

A newsletter of AIU North Zone VC Meet 2024 & Bharat-Nepal Higher Education Summit

AIU North Zone Vice Chancellors' Meet 2024 concludes successfully

Divya Adhikari & Smriti K.C

Dhulikhel, Nepal, February 16

The AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet 2024 concluded at Kathmandu University in Nepal, marking a significant milestone in South Asian higher education. The successful conclusion of the meet was marked by a valedictory session, graced by Nepal's Honorable Education Minister and Pro-Chancellor Ashok Kumar Rai as the guest of honor.

The event, inaugurated by Mr. Rai alongside Kathmandu University's Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Bhola Thapa, was testimony to the collaborative spirit driving educational initiatives in the region.

Prof. Dr. Thapa, in his welcome speech, hailed the conference as a historic event for Kathmandu University, emphasizing its important role in fostering higher education across South Asia. He highlighted the significance of global educational cooperation and partnerships for academic programs, alongside advocating for rigorous research collaborations at both regional and international levels. Prof. Thapa's remarks resonated with the conference's overarching theme of internationalizing education and harmonizing educational policies and practices.

Prof. Dr. Achyut Wagle, the Registrar of Kathmandu University, presented a comprehensive report detailing the meeting's deliberations, focusing on international collaboration and cooperation in higher education, reflecting the sentiments of the Vice-Chancellors over the two days of the meet.

Similarly, Dr. Pankaj Mittal, Secretary-General of AIU, expressed heartfelt gratitude to the team that represented



Photo: Raunak Shrestha

both Kathmandu University and AIU for organizing such a successful gathering of global Vice-Chancellors. Dr. Mittal highlighted the need to internationalize higher education in the region, advocating for balanced student mobility and active engagement in AIU initiatives, including university delegate visits.

Mr. Ashok Kumar Rai, Minister of Education, Science, and Technology of Nepal, highlighted the meet's significance in advancing internationalization efforts throughout Asian and South Asian higher education systems. He emphasized the need of addressing digital accessibility, fostering advanced research centers and nurturing collaborative relationships to facilitate joint research endeavors. Mr. Rai advocated for an Asia-centric approach to higher education, calling for regional and global collaboration on policies and practices to harness the opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence and globalization.

Prof. G.D. Sharma, President of AIU, drew the attention of participants towards the high percentage of students failing to

return to their home countries after studying abroad. Prof. Sharma stressed the collective responsibility of AIU and Kathmandu University in devising strategies to retain or repatriate students. Prof. Sharma emphasized the deep cultural, religious, and social bonds between Nepal and India as a foundation for youth engagement at the grassroots level, creating solutions within their own communities.

In his closing remark, Dr. Alok Kumar Mishra, Joint Secretary of AIU, thanked the entire team of AIU and Kathmandu University for their collaborative efforts in organizing the meet. Mishra emphasized the significance of the event in shaping future educational activities in the region.

The successful conclusion of the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet 2024 is testimony to the collective commitment of South Asian academic institutions towards building collaboration and innovation in higher education, ultimately paving the path for a shared future of learning and knowledge exchange.

Enhancing student mobility and diversity

Divya Adhikari & Smriti K.C

The third technical session of the AIU North Zone Chancellors' Meet 2024, held on February 16, focused on "Student Mobility & Diversity: Enhancing International Experience". The session was chaired by Prof. S. P. Bansal, the Vice-Chancellor of Central University of Himachal Pradesh. It featured insightful contributions from distinguished speakers from universities in India and Nepal, aiming to foster discussions on aligning global higher education practices towards enhancing international student experiences.

Prof. Bansal initiated the session by stressing the role of student mobility and diversity in today's global education landscape. He also highlighted the significant shift in India's educational focus from traditional rote-learning to a more critical and analytical approach, proposing that Indian educational philosophies could provide unique perspectives in rethinking global higher education strategies.

