

# **Nepal (Kingdom of)**

**Last updated: 31-01-2004**

## **Location and area**

Nepal is a constitutional monarchy in southern Asia, bounded on the north by the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China and on the east, south, and west by India. The area of Nepal is 147,181 km<sup>2</sup>. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Topography**

Mountains dominate the landscape of Nepal. Of the ten highest mountains in the world, nine (including Mount Everest 8,848 m) are located entirely or partly within Nepal's borders.

Nepal can be divided into three parallel bands running from the northwest to the southeast:

1. Closest to China is the Great Himalaya Range, where average elevations exceed 4,570 m.
2. The Mahabharat and Siwalik ranges of the Himalaya constitute the second band with elevations about 2,500 m.
3. The southernmost region is the Tarai, an area of plains, swamps, and forests. The alluvial soils of the Tarai are fertile, unlike those of the mostly barren uplands.

Other than the Tarai, the only sizeable area of flat land is the Valley of Kathmandu, a basin in the centre of the country.

## **Climate**

Elevation plays a major role in the climate of Nepal. In the high mountains, temperatures remain cold throughout the year and snow cover persists throughout the year. In the Tarai and the Valley of Kathmandu, summers are hot and rainy, and winters are cool. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Water**

Nepal's principal rivers, the Ghaghara (Karnali), Kosi, and Narayani, flow generally north to south and empty into the River Ganges. The country has no sizeable lakes. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Land use**

About 21 per cent of Nepal's land area is cultivated, primarily in the Tarai region (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Wetlands**

Nepal supports a wide variety of wetlands (Shrestha 2000), especially in the Tarai (Sah & Heinen 2000). These wetlands have experienced tremendous pressure from land clearance and fuel collection by the growing population due to migration of the people from the mountains (Sah & Heinen 2000).

## **Peatlands**

Franz & Kral (1975) described the occurrence of thin peat layers from a sedge fen (3000 m a.s.l.) in the Jumla region (West-Nepal). Beug & Miehe (1999) report on palaeoecological studies from six fens in the Langtang Valley and the Helambu area north of Kathmandu. All these fens were very small in area and the thickness of peat was less than 1 m. According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 2,335 km<sup>2</sup> of histosols exist in Nepal and 8,348 km<sup>2</sup> of gley soils.

Still to be checked:

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Yonebayashi, C. & Minaki, M. 1997. Late Quaternary vegetation and climatic history of eastern Nepal. *Journal of Biogeography* 24: 837-843. *peat*