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NATURAL INTELLIGENCE: Software engineers at work on Thursday in the Naxal office of the company Wiseyak, which primarily exports AI healthcare products.

SUMAN NEPALI

It's IT

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Nepal has seen a dramatic recent growth in its Information Technology (IT) sector with tech companies and freelancers building software products, as well as providing digital services for clients all over the world.

Nepal's IT service export industry in just the first half of 2023 is estimated at

\$800 million, although some say this is an underestimation. In 2022, an Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) report valued IT exports at \$515 million, a whopping 64.2% growth over the previous year. (Chart on page 4-5)

Annual IT exports now surpasses Nepal's direct earnings from the tourism industry. Besides assisting in bridging the balance of trade deficit, it also provides jobs to thousands of young engineers who may otherwise have emigrated.

Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) are already impacting programming and software, however this can also allow Nepal to leapfrog into a new age of innovation by building on its young talent pool.

"Nepal slept through the last tech revolution," says Kiran Bhakta Joshi of

Incessant Rain Studios, referring to the dot-com boom of the internet bubble between the mid 1990s to the early 2000s as everything started going digital and online. "AI provides us the chance to harness cutting-edge technology and shape our future."

The growth of Nepal's tech industry is happening in parallel with the boom in the global AI market with dozens of new apps coming up every day. Nepal should take advantage of both trends and go all in on AI.

The IT sector in Nepal directly and indirectly employs an estimated 1.5 million people already, and by declaring the next 10 years the Decade of Information Technology could give tech exports a boost.

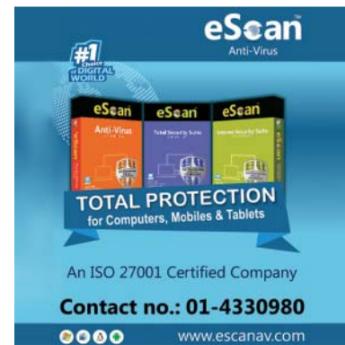
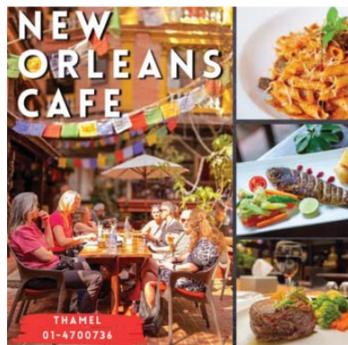
Joshi is the founder of Incessant Rain Studios and has worked on some of the most iconic animated movies of all time

like The Lion King and Kung Fu Panda. He recalls how, while working at Disney, digital animation replaced traditional drawing methods really rapidly.

Learning from this, Nepal's planners and government should be taking proactive steps to help tech companies here succeed in the AI game. Nepal needs the infrastructure, human resources and foreign investment to take maximum advantage.

But, says AI scientist Suresh Manandhar: "Nepal is going to miss the AI surge. It is a policy issue. As long as there are policies strictly regulating what foreign investors can do with their profits, overseas funds in the tech sector will be low."

MORE ON PAGE 4-5



natureknit
in Paris



Taking a leap forward, Nepal's own Natureknit Cashmere is venturing into the global market by participating in Maison&Objet Paris 2024.



Quality of equality for women

Shakti (शक्ति) in Hinduism is the all-powerful feminine goddess without whom the masculine form is just a shadow. The mother goddess is also प्रकृति (nature), signifying the intimate link of all life forms with the female creator being.

This week, women across Nepal have been celebrating the runup to the nationwide carnival of Tij, and the main day this year falls on 6 September.

Tij has traditionally been a symbol of entrenched patriarchy in Nepali society and a festival to put women in their place. They are required to fast all day to ensure longevity of their husbands, reinforcing the idea that a woman's worth is tied to a man.

However, Nepali womanhood has coopted Tij and turned it into a festival of emancipation, independence and even defiance. Leading up to the festival, artists and singers have released music videos on social media platforms with scathing satire, commentary, and protest. Tij has become the stage on which to highlight continued discrimination, abuse, even rapes and murders of women which have gone largely unpunished.

The way Nepalis celebrate our myriad post-monsoon festivals has changed with increased disposable income, and in the process become more commercialised and consumerist.

But just to show who is in charge, the Kathmandu District Administration on Tuesday issued a notice saying any 'unnecessarily extravagant celebration' of Tij would result in legal action. Why does Kathmandu's moral police feel it is necessary to control merry-making on the one day that Nepali women have reclaimed for themselves? Don't they have bigger fish to fry? Like arresting convicted rapists?

The 2015 Constitution has ensured better representation of hitherto excluded groups like women across all sectors. In theory.

Even though the amendment to Nepal's Civil Service Act has reserved 33% of civil service seats for women, they make up just 7.41% of the total jobs (page 10-11). Women from underserved communities suffer double discrimination.

Women and minorities in politics tend to be token nominations just to fulfil quota requirements. Women were elected to every local council as either a mayor or deputy mayor in 2017, but electoral alliances between political parties in the 2022 elections at all three levels of government gave politicians loopholes to bypass this requirement.

Indeed, while the number of female mayors and chairpersons rose slightly from 18 in 2017 to 25 in 2022, the number of deputy chiefs in 761 local governments fell steeply from 718 women to 564 at the same time.

Similarly, the 2015 Constitution mandated that 33% of MPs had to be women. Most female parliamentarians were never given a ticket for direct elections by their parties, they had to get into Parliament via the Proportional Representation (PR) system and are therefore not taken seriously by their male peers.

The current coalition government of the NC and UML came to power two months ago on the purported agenda of scrapping the PR system with a constitutional amendment, arguing it has brought political instability.

Forget for a moment that it is serial septuagenarian prime ministers of the three main parties who are more responsible for decades of instability, but women and other excluded communities are in real danger of losing guarantees of political representation.

The 2021 census shows the female population over the age of 10 who are economically active has increased from 29.2% to 60.4%. Women manage nearly 30% of all small and medium businesses.

Female land and property ownership has increased since women were guaranteed inheritance rights. But while businesses registered by women are on the rise, this is largely so that male family members can use up subsidies for female-owned enterprises.

However progressive the laws, that is only the first step. True equality cannot be achieved until women are socio-culturally empowered to make their own decisions: whether or not to get married, when and to whom, to join the workforce after marriage or be a homemaker, have children (and how many) or not have them, get divorced, or remarry.

There is no right or wrong in all this, it is a woman's choice. Family, society and community have no right to critique their decision. Patriarchy has contributed to gender inequality, but internalised misogyny lurks deep within society.

This is reflected in how Nepali families (including some matriarchs) continue to treat their daughters-in-law as slaves. Socialisation is so entrenched that in many cases, it is female family members who banish daughters to chhau huts during their periods because of fears of divine retribution.

Recently, it was women who defended a self-proclaimed 'godwoman' who sermonised that women must endure abuse and exploitation at the hands of the husband and his family because divorce is "unnatural".

Nepali society, including us women, have a lot to learn and unlearn so that the next generation can finally break free of the shackles of discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and inequality.

Shristi Karki



SUMAN NEPALI

The Nepal government should stop moral policing of Tij, and focus on ensuring true socio-political representation by women

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

1/11

Twenty years ago this week, in the aftermath of the killings of 12 Nepalis in Iraq, Nepal descended into a state of chaos leading to rare communal strife in Kathmandu and elsewhere across the country.

This was during the Maoist insurgency, and as the police tried to control the situation with the army as just bystanders and no fire service or any other support, we could not help but point out an obvious: an absolute vacuum of political governance, and how our first instinct in the face of tragedy was to turn to violence.

Excerpt of the editorial published in issue #1123 - 9 September 2004:

When the lives of 12 young Nepalis in search of survival were brutally ended by Iraqi terrorists in rage against the United States, the response in Kathmandu should have been grief and introspection. Also, a search for ways to make Nepal a better place for its citizens, one in which desperation would



not lead our youths to seek livelihoods in far-off places of war. Instead, on Wednesday our country descended into a state of uncontrolled violence as the monster of communalism for the first time stormed Kathmandu Valley and towns elsewhere.

The abject absence of governmental authority served to compound the extreme confusion and chaos. The violence against manpower agencies was widely covered by the media. Indeed, the destruction of property and the records of more than a hundred such agencies must in the end

affect tens of thousand of Nepalis working overseas as well as those aspirants still in queue for visas.

Nepal has become anarchic, ungoverned and ungovernable. Our sisters and brothers in the villages doubtless have known this fact for some time, but it took Wednesday's numbing events to confirm to city dwellers that chronic political skulduggery and the Maoist insurgency has today left us a shell of a government. It's all hollow inside.

For archived material of Nepal Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepaltimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



NOT-SO-PERMANENT FROST

Rapid thawing of the Himalayan ice-cap is compounded by little-studied melting of permafrost that destabilises peaks. This was likely behind the Melamchi flood in 2021 and the Thame disaster two weeks ago. Researchers Wilfried Haeblerli and Alton C Byers explain this phenomenon with local context and tips to prepare for permafrost-induced disasters. Read page 6-7 and watch explainer video online.



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Sumitra Karki wanted to be a nurse while growing up. Instead, she became a farmer-entrepreneur setting up a collective farming group in her village in Galkot and inspiring other women to pursue professional farming. See how the collective is a powerful model for independence and income. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for more multimedia content.

AIR POLLUTION

When will national politicians and development professionals in Kathmandu wake up to what their lack of rigorous pollution policies is doing to the people ('Bad air and polluted politics', Sonia Awale, #1227)?

Keith D Leslie

How many parliamentarians and local governments have really talked about air pollution? Apparently none. Air pollution and road crashes have to be two of the biggest crises we are facing. This means that reforming our transport system has to be one of the topmost political priorities.