Prof. S. P. Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Assam Royal Global University (ARGU), Guwahati, Assam, shared the challenges his university faces in attracting students from South Asian countries. He emphasized the importance of creating stronger connections with educational institutions in Nepal to facilitate a more diverse student ratio at ARGU. He pointed out the global trend of increasing student migration and emphasized the necessity for South Asian universities to offer education that is not only affordable and of high quality but also grounded in value-based principles to attract international students.

Prof. Dr Amma Raj Joshi, Vice Chancellor of Far Western University, Nepal, provided insights into the rapid globalization of higher education in South Asia and its impact on student mobility. This trend has led to enhanced diversity in student



Photo: Raunak Shrestha

populations, faculty expertise, and curricular offerings. He also highlighted the challenges faced by countries like Nepal, where increased student mobility could lead to negative effects, such as the creation of "ghost cities." He advocated for substantial improvements in Nepal's higher education system to better manage and structure student mobility.



Photo: Sumit Baruwal

Mrs. Katja Lasch from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) discussed the broader global trends in student mobility, highlighting the current imbalance in global student exchanges. She spoke about Germany's strategic approach to managing both inbound and outbound student exchanges, including setting realistic goals and establishing support structures like scholarships and awareness programs to promote international education exchanges.

The session also included a discussion on the imbalance observed in student migration, with more students leaving their home countries for education abroad than those coming in. This issue was linked to various factors, including the structural advantages offered by educational institutions in a global context. The discussion emphasized the importance of enhancing the structural quality of education in countries like India to attract international students and potentially reverse the current migration trend.

An interview with Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel Acting Director, GED (KU)

In this interview, we talked with Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel, Acting Director, Global Engagement Division, Kathmandu University.

Dr. Dinesh Kafle: The focus of this year's AIU North Zone VC Meet is the internationalisation of higher education. What is its relevance for Kathmandu University and members of AIU?

Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel: Kathmandu University, in its 32-year history, has been able to share its information or strength globally. But there is much we need to do to be known to wider Nepali, Indian, and Asian avenues. For example, we have joint degrees with Australia, the USA, and other countries. We could have more students from those countries as far as international students and collaborations are concerned. However, we are not that well known within this territory. For instance, Nepal has been sending thousands of students abroad, and we at Kathmandu University have a good track record with foreign students. Yet, we could not sell our program within our neighbourhood.

So we came up with the idea of hosting a

meet that would help university leaders come here and showcase their interests and strengths and understand ours too.

Dr. Kafle: What are the outcomes of this meet towards internationalisation of higher education?

Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel: We learnt that there is a lot for us to learn to internationalise higher education. It seems that we are lacking in internationalisation as far as foreign nationals are concerned. We got ample opportunities to learn from other universities. As of now, we have succeeded in bringing students from African and Asian countries. That experience might be helpful for us to further prioritize this internationalisation aspect.

Dr. Kafle: Along with the VC meet, there is an International Higher Education Summit is ongoing. What are the objectives of this summit?



Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel: We organised this summit because we realised a need to mobilize ourselves within the country. Even within Nepal, Kathmandu University needs to showcase our different schools and their programs for those who still have an idea of going abroad for education. When they are convinced that there are other universities available around here, they could come and join our academic programs.

Interview with Prof. Dr. Dhurva Prasad Gauchan Nodal Officer, AIU North Zone VC Meet 2024



Dr. Dinesh Kafle: As the Nodal Officer for the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet 2024, how has your experience been?

Prof. Dr. Dhurva Prasad Gauchan: This is one of the biggest events organized by Kathmandu University. During this event, there have been some hiccups in logistics, but these are bound to happen in any

program. We have a wonderful team with 13 functional committees working day and night to facilitate our respected guests from many countries including India, Bhutan, Australia, Norway, and China, among others.

I realised that diversity is an important aspect of any event, as we have guests from all kinds of backgrounds, with different food tastes. We have a guest who never accepts food cooked in a kitchen where non-vegetarian food is cooked. We managed by bringing pure vegetarian food from Bhaishnav Bhojanalaya. The transportation part was a bit chaotic due to the complicated arrival times and delayed flights. We are happy that we somehow managed it with our own transportation system, dedicated faculty members like Prof. Dr. Bibek Baral and Mr. Gokarna Poudel. More, we had an

amazing secretariat team. Another challenge is managing a team of 175 volunteers. The team led by Dr. Gokul K.C and Dr. Saraswati Acharya, worked day and night to give ease to the guests throughout the conference.

