sonam Geljen Sherpa, Chairperson, Federalism Enablement and National Concerns Committee.

With tourism increasing from roughly 20,000 visitors in 1998 to over 50,000 in 2023, waste management has become a pressing environmental concern in the Khumbu region. The inception workshop provided a platform for stakeholders to discuss project priorities, share insights and collectively identify pathways for long-term, community-driven solutions.

"For over three decades, SPCC has been at the forefront of waste management in the Everest region. But the scale and complexity of waste is growing rapidly. This project strengthens our community-led model by improving infrastructure, advancing recycling practices, and empowering local people with the skills and knowledge they need. We are grateful to see all stakeholders come together to prioritise the sustainable waste management and wellbeing of our mountains," said Tshering Sherpa, CEO, SPCC.

The programme brought together federal ministries, development organisations, and representatives from Sagarmatha National Park and its buffer zone, private sector, media, etc. to inform about the project and to receive feedback and suggestions for the successful implementation of the project. Discussions

focused on project design, community capacity building, waste segregation practices, collaboration avenues to establish a system for collecting, processing and transporting waste, including the region's rising volumes of electronic waste.

"The Everest region is not only a symbol of Nepal's natural heritage but also a global icon of resilience and environmental stewardship. As tourism grows, so does our responsibility to protect this natural world heritage site. This project brings together all key actors, from local communities to national authorities to build a waste management system that is sustainable, practical and locally owned," said Dr Ghana Shyam Gurung, Country Representative of WWF Nepal. "Our shared commitment today reflects a long-term vision for a cleaner, healthier and more resilient Sagarmatha," he added.

The workshop concluded with commitments to strengthen coordination among government agencies, conservation partners and community institutions, ensuring that activities under the Swachya Sagarmatha Project are inclusive, effective and grounded in local realities.

TNA Invest welcomes new institutional investors

Following its conversion into a public limited company earlier this year, TNA Invest (TNA-I) has onboarded Nepal's leading insurance companies - Shikhar Insurance, SuryaJyoti Life and Citizen Life – as new shareholders. The move is aimed at increasing its paid-up capital to Rs 1 billion.

The move marks a significant milestone in TNA-I's growth trajectory and comes as the company prepares for an initial public offering (IPO).

TNA-I had hitherto been the investment arm of True North Associates (TNA), a pioneer in Nepal's private equity and venture capital (PEVC) industry. It operates as a permanent capital vehicle and invests in early-stage businesses with potential to scale.

Its portfolio is sector-agnostic, with a preference for sector-disruptive and technology-driven businesses. Over the years, TNA-I has invested in 10 businesses and exited successfully from six, demonstrating its capability to identify, nurture and scale promising enterprises. Its current holdings include Sajilo Sewa, Foodmandu, Nepal Warehousing Company and Kathmandu Lanco.

The parent company, TNA, has been a thought leader and an ecosystem builder with a suite of investment subsidiaries covering the spectrum of investment philosophies.

With the new infusion of capital, TNA-I is poised to expand its investment horizon and aims to focus on high-growth sectors, including agro-processing, technology, energy, tourism and hospitality, and manufacturing, aligning with Nepal's evolving economic opportunities.

Moxy Kathmandu opens in the capital

Moxy Hotels, part of the Marriott Bonvoy portfolio, opened Moxy Kathmandu in Durbar Marg on December 12. The opening marks the brand's debut in Nepal and its third property in South Asia.

The 101-room hotel is located in one of the city's main business and entertainment districts and aims to serve both international visitors and local guests seeking contemporary social spaces and easy access to Kathmandu's cultural and nightlife scenes.

Moxy Kathmandu features an open lobby with modern artwork inspired by Nepali culture and The Moxy Bar, which doubles as the hotel's unconventional check-in counter and social hub. The property includes communal recreation areas with games such as air hockey and board games, and offers the brand's signature Moxy Hookup, providing guests with spontaneous perks such as complimentary drinks or local snacks.

Guest rooms are designed to maximise space and flexibility with walk-in showers, 55-inch HD smart TVs, modular furniture and motion-activated LED lighting. The hotel also includes a fitness centre for guests who wish to exercise during their stay.

Dining options at Moxy Kathmandu include LA HACIENDA – Barra y Cocina Latina on Level 11, a Latin American restaurant curated by Mexican chef Martin Hernandez Lopez, and CARIÑO – Terraza Latina, an open-air terrace bar. Both venues feature design elements by New York based Mexican designer, Pablo Castellanos, and offer views over Kathmandu Valley.

"Kathmandu is a city full of character. It's ancient yet modern, vibrant yet laid-back, always moving, always evolving. That's what makes it the perfect match for Moxy," said Subarna Thapa, Captain, Moxy Kathmandu. Kiran Andicot, Senior Vice President, South Asia, Marriott International, said the opening responds to growing demand for lifestyle hotel experiences that combine cultural connection with youthful energy.

Turkish Airlines carries 7.4 milllion passengers in November 2025

Turkish Airlines said it carried 7.4 million passengers in November 2025. The carrier expanded capacity and reported higher cargo volumes compared with the same month a year earlier.

The airline reported that available seat kilometres (ASK) rose 10.3% year-on-year to 22.3 billion in November. International load factor was 84.3% and domestic load factor was 86.8% for the month. The number of international-to-international passengers increased 18.9%, from 2.4 million in November 2024 to 2.9 million in November 2025. Cargo and mail carried in November grew 14.8% to 190.7 thousand tonnes.

For the January-November 2025 period, Turkish Airlines reported a total of 85.3 million passengers, an 8.4% increase compared with the same period in 2024. International-to-international traffic for the first 11 months rose 12.8% to 32.5 million passengers. The airline's total load factor for January-November was 83.2%, with an international load factor of 82.9% and a domestic load factor of 86.3%. ASK for the period increased 7.4% to 249.9 billion, while cargo and mail volumes rose 7.6% to 2 million tonnes.

By the end of November 2025, the airline's fleet stood at 513 aircraft. The company said its traffic results are consolidated and include data from the Turkish Airlines main brand and AJet. The figures were released by Turkish Airlines' Directorate of Communications.

MAW Vriddhi wins two awards at 2026 DongFeng Dealer Conference

MAW Vriddhi Motors won two major awards at the 2026 DongFeng Dealer Conference. The company received '2025 Award of Excellent EV Sales' and '2025 Award of Service Excellence', recognitions that underscore its rapid growth in Nepal's electric vehicle market and its focus on customer service.

In just 14 months, MAW Vriddhi Motors has sold more than 1,250 vehicles, a milestone in the new energy segment. The company's hatchback, Nammi Box, has become the largest-selling vehicle in its category, driven by strong customer trust and demand for smart-featured hatchbacks. The recent launch of the Nammi Vigo, with deliveries beginning in October, further expands the company's EV line-up for Nepali consumers. MAW Vriddhi now operates 12 sales outlets nationwide to provide accessible touchpoints for customers exploring electric vehicles.

The Award of Service Excellence recognises MAW Vriddhi's focus on customer satisfaction. The company runs 10 service outlets, reports a 92% customer satisfaction index, and maintains a 24/7 helpline for rapid assistance. Its service offerings include pick-up and drop-off facilities, roadside support and off-road vehicle servicing, designed to ensure customers receive help wherever they are and to build long-term relationships beyond the point of sale.

The honours reflect MAW Vriddhi's expanding presence in the country's EV transition and align with MAW Group's broader commitment to environmental responsibility and new energy solutions.

In a press release, the group said it is building a complete EV ecosystem to support Nepal's shift to cleaner transport and infrastructure development.

MAW Vriddhi's brand direction emphasises three pillars: value to stakeholders, the capabilities that enable leadership, and the reasons customers can trust its mission.

FNCCI receives British Council Going Global Partnership Award 2025

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) has received the British Council Going Global Partnership Award 2025. The federation received the award for its contribution to green skills development in Nepal and for strengthening cooperation between the public and private sectors.

The award was announced at the Going Global 2025 conference in London on October 28. Choodamani Paudel, Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, accepted the award on behalf of the Nepali partners and handed it to FNCCI Director General, Gokarna Raj Awasthi, during the formal launch of the Green Skills Advisory Board (GAB), held for the first time in Nepal.

The Going Global Partnership Award, presented on the fifth anniversary of the British Council's Going Global Partnership programme, recognises effective, distinct and inspiring projects operated with the organisation's support.