Prashanta Khanal

LOSS & DAMAGE

We must stop waiting for the government to do something as well as for climate compensation ('Measuring climate impact on culture and heritage', Rastra Raj Bhandari, #1226). Anyone of us can take the initiative to minimise loss and damage, starting with planting and tending to a few trees.

Sigmund Stengel

YARSA HARVEST

This is a perfect example of greed ('The human cost of Nepal's yarsa gold rush', Shrijan Pandey, #1227). What are people leaving for the next year, or for the future, if they want to hoard all the yarsa during one harvest season? Overharvesting yarsa is tantamount to cutting the head off a hen that lays golden eggs.

Sid Shahi

UNSTOPPABLE WOMEN SERIES

I look forward to getting these books ('The Unstoppables', Pratibha Tuladhar, Page 9). It is so important to celebrate our female heroes and inspiring leaders.

Sara Parker

DAM PROJECTS

As the water resources minister, I remember pushing for dam projects as a quick, least socially-disruptive and high peaking power projects ('Rivers be damned', Pinki Sris Rana, nepaltimes.com). However, during an on site visit, my vehicle was almost set on fire by a politician's hooligan cadres.

Dipak Gyawali

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Recognise Palestinian sovereignty

Guest Editorial
Nepal recognising Palestinian sovereignty will not by itself be enough to make Palestine a sovereign state. But it will make history, or at least, Nepal will be standing courageously on the right side of history, wrote Katak Malla in last week's guest editorial. Join the discussion online.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



Nepal's flying doctor

by Kunda Dixit
Nepal's only PhD airline pilot Capt Bhogendra Kathayat has devised a way to use decades of visibility data from Nepal's airports to come up with policy-level solutions to improve aviation safety as well as public health. Read about his life and work on our website.

X Most popular on X

Bad air and polluted politics

by Sonia Awale
A new report ranks Nepal as the third most polluted country in the world with its entire population living in areas where the annual average particulate pollution level exceeds the WHO guideline. Most appalling is the lack of political will to improve air quality. Visit nepaltimes.com for details.

66 Most commented

Nepal's star shines in Locarno

by Pinki Sris Rana
Thinley Lhamo won the Bocciano d'Oro Prize for Best Acting Performance at the 77th Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland last month for her role as Pema in Min Bahadur Bham's latest feature Shambhala. Like Pema, Lhamo's personal life has also been a journey of self-discovery. Profile online.

🔥 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The large investments made in Nepal's social sector should have made a dent in poverty reduction. But the money and its intended use have rarely benefited the people who need it most- driving an increasing number of young Nepalis abroad in search of work.

'Gaijin' - A Pessimist! @Gaijin_Ram
Why don't INGOs and investors work on generating sustainable employment opportunities for people who migrate abroad rather than just upskilling them? A lot of effort is being wasted in discourse aided by lack of credible need assessment.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Anyone who believes in international rule of law must condemn acts of terrorism whether it is by state or non-state actors. But the Nepal government and media seem to be silent in condemning acts of genocide in Gaza.

pigreen1 @pigreen1
Nearly 11 months now of brutal and devastating orgy of death and destruction by Israel in Gaza

1,000 WORDS



THE LONG MARCH: Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal on a routine morning walk in Surkhet where he inspected an under construction sports stadium on Saturday. The former prime minister is on a tour of western Nepal after his party meeting where he stayed a leadership challenge from the Janardan Sharma faction. Dahal has announced that his party will launch a "street protest" to oppose the ruling coalition's plans to scrap reservation for political representation with a constitutional amendment.

HEMANT KC / RSS



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ENGLAND

Self-learning comes before machine

The government must relax investment laws to attract overseas capital in the IT sector

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Besides barriers to more foreign investment in Nepal's IT sector, there is also a skills gap. The 2022 IIDS report talked to Nepal-based IT companies about problems regarding outsourcing work, and 67% of them cited the lack of skill and competence, and 53% noted a lack of professionalism.

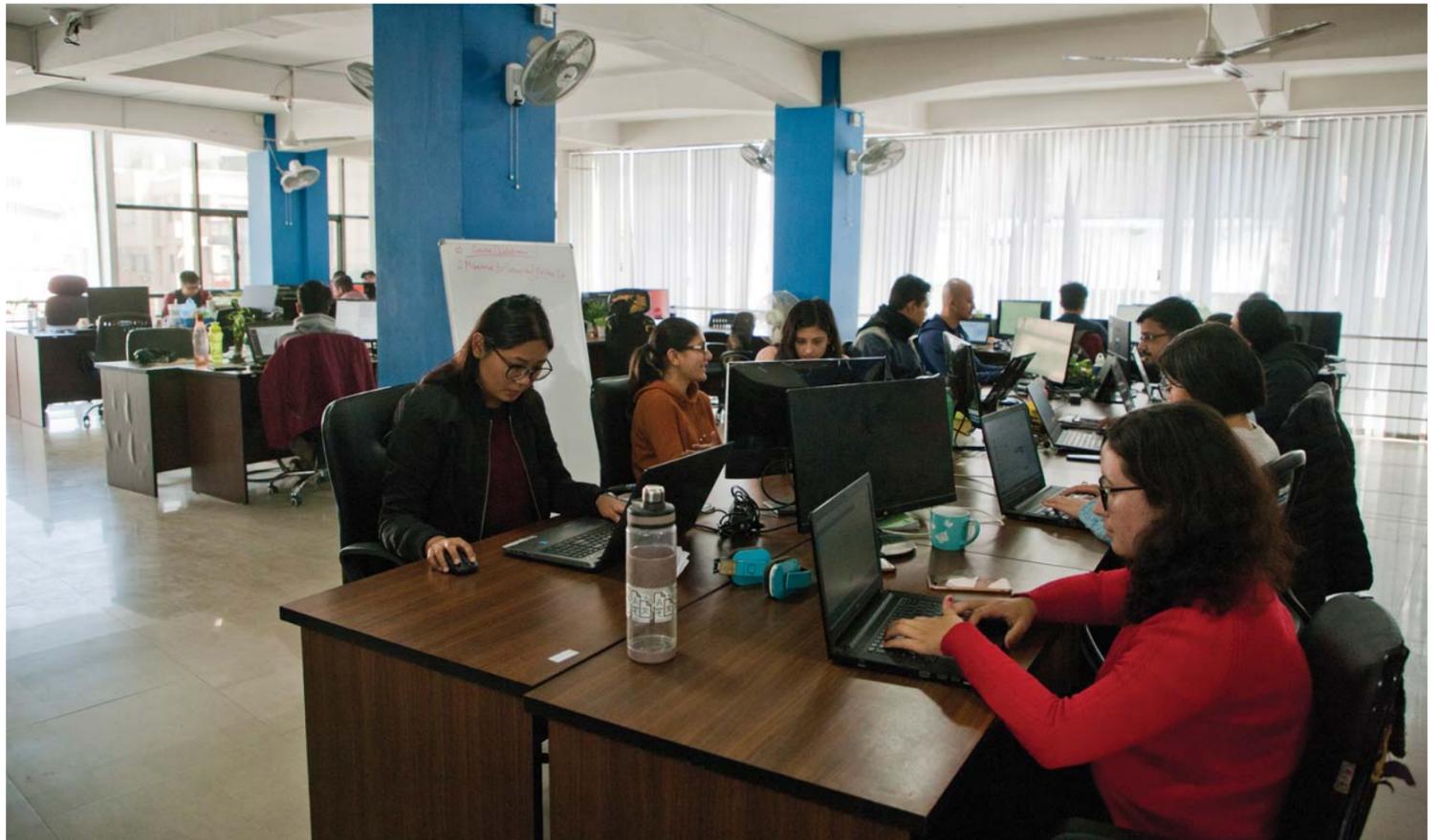
And that is an area in which Nepalis cannot get away with blaming politicians. A large part of the appeal of tech careers is the ability to self-learn, and courses, videos and books are free all over the internet. The IIDS report stated that a fifth of all IT sector workers did not have any degree.

This means Nepalis must first concentrate on self-learning before they can master machine learning and AI. Tech promoters say that there is not much we can expect from computer institutes or the government.

Suresh Manandhar is an AI scientist with over 30 years of experience in research, teaching and startups. Manandhar taught at the University of York for 23 years, heading its Artificial Intelligence Research Group.

He is currently head of Artificial Intelligence Research at Fusemachines and Honorary Chair in Artificial Intelligence at the Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology (MBUST) in Chitlang near Kathmandu.

Manandhar's priority for now is with his startup software company, Wiseyak, a healthcare initiative that uses AI and machine learning to enhance medical care and treatment. It also provides intelligent chatbots for organisations including NTC, and is



MONIKA DEUPALA / NT ARCHIVE

working on large language models of its own that are more bilingual in Nepali and English, with transcription and conversational capabilities.

"We are one of few companies in Nepal working with our own AI models, most companies are using APIs," Manandhar told us. While Wiseyak trains its own AI models, most other Nepali software companies simply integrate advanced AI tools like ChatGPT into the programs they build.

Manandhar says that as long as Nepal's foreign investment policies are restrictive with strict rules on what investors can do with their profits, the flow of overseas funds will be low. "Running Wiseyak has been very difficult, much more than I thought," he admits.

With AI applications getting better at generating deep fake videos, Kiran Joshi at Incessant Rain Studios is aware of its impending impact on animation and his business. After all, his

company has done well because Nepali animators are cheaper to hire than ones in Japan or the West.

Joshi reckons that given the advances in AI capabilities, the entertainment industry in general and animation in particular has a window of about two years before it can produce better content than humans.

