

Monthly Bulletin



RIGHTS Nepal

Digital Transformation | Human Security |
Good Governance | Strategic Engagements

Monthly Bulletin

RIGHTS Nepal is a think tank founded in 2020, based in Kathmandu with the mission of focusing on nationwide policies, decisions, plans, actions and their justified need, development and outcome.

This publication has been specifically designed to assess the important events of the past month on the basis of four major pillars: **Strategic Engagements, Good Governance, Digital Transformation and Human Security.**



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The content of this report is validated as accurate news extracted and summarized at the time of publishing. The report in itself is to be viewed and treated as an unbiased and impartial source of information.

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Digital Transformation

AI educational program launched in Kathmandu

King's College and Nepal Institute for Applied Mathematics and Informatics Institute for Research (NAAMII) have joined hands to create an AI Educational Program. The aim of this collaboration is to offer specialized and integrated AI courses in the future. The program is set to start between September and October, lasting six months. It's designed for early-career professionals and recent graduates who have a basic understanding of Python programming. Bishesh Khanal, co-founder and director of NAAMII, mentioned that there's a high demand for AI software experts in the global market, and Nepal already has freelancers working in this field. The initiative aims to boost AI startups in areas like agriculture and health in Nepal.

Provision for insurance against damages caused by cyber-attacks or cybercrime

Creating a system for cyber security insurance can help mitigate risks arising from cyber-attacks and cyber-crimes. Recently, the approved National Cyber Security Policy of 2080 includes provisions for such insurance. This also allows individuals and organizations affected by cybercrimes to claim insurance. In this policy, there are plans to amend and integrate relevant laws to safeguard intellectual property and copyright through means of information technology and other mediums. The National Cyber Security Framework will encompass subjects like translating international standards into action, as well as implementing criteria for cyber security. This is aimed at strengthening cyber security measures through international benchmarks, enabling the enforcement of cyber security standards, and providing guidelines for cybercrime prevention, investigation, and control.

Online Labor Approvals and Permits in Nepal

Nepal is embracing digital transformation in its labour sector. Starting from the month of Bhadra (mid-August to mid-September), foreign workers can now secure labour approvals and permits through an online platform. This advancement is being introduced by the Labor and Occupational Safety Department under the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security. The department is rolling out a Unified Labor Management Information System (ULMIS) that will become operational from the 1st of Bhadra. This digital system enables foreign nationals to conveniently apply for labour approvals and permits online, streamlining the process. Moreover, various tasks such as Trade Union registration/renewal, Labor Supplier registration/renewal, registration of business-related accident details, Labor Audit submission, and Establishment registration are now accessible online through the respective departments. To leverage these digital services, service recipients can visit the 'ULMIS Data Deo LEO Data GeoB Data NP' website and submit their applications. This digital shift marks a significant step towards modernizing Nepal's labour sector.

Nepal's National Cyber Security Policy Explores Controlled Internet Practices Through National Gateway Initiative

Nepal's Cabinet approved the National Cyber Security Policy amid a surge in cybercrime cases, but it has faced criticism for its approach. Concerns include government control over the internet and the National Internet Gateway, which some see as centralized surveillance. Critics argue the policy prioritizes data control over fostering trust in IT systems and leans toward national security control rather than a business-friendly

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environment. Implementation challenges are significant, and there is a history of difficulties in translating policies into practice. The policy's lack of clarity on matters like the National Internet Gateway's necessity is also a point of contention.

Bhaktapur Municipality Imposing Taxes on Internet Service Providers Contrary to Constitution

The recent decision of Bhaktapur Municipality to charge taxes from internet service providers based on the number of their customers has caused a lot of disagreement. This move contradicts the country's constitution and has led to many people questioning its legality. A letter sent to the Internet Service Providers Association revealed that the municipality intends to group companies based on how many customers they have and then decide on the tax rates. This choice has been met with disapproval because it seems to go against the rights given in Nepal's Constitution.