10th ICT Awards highlight ICT role in disaster response, election readiness

The finale of the 10th ICT Awards took place in Lalitpur on December 19. Minister for Communication and Information Technology, Jagadish Kharel, was the chief guest at the event organised annually by Living with ICT.

Addressing the programme, Minister Kharel said the proper use of information and communication technology helped minimise the impact of natural disasters – floods and landslides – this time. He added that the government will consult this year's ICT award winners and urged organisers to pick award candidates who inspire efforts to make the forthcoming March 5 election technology-friendly. According to him, ICT can be utilised for progress in health, education, employment and public service.

Vice-Chairman of National Planning Commission, Dr Prakash Kumar Shrestha, reminded attendees that the 16th periodic plan aims at increasing production and productivity by leveraging ICT.

Razan Lamsal, Founder and Chairperson of ICT Awards, said the organisation has spent ten years identifying, connecting and building an ecosystem for those striving to create an impact within the country. "While the government seems to be the main driver of ICT development, the private sector also needs encouragement for involvement and participation," he said.

The award is presented to those who have made outstanding achievements and shown excellence in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

This year's winners in category A included ARKBO Technologies, which won the inDrive Startup ICT Award 2025, and QuickCCA, which won the Product ICT Award 2025. Mind Bridge received the Rising Star Innovation Award 2025, and Kataho Digital Address received the Social Innovation Award 2025.

In category B, the Pioneer ICT Award 2025 was presented to Allen Bailochan Tuladhar, and the Entrepreneur ICT Award 2025 was awarded to Bibhusan Bista. The Professional Excellence ICT Award 2025 was presented to Ram Krishna Pariyar, Munni Rajbhandari received the Women Icon ICT Award 2025, and Nepal Diaspora ICT Award went to Dinesh Silwal.

Category C winners included the Social Security Fund, which received the Digital Governance Award 2025; Narayani Model Secondary School, which won Digital Education ICT Award 2025 (public sector); and Kopila Valley School, which won Digital Education ICT Award 2025 (private sector). NMB Bank won Digital Services ICT Award 2025 (enterprise sector), while Ambition Guru was awarded Digital Services ICT Award 2025 (neo sector).

In category D, Priyoshop.com of Bangladesh won South Asia Startup ICT Award 2025. The HamroPay Public Choice ICT Award 2025 was presented to Trip Turbo, and Jury Mention ICT Award 2025 was given to VayuDrishti.

In category E, the Province Startup ICT Recognition 2025 went to Medicab Technologies in Koshi; Janaki Soft International in Madhesh; Cloud Mandap in Bagmati; Brand Builder in Gandaki; Golden Technosoft IT Solutions in Lumbini; Everest Wireless Networks in Karnali; and BG Infotechs in Sudurpashchim.

At SEJON's 29th anniversary, private sector leaders warn misinformation harms investment climate

Private sector leaders, on December 1, warned that false information circulating on social networking sites is harming the investment climate and undermining business morale at a programme organised by the Society of Economic Journalists-Nepal (SEJON) on its 29th anniversary and awards handover ceremony.

On the occasion, SEJON distributed various awards under different categories to journalists. The SEJON Award, worth Rs 100,000, was presented to two journalists: Pawan Timilsina of Naya Patrika Daily and Bhuvan Poudel of Online khabar.

SEJON Print Media Award, worth Rs 50,000, was presented to Bimal Khatiwada of Kantipur Daily. The SEJON Digital Media Award, also worth Rs 50,000, was presented to Sunil Kunwar of Bizmandu.

Dr Bhola Chalise Liberal Journalism Award, worth Rs 100,000, was presented to: Sunita Karki of Annapurna Express and Uddhav Thapa of Nepal News.

The Late Sanjay Neupane Fellowship 2082, worth Rs 100,000 and established in memory of SEJON's Former Vice President, Late Sanjay Neupane, was presented to Bheshraj Belbase of Gorkhapatra Daily.

Chief guests at the ceremony, Finance Minister Rameshore Prasad Khanal and Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies Anil Kumar Sinha, honoured the award-winning journalists with certificates and cash.

AIDIA pivots to Central Asia: Envoys from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan highlight bilateral trade and energy ties

In a significant move to diversify Nepal's economic diplomacy, the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) recently hosted consecutive high-level roundtable discussions featuring the non-resident ambassadors of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The sessions marked a strategic effort to bridge the distance between the Himalayas and Central Asia, focusing on untapped potential in bilateral trade and energy investment.

The back-to-back interactions with Sardor Mirzayusupovich Rustambaev of Uzbekistan and Lukmon Bobokalonzoda of Tajikistan brought together a spectrum of Nepali policymakers, business leaders and energy experts, underscoring a growing interest in the Central Asian region.

The first roundtable titled 'Nepal-Uzbekistan: Strengthening Trade and Investment Ties', showcased Uzbekistan's rapid transformation into an economic powerhouse. Ambassador Rustambaev presented a compelling case for the Central Asian nation, citing a dramatic surge in GDP to nearly $115 billion in 2024 and a doubling of foreign trade volume to $65 billion.

"Uzbekistan has undergone comprehensive reforms to create an open, transparent economy," Rustambaev told the gathering, positioning his country as a gateway to a regional market of 300 million consumers.

Supporting this outlook, First Secretary Abdulaziz Abduganiev highlighted specific sectors ripe for collaboration. He noted that Uzbekistan's textile industry alone exports over $100 million annually, while the country offers significant tax incentives and a visa-free regime for over 90 countries to attract foreign direct investment. The message was clear: Uzbekistan is open for business, particularly in manufacturing, green energy and mining.

Shifting the focus from trade to energy investment and collaboration, the second roundtable on 'Nepal-Tajikistan: Strengthening Bilateral Ties with Focus in Energy' explored the natural synergy between two mountainous, landlocked nations. Lukmon Bobokalonzoda emphasised that Nepal and Tajikistan share more than just rugged topography; they share the potential to become the energy batteries for South and Central Asia, respectively.

Ambassador Bobokalonzoda called for a deepening of technical cooperation, suggesting that knowledge exchange on high-altitude infrastructure and grid management could unlock significant value for both countries. The discussion also addressed the logistical challenges of connectivity, with the ambassador advocating for direct air links to boost tourism and facilitate closer business-to-business engagement between Kathmandu and Dushanbe.

A recurring theme across both events was the strategic necessity of transitioning from 'landlocked' to 'land-linked' economies. The roundtables concluded with a consensus that diplomatic goodwill must now be translated into tangible economic partnerships.

By facilitating these dialogues, AIDIA aims to provide Nepali entrepreneurs and policymakers with a roadmap to navigate these promising but often overlooked markets, signalling a broader vision for Nepal's economic connectivity beyond its immediate neighbours.

Gorkhapatra organises Discourse on Recovery and Resilience

The Gorkhapatra Discourse on Recovery and Resilience convened a landmark gathering of government officials, central bank representatives and industry leaders to address the structural constraints currently stifling Nepal's economic potential on December 18.

Marking significant milestones for both Gorkhapatra daily and The Rising Nepal, the event provided a rare platform for the public and private sectors to openly debate the causes of low investor morale and sluggish growth. The consensus among participants was that while the country possesses immense business potential, immediate remedies are required to rectify policy instability and remove the procedural bottlenecks that discourage both domestic and foreign investment.

The private sector's role was a central theme, with data from the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the International Finance Corporation revealing that private enterprises contribute 81% to the GDP and more than 85% of national job creation.

FNCCI President, Chandra Prasad Dhakal, highlighted that unlike other professions, entrepreneurship carries a long-term commitment to employment and value chains that cannot be easily abandoned. Despite this impact, business leaders expressed a perceived lack of social respect and pointed to harsh regulatory realities, such as the restrictive Article 57 of the Income Tax Act, which penalises ownership changes and severely dampens the investment climate.

Technological innovation and infrastructure were also identified as vital pillars for future prosperity. While road connectivity has expanded massively since 1951, experts emphasised that the energy sector remains hindered by outdated technology and fragmented planning.

Digital pioneers noted that innovation often precedes regulation, as seen with the launch of e-Sewa years before a formal framework existed, suggesting that the government's primary role should be to facilitate and adopt private-sector breakthroughs. Strengthening local governance and reforming the Public Procurement Act were also suggested as necessary steps to empower authorities to reward efficiency and penalise poor performance.