But Hollywood is already panicking, with both writers and actors going on strike in 2023 demanding safeguards against

losing their jobs to AI.

"The landscape is incredibly volatile. You have to lead, and you have to stay very agile," says Joshi, who is taking as many steps as possible at Incessant Rain in Kathmandu to stay ahead of the curve – to tame AI as a tool, instead of being devoured by it.

Joshi's studio has introduced AI tools into its workflow, and is working with a Hollywood startup to carry out the manual, repetitive parts of animation post-

NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक

11 years with Turkish

Turkish Airlines marked its 11th year of route operation to and from Kathmandu on 2 September. The carrier is the only European airline serving Nepal, and has the largest global network of destinations. It started flying to Kathmandu in September 2013, and has been promoting tourism to Nepal through various travel and tourism trade fairs since.



Turkish is also celebrating the 20 millionth member of its Miles&Smiles loyalty program since its inception in 1989. Members earn miles from flights with Turkish Airlines and Star Alliance partners through co-branded credit card expenditures and from Turkish Airlines accommodation, tourism, car rental, and technology partners. Earned miles can be redeemed at shopandmiles.com for economy and business class tickets on Turkish Airlines and Star Alliance member flights.

The Turkish flag carrier is also enhancing its TKCONNECT program through a partnership with content aggregators Travelfusion, Verteil, DRCT, Mystify, Nuua, Nufflights and Theta. This will allow Nepali travel agents to create customised itineraries, offer exclusive deals, and streamline the booking process.



Intrepid Win

Intrepid DMC, Nepal's intermediary for Australian agency Intrepid Travel, won an award in the sustainability and social responsibility category at the PATA 2024 Gold Awards in Bangkok. Its More Intrepid Women for Nepal campaign was recognised as part of the company's commitment to an inclusive future in the workplace.

MAW at NADA

MAW group received more than 1,000 bookings of two and four-wheelers of the various brands of vehicles they deal with, including Yamaha, Avatr and Seres at the NADA Auto Show 2024. MAW also launched the 'MAW-Vridhhi Group,' which will be dedicated to the EV.

Gogoro E-scooters

Nebula Energy and Gogoro Inc. launched two of their battery-swapping e-scooters at the NADA Auto Show, Pulse and Je.go. Forty-five stations across Kathmandu have been set up for riders to swap depleted batteries for charged ones. The initiative is aimed at resolving range anxiety, charging time concerns, and mass-scale adoption of electric two-wheelers.

Ncell rewards Palesha

Ncell is awarding para taekwondo athlete Palesha Goverdhan with Rs1 million for her bronze medal at the Paris Paralympics 2024, the first podium finish in Nepal's sporting history. Ncell has been collaborating with the Nepal Paralympic Committee for a long time, supporting their training, development and participation in tournaments.

IME Junior App

Global IME Bank launched its Global Junior app to help teenagers develop good financial habits under adult supervision. They will learn to bank digitally and save and spend responsibly through this free app, which has features including balance checking, transaction inquiry, and payment through QR code capabilities.

Nabil shares

Nabil Bank concluded a special general meeting, passing a proposal to issue 8% Nonconvertible Cumulative Preference Shares worth Rs5 Billion. The shares are



being issued to grow the business and manage risk. The proposal was passed and is now pending approval from Nepal Rastra Bank and regulatory bodies.



Toyota Vijay Utsav

United Traders organised the Toyota Vijay Utsav from 29 August to 3 September in which customers could finance purchase of the Corolla Cross Hybrid with a 30% down payment, get free valuations on old cars, receive exchange bonuses, and take part in referral programs and daily lucky draws.



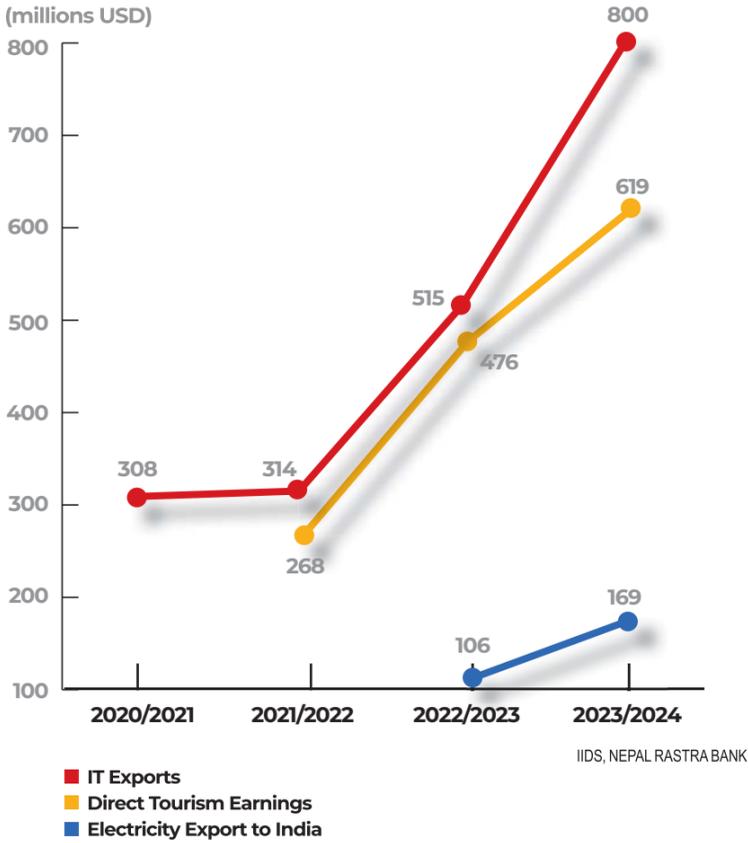
Samsung A06

Samsung launched the Galaxy A06, which comes with a 50MP primary camera, a 6.7-inch LCD screen, a microSD card slot, a 5,000mAh battery, and Samsung's Knox Vault security technology. The model is available in black, light blue and gold and starts at Rs15,499. Financing options with 0% interest are available.

e learning

NEPAL'S HARD CURRENCY EARNINGS

Remittance from overseas Nepalis last year was \$10.864 billion



production. Incessant Rain's artists and animators all dedicate some of their time to learn about AI tools in their departments, and share findings with the large staff.

Two years ago, Joshi established an academy to teach the fundamentals of animation and storytelling. Starting October, his team is adding a course that goes over the basics of programming AI.

Another successful Nepal-based company that focuses on AI is Fusemachines, founded in 2013 by Sameer Maskey, who has a PhD in AI and Machine Learning from Columbia University, where he now also teaches.

Maskey had a prolific research career while also building a startup that is now headquartered in New York, and became the first Nepali company to be listed on the NASDAQ to go public.

Fusemachines makes several AI products, including Xtract, which understands and extracts important information from documents. Another is Fraud Detection AI, which identifies and investigates scamming patterns. Yet another application forecasts demand and inventory, promising high precision.

The company also runs a fellowship program as part of its pledge to 'Democratise AI', which involves a scholarship for a six-month course that aims at 'producing high-quality AI and data science talent'.

For Manandhar and others in Nepal's IT sector, finding venture capital and other investors to keep their companies running is a major hurdle, and the government so far has not only been no help, but has proven to be a hindrance.

Kathmandu University has an AI course, COMP 472, and the syllabus is outdated with vague course objectives promising students will 'get the full picture of AI easily' and even adds that if interested they 'may go on to graduate school for further study'. The government recently

released a 'Concept Paper' about AI in which it mentioned Alan Turing and the 'Lmitation Game' (sic, typo in the report) in its executive summary. The document does identify problems such as a lack of skill and infrastructure and data security concerns.

But the government's foremost priority seems to be to regulate AI, and the second seems to be to make sure developers know the rules and follow them. Increasing research comes third, but with no pathway to reach it.

AI is now designed for quality control at factories or used in spotting cancerous tissue, but even before scientists have decided how it will affect jobs and technology, the Nepal government already wants to regulate it. Those resources would be better spent in making computers and the internet more accessible to citizens in underserved schools.

"Forget dealing with the bureaucracy, we use redundancy to get around the challenges we face in Nepal," says Joshi, who has taught himself accounting-for-risk and do-it-yourself lessons running his business in Nepal.

The IT business already deals with prolonged power and Internet outages, and as more and more young Nepali engineers leave the country, or are planning to leave, technical staff needs to be replaced with year-round training to deal with the turnover.

"People migrate mainly for two reasons. They need money, or their job bores them. So I give my team projects that are interesting to work on," says Joshi, who saw a lull in business during the Hollywood strike, but now is so busy he may have to outsource some work to India.

More successful tech companies means more jobs for Nepalis who prefer to stay home, more revenue for the government, hence more reinvestment in the sector, and a way to break the overwhelming dependence on remittance.