Govt launches 'Mero Poshan Sathi', mobile app for new mothers

The Nepal government has introduced a mobile app named 'Mero Poshan Sathi' (My Nutrition Companion) to aid new mothers in caring for themselves and their infants. This app is particularly beneficial during the critical 1,000-day period, which encompasses pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of the child until their second birthday. Developed by the Family Welfare Division (FWD) in collaboration with USAID's Suaahara Project, the application aims to ensure good nutrition. It also encourages timely vaccination and supplements intake and addresses various health concerns including breastfeeding and menstrual health. The app's utility extends beyond individual use, as it could be employed for disseminating essential information during epidemics or other critical situations.

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Human Security

Serotype-3 of the dengue virus wreaks havoc in Sunsari settlements

In Sunsari district, Nepal, there's a very serious outbreak of the deadly dengue virus. Nine people have died, and about 4,000 people have gotten sick with the virus in the area. Dengue spreads fast through mosquitoes and causes symptoms like high fever, muscle pain, rashes, headache, and eye pain. Hospitals are struggling to handle the large number of sick people, and even healthcare workers are getting infected. Families are having a hard time paying for medical treatment, and it's affecting their money and well-being. The government is trying to stop the spread by getting rid of places where mosquitoes breed. But they need to act quickly to save lives and take care of sick people. The real number of infections may be higher because some cases don't show symptoms and go unreported. It's a serious situation that needs immediate attention to protect people's health and safety.

Multiple respiratory viruses spreading in Nepal

As flu season approaches in Nepal, there is a concerning increase in respiratory virus infections, including influenza B with an undetermined lineage. Low flu vaccination rates raise the risk of severe infections for individuals with compromised immune systems and the elderly. Nepal has reported over 386 cases of influenza in 2023, with various strains. Experts recommend influenza vaccination, especially for those aged 50+ and immunocompromised individuals. Early diagnosis and public health measures like mask-wearing, handwashing, social distancing, and avoiding crowded places are crucial to mitigate the spread of these viruses.

Report Shows Toxic Air Cutting Five Years Off Lives of Nepalis

A recent report by the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) reveals that air pollution is drastically reducing the lifespan of Nepali citizens by approximately five years on average. This impact is even more severe than that caused by tobacco use and high blood pressure. The reduction in life expectancy varies across different regions, with areas like Mahottari, Rautahat, Dhanusha, and others experiencing up to 7.5 years of life lost due to pollution. The study, produced by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, highlights the alarming consequences of toxic air in Nepal, particularly in districts bordering India's heavily polluted northern plains. If pollution levels were to meet WHO guidelines, significant gains in life expectancy could be achieved, emphasizing the critical need to address air quality issues in the country. The report underscores the prominence of PM2.5 particles, a hazardous pollutant, and the concerning deterioration of air quality during winters in major cities. Nepal ranks as the world's third most polluted country in terms of PM2.5 levels.

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Good Governance

The World Bank will provide Nepal with a 100 million loan and a 3.8 million grant

The World Bank will keep funding the development of Nepal's healthcare system. The World Bank's Faris Hadad Zervos met with Mohan Bahadur Basnet, the minister of health and population, on August 2, and pledged to do so. The World Bank's national director, Zervos, stated that the organization continues to support the healthcare industry and would contribute 100 million dollars in loan support and 3.844 million dollars in grants over the course of the following five years.

32 exports are highlighted in a new trade strategy

The number of prospective export goods and services has increased significantly from 12 to 32 as part of the launch of Nepal's Nepal Trade Integrated Strategy (NTIS) 2023. On July 17, NTIS 2023, which replaces NTIS 2016, went into effect. By 2026, Nepal is expected to graduate from the category of least developed nation (LDC) to that of developing country, according to authorities. According to the Department of Customs, export revenues from items identified by NTIS 2016 increased to Rs48.11 billion in fiscal 2022–23 from Rs38.41 billion in fiscal 2021–22. Other than the items listed, exports totalled around Rs37 billion during the previous fiscal year.