Addressing the current financial paradox was a priority for banking and regulatory officials. The country currently faces a situation of 'idle money', with over Rs 1,100 billion in excess liquidity and foreign exchange reserves sufficient to cover 17 months of imports, yet credit demand remains low due to weakened business confidence.

Experts proposed that the government must increase its own spending to catalyse private expenditure and suggested channelling low-cost liquidity into large-scale projects like reservoir-based hydropower. Finance Secretary Dr Ghanashyam Upadhyay concluded that the essential challenge lies in converting this accumulated cash into productive capital through strategic planning and stable policy.

Government ministers responded to these concerns by pledging a 'Development Decade' aimed at streamlining forest management, mining and industrial security. Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies Anil Kumar Sinha assured the private sector that the government is committed to protecting investments and ensuring an environment free from organised disruption.

General Manager of the Gorkhapatra Corporation, Lal Bahadur Airi, confirmed that the insights gathered from these sessions would be formally submitted to relevant state agencies to guide future policy reforms and restore the nation's economic momentum.

Startup Summit Nepal 2025 highlights AI policy, cross-border collaboration

The Startup Network Nepal (TSN) organised the Startup Summit Nepal 2025, a national innovation and entrepreneurship conference, in Kathmandu on December 20. The summit brought together founders, investors, policymakers and international partners to discuss ways to accelerate Nepal's startup ecosystem.

Held in collaboration with PHDCCI (India-Nepal Centre) and the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), the event ran under the theme 'Fostering global collaboration, building beyond borders' and addressed rising entrepreneurial ambition, increased digital adoption and a youth-led innovation movement.

At the inauguration, Minister for Communication and Information Technology, Jagadish Kharel, said the government had enacted the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy within three months and is working to lay the foundation for Digital Nepal. He urged organisers to form a team to collaborate with the government on entrepreneurship, IT and innovation and asked them to submit a proposal.

The summit featured two panels on Nepal-India collaboration and the role of AI and Data Infrastructure, where panellists discussed cross-border collaboration, investment readiness, regional market access, AI adoption, data governance and cybersecurity, and highlighted opportunities in data centres and renewable energy.

A Startup Pitching Competition saw Team Dragon Warriors take first place, followed by Team Meme Patra and Team Sodhera.

CNI felicitates 16 top taxpayers recognised by government

Confederation of Nepalese Industries felicitated 16 institutions and individuals on December 16. They were recognised by the Government of Nepal as top taxpayers on the occasion of National Tax Day 2082.

The felicitation, held at the CNI Secretariat, saw the private sector body honour the same taxpayers the government had acknowledged, presenting awards on behalf of industry.

Among the organisations honoured, Dabur Nepal was recognised for filing the highest income tax among commodity exporters and Unilever Nepal for filing the highest income tax among special industries. Soaltee Hotel received recognition for filing the highest income tax among tourism businesses, while Bhat-Bhateni Supermarket and Department Store was honoured for the highest income tax among commodity trading businesses. Bhotekoshi Power Company was named the top taxpayer among energy-based industries.

Other sectoral honourees included Poshak Breeders Farm for agriculture and livestock, Verisk Nepal for information technology service exporters, and Third Eye International for sole proprietorships. Nepal Investment Mega Bank was recognised as the top taxpayer among banks, financial institutions and insurance businesses, and Nobel Medical College Teaching Hospital was honoured among health and educational institutions.

IME was recognised for filing the highest income tax among remittance and money transfer businesses, and Nepal Telecommunications Authority was honoured among entities. CDS and Clearing received recognition for the highest income tax among taxpayers with an annual turnover between Rs 500 million and Rs 1 billion, while VF Services Mauritius was honoured among taxpayers with turnover of up to Rs 500 million.

Nepal Telecom was recognised for filing the highest VAT among taxpayers who consistently filed VAT returns and paid taxes on time for the period from fiscal year 2019/20 to 2024/25. Raj Bahadur Shah, Managing Director of Jawalakhel Group of Industries and CNI Vice President, was honoured as the top individual taxpayer.

The event underscored CNI's effort to promote tax compliance and acknowledge private sector contributions to the state treasury.

SparrowSMS recognised as Meta Tech Provider; launches WhatsApp Business platform in Nepal

SparrowSMS, a flagship product of Janaki Technology, has been officially recognised as a Meta Tech Provider. The company has also launched a dedicated WhatsApp Business Messaging Platform in Nepal.

As an authorised Meta Tech Provider, SparrowSMS now enables direct embedded sign-up with Meta, simplifying and localising the onboarding process for WhatsApp API and allowing businesses of all sizes to start using WhatsApp Business messaging without technical complexity.

The platform includes WhatsApp embedded sign-up for seamless account creation, blue tick verification to strengthen brand trust, bulk WhatsApp broadcasts for instant customer outreach, and detailed campaign analytics and retargeting to optimise communication performance. It also offers multi-agent live chat for real-time engagement and a no-code chat-flow builder to enable automated, personalised interactions without technical expertise.

"Our direct Meta API-powered WhatsApp service makes customer communication more effective, reliable and accessible for every business, from retail shops to large enterprises. It simplifies engagement and helps companies build stronger relationships with their customers," said CEO Manoj Thapa.

With more than a decade of industry experience, SparrowSMS serves government agencies, financial institutions, educational organisations and private enterprises across Nepal. The company says the new WhatsApp platform will enhance customer experience, support automation, and help brands improve engagement and retention across the customer journey.

Ncell app surpasses 10 million downloads

Ncell's self-service mobile application, the Ncell App, has surpassed 10 million downloads, the company announced on December 2, establishing it as one of Nepal's most widely used digital platforms.

To mark the milestone, Ncell launched a 10-day celebration campaign under which 10 lucky customers each day won 10 GB of all-time data, valid for 10 days. Customers who downloaded the app and logged in for the first time, or who purchased any pack through the app during the campaign period, were eligible to win 10 GB of data.

The app, designed to digitalise and simplify the customer journey, offers a one-stop solution for a wide range of services. Users can perform top-ups, buy packs, register grievances, transfer balances, play online and offline games, and activate or deactivate services without dialling short codes or visiting points of sale or Ncell centres.

The app is available to download or update from the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store.

Lumbini Ceramics partners with Nabil Bank to offer channel financing to dealers

Laminar Tiles, manufactured by Lumbini Ceramics, has entered into a partnership with Nabil Bank to offer channel financing facilities to the company's dealers across Nepal.

The agreement was signed in Kathmandu by Prakash Poudel, Chief Finance Officer of Lumbini Ceramics, and Tek Raj Bhatta, Chief Business Officer of Nabil Bank. Under the deal, dealers will gain easier access to working capital to manage inventory and strengthen day-to-day operations.

As per the agreement, Nabil Bank will extend a package of preferential services to participating dealers, including 0.5% loan administration fee, discounts on letters of credit and bank guarantee issuance, and 50% discount on corporate mobile banking, safe-deposit locker and POS terminal fees. Dealers will also receive free SMS transaction alerts, free credit cards for key personnel with limits of up to Rs 500,000, and critical illness insurance under the bank's Nabil Care programme.

Both organisations said the collaboration is expected to improve dealer liquidity, reduce financial burdens and support the continued growth of Nepal's tiles sector by making financing more predictable and accessible.

The channel financing facility is aimed at helping dealers scale operations more smoothly and strengthening the supply chain for Laminar Tiles nationwide.

GCN, NYEF organise learning series on sustainability and business growth

Global Compact Nepal (GCN), in collaboration with Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs' Forum (NYEF) Lalitpur Chapter organised a Learning Series and social event titled 'Unlocking Business Growth Through Purpose and Sustainability', on December 1.

The session brought together young entrepreneurs, private sector leaders and sustainability practitioners to examine how sustainability principles can strengthen business resilience, improve operational efficiency and create long-term value. The event also highlighted the UN Global Compact's Communication on Progress (COP) reporting framework as a tool for companies to measure and communicate their ESG performance.

Opening remarks were delivered by Anukul Shrestha, Vice President of NYEF, and Samir Thapa, President of GCN. Krishna Bikram Shah, Executive Director of GCN, followed with a presentation on how sustainability has become a strategic driver of competitiveness and innovation, emphasising that sustainability is no longer just a responsibility but a catalyst for operational transformation and growth.