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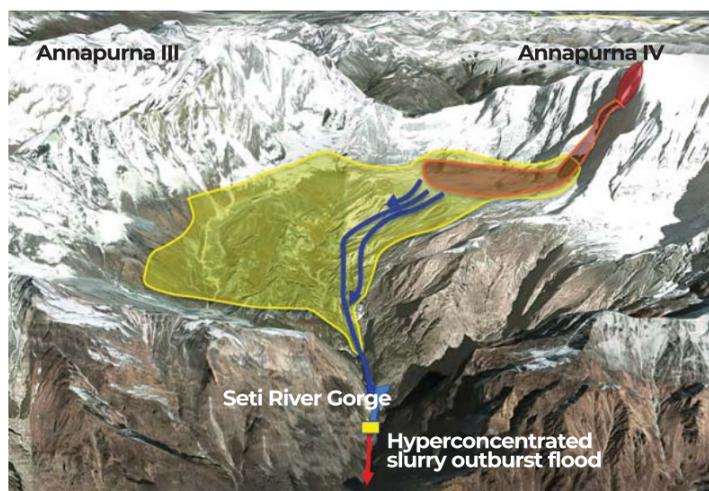
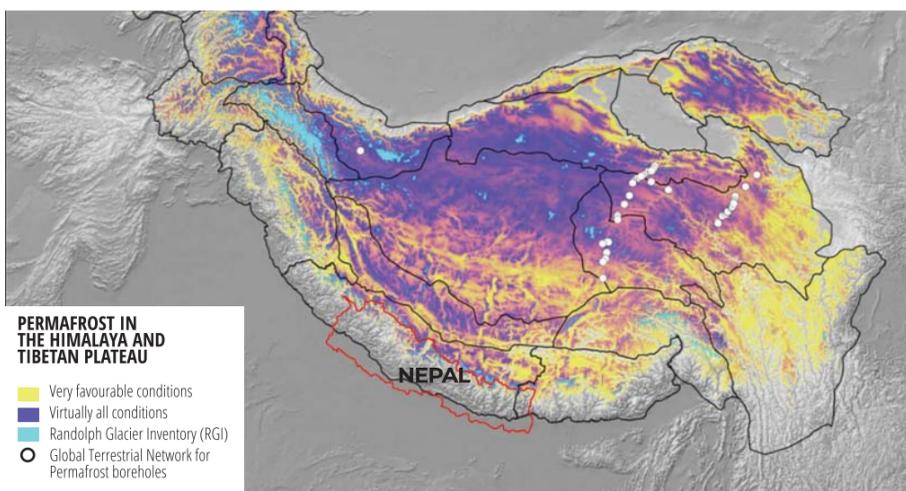
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Even small glacial lakes, such as these currently forming near the terminus of the Kangchenjunga glacier in eastern Nepal, can be dangerous.

The not-so-permanent frost



Permafrost Permanent

Rock failure from Annapurna IV led to a series of cascading events that resulted in the Seti River flood of 2012 that killed 72 people.

Rapid thawing of the Himalayan ice-cap is compounded by little-studied melting of permafrost that destabilises peaks

■ **Wilfried Haeberli and Alton C Byers**

A warming atmosphere also warms perennially frozen mountains. The stability of frozen rocks decreases with increasing temperature similar to how butter just taken out of a fridge becomes softer and less resistant to the cutting force of the knife.

Thawing frozen mountains means softening them, making them less resistant against gravity, leading to breakage of small to large sections, resulting in rock falls, rock avalanches, and landslides.

There is growing concern about the impact of global warming on the stability of icy peaks in mountain ranges around the world, which several recent events in the

Himalaya well illustrate.

Permafrost is a technical short form of 'permanent frost' for frozen ground which remains at temperatures below zero degrees throughout the year.

Permafrost is below the surface, is not directly visible, and therefore often escapes the attention of scientists and political authorities. Sophisticated methods must be used to explore it, such as drilling, geophysical soundings, or climate-related modelling.

Generally, temperatures at surface level and directly below match the temperature of the air immediately above it. Polewards to around 60°N and S latitude, mean annual air and ground temperatures are mostly below 0°C. Permafrost is widespread in Alaska, northern Canada and Siberia.

The lower limit of negative mean annual temperatures is at 2,000-3,000m at mid-latitudes such as the European Alps or the Southern Alps of New Zealand, to 3,000-4,000m in the Himalaya, and to 5,000m near the equator in the Peruvian Cordilleras.

Above these elevations, permafrost affects peaks. In high mountains the permafrost area is often far larger than their glacier-covered regions. In Nepal, the permafrost-affected area is about 2 to 3 times bigger than the glacier area, while in China with the perennially frozen Tibetan Plateau this factor is about 30.

Temperatures decrease by 6-7°C for every 1,000m of altitude increase, and the coldest and most deeply frozen rocks are found in the highest parts of the peaks. The

frozen zone inside mountains can reach depths of hundreds of metres. It is not just the ice on peaks in the European Alps or the Himalaya that is frozen throughout the year, but so are the rocks.

The sunny side of mountains are warmer, and the permafrost is thinner there than slopes in mountain shadow. Temperatures are not constant throughout the year, so a thin surface layer up to a few metres on top of permafrost that thaws in summer and freezes in winter. This seasonal freezing and thawing surface layer on permafrost is called the 'active layer'.

Deep, long-term freezing influences geomorphic processes inside mountains, drastically changing their properties. Growth of ice in cracks and fissures within solid rock tends to expand already

12 TIPS

Awareness and Protective Measures

Changes in high altitude permafrost, and the devastating geomorphic events they cause are still poorly understood by Nepal's scientific community and government. Earthquakes and heavy rainfall are usually reported by the press to be the primary causes of catastrophic events, both of which are impossible to predict.

However, climate change and gravity, the two major forces at work on Himalayan permafrost, are constants. As permafrost continues to destabilise at the highest altitudes in the Nepal Himalaya, more and more devastating events can be expected to occur.

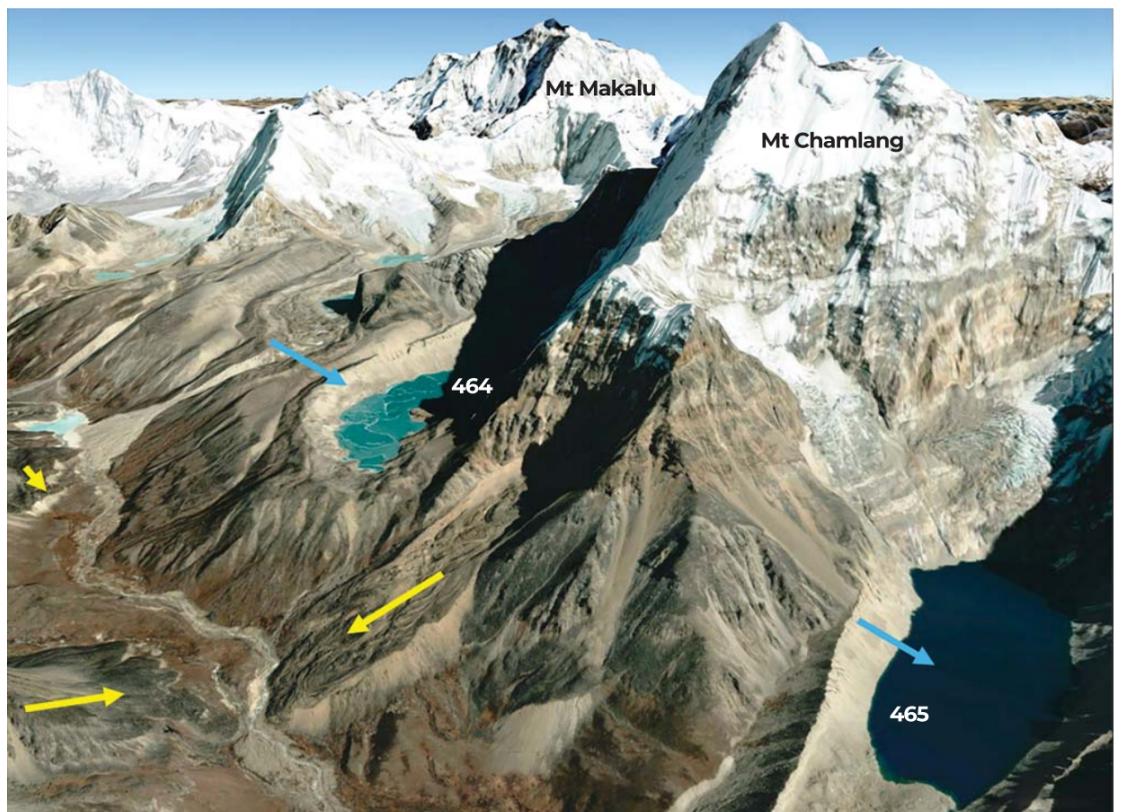
The question is, what can we do about it? Based on our collective experience in the European Alps, Peruvian Andes, and Nepal Himalaya over the past several decades, we offer the following suggestions:

- 1 Encourage more permafrost and hazard research.** Nepal's scientists and practitioners need to better understand and acknowledge the role of permafrost change in the growing list of climate change-related impacts in the high mountain environment, and more research of an applied nature is indicated. Interdisciplinary approaches that include and involve local people usually yield the most promising and effective results.
- 2 Standardise glacial lake risk assessment methods.** Currently, scientists use various methods to assess a lake's potential danger of flooding, with predictably mixed and widely differing results. Imja glacial lake in Khumbu, for example, is considered by some scientists to be extremely dangerous, and by others to have a low to moderate risk. The result is confusion among local people, local governments, and scientists alike.
- 3 Update and revise the current list of potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal.** The inventory should incorporate the changing permafrost factor, including smaller lakes less than 0.01km². Even very small glacial lakes, such as those above Thame and the Langmale glacial lake in the Barun, can be as destructive as large lakes under the right conditions and cascading processes.