Cooperative victims and the government reached an agreement on 7 criteria, which led to the movement's suspension

The government and the cooperation victims have come to a 7-point accord. The cooperative victims who have been protesting in Maitighar for two months came to an agreement on seven items and decided to call off the demonstration during a meeting on August 01, at Singh Darbar. The government reviewed the requests of the saver's members of cooperative organizations who are on a hunger strike and sit-in in Maitighar Mandal and came to an agreement on 7 points in the name of Cooperative Victims Savers Federation Sangharsh Samiti.

Hetaunda-Bharatpur-Bardghat transmission line and a new Bharatpur substation were both officially opened today

Today (August 22) is the official opening of the Hetaunda-Bharatpur-Bardghat 220 KV double circuit transmission line and the new 220/132 KV substation in Bharatpur. Today's substation and transmission line inauguration will be performed by Prime Minister Prachanda. At noon today, Prime Minister Prachanda will take a jet to Chitwan to attend to that. At Bharatpur Metropolitan City-11 Anptari in Chitwan, the substation utilizing "Gas Insulated Substation (GIS)" technology was constructed as part of the Marsyangdi Corridor 220 KV transmission line project. The opening is slated for Prime Minister Prachanda.

Nepal Airlines operates flights from Bhairahawa to New Delhi and Hong Kong

Regular flights between Bhairahawa's Gautam Budh International Airport and New Delhi and Hong Kong will be run by Nepal Airlines Corporation. Regular flights to Hong Kong and New Delhi will begin on August 29, according to the airline. According to the airline, it intends to launch one flight every Tuesday from Bhairahawa and gradually raise the number of flights in response to consumer demand and corporate market management. For the convenience of travellers, preparations have been made to transfer the bags straight to the destination and provide the boarding ticket to the destination at the moment of check-in.

Good Governance

Supreme Court introduces an automated case management system

To improve openness in case handling, the Supreme Court launched its long-awaited automation system on August 28. Bishowambhar Prasad Shrestha, the newly appointed Chief Justice, declared during the system's inauguration that the installation of the new system has officially begun the process of reforming the judiciary.

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Strategic Engagements

Nepal-China Diplomatic Relations after 68 Years

The 68th anniversary of the beginning of diplomatic ties between China and Nepal falls on August 1st. The bilateral relations between the two close neighbours have successfully endured the test of time throughout the previous 68 years of diplomatic connections, despite substantial changes in domestic, global, and regional circumstances. Both nations fully believe in the peaceful resolution of bilateral and international conflicts and uphold the UN charter and the five principles of coexistence. Nepal has remained steadfastly committed to the One China policy, recognizing that Xinjiang and Tibet are internal Chinese affairs while Hong Kong and Taiwan are fundamental components of China. Nepal has also regularly given China assurances that its interests won't be compromised when using its soil. Because both parties have consistently upheld their fundamental interests, their relationship is one of mutual respect and trust. In contrast, Nepal now has fresh prospects thanks to China's rise. China has constantly helped Nepal's efforts to develop socially, economically, and culturally, becoming a crucial ally in Nepal's quest for prosperity. China is now Nepal's biggest commercial partner, second-largest source of tourism, and third-largest source of FDI (foreign direct investment). It is also a significant development partner.

India agrees to allow explosives

India, which has halted the import of explosives, has simplified the project given to it by Chinese and Nepali contractors. The distributors claim that India has begun the simple distribution of "No Objection Certificates" (NOC) for the import of explosives. Balram Khatiwada, the general secretary of IPAN, recently claimed that the Indian Embassy has been accommodating about NOC for investment projects in Nepal. "India has issued NOC for indigenous projects," he declared. India, which obstructed Nepal's ability to import the explosives it required for its road and hydropower projects, submitted a letter to stop the construction after setting up a system to allow it a day to assess the projects that were being carried out in Nepal. India set a restriction that the explosives imported from their nation should only be utilized for the projects for which they were requested in a letter it issued to the government in the third week of May.

American Ambassador Thompson and Prime Minister Prachanda meet and discuss the implementation of the MCC

Dean Thompson, the US ambassador to Nepal, met with Prachanda, or Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the prime minister. On August 01 morning, Ambassador Thompson visited Prime Minister Prachanda, who is also the Chairman of the CPN Maoist Center, at the Prime Minister's mansion in Baluwatar. According to reports, the discussion included the execution of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), ties between the two nations, and US assistance for Nepal's economic growth. High-level sources claim that Ambassador Thomson was worried about Prachanda's decision to attend or abstain from the UN General Assembly. For Prime Minister Prachanda's trip to China, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is getting ready.

