

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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Digital Transformation

Nepal's Early Warning System for Earthquakes: Not Operational Despite Chinese Support

Nepal's early warning system for earthquakes has not been operational since the 2015 earthquake, despite collaboration with China. China's Institute of Care Life People of China (ICLPC) had provided support to Nepal and installed 320 sensors, but the system has not been fully operational due to technical challenges, the need for skilled personnel, and the high cost of deployment and operation. The Nepali government has requested a budget of NPR 10 crore (approximately USD 1 million) for the system's operation, but due to budget constraints, the system has not been fully utilized. Dr. Shiv Suvedi, an earthquake expert, emphasized the importance of upgrading and utilizing these systems to protect the lives of millions of people in Nepal.

Dhangadi Sub-Metropolitan City Launches Mobile App for Emergency Assistance

Dhangadi Sub-Metropolitan City has launched a new service that allows residents to request emergency assistance via a mobile app. The app uses GPS technology to provide detailed information about the location in distress, which can be viewed on Google Maps. This feature provides essential information about who initiated the distress call, the exact location, and contact details. Mayor Hamal has made the app available for download via a Google Drive link.

Nepal Bans TikTok, Citing Social Harmony Concerns

The Nepalese government has banned TikTok, the popular Chinese-owned video-sharing app, citing concerns about its negative impact on social harmony. The ban came into effect on November 14, 2023, and internet service providers (ISPs) in Nepal were instructed to block access to the app. The government has stated that it decided to ban TikTok after receiving numerous complaints about the app's content, which it deems to be anti-social and offensive. The government also expressed concerns about the app's potential to spread hate speech and its negative impact on mental health. A group of 30 organizations working for freedom of speech and expression has filed a lawsuit against the government, challenging the constitutionality of the ban. They argue that the ban violates Article 17 (2 a) and Article 19 of the Nepalese constitution, as well as international human rights law.

Government Targets Free VPNs and Open DNS in Battle against TikTok Ban

In an effort to enforce the ban on TikTok, the Nepal Telecommunications Authority is considering restricting access to free VPN and open DNS services. The government made the decision to ban TikTok in October, citing its negative impact on social harmony and the social environment. However, TikTok users have been accessing and are getting live using alternative methods like using free VPN and open DNS services. In response, the regulatory authority is exploring ways to block these alternative options. Authorities are also concerned about the cybersecurity risks associated with the use of free VPN and open DNS services.

Digital Transformation

Karnali police launch QR code system for filing police complaint

The Karnali police have launched a new QR code system to make it easier for people to file police complaints. People can now scan the QR code stickers that have been pasted at their homes and file a complaint online. The police will then classify the complaint as urgent, non-urgent, or general, and investigate it accordingly. The police say that the new system will help to improve public trust in the police and make it easier for people to get help.

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Human Security

Israel claims Nepali student Bipin Joshi in Hamas captivity

Bipin Joshi, a Nepali student missing in Israel since October 7, is among 122 foreign nationals held hostage by Hamas militants, according to the Israeli government. Joshi is one of 17 Nepali students who were living near the Gaza Strip when they came under attack from Hamas. The Israeli government is working to free the hostages without any demands, while Hamas has demanded the release of all Palestinian prisoners incarcerated in Israel.

At least 157 people dead, 197 injured in Jajarkot earthquake

A magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck Jajarkot, Nepal, on Friday night, killing at least 143 people and injuring 197 others. The epicenter of the earthquake was located at Ramidanda of Barekot Rural Municipality in Jajarkot, and the temblor was felt as far as Kathmandu and New Delhi. The earthquake caused widespread damage to infrastructure in Jajarkot and Rukum West districts, with many houses and buildings collapsing. The Nepalese government has mobilized security forces and rescue teams to the affected areas, and international aid is also pouring in. The earthquake is a reminder of the need for Nepal to be prepared for larger earthquakes. Seismologists warn that another earthquake may occur in the Jajarkot area, and that people should brace for earthquakes of magnitude 6 and 7, which are more common than magnitude 8 earthquakes.