- 4 Develop new feasibility study protocols for large hydropower projects.** These guidelines must incorporate the changing permafrost factor as well as the heightened threat of glacier floods. The potentially disastrous impacts of climate change upon major hydropower projects in Nepal have been predicted by scientists for decades, and yet the construction (and destruction) of major, multi-million-dollar installations continues. Hundreds of lives, and millions of dollars of infrastructure, stand to be saved through the use of more detailed, comprehensive evaluations of permafrost and glacier-related risks prior to project implementation.
- 5 Develop zoning policies.** These should discourage the location of farms and infrastructure (homes, tourist lodges) within known and active floodplains. Some scientists believe that most of the deaths from the 2012 Seti flood could have been prevented had settlements not been located directly in the floodplain.
- 6 Simple is beautiful.** Rock-filled wire cages (gabions) can be engineered to effectively divert floods and should continue to be promoted in high mountain regions. In the village of Chukung located directly in the floodplain of the

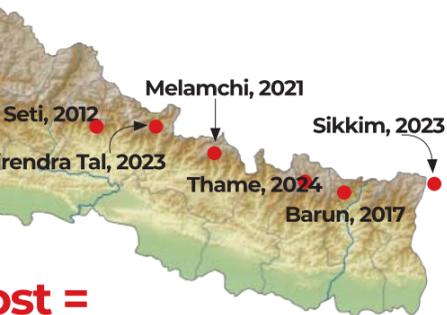


A BYERS



Mt Chamlang (7,319m) with creeping frozen debris (rock glaciers, yellow arrows) and Lakes 464 and 465 (blue arrows) from glacier retreat at its foot. Mt Makalu (8,485m) is in the background.

Recent events in Nepal and India possibly triggered by melting permafrost



Permafrost = Thawing out

such ice-rich frozen masses to slowly creep down the slopes of mountains. Landforms resulting from permafrost creep over past millennia look like lava streams and are called 'rock glaciers'.

Thawing out
From long-term temperature measurements in deep boreholes, we know that global temperature increase of the atmosphere during the past about 100-150 years has warmed up mountain slopes down to depths below the surface of about 100m. The effect of this deep warming is the reversal of the freezing and cooling effects.

It reduces the strength of rocks or debris with ice and makes them 'softer' and more permeable to water. Over the past decades, creep rates of frozen debris in rock glaciers have markedly increased, and the frequency of large rock-ice avalanches from high-mountain permafrost has accelerated.

In the Peruvian Andes, two major events from mountain permafrost occurred in 2020 and 2023. Both had volumes of 1-1.5 million m³, reached lakes at the foot of the slope, and produced flood waves. The 2020 Salkantay flood caused loss of lives and heavy damage at Santa Teresa, 35km down valley. The flood wave at Rasac was fortunately retained within the lake at lower altitude.

On 5 May 2012, a massive rock, ice, and debris avalanche from Annapurna IV cascaded into the Seti River gorge, plummeting into a rockfall-dammed lake. The impact triggered an air blast that levelled thousands of hectares of forests, a

existing openings, and even create new ones. The related weakening of bedrock, however, is compensated by strong adhesion and increasing strength induced by the ice fillings and related cold temperatures.

Not only the ice itself, but also rocks, rock-ice, and rock-rock contacts increase their strength with lower temperatures. Perhaps most important is the effect of freezing and ice filling of cracks between rocks containing water. Deep frozen rocks are essentially impermeable to water as an often-decisive factor of stability inside mountain slopes.

In the abundant debris masses at the foot of high mountains, deep, long-term freezing causes even more spectacular changes. Formation of ice inside and beyond the pores can create a mixture of ice and debris with ice lenses, enabling



This massive breakage (below) of solid rock from Saldim Peak in 2017 fell on a lake and unleashed a flood downstream on the Barun River. Top photo is of the peak before the collapse.



ABYERS

dust cloud covered the countryside in fine white rock powder, and a hyper-concentrated slurry flood that killed 72 people downstream.

On 20 April 2017, a high altitude breakage of solid rock from the east

face of Saldim Peak (6,388m) in the Barun Valley turned into a 1.1 million m³ debris flow of ice and sediment that plummeted 1,200m down to the Langmale Glacial lake below.

Although the lake was less than 0.01km² in size, the combination of lake water with melting ice from the ice-debris flow triggered a massive hyper-concentrated flood that destroyed forests, pastureland, and trekking lodges for several dozen kilometres to the Barun's confluence with the Arun.

In India's Uttarakhand state bordering Nepal, the Chamoli event of 7 February 2021 was catalysed by the detachment of 20 to 30 million m³ of rocks and ice from a frozen, ice-clad peak. The ensuing avalanche developed into a rapidly flowing mass of rocks, ice and water, killing 204 people and heavily damaging an under-construction hydropower infrastructure 35km downstream.

On 3 October 2023, the collapse of about 15 million m³ of debris from a perennially frozen moraine into South Lhonak Lake in the Sikkim Himalaya produced a flood wave and debris flow which killed 14 people with over 100 missing, destroyed a hydropower reservoir at Chungthang, 60km downstream, and caused destruction of houses, roads, and agricultural land.

Similar processes may have been involved in the Birendra Tal glacial lake flood of 21 April 2024 and the Thame flood of 16 August 2024.

Each of the above cases show the potential hazard over long distances related to process chains, especially in connection with impacted mobile water bodies in glacial lakes and artificial reservoirs. 🇨🇳

Dr Wilfried Haeblerli is with the University of Zurich and Dr Alton C Byers University of Colorado at Boulder.

Lhotse Glacier in the Sagarmatha National Park, for instance, the installation of gabions after a glacier flood in 2015 protected the village the following year when a second similar flood from the same glacier occurred.

7 Build higher bridges. This can effectively address the growing frequency and magnitudes of glacier floods in the high mountains, eliminating the need for continuous rebuilding.

8 Increase awareness. Nepal's mountains will continue to destabilise and become even more dangerous in future. Exercising extra caution while crossing a landslide, an active torrent, or a debris-covered glacier is a fact of life in today's high Himalayan regions. Likewise, constructing a lodge, school, or community building beneath a small and seemingly harmless glacial lake should be discouraged.

9 Promote simple and effective early warning systems. In spite of their much-touted role in disaster mitigation, early warning systems installed to date at potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal have proven to be expensive disappointments. They are typically installed by a remote and distant government agency, little training in their use by local villagers is offered, and local people say they have

no idea what the warning sirens sound like nor what they should do if one goes off. Thus far the most effective and proven EWS tool has been the cell phone. Hundreds of lives were saved during the Seti River flood of 2012 when upstream witnesses phoned warnings to their downstream family and friends.

10 Improve mechanisms that allow scientists to communicate. The results of their permafrost and glacier hazard research should directly, quickly, and effectively be communicated to decision-makers. This has proven to be easy to recommend but difficult to implement in most of the world but is nevertheless in need of our constant efforts to achieve.

11 Encouraging transboundary permafrost research. Increased cooperation between scientists and researchers in Nepal, China, and India is needed to help identify potentially vulnerable crossborder rockfall, avalanche, and catastrophic flooding risk.

12 Develop and implement adaptation planning. Continue planning and training programs targeted at permafrost-related floods and other highland-lowland hazards. Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPA) have proven to be an effective tool for increasing local awareness of climate impacts as well as planning for mitigation measures.



Gabions installed near Chukung in 2015 protected the village from a similar flood from the Lhotse Glacier in 2014.

ABYERS

EVENTS

**Art Festival 2024**

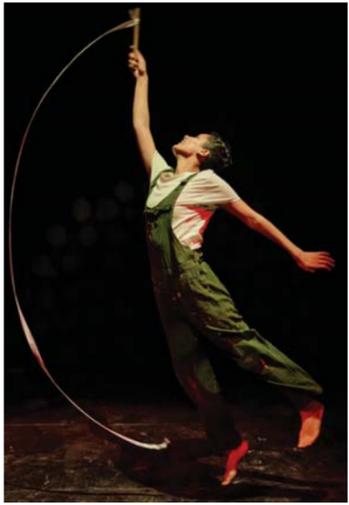
The seventh iteration of the Himalayan Art Festival this year will feature artwork from 150 Nepali artists, highlighting Nepal's rich cultural heritage.

9-14 September, 11am-7pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, 9841211295

Almost Weekend

Get tickets and go with friends and family to this stand-up comedy show this Friday to destress from the hectic week.

6 September, 7:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs250-Rs800, Titos Pub, Thamel

**Shilpeeni**

The play Shilpeeni is an inspiring tale of self-discovery and empowerment that explores the setbacks and triumphs experienced by women.

Until 11 September, 5:30pm, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

Art exhibition

The Kathmandu International Art Exhibition happening this week will display the works of over 20 artists from eight countries including Nepal.

Until 10 September, 10am to 5:30pm, Taragaon Next, Boudha

**Vulture Awareness Day**

Join in this hike organised by Bird Conservation Nepal to celebrate the 16th International Vulture Awareness Day.

7 September, 6am, Meeting Place: Nepal Tourism Board, 9847022967

DINING

**Achaar Ghar**

Satisfy your desire for home-cooked meals and choose from a myriad of pickles prepared from recipes passed down through generations.

Kamalpokhari (01) 5916968

MUSIC

College Carnival

Pahelo Batti Muni along with Sabin Rai and the Pharaoh will join the Prime College Carnival this weekend that promises to be full of music, entertainment, and food.

7 September, 10am onwards, Ticket: Rs499, Prime College, Khusibun

**Robin Tamang tribute**

Sing along to the songs of Robin and The New Revolution at this charity event to pay tribute to the late singer.

7 September, 9pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel

**Live Music Night**

Be part of a musical evening at Hard Rock Cafe, where English musician Andy Benett is set to perform live this Friday.

6 September, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg, 9801986771

**HipHop Mandal**

Members of the group Outlawz, which hip hop icon Tupac Shakur was a part of, will be part of the Hip Hop festival next weekend. Don't miss the chance to watch the group perform live.

13 September, 2pm-9pm, Ticket: Rs1,000-Rs2,500, Bhrikuti Mandap

Dasai Music Fest

Those in Hetauda might not want to miss this musical event featuring Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh, as well as Chewang Lama and The Band.