A case study from Formation Carpets featured prominently. Formation Carpets, a social enterprise that manufactures ethical hand-knotted rugs for export, was represented by its founder, Sulochana Shrestha Shah, who played a key role in creating the Rugmark label (now GoodWeave). Formation Carpets is the first Nepali company to join the UN Global

Compact and implements the compact's 10 principles across its operations.

The second presentation came from Hoste Hainse, a non-profit organisation that provides free education to underprivileged children in Nepal. Hoste Hainse outlined its efforts to integrate sustainability into its operational model, diversify social-enterprise programmes and scale social impact through partnerships and fundraising.

The programme also included a testimony from Sumitra Basnet, Social Enterprise Associate at Formation Carpets and a former child labour survivor. Rescued by GoodWeave Nepal and later offered employment by Hoste Hainse and Formation Carpets, Basnet recounted her journey and described her ongoing advocacy against child labour through GCN.

The event concluded with discussions on next steps and a networking session that brought together entrepreneurs, private sector representatives and UN agency delegates to exchange ideas and explore collaboration.

Organisers said the Learning Series demonstrated how partnerships between business networks such as GCN and NYEF can advance inclusive growth and sustainability agendas in Nepal, contributing to climate action, innovation and responsible business practices.

TikTok announces updates to control AI-generated content

TikTok has announced a set of updates designed to help users better understand, identify and control AI-generated content on the platform. The company said the changes are intended to make AI use more transparent while preserving creative discovery and user choice.

According to a press release issued by the company, a new control will be tested within the 'Manage topics' feature that lets users adjust how much AI-generated content appears in their 'For You' feed. Users who enjoy AI-created storytelling or educational clips can increase their exposure, while those who prefer less AI content can reduce it. TikTok said the setting is designed to customise feeds without removing the variety of creative content on the platform and complements existing tools such as keyword filters and the 'not interested' button.

Meanwhile, TikTok is also strengthening its AI labelling systems. The platform already uses creator labels, AI detection models and C2PA Content Credentials to identify AI-generated videos, and more than 1.3 billion videos have been labelled to date. The company is now testing invisible watermarking, a technological watermark readable only by TikTok's systems that remains after editing or reposting, making AI labelling harder to remove and more durable. Over the coming weeks, invisible watermarks will be added to AI-generated content created with TikTok tools such as AI Editor Pro and to uploads that include C2PA Content Credentials.

In addition to product changes, TikTok is also launching a \$2 million AI literacy fund to support non-profit organisations and experts in producing educational resources. The fund will back partners across more than a dozen countries to create materials that explain how AI works, how to recognise AI-generated content, and how to use AI safely and responsibly. The resources will promote media literacy, responsible technology engagement and awareness of TikTok's transparency tools.

TikTok said the updates reflect its ongoing commitment to help the community navigate AI as the technology evolves, and that it plans to expand tools and partnerships to support safe, transparent and creative digital experiences.

Clean-sir solutions can improve lives of nearly one billion people across South Asia: World Bank

Air pollution across the parts of South Asia known as the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills (IGP-HF) is causing major losses in health and productivity and remains one of the region's most severe development challenges. Nearly one billion people in the IGP-HF breathe unhealthy air resulting in around one million people dying prematurely every year. Economic losses are estimated at close to 10% of regional GDP annually.

'A Breath of Change: Solutions for Cleaner Air in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills', released by the World Bank on December 15, finds that a handful of actions – if taken across a range of sectors and jurisdictions – can significantly reduce pollution, improve public health and support stronger economic growth.

Air pollution in the IGP-HF, which comprises parts of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, comes from five key sources. These include households burning solid fuels for cooking and heating, industries burning fossil fuels and biomass inefficiently and without appropriate filter technology, motorists using inefficient internal combustion vehicles, farmers burning crop residues and inefficiently managing fertilisers and manure, and households and firms burning waste.

The report highlights solutions that can be readily adopted and scaled up, including electric cooking; electrification and modernisation of industrial boilers, furnaces, and kilns; non-motorised and electric transport systems; improved crop residue and livestock waste management; and improved waste segregation, recycling and disposal.

The report groups clean-air solutions into three mutually reinforcing core areas. First, abatement solutions that reduce emissions at their source in cooking, industry, transport, agriculture and waste management. Second, protection measures that strengthen health and education systems, so children and vulnerable communities are safeguarded during the transition to clean air. Third, strong institutions supported by regulatory frameworks, market-based instruments and regional coordination that sustain multi-sector and multi-jurisdictional progress over time.

"This report shows that solutions are within reach and offers a practical roadmap for policy and decision makers to implement coordinated, feasible and evidence-based solutions at scale. There are strong financial and economic rationales for South Asian enterprises, households and farmers to adopt cleaner technologies and practices, and for governments to support them," said Martin Heger, Senior Environmental Economist at the World Bank.

To help countries operationalise solutions, the


KL DUGAR GROUP
Smart Appliances (P) Limited
SKYWORTH
HOME APPLIANCES
THE CHOICE OF 40 CRORE FAMILIES
SKYWORTH
VISIT OUR SHOWROOM:
Charkhal, Dillibazar, Kathmandu.
Ph: 01-4536920, 9801305532
SKYWORTH
WWW.SKYWORTHNEPAL.COM

report emphasises the 'Four I's'. Information that provides accessible and reliable data for planning and accountability. Incentives that encourage behavioural and investment shift toward cleaner options. Institutions that coordinate action, ensure compliance and link national and local implementation. Infrastructure that enables clean energy, transport and waste systems along with modern and efficient industrial operations.

"Achieving cleaner air will require continued collaboration, sustained financing and strong implementation at local, national and regional levels. By acting together, governments can follow this pathway to cut pollution, save millions of lives and deliver cleaner air for all," said Ann Jeannette Glauber, World Bank Practice Manager for Environment, South Asia.

Miraaya Wellness and Golf Resort launches world-class wellness programmes

Miraaya Wellness and Golf Resort has introduced a series of transformative wellness programmes, combining authentic ayurvedic treatments with globally recognised healing philosophies inspired by the award-winning The Farm at San Benito. The initiative aims to position Nepal as a destination for international-standard restorative and regenerative wellness.

At the heart of the offerings is Prana Veda, led by ayurvedic physician Dr Cristeena Francis, providing personalised consultations, therapeutic treatments and wellness practices such as yoga. Guests can undertake specialised journeys, including detox, stress relief, rejuvenation and women's health programmes.

The resort also integrates practices from The Farm at San Benito, featuring plant-based cuisine, signature spa treatments and personalised health assessments in a serene environment at the foot of the Devchuli Hills near Chitwan National Park.

Rahul Chaudhary, Managing Director and CEO of CG Hospitality, said the programmes combine ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with evidence-based global wellness practices, offering visitors from around the world a holistic and transformative experience.

Stays are available from a minimum of three nights to 24 nights or more, with packages ranging from $1,000 to $7,000. Miraaya Wellness and Golf Resort aims to provide integrated wellness journeys tailored to individual health goals.

CIM launches first 'Business at School' series at Naragram Secondary School

Chamber of Industries Morang (CIM) has launched the first series of its 'Business at School' programme at Naragram Secondary School, Budhiganga. The initiative aims to inspire young people in the industrial and business sectors and to identify opportunities for self-employment and employment within the country.

Formally inaugurating the programme, CIM President, Nand Kishor Rathi, said that realising guidance and inspiration are essential to enhance skills and efficiency as times change, CIM has introduced the concept of the 'Business at School' programme. He expressed confidence that the programme would show students the opportunity to become successful entrepreneurs within the country.

Programme Coordinator, Srijan Pyakurel, said the initiative provides opportunities for students to understand the working procedures of the industrial and service sectors, receive counselling from subject experts, and learn skills such as the basic process of starting a business, investment and risk management.

CIM said that, during the programme, Manmohan Memorial Polytechnic conducted a 'test the training' session for classes 11 and 12 on the Internet of Things and knowledge automation for industrial automation, and Shirshak Enterprises ran a CCTV camera installation session. Career counselling, skills and product exhibitions, live training, business idea presentations and sharing of experiences by successful entrepreneurs also took place.

At the event, Budhiganga Rural Municipality Chairperson Jit Narayan Thapa Magar said the local level is always positive towards such initiatives and that programmes which show young people the path of possibilities within the country are a matter of pride for the local level. He added that the rural municipality would continue to support initiatives that encourage entrepreneurship.