Nepal on alert as China reports spread of mysterious pneumonia virus

Nepal is facing a surge in respiratory illnesses caused by a combination of viruses, including influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus, as well as bacterial infections like Mycoplasma pneumonia and pneumococcus. These same pathogens are also responsible for an ongoing outbreak of a mysterious pneumonia in northern China. The World Health Organization has requested detailed information from China about the outbreak, and health officials in Nepal are closely monitoring the situation. The flu season is at its peak in Nepal, and major hospitals in Kathmandu are reporting a rise in respiratory virus infections. Experts warn that unvaccinated individuals, especially the elderly and those with compromised immunity, are at the highest risk of severe infections. Early diagnosis through testing is crucial for preventing the spread of infections and reducing the severity of the disease. Public health measures such as mask-wearing, handwashing, and social distancing are recommended to mitigate the spread of infections in both China and Nepal.

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Good Governance

Council of Ministers decision: All earthquake victims' medical care is provided at no cost

The government has announced that it will provide free treatment to individuals who were injured in the recent earthquake. Health and Population Minister Mohan Bahadur Basnet revealed this decision after a cabinet meeting. He emphasized that all injured individuals, regardless of the cost of their treatment, will receive it for free. He also suggested extending this free treatment to private hospitals. The government has completed the rescue efforts and is now focusing on expediting the treatment, relief, and rehabilitation of the earthquake survivors. They have begun distributing food, tarps, and tents to affected areas, with a commitment to ensuring that no one is left without necessary support. While details about financial aid for families who lost loved ones in the earthquake were not clear, there is a proposal to increase the existing relief amount of three lakh rupees. The government will also establish standards for the assistance provided by different countries to earthquake victims, aiming to coordinate and streamline the aid efforts more effectively.

High-value product exports from Nepal increase by 18%

In the first quarter of the current fiscal year, Nepal saw an 18% increase in the export of high-value products, notably iron and steel, cardamom, dog chew, ginger, cement, and lentils. The total earnings from goods specified in the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy (NTIS) 2023 amounted to Rs26 billion during this period, with Rs3.99 billion attributed to the addition of new products and services. However, experts remain cautious, as some of the newly added items were already performing well. For example, iron and steel exports surged by 102.7%, primarily due to government subsidies, and cement exports grew significantly, though delays in export incentives affected their potential. Other products like readymade garments, large cardamom, dog chew, medicinal herbs, ginger, vegetables, and honey also saw positive export growth, but the high production costs for readymade garments posed a challenge. On the other hand, several items, such as woollen carpets, jute products, woollen felt products, tea, pasta, handmade paper, rosin, resin acid, silver jewelry, leather, and coffee, experienced declines in their export performance.

Taplejung alone offers almost 2000 megawatts of power

In Nepal's Kosi province, there's a significant push for power generation, with 25 projects underway in Taplejung district alone, aiming to produce around 2,000 megawatts of electricity. Notably, 9.9 megawatts of power from Iwakhola and 35 megawatts from the Kabeli River are already connected to the national grid. Several projects are focusing on harnessing the energy of the Tamor River, including the upcoming 285 MW Upper Tamor 5 hydropower plant. Kabeli River also hosts multiple ongoing projects, such as Super Kabeli Khola and Kabeli-3, among others. Other rivers in the region, like Mewa, Sona, and Ghunsa Khola, have hydropower projects in various stages of construction. Overall, there's a significant expansion in hydropower capacity within the district.

Nepal links back into China's grid plan to power communities in the North

Nepal is in discussions with China to electrify remote border villages by connecting them to China's power grid due to difficult terrain. While no formal agreement is in place, a cross-border transmission line project is in the works, and several Nepali villages are targeted for electrification with Chinese assistance. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) plans to install meters to measure electricity consumption and bill locals at the

Good Governance

Nepali rate. The NEA aims to achieve universal electricity access by 2024-25 through grid expansion. Currently, over 95 percent of Nepal's population has access to electricity from the national grid, while some rely on alternative energy sources.

Survey commenced at Rasuwa and concluded along the Kerung Railway towards Nuwakot

A Chinese technical team, which arrived in Nepal in January 2019 to assess the feasibility of the Kathmandu-Kerung railway, has completed the survey in the Nuwakot section. The team is now using drones to conduct surveys in Rasuwa, Kathmandu, and Nuwakot districts. Due to the terrain over the Shivpuri Nagarjuna National Park, drone surveys are coordinated with the Nepal Civil Aviation Authority. The study, initially scheduled to begin before the monsoons, involves 43 technical teams and aims to be completed within 42 months. Delays occurred due to the time taken to obtain survey consent in certain areas. The feasibility study, financed by China, will determine construction costs, timeframes, potential challenges, and the overall distance of the railway. A detailed project report will be prepared during construction, and the study will guide the government in budget allocation. The estimated cost of the railway construction is 2 billion 71 billion 368 million rupees. Keshav Kumar Sharma, Secretary of the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, is set to discuss the Kathmandu-Kerung railway during a meeting in China.