11 September, 5pm onwards, Hetauda, 9855074449

**Rain Restaurant**

Grab a Thakali set, braised pork belly or an assortment of tacos at this multi-cuisine restaurant with its appealing vertical garden and great views of Patan.

Jawalakhel (01) 5548508

Koto

Koto's menu includes Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karaage, Katsu Don, and a variety of other authentic Japanese dishes.

Darbar Marg (01) 4220346

GETAWAYS

**Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort**

Get upto 35% discount this rainy season in this luxury resort, which is just an hour drive from Kathmandu. Book a monsoon escapade and head out for some experience this weekend.

Dhulikhel, 9851373755

Tuki Resort

With modern structures, dedicated service and comfortable rooms, Tuki Resort offers accommodations at affordable prices.

Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 466036/466037

**Mountain Glory Forest Resort**

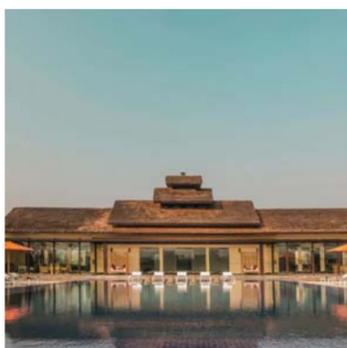
This expansive luxury resort is ideal for anyone looking for breathtaking mountain views and time away from busy schedules.

Dovilla, Pokhara, 9802859011

Hotel Yukhang

A hotel built with Dachhi appa bricks from the Malla era and Bhaktapur's wooden crafts, Hotel Yukhang with its mediaeval touch will enhance the experience of visitors.

Thamel (01) 4267358

**Meghauri Serai**

If you want to visit Chitwan at a relatively mild temperature, this might be the right time. Overlooking the Rapti river, the luxurious Meghauri Serai integrates local culture and art.

Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

The Yard

Meals at The Yard feature fresh organic ingredients, rich flavours, and great presentation.

Sanepa (01) 5432965

**GRG Bakery**

Celebrate special ceremonies with cakes and sweet treats at this bakery. Choose some favourites from the diverse range of cake options.

Nakhipot, 9813633705

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Out with a Bang**

The monsoon seems to be planning to leave Nepal not with a whimper, but a bang. A large low pressure circulation has entered Nepal from the east (pictured), and this is expected to bring sometimes heavy precipitation to central Nepal in the next few days. The rains will follow the 'Bhadaure Jhari' pattern: bright sunny mornings with cloud buildup, sticky afternoons and isolated showers falling mostly at night. After this system, more of the rain will be convection driven rather than from moisture infusion.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 19°	29° 20°	29° 19°

OUR PICK



Jane Gloriana Villanueva is a 23-year-old devout Catholic Latina who has vowed to save her virginity until marriage so that she doesn't follow in the path of her single mother. This is made complicated when she is accidentally artificially inseminated during a regular checkup. She now has to break the news to her detective boyfriend while simultaneously falling in love with her hotelier baby daddy, a former cancer patient who is married and is also her boss. Meanwhile, there is a serial killer-drug lord on the loose. The 5-season-long satirical telenovela ran from 2014-19 and stars Gina Rodriguez, Andrea Navedo, Yael Grobglas and Justin Baldoni.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Me, the Interpreter

Trials and tribulations of the job while learning the language myself

After I joined the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in June 2007 as the Language and Admin Assistant, I was assigned to the Arms Monitor section in Nepalganj.



ANGREZI
Anbika Giri

UNMIN was established by the UN Security Council after the end of the Maoist conflict to monitor and implement the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. Aside from other peacekeeping work, UNMIN maintained and administered demobilised Maoist guerrillas in seven main and 21 satellite camps across Nepal.

My main role in Nepalganj was to assist the international Sector Commander during meetings with various officials in the Mid-western region, including CDOs, politicians, security personnel from the police and army.

The first meeting of the Jordanian Sector Commander was at the Nepal Army barrack in Bardia. Our group consisted of nine international personnel from the Arms Monitor section. The Jordanian's English was easy to understand, but the accents of others were harder to comprehend.

We received a warm welcome from the Nepal Army, and the Battalion Commander explained the situation in the area, giving us a tour of his base. I was nervous, but thought that I had handled the interpretation well enough. Following the meeting, the soldiers served us breakfast.

Inside the personal dining room of the Battalion Commander, I noticed sandwiches, sliced mangoes, Coke, toast, jam, and butter laid out on the table. As we were getting ready to begin, a soldier approached the Commander and whispered something in his ear. The Commander then looked at me and asked,

“लोकल कुचुराको मासु र चिउरा खान्छन् कि सोध्नु त?”

I turned to the Jordanian Sector



TRIGGER HAPPY: An ex-Maoist guerrilla hands over his weapon to an UNMIN arms monitor at a demobilisation camp in 2008 in Ilam.

Commander and was relaying the question, but got stuck, “Would you like to eat local chicken with...”

Looking back at the Commander I asked: “चिउरालाई के भन्छन् अङ्ग्रेजीमा?” He found it hilarious that I did not know what चिउरा was in English, and said, “Bitten Rice, हैन त?” He responded as if I had confirmed his unofficial translation. I then finished my sentence to the Sector Commander, asking whether he would like local chicken with “bitten” rice.

One day our team was being led by a Swedish military officer for a meeting with the Senior Superintendent of the Nepal Police. We arrived at his station, but he was not there because his force had been busy evicting members of the Maoist Young Communist League (YCL) from a house where they were occupying.

Luckily, both sides resolved the situation through dialogue, and the tension subsided. After meeting the YCL leader, we wanted to get the Police's side of the story. When the SSP finally arrived, he looked preoccupied and we began promptly once he took his seat.

As I was translating his lengthy introduction of himself into a more concise version, I mistakenly referred to him as DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) rather than an SSP, which seemed to upset him.

I quickly apologised and translated his introduction accurately. The Swedish army officer was seated across from him, jotting down notes. The SSP could read his English notes, and instructed me to tell the Swede to write down everything. (“मेरो पुरा परिचय लेख्न भन”) I told the SSP politely that I was just the interpreter and could not tell the UNMIN officer what to write and not to write in his notebook. The short meeting ended, and the SSP insisted again that I tell the Swedish army officer to add a few more sentences of his introduction to his notes, and not just write ‘SSP’. (“एक दुई वाक्य थप्न भन्नु। ज्यास्स एसएसपी मात्र त के लेखेको।”)

I held back my laughter because there was no way I could translate “ज्यास्स” into English. There just is not an equivalent word, and it would need a whole sentence to get the thought across: “Perfunctorily just jot down the bare minimum and get it over with”, or

words to that effect. Having a limited English vocabulary, making tons of grammatical errors, and feeling nervous were even more challenging when meeting politicians. It was hard to figure out where politicians put full stops and commas in their sonorous speeches.

Once in Simkot of Humla district, I was interpreting speeches at a gathering of over 100 members from various political parties. Everyone spoke passionately as if it was their last chance to be heard. I struggled to understand the local dialect – this was mountainous northwestern Nepal, and I am from the southeastern plains.

The subject of the speeches was the rehabilitation of those forced to flee during the Maoist insurgency. A young man, who seemed agitated, was yelling loudly. I stepped in to translate that his family had been forced from home due to the conflict when he was just 16. He was sent to Kathmandu for further education while his parents rented a house in Nepalganj.

All this was fairly easy to translate, but then he began angrily criticising a leader of the Maoist Party, using rude language. How could I translate such words into English? Besides, I did not even know the English equivalent of those local swearwords.

“मेरो कुरा अङ्ग्रेजीमा भन्दैनु” thundered the man in a menacing voice, ordering me not to leave anything out. The Sector Commander asked what the man was going on and on about, and I told him I did not understand and apologised, while the man kept interrupting and accused me of being biased, and not translating his tirade.

I finally told the man: “तपाईंको गाली मलाई अङ्ग्रेजीमा भन्न आएन। गाली ट्रान्सलेट गर्न आको हो म?” (I cannot translate your curses. Am I here to translate your profanity?)

He shouted back (expletives beeped out): “किन जागिर खाको त? बाउको सोर्स होला... beep... beep... beep...” (Then why were you hired? Your Dad must know someone...)

I moved on to the next person in the audience and completely ignored him. However, today as I think back to that day in Humla his angry words still ring in my ears. I wish I could have told him that I got the UNMIN interpreter job because a friend had heard about the opening and I filled out the UN's complicated P11 application form. My Dad had no idea what I was getting into. 🇳🇵

Anbika Giri is a novelist and author of children's books in Nepali. Angrezi is her monthly column in Nepali Times about learning English in Nepal. Read earlier instalments of Angrezi online.

The Unstoppables

It was the first time I was seeing books for children on female figures from Nepal.

On a certain February morning earlier this year, we gathered in the drawing room of a friend, reading through the drafts of a set of four books for children, by Luja Mathema. The books, which became the Unstoppable Women Series, feature four Nepali women who are icons of courage, intelligence and



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratihba Tuladhar

perseverance.

Prawin Adhikari, who translated the books from English into Nepali, had made available his space so that Luja, Iva Maharjan, and I could join him to proofread the books.

Across a slow day, punctuated by coffees and teas, we read the stories about the women: Ambica Shrestha, Ani Choying Drolma, Sapana Pradhan Malla, and Pasang Lhamu Sherpa.

The first book I picked was the one on Ani Choying Drolma, someone I had met through my work as a journalist. The first time I saw her, she sat on the floor of a raised platform inside a hall at Yak and Yeti, performing to an audience to raise funds for the Aryatara School for nuns.