Damodar Phuyal, Chief of Educational Division at the Koshi Province Ministry of Social Development, said the programme orients education towards practicality and that experience of the real sector is necessary alongside academic knowledge. He said this type of programme will be extremely useful for students to understand the opportunities and challenges in the industrial sector.

Global IME Bank signs MoU with FAN to provide greenhouse loans

Global IME Bank and Floriculture Association Nepal (FAN) have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the use of greenhouse technology in floriculture and ornamental plant production. The agreement also aims to develop a convenient loan system for growers.

The agreement, signed by Ashim Karmacharya, the bank's Head of Infrastructure and Project Financing, and Rajesh Bhakta Shrestha, President of FAN, commits Global IME Bank to provide specialised greenhouse loans targeted at floriculture entrepreneurs and farmers.

The partnership aims to expand financial access for floriculture entrepreneurs

NAIMA holds first AGM; approves Nepal Mobility Expo 2026

Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA) successfully concluded its first annual general meeting (AGM) at the NAIMA office in Kamalpokhari, Kathmandu, on December 11.

The AGM formally passed programmes for the coming year, institutional structures and strategic plans, and approved arrangements to organise the Nepal Mobility Expo 2026 at Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu, from August 11 to 16 next year.

Addressing the AGM, President, Ritu Singh Vaidya, said that within a short period of its establishment, NAIMA has succeeded in establishing itself as an integrated and powerful voice for the country's mobility sector. Presenting the achievements of the past nine months, Vaidya said the successful organisation of the first NAIMA Nepal Mobility Expo 2025 provided stakeholders across the automobile sector an opportunity to view the exhibition in one place, and that the continued conduct of learning sessions in the mobility sector has made the organisation's role even stronger and more credible.

NAIMA Executive Director, Raj Kumar Dulal, presented the audit report for FY 2024/25, annual programme and financial report and plans for the upcoming year. The AGM passed the programmes for the year 2025/26, which include regular mobility dialogues, capacity-building training, sectoral research and studies, policy advocacy, and the organisation of NAIMA Nepal Mobility Expo 2026.

Under institutional strengthening, the AGM formed a Strategy and Membership Affairs Committee under the leadership of member, Akash Golchha. While welcoming Megatech Group as a new member, the AGM nominated Suresh Lohani as a member of the Research, Data and Media Committee. Delegates committed to including potential and qualified brands and to continuing regular dialogue on issues of collective interest in the mobility sector.

and business owners seeking to invest in greenhouse technology, while boosting the production and productivity of flowers and ornamental plants across the country.

The initiative is expected to help entrepreneurs and farmers increase flower production and productivity, promote greenhouse technologies, develop quality infrastructure and enhance services. The partners said the collaboration should also encourage floriculture operators to adopt climate adaptation practices, sustainable business methods and modern technology. **B**

360.QUOTES

Part of the challenge of being an entrepreneur, if you are going for a really huge opportunity, is trying to find problems that aren't quite on the radar yet and try to solve those.

Running a start-up is like eating glass. You just start to like the taste of your own blood.

I definitely wanted to earn my freedom. But the primary motivation wasn't making money, but making an impact.

I think the perception of wealth and power is that things just become easier and easier when in reality as you raise the stakes things become more stressful.

Think big, dream big, and then take action to make those dreams a reality.

Sean Parker

is a pioneering American entrepreneur and philanthropist who has fundamentally altered the landscape of digital media and social networking. He first gained global prominence as the teenage co-founder of Napster, the peer-to-peer service that disrupted the music industry and paved the way for modern streaming. Parker's influence continued as he co-founded Plaxo and later became the first president of Facebook, where his strategic vision was vital to the platform's early scaling and success. As a venture capitalist, he co-founded Founders Fund, investing in transformative sectors like artificial intelligence and biotechnology.

Beyond business, Parker is a major philanthropic force. Through The Parker Foundation, he has donated hundreds of millions of dollars to advance life sciences, with a specific focus on cancer immunotherapy and allergy research.

"KNOWN AND UNKNOWN CHALLENGES QUIETLY SHAPED MY JOURNEY. THEY SHOWED ME THAT STRENGTH IS NOT ABOUT CONTROL OR POWER, BUT ABOUT ALLOWING OTHERS TO GROW AND LEAD. I ALSO EXPERIENCED BEING MISUNDERSTOOD, SEEN PARTIALLY OR INACCURATELY. WHILE THIS DOES NOT FIT INTO TYPICAL SUCCESS NARRATIVES, IT FORCED ME TO LOOK INWARD AND UNDERSTAND MYSELF MORE DEEPLY RATHER THAN CORRECTING EVERY EXTERNAL PERCEPTION. THROUGH THESE EXPERIENCES AND SIX YEARS IN THE MEDICAL FIELD, I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND A QUIET TRUTH: EACH OF US MUST CARRY OUR OWN OXYGEN TANK"

Jyoti KC
Medical Technician, United States Air Force

Jyoti KC made history as the first Nepali-American analogue astronaut selected to join the Lunares Research Station, marking a significant milestone for Nepali representation in space-related research. Born into a middle-class family in Dang, she spent much of her childhood outdoors, finding comfort in nature. At home, she often watched the National Geographic channel, which introduced her to places far beyond her immediate surroundings such as the Sahara Desert, African wildlife and unexplored regions of the world. These early exposures revealed to her that the world extended far beyond her local environment and was rich with diverse cultures and ecosystems. The curiosity and learning habits she developed during these formative years continue to shape both her personal and professional life.

After completing her schooling at Moonlight Boarding School in Dang and her higher secondary education at Mani Mukunda College in Butwal, KC applied for the US Diversity Visa with friends and was selected. She moved to the United States in July 2017. After interacting with members of the US Air Force, she decided to enlist. Pursuing her ambition with determination, KC is now serving as a medical technician and undergoing training to become an analogue astronaut.

In this edition of **Business 360**, KC shares five experiences that have significantly shaped her life, both personally and professionally.

Decision to join the United States Air Force

One professional milestone I will never forget is the decision to join the United States Air Force and the day I graduated from training. At the time, the choice felt practical rather than symbolic. I stepped into a life of service without fully understanding how unfamiliar and distant it was from anything I had known growing up in Nepal. What I did not realise then was that this decision would transform me entirely.

Military training demanded extensive effort, often unseen or unrecognised. It required airmen to demonstrate three essential attributes: emotional regulation, physical endurance and mental resilience. I experienced intense fatigue as I learned to adapt my behaviour to a structured, performance-driven system. My days were devoted to acquiring new skills, and it was only on graduation day that the meaning of the journey truly settled in.

Standing in uniform, I recognised that I had chosen a path of service in another country, not for recognition or power but out of commitment to a purpose. As a Nepali-American woman serving abroad, I felt profound gratitude that outweighed any sense of achievement. That moment marked the beginning of my personal development, as I learned fundamental social and cultural skills within the military. My purpose - to serve humanity - became clearer and remains the guiding principle of my life.

Medical training that quietly changed my direction

My path took a decisive turn during my Air Force training as a medical technician. At the time, I viewed it simply as a requirement, something to learn and execute correctly. Only later did I recognise its deeper impact on my thinking and direction.

Over 11 months of training, I gained firsthand experience in teamwork by working with airmen from diverse backgrounds, cultures and professional disciplines. Survival and combat training taught me how to function under stress, but it was medical training and its real-world application that transformed me most.

During the Covid 19 mission, I spent nine months providing medical support to more than 80 towns, serving over 200,000 people. We worked through every type of weather, responding to widespread fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Air Force and Army medics worked alongside personnel from multiple branches, united by a shared mission to protect human life.

This became my generation's first major medical battle. I worked seven days a week to contain the outbreak, protect communities and preserve social connection. In those moments, the importance of breath and blood became unmistakably real. Monitoring oxygen levels, maintaining airflow and controlling bleeding were no longer abstract medical concepts, they were immediate, human necessities.

I witnessed vulnerability in its most honest form. People depended on one another, and that shared vulnerability created a collective responsibility to protect and support each other. Only afterward did I fully understand the depth of that experience. It taught me that service is rooted in care, protection begins with understanding vulnerability, and strength is built through adaptability, collaboration and emotional support. These lessons continue to shape how I lead and work across diverse fields, including the military, engineering and space research.