Vice President Yadav leaves for China

Vice President Ramsahay Prasad Yadav of Nepal embarked on a six-day trip to China, where he attended the 27th China Kunming Import and Export Fair and the 7th China-South Asia Exposition. His delegation included his wife, secretary, personal physician, and security officers. During the China-South Asia Expo, he met with

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Yadav requested easier export of Nepali agricultural products, affirmed Nepal's commitment to the one-China policy, and assured that no anti-China forces would exploit Nepali territory. Wang praised Nepal's consistent support for its relationship with China, both from the government and the opposition.

Chinese military delegation visiting Kathmandu

A Chinese military delegation, led by Major General Yue Ande, has arrived in Nepal on an official visit. The delegation, consisting of eight people, is expected to meet with Chief of Army Staff Prabhuram Sharma and other individuals. The summit will focus on border security and military ties between the two nations. The COVID outbreak has halted Nepal and China's bilateral military and defence activities, including ministry exercises and military training courses. A date for the combined military exercise has not been set, but it is expected to take place in Nepal. Since 2017, platoon-level cooperative military drills have been conducted between the two nations.

India imposes export restrictions on onions after those on grains and rice

Following the export of essential foods like wheat and rice, India has developed a tight policy regarding onions. In anticipation of a potential spike in onion prices on the local market, the Indian government has placed a 40% export levy on the vegetable. Onions are now subject to export taxes for the first time. The Ministry of Finance reports that the tax on onion exports will be in effect until December 31, 2023. Onions from India are also successfully imported into Nepal. It is anticipated that Nepal will pay more for onions as a result of India's most recent move.

Dahal's strategy for China may include two north-south corridor roadways

The two cross-border transmission lines between Nepal and China are scheduled to be built, and there may also be an agreement on bilateral power exchange, according to Prime Minister Dahal, who has already made the announcement. The documentation for the building of two transmission lines, the 220kV Chilime-Kerung and Kimathanka-Zhentang (Chentang), which are situated in China's Tinkey County, is being prepared by representatives of the Ministry of Energy and the state-owned Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). Speaking at a public event on August 21 in Surkhet, Dahal indicated that during his future trip to China, the development of the Hilsa-Surkhet road portion will be prioritized. The Karnali Corridor includes the Hilsa-Surkhet project. According to the government, some potential projects that the government of Physical Infrastructure and Transportation wishes to include on its wish list for the prime minister's visit to China are the Gandaki Corridor, Koshi Corridor, and the upgrading of the Araniko highway.

The map of Nepal's bordering region not included in the new map that China issued

China released an updated map that includes Nepal's territory and Taiwan. This follows India's annexation of Nepalese land and Nepal's new map. China's new map, resembling their 2023 edition, replaces Border expert Shrestha suggests China omitted Nepal's updated map due to strained diplomacy and disregard. Shrestha also

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highlights China's ambassador establishing a Nepal-India-China tripoint border in 2056 at Lipulek Bhanjang, asserting Kalapani is Nepal's and historical evidence supports extending the border to Limpiyadhura. Nepal hasn't responded to China's new map yet, citing the need for clarity. In 2015, India's border trade deal concerning Lipulekh upset Nepal, resulting in a protest note from Nepal that remains unanswered.

Elford, Vice President for MCC Implementation Agreements in Nepal

In order to carry out the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) initiative, which combines American funds and Nepalese investment, starting on Wednesday (August 30), MCC Vice President Cameron Elford has come to Nepal. On August 29 he landed in Kathmandu for the MCC project implementation (coming into force) agreement. In the presence of Vice President Cameron, the agreement to carry out the project, with a total cost of 697 million US dollars, was reached on Wednesday at the Ministry of Finance. The project's execution will thereafter be officially announced (publicly) by MCA Nepal.

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