I was a rookie reporter and



HEROINES: Book launch on 1 September with (left to right) Luja Mathema and her daughter, Sangeeta Shrestha, Sapana Pradhan Malla, Ani Choying Drolma and Pasang Lhamu Sherpa's daughter Dawa Futi.

it was one of my first stories. But seated on the floor as Ani's chants filled the room I felt I had been removed to someplace else. I went back to the newsroom, holding three DV tapes to edit, not knowing how I would fit the story of such force in a two-minute broadcast. But I did anyway. Anchor story, page 1.

The experience of writing and producing a story can shift something in you. I came away feeling braver. It is this change that Luja hopes to inspire in children through her four books.

Luja says she wrote the books for her daughter because she hardly

ever found books about female heroes. so she wrote them herself.

“I want the children to be encouraged, excited, and hopeful. Having access to such stories at a young age is crucial to increase children's awareness about all the possibilities in the world,” she says.

Spending a day proofing Luja's books is the only time I've ever met her. But in those few hours, I was fascinated by her drive to get the books done and to put them out on the shelves for children.

The second book I proofed was the one on Ambica Shrestha, who was still among us when we were

reading together that day. When we come to the part where she arrives in Darjeeling and joins Loreto Convent, there's an illustration of her looking out through the window with a friend. I teared up and there must have been a catch in my voice.

I had met Ambica Shrestha for the first time at a Loreto alumni meeting. And every time I met her after that, she said hello. What I really took away each time was the way she carried herself, always tall in the things she did and never afraid. As a fellow alumna, I hoped I had inherited some of her traits.

The common thread that binds

the four books is the determination and strength of character of all the four women featured. The text is replete with anecdotes of inner strength that helped them forge unique paths.

While Luja's attempt in bringing these books together was rooted in the intent to gift them to her own daughter, she has gone on to set a substantial precedent for others to create books about Nepali women.

The books are illustrated by artists Prakash Ranjit, Shaili Malla and Njhua Shakya.

Shaili captures some details of Boudha in the illustrations that you would only notice if you grew up in the vicinity. Njhua's illustration on the last page of the Pasang Lhamu book is steeped in pathos, and yet salvages the book from what might have been a dreary ending. Prakash's drawings of LC made me want to revisit Darjeeling.

What I like most about these books is that they are bilingual. The Nepali and the English text appear alongside each other on each page. From my experience of reading to my nephew at bedtime, I do wish that the font size had been larger and more eye-friendly.

Regardless, I can't wait to bring the books home to my nephew, so I can share with him the stories of the Unstoppable Ambica, Ani, Pasang and Sapana. 🇳🇵

Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people (with some names changed) in Pratihba's life.

Reaffirming affirmative action

Reservation has uplifted some of Nepal's left out, but others are still underrepresented in the civil service

■ Dhanu Bishwakarma

Manoj Kumar Mahara grew up in a Dalit settlement near Janakpur in a family that could not even afford to send its children to school.

Still, he was one of only two students from the community that went to school. But he had to drop out in Grade 10 because his father went overseas to work. His mother worked as a farmhand in a landlord's field.

The family borrowed money to pay for Mahara's high school, and as he prepared for the Public Service Commission exam. Because of the government quota for Madhesis, he got a job in the civil service in 2016.

Now 32, Mahara is a senior officer at the Land Management and Revenue Office of Siraha district, one of few from his community to have a government job. Because of his earnings, his father no longer has to toil in Saudi Arabia and he has paid off the Rs100,000 loan his family owed to a microfinance company.

"It would have been tough for me to get this job had it not been for the reservation system," he says. "This government job is not just my livelihood, it also gives my family dignity and respect in the community."

Many Nepalis in the Tarai face double the discrimination because of being both Madhesi and Dalit – both the communities have faced historical ostracisation and economic deprivation.

Even within the Dalit community there are sub-castes: nineteen in the Tarai and seven in the mountains. The discrimination against Dalits in the Madhes is said to be worse.

Nepal's civil service reservation policy, introduced after the post-conflict 2007 Interim Constitution, gave Nepalis from excluded and underserved communities an opportunity to participate in the state mechanism, changing its structure in the process.

In the 17 years since, Dalits and others have had a more proportional representation in the state structure than before, although there is still a long way to go. (Charts, next page) And even though the laws are there, societal and cultural discrimination is slower to change.

Discussions about affirmative action to redress discrimination began in fact after the 1990 People's Movement. Before that, discourse on gender, indigenous rights and exclusion of Dalits were considered 'development' issues rather than violations of human rights.

The 1990 Constitution acknowledged diversity and inclusion for the first time, and while the Constitution Drafting Committee had arranged for a 5% reservation for women and 3% for Dalits, the interim government removed the quota for Dalits before the Constitution was promulgated.

Under the post-conflict Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006, the inclusion of Dalits and minorities was explicitly mentioned as a part of the state restructuring process. Article 21 of Nepal's Interim Constitution 2007 guaranteed social justice, stipulating: 'Women, Dalits, indigenous ethnic groups, Madhesi communities, oppressed groups, poor farmers and labourers, who are economically, socially or educationally backward, shall have the right to participate in state



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structure on the basis of principles of proportional inclusion.'

Tula Narayan Shah, chairman of the Nepal Madhesh Foundation, concedes that the reservation policy has brought communities previously excluded from the state mechanism to the mainstream, helping bridge the inequality gap. "Previously, Nepal's civil service was almost entirely made up of Brahmin and Chhetri men, reservation has ensured the presence of different communities," Shah told us.

Hill Dalits have benefited more from reservation, while Madhesi Dalits remain on the sidelines. Indeed, while reservation has played a significant role in ensuring the representation of different communities in government service, the Public Service Commission's data from the last seven years shows that access to reservation itself has not percolated past those who are on the top of the hierarchy of reserved groups to reach socio-economically marginalised communities.

For instance, while 97 of Nepal's caste groups have entered government service, 45 other groups remain excluded. The presence of underserved caste and ethnic groups within the indigenous community is still small, and in many cases disproportionate to the population of those communities.

"Even within the Dalit community, hill Dalits have benefited more than those from the Madhes," says Umesh Prasad Mainali of the Public Service Commission. "While reservation has brought positive change, its benefits have fallen to only selected castes within the cluster groups."

Meanwhile, the Tarai's Brahmin community makes up most of the Madhesi category in the civil service, which means Dalits get left out even though they can compete under two cluster groups.

Journalist and human rights activist Bhola Paswan says that the double discrimination, poverty, lack of access to education, and language barriers have contributed to the continued underrepresentation of Madhesi Dalits in Nepal's civil service.

"Madhesi Dalits with a literacy rate of 48% can compete within Dalits, but how can they compete with higher caste Madhesis who have a 100% literacy rate?" asks Paswan, who says caste reservation is in urgent need of review.

Other experts say that the 45% civil service seats set aside to ensure inclusion is not effective because even though women are allocated 33% of reservation seats, it has not translated

into reality, especially since women make up 51% of Nepal's population.

There are also complications when an individual is part of more than one group allocated for reservation. For instance, a Dalit woman can apply under the women category, Dalit category, or through open competition.

"Since the Dalit quota is not categorised by gender, her competition will ultimately be with women and Dalits as a whole," explains researcher Kailash Rai, who says a separate provision for women under different reserved categories would be more fair.

Muslims have also been at a disadvantage because they are placed in the Madhesi category for the civil service, although the proportional representation criteria applies for them in politics.

In 2021, the Madhesi Commission included the Tharu and Muslims as part of the Madhesi community, which was widely disputed, since there are separate Tharu and Muslim commissions.

Mohammad Zakir Hussain, former State Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare, argues that there are also Muslims from Nepal's mountain districts, and his

community cannot compete with Madhesi Brahmins who are better educated and connected.

In 2020, medical student Binay Kumar Panjiyar sought a Supreme Court intervention to demand a government scholarship for a postgraduate in medicine. The court ruled that reservation should be interpreted as a class issue, which was itself criticised for undermining reservation for representation by gender, caste, ethnic, and geography.

Lack of access to education is deemed to be the main reason communities have not been able to benefit from representation quotas.

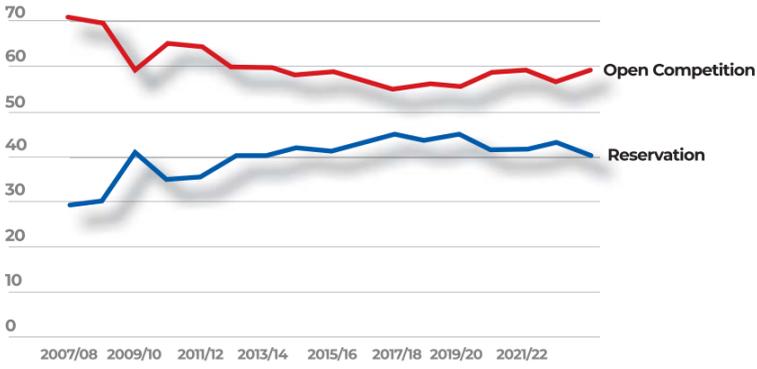
"Reservation allocation must look into marginalised groups within underserved communities and take into account education and economic conditions across cluster groups themselves," says researcher Bhaskar Gautam.

Indeed, Magar, Rai and Gurung communities have not been represented in the civil service in proportion to their population, and Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar, of the Indigenous Nationalities Commission explains the main reasons: "They prefer to join the military, go for foreign employment, and lack access to education."