Government established a group to implement changes in Home Administration

Former Chief Secretary Leela Mani Paudyal is leading a government-formed committee tasked with recommending policy reforms in the agencies under the Ministry of Home Affairs in Nepal. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha announced the committee's formation, emphasizing its goal of addressing challenges and gaps in public service delivery. The committee includes former secretaries, a police chief, an APF chief, a sociologist, and an IT expert. Shrestha expressed his focus on policy reforms in the Home Ministry and mentioned the establishment of sub-committees for thematic areas like Nepal Police and immigration administration. The committee aims to positively impact various sectors through voluntary service.

Oli, the prime minister, and Deuba decide to complete the transitional justice legislation

The Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, UML President KP Sharma Oli, and Congress Chairman Sher Bahadur Deuba have agreed to pass a bill on transitional justice in the upcoming Federal Parliament session. The decision comes as conflict victims express concern over the prolonged delay in finalizing transitional justice, 18 years after the agreement to end the conflict. The leaders committed to completing the peace process swiftly, acknowledging the need to finalize the pending bill. Despite completing the constitution, army adjustment, and state restructuring as per the 12-point agreement in 2063, the issue of transitional justice remains unresolved. The leaders aim to address this long-standing issue in the forthcoming parliamentary session.

Good Governance

Nepal aims to reduce the requirement for Indian content in credit projects

Nepal has requested India to reduce the Indian content requirements from 50% to 30% for projects funded under the Line of Credit (LoC), citing bureaucratic delays. The Department of Roads raised concerns about the time-consuming process of validating goods from the Indian market, impacting project implementation. Despite lobbying for years and raising the issue during bilateral talks, India has not shown eagerness to make the change. The LoC, totaling \$1.65 billion, has financed various infrastructure projects in Nepal, but bureaucratic hurdles, especially related to Indian content requirements, have caused delays. Similar issues have been faced by other countries, such as Bangladesh, leading India to agree to lower the Indian content requirement to 50% for LoC projects there.

The government decided to hold elections for the National Assembly on January 25

The Council of Ministers, in its recent meeting, announced that the National Assembly elections are scheduled for January 25, following the Election Commission's consultation. The decision, made during the Wednesday morning Cabinet meeting, aligns with the legal requirement to hold elections 35 days before the expiration of the term of one-third of National Assembly members (20 individuals) on March 3. Additionally, Shweta Dawadi has been appointed to the vacant secretary position in Nepal Engineering Service.

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Strategic Engagements

With the new import regulation, Nepal's power might illuminate more of India

India's power ministry has introduced new rules allowing Indian distribution companies to incorporate imported hydropower into their renewable energy quota, starting from the fiscal year 2024-25. Previously, they were required to buy a specified percentage of hydropower from domestic projects only. This change benefits Nepal and Bhutan, as it allows them to export more hydroelectricity to India. The new rule aims to increase the share of renewable energy in India's energy mix, with a minimum target of 29.91% in fiscal 2024-25, and the quota for hydroelectricity set to increase over the years. However, Nepal still has concerns over Indian policies, such as not waiving Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charges for hydroelectricity exports. Nepal's private sector hopes to take advantage of these new rules once legislation allows them to trade power legally.

Call to House Speaker Ghimire from British envoy Fenn

British Ambassador to Nepal, Rob Fenn, met with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Devraj Ghimire, to discuss bilateral interests and exchange experiences. They highlighted the long-standing diplomatic relationship dating back to 1816 and the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship between Nepal and the UK. Ghimire emphasized the shared values of democracy, parliamentary systems, law, and human rights, with the UK serving as an example for Nepal. He expressed gratitude for British assistance during the 2015 earthquake and in managing the Covid-19 pandemic. Ambassador Fenn expressed his belief that Nepal's development would accelerate by retaining its workforce and assured continued UK support, with plans to increase aid and assistance. Parliamentary exchanges were also discussed.