A setback that stayed

The failure that stayed with me was not a single event but a realisation. I came to understand that my greatest failure would be reaching the end of life having avoided what truly matters, choosing comfort over learning or silence over responsibility. This insight reshaped how I perceive loss and disappointment.

I learned to view delays, misunderstandings and slow progress as integral parts of growth. Complex journeys - especially in high-risk environments - rarely follow straight paths. What matters is not speed, but direction. As long as my actions align with strengthening human connection, setbacks become signals for recalibration rather than reasons to stop.

This shift clarified my motivation. I am not driven by recognition, but by alignment between intention and action. I choose clarity over noise and responsibility over ease. That awareness continues to guide me, reminding me that human life is interconnected and worth protecting. Without understanding humanity, nothing we invent or discover carries lasting meaning, on this planet or beyond.

A moment that still makes me pause

A moment that continues to stay with me connects two major crises in my life. The first occurred during the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, when I was in Kathmandu. I was not trained as a responder then; I simply helped where I could, guiding people to shared tents, making space for families, and cooking meals at a friend's mother's home. There was no hierarchy, only the immediate need to care for one another. That experience taught me that what united us was not social difference, but shared vulnerability and compassion.

Years later, during the Covid 19 mission, I found myself in a similar role, this time as a trained medical technician. I administered tests, delivered vaccines and cared for diverse communities. Although the scale and resources differed, the human response was strikingly similar. In crisis, people seek safety, reassurance and connection. They look for someone who will listen, remain present and help them breathe through uncertainty.

What makes this memory linger is its universality. Whether facing an earthquake or a pandemic, humanity responds with the same vulnerability and instinct to protect one another. It reminds me that beyond systems, uniforms and borders, human connection remains the most essential form of care.

Realising interdependence

My perspective did not change through a single achievement, but through a gradual understanding of my journey - including my exploration of space-related work. Just as the roots of an apple tree remain apple roots, human nature remains constant unless shaped by shared knowledge, experience and responsibility. True transformation does not come from recognition or reward alone, but from understanding one's purpose.

Early exposure to recognition and advancement taught me not to seek validation, but to remain humble and aligned with my values. Independence came early in my life, yet it taught me the importance of investing in human connection. Progress, I learned, is sustained through collaboration, not isolation.

Known and unknown challenges quietly shaped my journey. They showed me that strength is not about control or power, but about allowing others to grow and lead. I also experienced being misunderstood, seen partially or inaccurately. While this does not fit into typical success narratives, it forced me to look inward and understand myself more deeply rather than correcting every external perception.

Through these experiences and six years in the medical field, I have come to understand a quiet truth: each of us must carry our own oxygen tank. Those who cannot breathe independently often lack the capacity to support others. When all energy is spent on personal survival, little remains for compassion or growth. We do not need to fit into someone else's space to breathe, we already have room to grow within ourselves.

This understanding changed how I move through the world. I now operate with internal clarity of vision, one that prioritises learning, service and unity. Every new responsibility demands new skills, deeper knowledge and adaptation. By staying focused on meaningful impact and committing to small, intentional actions, real and lasting change becomes possible. **B**

TOP PICK

“EVEN AS A MARKETER WHO UNDERSTANDS THE MECHANICS BEHIND ADS, HUMAN BEHAVIOUR IS STILL EMOTIONAL AT ITS CORE. GOOD ADVERTISING DOES NOT TRICK YOU. IT MAKES YOU CURIOUS AND CURIOSITY IS POWERFUL”

Riya Shrestha
Marketing Consultant
Personal Branding Coach
Educational Content Creator

Riya Shrestha is one of Nepal's youngest marketing professionals and a pioneering female voice in the country's educational content space. Over the past four years, she has built a career that spans consulting, coaching and content creation, shaping how businesses and individuals communicate, grow and establish authority in the digital landscape.

As a marketing consultant, Shrestha partners with businesses to elevate their digital strategies, specialising in content marketing that aligns brand essence with impactful, organic content. Known for her meticulous approach, she helps clients amplify their presence and ensure every campaign reflects their core identity while driving measurable growth.

In her role as a personal branding coach, Shrestha works with HNWIs, entrepreneurs and founders to establish them as recognised leaders in their industries. Drawing on a deep understanding of the content landscape, she curates tailored strategies that showcase her clients' expertise across platforms, translating knowledge and achievements into a compelling public persona.

As an educational content creator, Shrestha runs Rato Rupaiya and other channels where she simplifies complex business, marketing and entrepreneurial concepts into bite-sized, research-driven content. Across four years of consistent content creation, her content has garnered over 110 million views across platforms, featuring stories of Nepali startups, top entrepreneurs and marketing insights that rarely receive coverage. As the first female creator in Nepal to focus on this niche, she has built a space that combines depth, insight and storytelling in ways that resonate with professionals and students alike.

What unites all her work is mastery of content strategy and marketing. By leveraging content as a tool for growth and influence, Shrestha helps businesses and individuals not just communicate but establish authority and lasting impact in their respective spheres.

In this issue of **Business 360**, Shrestha speaks about branding and its relevance.

If your personal brand were a single word, what would it be?

Educator. At my core, I love learning and simplifying complex topics. I have had business school students tell me they watch my videos before exams, which tells me the content is not just engaging but genuinely useful. That is the role I value most: making difficult concepts accessible and clear.

What part of your journey shaped your personal brand the most?

Content creation itself. Consistently creating educational content shaped how people perceive me long before they ever meet me. My work often speaks for me in the first meeting. Over time, it helped position me as someone who is research-orientated, quality-driven and serious about educating, not just creating content for views.

How do you balance authenticity with professionalism?

For me, authenticity does not mean oversharing or chasing relatability. It means never sacrificing integrity for views. I am very aware of what works on platforms but I choose not to compromise on accuracy, research or values. Professionalism is simply authenticity with discipline.

How do you define a strong brand in one sentence?

A strong brand is one that stays consistent to its essence while earning trust through clarity, quality and repeated proof.

Do advertisements influence your purchase decisions?

Yes, they do, like most people. Even as a marketer who understands the mechanics behind ads, human behaviour is still emotional at its core. Good advertising does not trick you. It makes you curious and curiosity is powerful.

How do you stay consistent when motivation drops?

I do not rely on motivation but on routine. Once systems are in place, decision fatigue disappears. That said, when motivation drops significantly, I believe in giving myself grace, listening to my body and slowing down temporarily instead of forcing output.

A branding myth you wish people stopped believing in

That you should do what 'everyone else is doing'. When content and branding are not aligned with a brand's true essence, it shows, and it weakens trust in the long run.

What mistake taught you the most as a creator?

In the beginning, I underestimated how important volume is for learning. You need to create a lot before you understand what truly works. After doing it hundreds of times, pattern recognition becomes natural but that only comes through consistent output.

What kind of content builds trust the quickest?

Research-driven content. When people can tell that you have gone deeper than surface-level information, it immediately builds credibility. The kind of content that makes you wonder, 'How did they even find this?' creates trust very quickly.

What usually inspires your best ideas?

People. I work closely with business owners, professionals and creators who do exceptional work. Being surrounded by thoughtful, driven people naturally leads to better ideas and sharper perspectives.

What is the biggest mistake professionals make when building a personal brand?

Trying to be known for everything. Strong personal brands have clear associations. One primary niche creates distinction. Everything else should be closely related, not scattered.

Consistency or creativity

Consistency. Creativity matters, but without consistency, it never compounds. Consistency is what turns ideas into credibility.

What is one marketing strategy that you swear by?

Alignment. When content, messaging and brand essence are aligned, marketing becomes more effective and sustainable. Misalignment usually comes from desperation for views rather than clarity of purpose.

If you had to describe your content style in one sentence, what would it be?

Research-driven educational content that simplifies complex business, marketing and psychological concepts with clarity and depth.

What is more important for creators today - storytelling or strategy?

Strategy. Storytelling works best when it is intentional. Without strategy, stories may get attention but they rarely build long-term authority or trust. **B**

GET FIT

BEING INJURY-PRONE IS NOT WEAKNESS, IT'S DISCONNECTION

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

I catch many people in their mid-years saying casually: "My body is weak now. My bones can't take it. Age has caught up." The way I see it may make some of your uncomfortable because the truth is we are not weaker by nature, we are simply disconnected from our bodies.