Dr. Kafle: How was managing this meet different from other programs?

Prof. Dr. Dhurva Prasad Gauchan: I'd like to compare that with SAUFEST 2008, when we managed more than 500 participants at the KU premises. I worked as a liaison coordinator, responsible for the mobilization of volunteers, accommodations, and transportation facilities. In that time, KU was the sole organizer. This time, it was a bit different because all decisions were taken bilaterally by AIU and KU, and we had to follow the administrative protocols.

Interview with Ms. Ekku Maya Pun Spokesperson, School of Arts (KU)

Dr. Dinesh Kafle: This is one of the major international programs organized by Kathmandu University. What is the experience of Kathmandu University in organizing the AIU Vice Chancellors' conference?

Ms. Ekku Maya Pun: It is a very exciting opportunity for KU to showcase what we are able to do. But at the same time, it is a challenge because KU has not done any events of this scale in the past. Still, it is a learning experience for us. No doubt, there were some lapses during the event, but we tried our best. I think the delegates, the distinguished VCs, and other guests will understand our limitations and appreciate what we have done.

Dr. Kafle: What were the main focuses this year?

Ms. Ekku Maya Pun: Our discussions focused on three main themes this year. If I remember correctly, internationalization and cooperation among partner universities were the first. Secondly, the mobility of students and diversity, and enhancing the experience of our students were discussed intensely during the conference. Another was harmonizing the standards for internationalizing education. When we work together with the universities at the national level as well as the international level, we need to discuss the standardization of our degrees, equivalence, etc., and if we want to go abroad, we need to talk about accreditation so that our degrees will also be accepted and acknowledged. This is one challenge out of many to be addressed, I think, this conference of leaders who have been contributing in the higher education sector will help tremendously.

Dr. Kafle: What are the things that you find missing in this meet and how could we have done it better?

Ms. Ekku Maya Pun: As a female faculty member at Kathmandu University, I am the first female to hold the position of

Acting Dean. Hence, I would like to mention my remarks from a gender perspective about this meet. It was encouraging to see so many VCs who were women and who had taken part in the panel discussions. It is a learning experience and an indication to show many others that women can achieve higher positions as well. So this is a positive thing that I take from this meet. But another thing that I would have appreciated is a little bit of gender perspective in the discussions. Despite all the significant historical achievements of women, speaking as a woman from South Asia, every aspect of a woman's life is influenced by gender. Therefore, the percentage of female students in higher education is comparatively low. This perspective could have been discussed. Gender-specific discussion to increase women's mobility across the border would have been a bonus at this VC meet.



AIU Business Session held



Photo: Sumit Baruwala

The AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet 2024 included a business session on the second day of the meet. Led by Dr. Pankaj Mittal, Secretary-General of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), the session focused on the organization's plans leading up to its 100th anniversary in 2025.

Dr. Mittal highlighted AIU's role as a think tank, bridging gaps between governments and universities, and supporting faculty development, research, and education. She emphasized AIU's efforts in internationalization, including the Indian Network for Internationalization and new consultancy services to enhance global connections and digitalization in education.

The session also focused on the need to balance global outreach with local needs, including addressing degree recognition and aligning with national standards. Prof. G.D. Sharma, AIU President, discussed plans for establishing five excellence centres, promoting sports, and inviting Nepalese universities to join AIU to strengthen higher education collaboration.

The AIU business session highlighted the organization's dedication to improving educational standards and fostering international and national academic partnerships. With 995 member institutions, AIU plays a key role in ensuring the equivalence of degrees across national & international standards.

Terracotta murals brighten up KU's courtyard



Rajasi Niraula



Photo: Nishant Gaire



Photo: Nishant Gaire

As you walk through the corridors of Kathmandu University's main administrative building, you can see a mural of bright patched mosaic clay with intricate carvings. Have you wondered what these muddy mosaics are? They are terracotta, a type of clay ceramic made in low fire. These terracotta murals carry the essence of the seven schools under Kathmandu University and were carved by the students of the Department of Fine Arts.