Closing its embassy in Nepal, North Korea

North Korea has decided to close its embassy in Nepal, as confirmed by North Korean Ambassador Jo Yong Man in a meeting with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The embassy is located in Lalitpur, and preparations to leave Nepal have begun. The decision is attributed to global political factors, geopolitical influences, and a growing economic recession. After the closure, North Korea's embassy in New Delhi, India, will handle Nepal's affairs. Diplomatic relations between Nepal and North Korea were established in 1974, and North Korea opened its embassy in Nepal that same year. Nepal, however, does not have an embassy in North Korea. North Korean businesses in Nepal, including restaurants in Kathmandu and hospitals in Tanahun and Kanchanpur, were closed in December 2019 due to UN sanctions. The decision to close the embassy may be related to economic challenges, geopolitical considerations, and military strategy.

Prime Minister and the Chinese Communist Party's Tibet Secretary met

Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Tibet Autonomous Region Secretary Wang Chungcheng recently met with Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to discuss mutual cooperation and interests between the two countries. The meeting also included gratitude from Prime Minister Dahal for China's support in providing relief materials to earthquake victims. Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song was also present, informing about the CPC's visit to Nepal. Ambassador Song is on a five-day visit, planning to observe earthquake-recovery projects in Bhakktapur and participate in a Nepal-China Cultural Exchange program in Pokhara before heading to Colombo, Sri Lanka on Sunday.

Strategic Engagements

Nepal's involvement in COP-28, led by the Prime Minister

Nepal, led by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, is set to participate in the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP-28) in Dubai, UAE. The team, including officials like Minister Virendra Prasad Mahato, aims to lobby for compensation through the Climate Fund, emphasizing Nepal's lack of responsibility for carbon emissions but the adverse impacts suffered. The government, in collaboration with various agencies, is preparing for Dahal's participation, focusing on the Loss and Damage fund. Prime Minister Dahal insists on Nepal's right to compensation, not as a plea for help, but as a claim for justice. The agenda includes climate finance, technology transfer, and gender and youth empowerment. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, after visiting Nepal, highlighted the country's vulnerability to climate change, urging global action. COP-28 aims for climate justice, fulfilling financial promises, and addressing the Milestone Loss and Damage Fund. Guterres' observations on Nepal's climate challenges will be presented during the conference.

India forwarded the Dodhara Chandni dry port's DPR

The proposed dry port at Dodhara Chandni in Kanchanpur is set to be constructed with a detailed project report (DPR) prepared by the Indian government. Engineer Anish KC revealed that the estimated cost for the project is 5.75 billion rupees, entirely funded by India. The DPR indicates a construction timeline from 2024 to 2026. The port will occupy about 280 bighas of Mayapuri and Gaurishankar community forest, with Environmental Impact Assessment approval pending the Council of Ministers' decision to allow tree felling. The construction includes cutting down 1,989 trees. India has initiated the construction of an access road connecting the port to the ASEAN Highway. Gokarna Awasthi, the director general of the Federation of Nepalese Industries and Commerce, sees the dry port as a gateway to opportunities, especially with the opening of the western border.

Joint military drill between India and Nepal begins

The 17th edition of the Nepal-India Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN has commenced in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, India, with the Nepal Army's Tara Dal Battalion and the Indian Army's KUMAON Regiment participating. The annual exercise, taking place from November 24 to December 7, focuses on enhancing interoperability in jungle warfare, counter-terrorism operations in mountainous terrain, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Activities include the use of drones, medical training, aviation aspects, and environmental conservation to improve operational capabilities and coordination in challenging situations. The exercise aims to strengthen bilateral relations, provide a platform for soldiers to exchange experiences, and achieve shared security objectives between the two friendly neighbors.

Bangladesh seeks a trilateral energy framework

Bangladesh has proposed a high-level bureaucratic mechanism for trilateral cooperation in the energy sector involving Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. Currently, Nepal has bilateral mechanisms with India and Bangladesh separately. Bangladesh has submitted a draft agreement for a trilateral Joint Working Group and Joint Steering Committee, seeking enhanced collaboration in the energy sector. The proposal comes amid ongoing bilateral talks on power trading and joint investment in Nepalese hydropower plants. Trilateral cooperation is crucial for projects like the 683MW Sunkoshi-3 hydropower project and the export of electricity from Nepal to

Strategic Engagements

Bangladesh through a dedicated transmission line. The move aligns with the countries' renewable energy goals, with Nepal targeting 15% from renewables by 2030, India aiming for 500GW of renewable energy by 2030, and Bangladesh seeking 40% from renewables by 2041.

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