

In Nepal, time is always 15 minutes apart from everywhere else

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Buddhist holy men lighting incense and lamps of clarified butter, the smog smothering the sibilance of street sweepers and the toll of temple bells.

Nepal's unique national time zone — five hours and 45 minutes ahead of Coordinated Universal Time — is but one manifestation of how fiercely the country guards

its singularity. Its flag, made up of twin triangles symbolising the Himalayas, is the only national pennant that is not a rectangle. Nepal boasts its own calendar, too. In Kathmandu, the year is now 2083 — 56 years, eight months and change ahead of the Gregorian calendar used in much of the rest of the world.

The pride that has birthed these distinct symbols of nationhood is rooted in Nepal's geography.

"The Nepali people feel very proud of having been independent for centuries, not being colonised ever," said Jaya Raj Acharya, a retired diplomat who served as Nepal's ambassador to the UN. "This sense of national identity unites us, even though we are today speaking 123 languages in a country that is about the size of New York State."

Nepal Standard Time was officially designated in 1986, 15 minutes ahead of India's time zone, to which it had been tethered. This declaration of national exceptionalism, displayed at a Kathmandu clock tower first built in 1894, seems beloved by the populace, even if it forces Nepalis to engage in quick arithmetic when travelling or setting meetings outside of the country.

Standing in front of the Kathmandu airport before his flight to South Korea to study global economics, Alan Thapa,

18, assured his family that he would call when he landed, then proceeded to subtract 3 hours and 15 minutes from his arrival time.

"I'm studying economics," he said. "It is not a difficult calculation."

The longitude on which Nepal's time zone is set runs through Mount Gaurishankar, a Himalayan peak that can be seen from the outskirts of Kathmandu on the rare days without air pollution. There is a joke that Nepal Standard Time grants a 15-minute grace period to a perennially rushed populace. The punchline makes sense when stuck in Kathmandu's traffic jams, with their cacophony of cars, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws, cows and goats; their porters hefting impossible loads; their frequent celebratory processions of giant chariots trailed by demon-masked acrobats praying for rain or a good harvest.

For centuries before Westerners took it upon themselves to decide time — choosing the Greenwich Observatory in London as the prime meridian and other longitudes to represent the other hours of the day — Kathmandu residents would find out the official time by visiting a rectangular pool in the Hanuman Dhoka palace complex, the seat of the monarchy. There, as soon as a ray of sun broke over the Himalayan foothills surrounding the



The flag of Nepal in Kathmandu in September 2025. (Getty Images)

the king and queen included, before ending his own life.

Some traditions were not tossed out with the monarchy.

The Bikram Sambat is Nepal's official calendar, based on Hindu precepts. Each year a government-authorised committee of astrologers and astronomers determines the exact time the next year is to start, dependent on the trajectories of the sun and the moon. Unlike the solar Gregorian calendar, with its set 12 months and quadrennial leap year, the Bikram Sambat shifts slightly, with the new year around mid-April. The number of days in each month depends on the year and can run up to 32.

Shree Krishna Adhikari, an expert in astronomy and astrology, led the seven-member committee for four years, retiring last July. Now 77, he presided over debates between orthodox and modernist committee members about how to decide the precise times of auspicious dates for prayer and celebration.

The traditionalists, he said, clung to old mathematical ways, leading to erroneous calculations.

"We didn't have computers back then," he said. "We should trust math, science, the age of modern discovery."

Adhikari, however, bristled at the idea of switching to the Gregorian calendar.

"We cannot abandon the

world that our ancestors created," he said. "This is what makes us Nepali."

Other calendars are in use in this diverse nation, including a Tibetan Buddhist one. Another is the calendar of the Newar people indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley, who adhere to both Hinduism and Buddhism. Since 2008, this calendar, too, has been given official status in Kathmandu. Most years in the Newar calendar have 12 months, some have 13 and a few have 11. In the Newar cosmology, it is now the year 1146.

There are apps to help Nepalis convert between calendars. And while the country's copious paperwork employs the Gregorian calendar, Nepali passports use the Gregorian calendar.

The importance of both lunar and solar traditions to Nepali timekeeping is echoed in the country's triangular flag, which is decorated with a moon and a sun.

Most days for the past 20 years, Laxmi Narayan Shilpakar has stood in Durbar Square in Kathmandu, holding a Nepali pennant taller than he is. Shilpakar, 70, said he started his flag-waving to promote reconciliation soon after the country's decade-long Maoist insurgency, which claimed nearly 18,000 lives.

"At the time, people were

trying to divide Nepalis by saying: 'Are you a monarchist or a Hindu or Buddhist or whatever,'" he said. "I wanted to say, 'We are all Nepalis under the same flag.'"

Today, Nepal is governed by Balendra Shah, a rapper turned Prime Minister, who came to power in March after a Gen Z-led revolution. Shah was mayor of Kathmandu, and three years ago, in response to a mural map of an ancient Indian empire unveiled at the Indian Parliament that included parts of what is now Nepal, he displayed a map in his office of "Greater Nepal". It sprawled across land in present-day India that had been signed away in the 1816 treaty ending the Anglo-Nepal War.

Steps away from where Shilpakar wields the Nepali flag is the Hanuman Dhoka palace complex, the symbolic heart of the country.

Somewhere inside is the pool from which royal keepers of the clock carefully dispensed water into clay pots. Today, though, no one — not a guard nor a guide nor an amateur historian roaming the palace grounds — seems to know exactly where the ancient water clock kept measure. One pool in the palace has been cemented over. Another is murky with algae, the secrets of Nepal's chronometry lost to time itself.

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DEAR WEEKLY LOTTERY
₹1 CRORE WON BY
PUNE RESIDENT



Smt. RUPALI LAXMIKANT KOLHE from PUNE, MAHARASHTRA has won ₹1 Crore as first prize in

Dear Weekly Lottery in the draw held on 27.02.2026. Her winning ticket number is 70B 54275. She has submitted her prize-winning ticket along with the prize claim form to Nagaland State Lotteries. "Dear Lottery has empowered me with huge One Crore rupees of prize money which has happened without any planning. I have just wanted to try my fortune and have bought few tickets of Dear Lottery. This exercise would be giving big financial relief to common people without any stress", said the winner.

*Winner detail taken from Government website.