The human body was not designed to sit still for hours, scroll endlessly, and then suddenly perform when required. Yet, that is exactly what modern life demands of it.

Previous generations didn't talk about workouts or fitness routines. They walked more, worked with their hands, climbed, bent, carried and rested naturally. Their bodies stayed in conversation with movement. But today, we live in chairs. We outsource effort. We move less and expect more. When the body is suddenly asked to lift, run, twist or even climb stairs, it protests. That protest often shows up as injury. This isn't fragility. It's unfamiliarity.

Injuries come from imbalance, not just lack of strength. Most injuries don't happen because we can't lift heavy weights. They happen because some muscles are overworked while others have gone silent. Poor posture, limited mobility and repetitive habits slowly distort how we move. Over time, joints carry loads they were never meant to handle alone. Pain appears not as punishment but as a message.

You must remember that the body adapts, always. The question is: to what?

Muscles are protection, not decoration. After the age of 30, muscle mass naturally declines unless we actively use it. When muscles weaken, joints lose support, balance fades and reaction time slows. Injuries happen not because bones fail, but because the body's protective systems are no longer engaged.

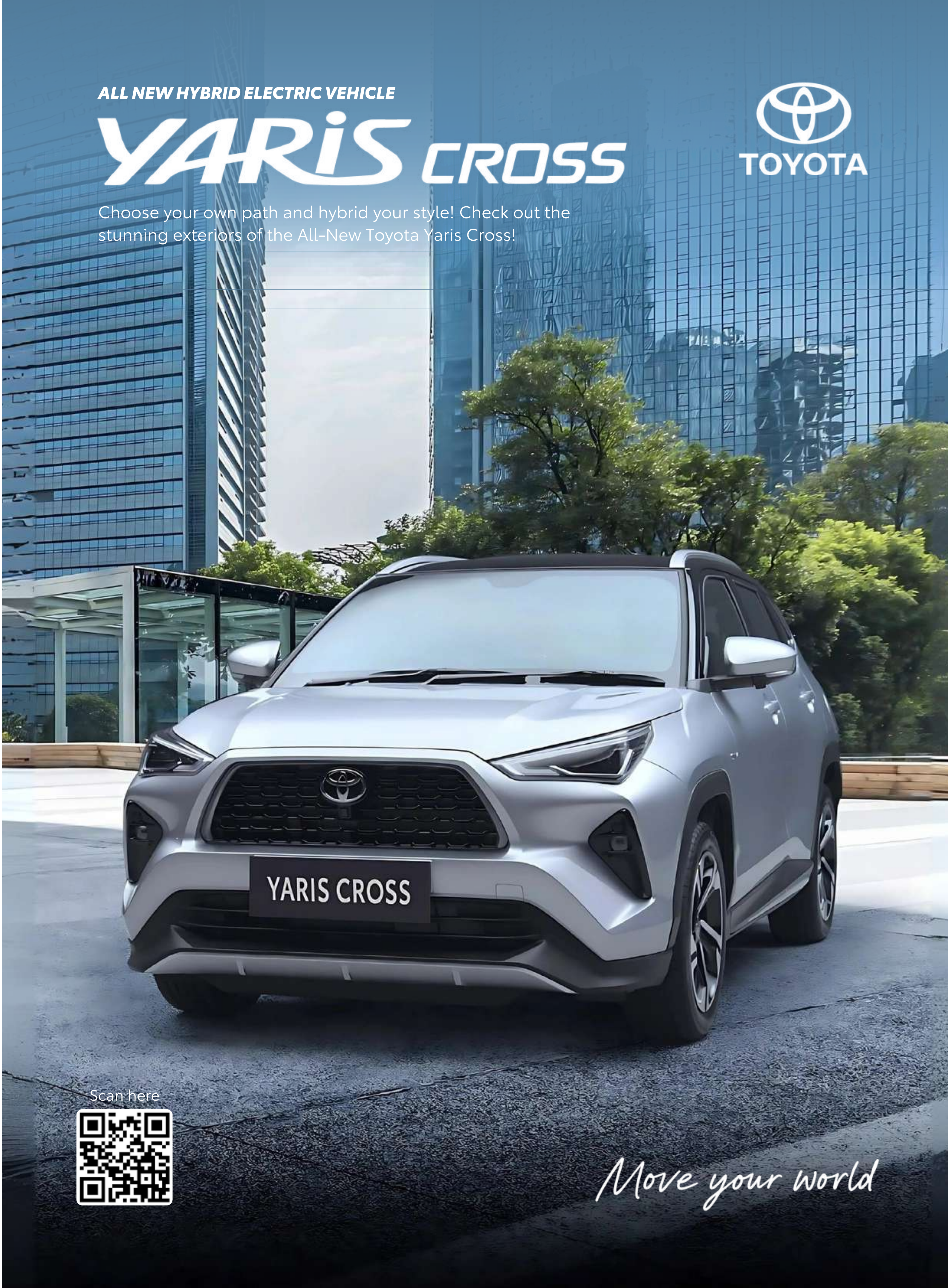
Those of us who are reluctant to commit to routine exercise and going to the gym, please note that strength is not about looking fit, it is about staying capable. Exercise is not a luxury, a trend, or a punishment for overeating. It is maintenance. It is how we tell the body, "You are needed."

Muscles are protection, not decoration. After the age of 30, muscle mass naturally declines unless we actively use it. When muscles weaken, joints lose support, balance fades and reaction time slows. Injuries happen not because bones fail, but because the body's protective systems are no longer engaged.

Regular movement trains the body to absorb stress safely, keeps joints mobile and resilient, builds balance and coordination, strengthens bones through healthy load, improves recovery, mood and confidence. Exercise doesn't just add years to life; it adds life to years.

There are simple ways to begin. You don't need extremes. You need consistency. Walk every day, start slow but stay consistent. Strengthen legs, hips, core and back 2–3 times a week. Always, stretch and warm up before activity. Respect rest and sleep. Listen to pain early, not after injury. Move – not to chase perfection but to reclaim resilience.

Exercise is not about pushing harder. It is about staying able, independent and whole. **B**


ALL NEW HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLE
YARIS CROSS
Choose your own path and hybrid your style! Check out the stunning exteriors of the All-New Toyota Yaris Cross!
TOYOTA
YARIS CROSS
Scan here
Move your world

SUNAINA GHIMIRE PANDEY
PRESIDENT, CAN FEDERATION

> "The moment you mentally commit to a role, responsibility begins, long before the title arrives. Privilege follows responsibility, not the other way around. Influence should always be understood as a duty, never as entitlement"

Sunaina Ghimire Pandey is a trailblazer in Nepal's information and communication technology sector. As a child, she often accompanied her father on morning walks, lingering afterward at a nearby tea stall where he and his friends exchanged ideas on everything from society to progress. Those early conversations - rooted in curiosity and a growth mindset - quietly shaped her own outlook, nurturing the achiever's instinct she carries to this day. She describes herself as a lifelong learner and a go-getter.

Pandey made history as the first woman to lead the Federation of Computer Association Nepal (CAN Federation) as its president. With over 25 years of sustained contribution to technology development, leadership, and policy advocacy, her influence on Nepal's digital landscape is profound. Her early technical work played a pivotal role in the localisation of Microsoft Windows XP and Office, the establishment of national standards for Nepali computing, and the expansion of digital access for millions.

Beyond her technical accomplishments, Pandey has built and led institutions, promoted digital entrepreneurship, and consistently championed women's inclusion in ICT through policy reform, mentorship, and leadership development. Her contributions to Nepal's digital transformation have been widely recognised.

In this edition of **Business 360**, Pandey shares her perspective on leadership.

What is leadership to you?

Leadership is about setting a clear goal and working toward it while bringing people together for a larger purpose. Along the way, there are moments of doubt—when you ask yourself, why am I doing this? and feel tempted to walk away. But leadership means understanding that effort, uncertainty, and setbacks are integral to the journey.

True growth begins with an honest struggle within oneself. Overcoming both inner conflicts and external challenges becomes the foundation of leadership.

Is leadership inborn or acquired?

Leadership is entirely acquired. If it were inborn, there would be no struggle, everything would be handed to us effortlessly from birth. But that is never the case. The first challenges often begin at home, navigating restrictions and expectations. Then come societal pressures and external obstacles. Facing these circumstances head-on is what shapes a leader.