As a testament to the university's commitment to nurturing a sense of community among all schools the murals serve as a reminder that we all belong here. The university's courtyard is itself a symbol of community, where students come together, basking in the warm sun and sharing a cup of tea. These terracotta murals are a tribute to the unity and solidarity of Kathmandu University.

Seventy-six students from the Department of Fine Arts have poured their hearts into clay, an ancient art material, to adorn the walls of the courtyard.

"These carved terracottas have low relief, they have a tactile quality, and they ignite sensorium when touched," said Pratima Thakali, who supervised the students in creating the murals. Repetitive tactile

motions in the creation make terracotta art more intimate. Experimenting on the surface of the clay, creatively pressing, and carving it makes it even more expressive and effective, says Thakali.

Terracotta tiles carry a strong legacy in the art history of Nepal, and since the materials are easily available, they are sustainable choices that also preserve local skills. Using clay and traditional firing techniques, a 420 x 2 feet terracotta relief mural was made as part of a research project as well as the university's vision to represent all schools at one place.

The mural has been installed in the university courtyard, joining the canteen and the library together. It is the meeting point for all students. The place has justified the terracotta art. The earthy tone

of the terracotta has added warmth and complemented the serene university premise.

Incidentally, the mural was unveiled on the auspicious day of the Saraswati Puja and the curtain raiser of the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet 2024, being hosted by Kathmandu University.

The students who had contributed to making these durable art pieces said it was a matter of honour for them to have their art displayed prominently at a strategic location in the university. "I had breathed life into the murals, and I am happy that they have found a niche location at the university," said a student who contributed to the art piece.

Amid talks on higher education, VCs grab a chance to shake a leg

Prerana Subedi

On an unusually warm winter morning in Dhulikhel, Kavre, on February 15, 2024, the football ground and the multipurpose hall at Kathmandu University witnessed a jamboree of people in vibrant dresses. Students and local community members had come together to showcase cultural performances representing various ethnic communities, bringing a much-needed freshness to the otherwise intellectually rigorous atmosphere in the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet, 2023-24.

Nepal's cultural heritage, featuring Sherpa, Thakali, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Sunuwar, Dura, Tamang, Newar, Maithili, Khas, and Tharu communities, was on full display during the inauguration of the VC meet. The fact that the students and the community members came together to put up a grand show exhibited how the university has been able to integrate education with community engagement.

What added to the festivity was the active participation of Vice-chancellors, who



Photo:Prasun Rajbhandari

shook their legs along with the dancers in the cultural performances. The VCs seemed to be captivated by the cultural attire worn by performers and borrowed the performers' arte-facts to wear and be photographed. It was an opportune moment to bring into practice the ideals of unity in diversity. This way we can bridge classroom learning with societal engagement, aiming to deepen our understanding of the significance of Nepal's indigenous communities, culture, and history.

The fact that cultural dance performances could enchant a diverse audience showed the true power of dance as an artistic and cultural medium. The event brightened the university atmosphere with happy faces, fostering a strong sense of global interaction and promoting Nepal's rich ethnic identity.



Photo: Prasun Rajbhandari

Glimpses of the North Zone VC Meet 2024



Photo: Raunak Shrestha



Photo: Sandeep Adhikari



Photo: Prasun Rajbhandari



Photo: Prasun Rajbhandari

The Media Team

Editorial Team



Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary



Dr. Sudhamshu Dahal



Dr. Kashi Raj Pandey



Dr. Dinesh Kafle

News Coordinators



Ngima Gelu Lama



Shekhar Gautam

Reporters



Divya Adhikari



Prerana Subedi



Rajasi Niraula



Smriti k.C

Photographers



Prasun Rajbhandari



Raunak Shrestha



Sumit Baruwal



Sandeep Adhikari



Nishant Gaire

Designers



Sanjima Jugjali Pun



Saumya Joshi

Production Coordinator



Saurav Rajbhandari