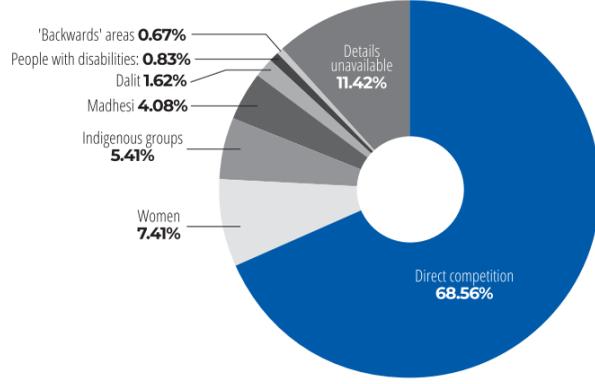
However, anthropologist Mukta Singh Lama blames underrepresentation of these communities to historic state



Civil service jobs by recruitment criteria



Current distribution in civil service jobs by ethnicity



By the numbers

The Civil Service Reservation Policy was introduced in Nepal through the Second Amendment in 2007 to the 1993 Civil Service Act, which stated that in order to make the civil service inclusive, 45% of the total posts shall be set aside and be filled up by having separate competition between six groups based on gender, ethnic and caste background, as well as geography.

This 'positive discrimination' policy allocates 33% of civil service jobs for women, 27% to indigenous groups, 22% to Madhesi people, 9% to Dalits and 5% to people with disabilities, and 4% to people from 'backward areas' (which include six districts of Karnali Province and three from Sudurpaschim Province). Nepalis from poorer Brahmin and Chhetri communities are also eligible for reservation.

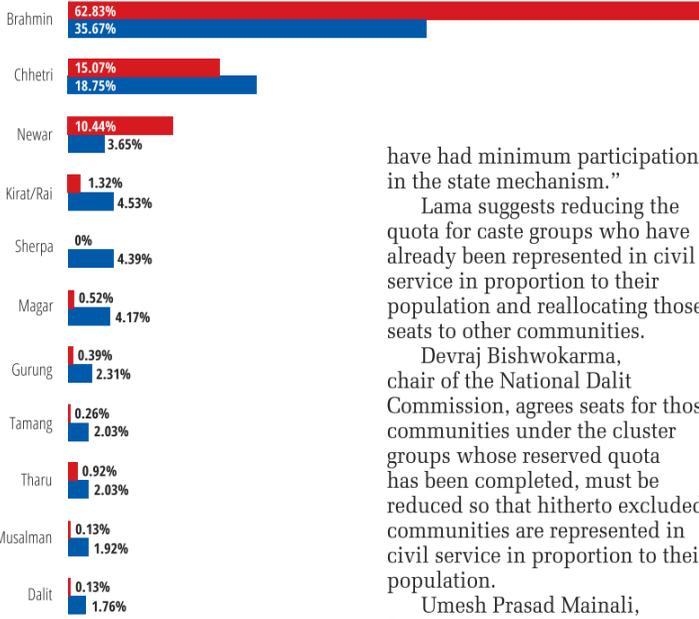
Since the introduction of the reservation system 17 years ago, the percentage of Dalits in the civil service has increased from 0.13% to 1.76%, while the percentage of Muslims has gone up from 0.13% to 1.92%. Only 11 caste groups were present in government jobs in 2007, compared to 97 today.

There are currently 85,520 civil service employees, of which 68.6% entered through direct competition, 7.4% of civil service workers are women, 5.4% are from indigenous communities, 4.1% are Madhesi, 1.6% are Dalit, 0.8% are people with disabilities, and 0.7% are from backward areas.

Meanwhile, the percentage of Khas Arya Nepalis in the civil service has gone down from 80.6% before the implementation of reservation to 70% at present – still the largest share in the civil service.

According to the National Census, Brahmins, constitute 11.3% of the population but make up 34.18% of the civil service, while Chhetris who make up 16.45% of the population hold 19.15% of government jobs.

Proportion of civil servants by main caste and ethnicity before and after reservation



have had minimum participation in the state mechanism.”

Lama suggests reducing the quota for caste groups who have already been represented in civil service in proportion to their population and reallocating those seats to other communities.

Devraj Bishwokarma, chair of the National Dalit Commission, agrees seats for those communities under the cluster groups whose reserved quota has been completed, must be reduced so that hitherto excluded communities are represented in civil service in proportion to their population.

Umesh Prasad Mainali, former chair of the Public Service Commission, says that some of Nepal's indigenous communities have reached economic, social and educational advancement through reservation so they no longer need to be included. “This

problem should be addressed by the upcoming Federal Civil Service Act.”

Mainali adds, “We might not be able to represent all of Nepal because of the scale of our diversity, but groups with a larger demographic presence must be included.”

Some activists say the current reservation system has elevated privileged groups and it would be more prudent to set aside quotas on the basis of class rather than on caste or ethnicity.

“People representing only a select few caste groups have entered civil service,” says Vijay Kumar Datta of the Madhesi Commission. “At this rate it will take another 200 years for less privileged Madhesi communities to be represented in the civil service.”

In a report titled The Impact of Reservation on Existing Government Services published in 2021, the National Inclusion Commission recommended that reservation should be abolished altogether by 2034. “The goal of the six allocated groups making up 45% of the civil service seems to be achievable within the next 14 years ... it is not desirable to maintain

the reservation system beyond that time,” the report says.

The report also drew a backlash for not taking into account the benefits of reservation to the target communities — as did the six-member commission that prepared the report, all of whom belonged to privileged caste groups.

The discussion was reignited earlier this month as commentators drew parallels between Nepal's reservation system with the Bangladesh student protests against their quota system even though, there, it was anger over the increased job quotas for cadres of the Awami League.

The debate between affirmative action and meritocracy is a long one, and has been going on in every country. Although Nepal's inclusion policy aimed to represent historically excluded communities and state bodies, it did not consider the shortcomings.

Says Bhaskar Gautam: “If the state had properly committed to the policy during the Constitution-making process, reservation quotas could have been allocated to those who have been sidelined even within the marginalised communities.”

exclusion. “Although they are a large part of Nepal's population, these communities have been historically oppressed, and have not had access to education and information, which means they

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Nepali surgeon with a vision for the world

■ **Kunda Dixit** in Dhangadi

Bidya Prasad Pant was a junior ophthalmic assistant at Geta Eye Hospital in Dhangadi when a 70-year-old man, blinded by cataract, was brought in by a relative who carried him for a week in a bamboo basket from Bajhang.

Back then in 1984, the charity-funded hospital only performed cataract operations when its Nordic surgeons were visiting. So the man had to be turned away.

"It made me feel helpless, my inability to help the man touched me deeply. I made up my mind to be an eye surgeon myself," Pant told us just before flying to Copenhagen to receive this year's Boberg-Ans Award from the Danish Ophthalmological Society on 27 September for 'significant contribution to the dissemination and advancement of cataract surgery in the developing world'.

In the past 40 years, Pant has done over 200,000 eye surgeries in Nepal, Burma, and around the world. He possibly holds the record for most eye surgeries: 312 in one day and 16,005 in one year.

Pant shuns publicity, and agreed to this interview after repeated requests. His is an extraordinary journey of determination, perseverance -- and vision.

The cheapest and fastest way to become a doctor those days

was to go to Russia. Pant left his wife with three children at home and went to Russia in 1992 and graduated in 1999 from Rostov-on-Don, specialising in eye surgery. He was then invited by his surgeon colleague from Geta, Dag Riise, to Hamar in Norway to get further training in ocular operations.

The conflict was raging in Nepal, and Riise offered Pant a job in Hamar, but he refused. Pant did not just return to Nepal, but came back to Dhangadi to rejoin Geta.

Riise regarded Pant as his "Nepali son" and the family invited him for his funeral in 2013 after he drowned at age 81 during a skiing accident. Back in Nepal, Pant devoted his life to expanding Geta, which offered free surgeries to patients from Nepal and India.

When an Indian diplomat visiting Dhangadi noticed that 85% of the patients at Geta were from India, the embassy helped build an annexe to the hospital. More surgeons were trained, and at one point the hospital was performing 45,000 surgeries a year.

Pant worked with HelpMeSee to perform free surgeries in Nepal, and also on board DC-10s of Orbis, the flying eye hospital hopping to airports all over Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Since 2014, Pant has been doing free eye surgeries for Australia's DAK Foundation in developing countries, and he and his team have performed 300,000 operations just in Burma.



PHOTOS: HELPMESEE

The need is still great because of the backlog of ageing patients, and greater ultraviolet solar radiation risk at higher altitudes due to the thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer. Cataract is the cause of more than half the blindness worldwide, and this will increase by 70% in the next 25 years.

One of the neediest places is the Burmese hinterland near Mandalay where Pant leads a team of surgeons at Tipitaka Chalupala Eye Hospital and Monastery.

"When I first went to Yangon in 2013 there were people waiting up to six months in queue for eye surgery," recalls Pant. Burmese

Nepalis were excited a doctor from Nepal was doing the operations.

When his father died last year in Dhangadi, Pant's Burmese patients collected more than \$4,500 as donation, which he promptly handed over to the monastery.

Pant was not just operating, but also helping Burmese surgeons to be trained at Kathmandu's Tilganga and other hospitals.

For his work in Burma, Pant was recognised by the British Medical Journal with the Surgical Team of the Year award, and the International Association of Preventive Blindness (IAPB) Eye Health Hero Award in 2017. 🇳🇵



EYE FOR AN EYE: Bidya Prasad Pant has performed over 200,000 ocular surgeries in the last 40 years, including in Burma, Ethiopia, Nepal (above) and with Orbis Flying Eye Hospital (top) at Ilorin airport in Nigeria. For his global work, the Nepali surgeon is being recognised by the Danish Ophthalmological Society on 27 September.

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