Was there an incident that has truly tested your leadership?

In 2019, when I contested for the presidency of CAN Federation, I faced immense resistance. No woman had ever vied for or held the position before. Even my family worried about the stress and challenges I was under. Many people tried to discourage me, saying I was too young, unprepared or incapable, and advised me to try again after a few years. It often felt like an emotional attack.

Yet, there was also overwhelming support from those who wanted to see change. I remained determined because of my team's belief in me. Although I did not win that election, I never felt defeated. I stood firm until the end, and that journey itself was a profound test and affirmation of my leadership.

As CAN president, have you made any unpopular decisions for long-term sectoral benefit?

After assuming the presidency, we initiated structured policy work through strategy planning meetings to define both short- and long-term goals for the sector. Many stakeholders - internal members, organisations, even government bodies - initially resisted participating, viewing it as an unnecessary burden. Resistance still exists. However, these meetings are essential for building sustainable strategies for Nepal's IT sector. Sometimes leadership requires persisting with ideas that are not immediately popular but are necessary for long-term growth.

Which challenges in Nepal's IT ecosystem do you feel personally accountable to address?

Earlier, policy barriers were the primary concern. Today, the biggest challenge is the shortage of skilled human resources. We are working on skill development by collaborating with the National Academy of Vocational Training (NAVT).

Equally critical is preparing our workforce for artificial intelligence. Globally, companies are replacing traditional developers with AI-skilled professionals. If we fail to equip our youth with AI capabilities, we risk losing global competitiveness and jobs. Addressing this is a top priority for me.

When should a leader hand over the baton?

In the IT sector, technology evolves daily. Timely leadership transition is essential. Unlike

other sectors where experience and age dominate, IT thrives on new knowledge and adaptability. When experience complements the knowledge of the younger generation, that is the right moment to pass on leadership. My tenure is two years, and I fully intend to hand over responsibility at its conclusion.

How has being CAN President reshaped your view of power and influence?

In the IT sector, power and influence matter far less than strategic innovation. Technology always comes first; policies and regulations follow. Hotmail existed before policies. Pathao operated before regulations were formed. What drives success in IT is not authority, but strategy and innovation. I understood this early on, and my experience as president has only reinforced that belief.

When did you first realise people were listening to you as a leader?

During Microsoft's Black Screen awareness campaign for Windows XP in 2008–09, we gathered around 5,000 people. The stage was completely dark when I walked in. I was terrified, so nervous I thought I might faint.

But in that darkness, I couldn't see the audience; only my voice carried. When the lights came on, I focused on my words, not the crowd, and spoke with confidence. Even afterward, on my way home, I could hardly believe I had addressed such a large audience. That was the first time I truly felt heard.

If you were mentoring your younger self, what leadership advice would you give?

I would speak to her about maturity and restraint. I was once too aggressive and unguarded with my words. I would tell her that nothing is impossible.

When I was younger, I never imagined I could hold a position like this. I believed certain goals were simply unattainable. Today, I would tell my younger self: take the first step. Just begin. Stay optimistic. Build deep skills and knowledge in your chosen field.

How do you navigate rooms where politics, business interests and egos collide?

My instinct is neutrality. Remaining calm, balanced, and emotionally detached is essential. I step back, observe from a third-person perspective, and focus on the larger purpose rather than individual gain. That approach helps prevent escalation and fosters constructive outcomes.

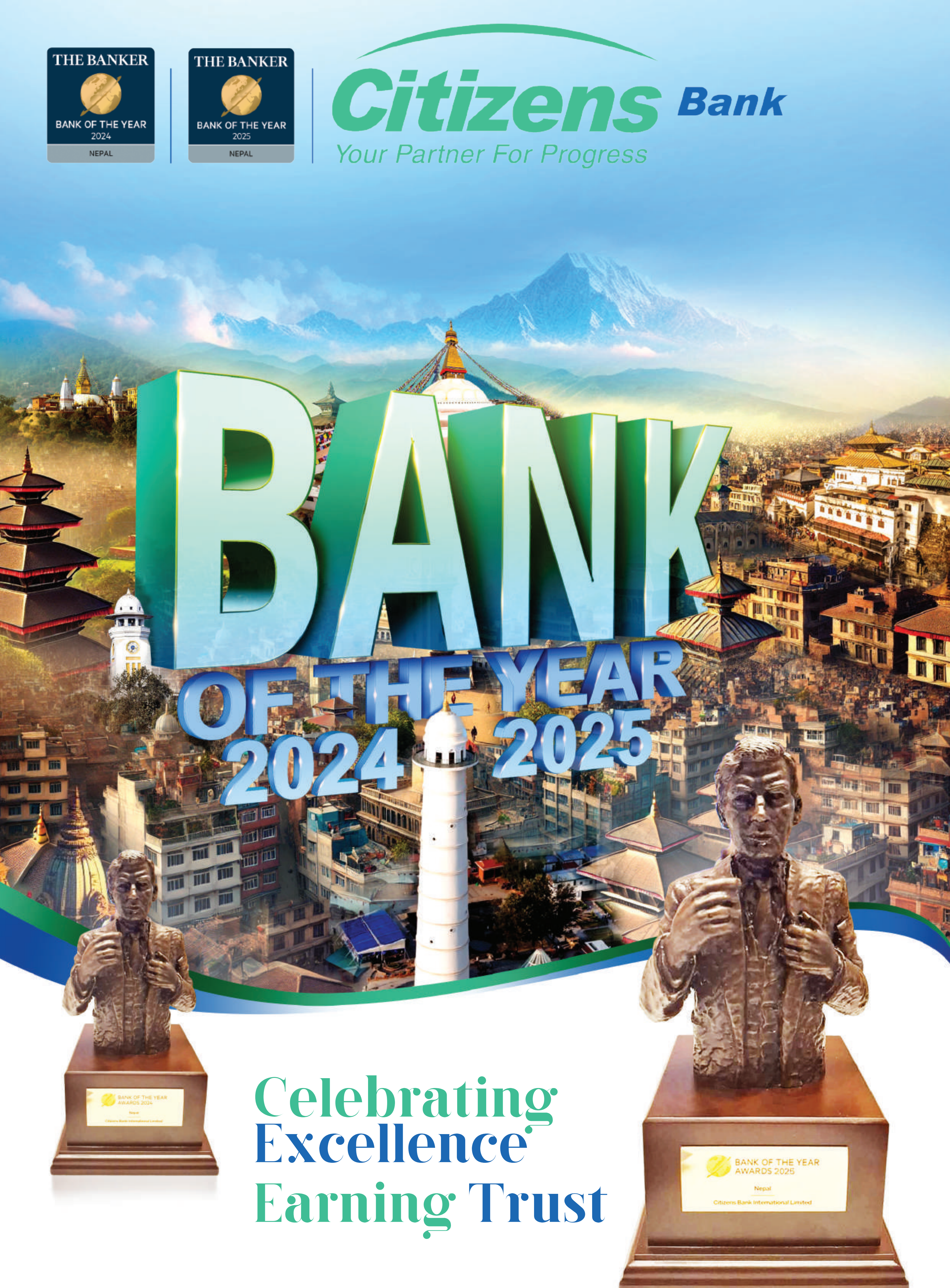
What is the emotional toll of leadership, and which rewards go unspoken?

Leadership is emotionally exhausting. Your heart breaks repeatedly, your mind is constantly overworked, and physical fatigue becomes routine. Yet, you must continue. Many decisions cannot be made based on personal will. Collective decisions are often perceived as personal ones, even when they conflict with your own values. This silent burden of leadership is rarely acknowledged.

When does influence become responsibility rather than privilege?

The moment you mentally commit to a role, responsibility begins, long before the title arrives. Privilege follows responsibility, not the other way around. Influence should always be understood as a duty, never as entitlement. **B**


Hotel Bookings?
अब eSewa™ बाटै


THE BANKER
BANK OF THE YEAR
2024
NEPAL
THE BANKER
BANK OF THE YEAR
2025
NEPAL
Citizens Bank
Your Partner For Progress
BANK
OF THE YEAR
2024 2025
BANK OF THE YEAR
AWARDS 2024
BANK OF THE YEAR
AWARDS 2025
Nepal
Citizens Bank International Limited
Celebrating
Excellence
Earning Trust